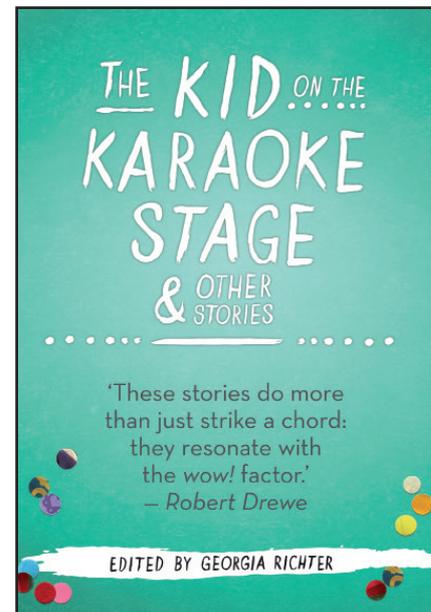


The Kid on the Karaoke Stage & Other Stories Edited by Georgia Richter



English Learning Outcomes

Developing knowledge and understanding of:

- (a) the contexts, purposes and audiences of texts
- (b) the forms and features of language
- (c) the structures of texts

Developing skills in:

- (a) accessing and generating ideas and information through effective communication as an individual or collaboratively
- (b) processing and organising ideas and information through investigating, comparing, inferring, critical thinking, generalising, synthesising and drawing conclusions
- (c) reflecting to redefine meaning and one's own learning in language
- (d) evaluating texts in relation to purposes, own experiences, understandings, values, attitudes and beliefs

About the Book

There are twenty-eight distinctive narrative voices in this anthology of new writing from Australia's west. Combining short pieces of fiction with creative non-fiction, *The Kid on the Karaoke Stage & Other Stories* is a quirky and memorable collection that will resonate long after you close its covers.

Contributors include: Amanda Curtin (Winner, University of Canberra National Short Story Competition), Jon Doust (Longlist, 2010 Miles Franklin Literary Award), Goldie Goldbloom (Winner, 2008 AWP Novel Award, *Jerusalem Post* short fiction prize), Pat Jacobs (Winner, WA Premier's Book Awards), Alice Nelson (Winner, 2009 *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Novelist) and many more.

Acclaimed author Robert Drewe says 'These stories do more than just strike a chord: they resonate with the *wow!* factor'. Brenda Walker says 'This whole collection is brimming with original and vibrant writing' while *Bookseller+Publisher* suggests you 'Pick up this book if you appreciate home-grown literature, and marvel at the talent that resides in the West.'

About the Editor

Georgia Richter is publisher of adult fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry at Fremantle Press. She is also an award-winning author of short fiction whose work has appeared in literary journals across Australia.

Suggestions for Studying the Text

A. BEFORE READING

Take time to examine and talk about:

The cover

1. Consider the book's title, *The Kid on the Karaoke Stage & Other Stories*. Now look at the table of contents. Where does the book's title come from? What do you think the title story might be about? Do you think the title story will be humorous or serious? Give your rationale.
2. In what ways does the cover design relate to the collection's title? Consider elements like the white 'spotlight' effect, confetti and selected typeface. What associations do these design elements evoke in the reader? What expectations?
3. The cover quote from internationally renowned writer Robert Drewe (author of *The Shark Net*) talks about stories that 'strike a chord' and 'resonate' (more musical references!). How does a story 'strike a chord' with a reader? Give examples of books, poetry or articles you have read that strike a chord with you. Why do these pieces linger in your memory?

The back cover blurb

1. The back cover offers quotes from five of the stories in the collection. Once you have read the quotes, consider:
 - How does the writing style vary across the quotes?
 - What words would you use to describe each of these short texts? (e.g. philosophical, direct, suspenseful, contemporary, Australian, etc)
2. Choose one of the five quotes and use it as the first paragraph of a story of your own (500–700 words). Elect to either read your story to the class or compare it to the story of another class member who selected the same quote as the basis for his/her story.

The introduction

Read the introduction by the book's editor, Georgia Richter, then answer the following questions.

1. What are some of the themes identified by the editor as important in this anthology?
2. Some of the works in the book are fictional short stories, while others are creative non-fiction pieces. What is the difference between short stories and creative non-fiction? What elements do they share? What are the differences between these genres?
3. On page 8, Richter notes, 'Sometimes it is hard to tell which is which, and I have left this deliberately so.' Why do you think the editor made this choice? Does it matter if the reader knows whether they are reading fiction or creative non-fiction?

