

# Don't Call Me Jojo

Author: Tania Mills

## Synopsis

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Josie's world is falling apart. Her father Joseph has just been arrested for receiving stolen property. The police raided her house late one night and found boxes of stolen phones under Josie's bed. Josie feels confused and betrayed. She knows that her father loves her and her little sister Nell, but she can't forgive him for what he has done. She feels like her father is two different people: the loving and compassionate man who calls her Jojo; and the man with the grey, sunken face and pathetic, flowing tears of the police raid. Josie becomes further disillusioned with her father when she learns from her mother that Joseph was in trouble when he was younger, and has already spent time in prison! Josie feels like she needs to distance herself from her father. She was always his little 'Jojo' but now she detests that name.

To make matters even worse, Josie's mother announces that they are moving to be near Joseph while he serves his prison sentence. Josie is mortified, but then realises that since everyone at her school knows about her father's crime, staying where she is probably won't be much fun anyway. So Josie, her mother and little Nell move to Pleasant Valley so that the family can be together.

Things don't exactly work out this way though. Josie can't bring herself to visit her father in prison. She feels deceived by Joseph and, even when these feelings start to dissipate, she still can't bring herself to go.

Despite this, Josie begins to enjoy herself in Pleasant Valley. A lot of the other kids at her school also have parents who are in prison so she doesn't feel so embarrassed. She makes friends with a lovely girl called Jamie. At first Josie is confused because everyone else at school gives Jamie the cold shoulder. But then she finds out that Jamie's dad is a cop. Josie initially reacts badly - after all, cops are the enemy, aren't they? But then she comes to a realisation: Jamie didn't lie to her, she just didn't come clean. But, then again, neither did Josie. If anyone shouldn't judge another person for what their father is or has done, it is Josie.

## Text Type

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*Don't Call Me Jojo* is a realistic and powerful novel that will appeal particularly to teenage girls. The story is set in New Zealand and many students will be familiar

with the locations mentioned. *Don't Call Me Jojo* is a fast-paced and interesting read that will keep even reluctant readers engaged.

The narrator of the story is Josie Wilding, a teenage girl whose world is turned upside down when she learns her father's shocking secret. Josie is a typical teenager, and has always been close to her parents. When she learns about the crime that her father has committed she is angry and feels utterly betrayed. She is mortified about what her father has done and becomes the victim of bullying from some of the students at her school who have heard the rumours. To make matters worse, Josie is forced to move away to a new town to be near her father in prison.

Josie is a believable character who shows strength and courage as she faces the changes in her life. She learns about the importance of judging people for themselves rather than for who their parents are. She stands up for her new friend Jamie when the other kids at school turn on her. As a victim of prejudice herself, Josie doesn't want to become like those who tormented her.

Themes include the importance of family and forgiveness, prejudice and bullying, overcoming challenges and personal growth.

## Sharing the Novel

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*The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 5-11), Chapters 2-8 (pp. 13-83) and Chapters 9-Epilogue (pp. 85-135).*

*During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas raised in the novel. Have them make inferences and relate Josie's experiences to their own lives and broader understanding. Students should analyse the main character and discuss what challenges and problems she faces, how she deals with them and what lessons she learns from her experiences. Encourage students to identify themes and messages in the novel and how they are developed by the author. Students should back up their ideas with specific evidence and examples from the text.*

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Describe the front cover of the novel. How do the cover photos reflect what is in the blurb?
- Who is the main character in the novel?
- What shocking secret does Josie find out about her father?
- How does Josie feel about what her father has done?
- Why does Josie have to move?
- Why do you think the story is called *Don't Call Me Jojo*?
- What challenges do you think Josie will face in the novel?

***Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 5-11) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.***

### **Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 5-11)**

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- What time is it when Josie gets woken up? How does she feel when she hears the noises outside? Why doesn't she go and wake her parents? What does she do when someone hammers on the door?
- Who is at the door? What immediate thought does Josie have when she learns who it is?
- How does Josie's dad react when he learns who is at the door? Who lets them in?
- What do the police find when they search the house? What does Josie's mum do when the police question Josie about the phone? How does Josie's dad react to the policeman's discovery? Where do the police find the rest of the stolen goods?

#### **Discussion**

- What information do we learn about Josie and her family in Chapter 1?
- What do you think Josie's mum means when she says "you promised me"?
- Why does Josie find the police raid on her house so frightening? Why does the fact that the police find the phones in Josie's room make what her father did seem even worse?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

***Students read Chapters 2-8 (pp. 13-83) independently before the next shared session.***

## Comprehension Chapters 2-8 (pp. 13-83)

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- Who comes over to look after Josie and Nell? What does she tell Josie about what is going on? What doesn't she tell her?
- Why does Josie feel so angry when her mother comes home? What does Ellen tell Josie about her dad when he was younger? How does Josie feel when she learns about his past?
- What promise to Josie's mum did her dad break? What is he being charged with? How is he going to plead?
- Why does Josie get so angry when her mother calls her Jojo?
- Why is Josie pleased that her dad gets arrested in the school holidays?
- Where does Joseph go and stay when he gets out on bail?
- Why does Josie search the house?
- What does Josie's mum do that reveals to Josie how stressed she is?
- How long does Joseph have to stay in prison?
- Why doesn't Josie want the other kids at school to find out what her father has done?
- How does Josie react when her mother tells her that they have to move? Is it fair of Ellen to make Josie move away from her friends? Why/why not?
- What does Josie overhear her mother saying on the phone? Why does her attitude towards her mother soften after this?