4. In compiling a collection of stories, an editor's role involves selecting the works to be included, working with each author to develop their story to its full potential, and arranging the final works in a meaningful order. What do you think would be the challenges of editing an anthology of twenty-eight stories?

B. DURING READING

1. In Sj Finch's title story, the narrator is caught between his friends' expectations and being true to himself. By the end of the story he decides he 'will never speak like one of these boys again' and chooses to drink water instead of beer. Yet he also writes, 'Don't stay true ... make believe' and performs again on stage (but sober) without inhibition. Why do you think the writer chose to problematise the story's ending?
Further study suggestion: Explore the concept of 'problematism' and its role in critical thinking, as applied in both science and the arts.
2. What does the collection's title mean in the context provided by this title story?
3. How would you chart the differences between the narrator at the beginning of the story and at the story's end? What do you think the 'meaning' of this story is?
4. In typical Absurdist style, Jon Doust's story 'The Man with the Moustache' reads as an illogical, dream-like chain of events. The writer constructs a world where cause is not connected to effect in a realist way, and actions become meaningless. How does Doust's 'Absurd Hero' respond to these events (give specific examples from the text)? Is he aware of their absurdity? Can he ever escape his situation? What are the philosophical implications of this?
Further study suggestion: Explore other Absurdist authors like Kafka, Camus or Beckett. What makes their writing Absurdist? What are the functions of the Absurd in literature?
5. 'The Road to Katherine' has a distinct Australian flavour. Give examples of how setting, characterisation and diction are used by the author to locate the story in an Australian context. Is this story about Australia as you know it? If not, do we accept this story, nonetheless, as authentically Australian? What changes would a writer have to make to set this story somewhere else?
6. Examine the way Goldie Goldbloom establishes tension in this story. What is dramatic irony? To what extent does the narrator, Care, share the same degree of understanding and knowledge as the reader? Why does the story end at the point where it does?
Further study suggestion: Locate examples of dramatic irony in other texts you have studied this year.
7. In Pat Jacobs' 'The Chrysoprase Plain' the physical environment becomes a place of struggle for identity and power. What is the protagonist's relationship with this environment? In what ways does Jacobs construct this environment as gendered? Support your argument with evidence from the text.
8. The protagonists in both 'Chomsky and the Kultigator' (Paul) and 'The Exhibition' (Beatrix) witness a range of attitudes to culture and art. What are some of the attitudes encountered by each protagonist (for Paul – in the context of book publishing; for Beatrix – in visual arts)? What literary devices does each story use in order to show these attitudes? Do the stories position the reader to favour some attitudes over others?

9. 'My Scallywag Suit', 'Little-big Sister' and 'Saltwater Memories' each choose the first person point of view to convey experiences of family dynamics. What do you think would happen if those stories were told in the third person? Or from the point of view of another family member? Do you think each of these stories is a work of fiction or creative non-fiction? Provide a rationale for your answer. What do you think are the challenges associated with the genre of memoir (which is a sub-genre of creative non-fiction)? What are the risks a writer might encounter in writing about things that are true? Do you find the idea of writing about your own life inviting? Why or why not?
10. War is a powerful subject of both fiction and non-fiction writing. How is the theme of war represented in 'I Sit Here – We Sat there'? In 'Caterpillar Men'? In 'Deeper Water'? Which historical war does each story deal with? Whose experience of the war is depicted in each and why? Which of these stories do you think are fiction and which are non-fiction? What does the idea of war evoke in you? Does your own family have any war stories to tell?
Further study suggestion: Research the historical context of the Vietnam War, the Korean Comfort Women and/or the war in Afghanistan.
11. 'Some aspects of culture are so deep they can't be measured or counted, and can't be eradicated simply by being forced into new religions,' writes Peter Docker in 'Funeral Song' (p. 193). What does the narrator mean by this? In what ways is this statement true for the Irish congregation inside the church? For the Aboriginal mourners outside? What are the points of cultural overlap for these two groups? What is the role of the character of the dead brother in this story? Discuss other stories in this collection that seem to represent a subject, or a 'truth' larger than themselves.
12. What kind of Australia is Docker depicting? How does it sit against the Australias of Goldbloom, Jacobs, Doust and Carmody?
13. Discuss notions of brotherhood and masculinity in relation to the stories of Docker, Carmody, Russell, Doust, George, Hutchison and Sj Finch. Many of them are to do with a coming of age, or a getting of wisdom. What points of understanding (or indeed, of no return) do their protagonists reach? Is this shift in consciousness the main point of each particular story?
14. 'The Pearl Divers' draws on the real history of Broome, Western Australia, as the world's pearling capital in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In what ways is the narrator's life similar to that of Yaie, who lives in a tin shed in her garden, and in what ways is it different? Who is happier? Why do you think the writer chooses the private story of a couple's marriage to examine public issues like exploitation and injustice? Why does the narrator's marriage collapse as her understanding increases?
15. What do the stories of Ortega and Curtin have in common? The editor Georgia Richter notes that these stories 'share an interiority that takes them out of suburbia and fully inside houses and selves' (p. 9). What kind of interiority is represented in the stories by Ortega, Curtin, Amram and Rossiter? What is the significance of the physical milieu inhabited by each story's protagonist?
16. A story's tone is, arguably, not a tangible thing – yet it is something we respond to as readers. How would you define 'tone'? Identify the tone in the stories by Rossiter, Gallagher, Ortega, Relph, Taylor, Russell, Goldbloom and Frances Finch (e.g. ironic, angry, solemn, nostalgic, formal/informal etc). Examine how language is used by each author to achieve this tone (give specific examples from the text). Are there stories in the anthology that share a similar tone? If so, what are they and what tone is used?

17. In John Stubbley's 'The Light of Home', the narrator explores the way light shapes his experience of place, language and people. How does Stubbley's extensive use of imagery work to reflect the experience of light as more than just visual?
18. In what ways is 'The Light of Home' a piece about Australia? Compare this story to other stories set in whole, or in part, abroad – by Relph, Gallagher, Nowland, Rock and George. What is the function of Barcelona in Williams' story? Do other places help us understand who we are? If so, how?
19. The final story in the anthology, 'The Island', is written in the form of a parable. Typically for this genre, the story ends with a moral lesson. What is the allegorical significance of the island in this story? Why do you think this story was chosen to end the collection?
Further study suggestion: Explore allegorical literature in one of the following contexts: biblical and religious texts; the fables of Aesop or La Fontaine; modern literature (e.g. Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*).
20. Consider the journey made by the old man in 'The Underground River'. What metaphors are at play here?
21. Consider the way water is used in a variety of stories, including those by Carmody, Ellis, Hunting, Whalley and Rock. List its metaphorical impact in each.
22. A number of these stories are about, or directly include a, death. What is the function of death in stories by Lester, Curtin, Carmody, Docker, Ellis, Polain, Taylor, Pearce, Nelson, Hutchison and Williams? In particular, how do Lester, Polain and Curtin use the fact of death to create tension in each of their stories? Why is death a common theme in literature?

C. AFTER READING

1. Create the contents page of your own anthology. Select the titles of a range of literary works and arrange them in a meaningful order. Be flexible with, but consider, issues such as the number of works to include and their length, genre, style and theme. Present the contents of your 'ultimate collection' to the class and explain the reasons for your choices.
2. As a class, discuss which stories are open-ended and which ones have closed endings. Give reasons for your conclusions. How does the absence of a resolution in a story affect the reader? Why do you think a writer would choose to do this? Choose one story from the anthology and rewrite the ending in 300 to 400 words. Prepare a rationale to accompany the revised ending and explain its new direction.
3. Write a fiction or creative non-fiction piece that could fit in this anthology. Provide a rationale for its inclusion, including your view on where it would fit in the collection.
4. Choose a piece of prose by another author and place it in this collection. Discuss reasons for the choice of story and its place within the collection.
5. List all the stories in this collection. Next to each one in the list, identify key themes (e.g. war, love, loss, death, water). Write next to each story other possible ways of categorising it such as past/present, at home/abroad, fiction/creative non-fiction.
6. The stories in the anthology have been arranged in a specific order. This is only one of many possible arrangements. Rearrange these stories in a different order. Provide your rationale for so doing.

7. Creative non-fiction shares with the short story elements of fiction (characterisation, scene setting, dialogue, narrative tension). Both genres have at their core an element of actual or emotional truth. Often there is also some kind of personal investment by the protagonist or the narrator – something which is at stake. Select a personal experience to explore and shape into a piece of prose with a beginning, middle and an ending. Discuss ethical dilemmas that may present themselves in the course of the exercise. The prose piece can be plotted, discussed, or written.
8. Travel writing is a popular creative non-fiction sub-genre. Write about a travel experience that has changed your way of perceiving the world.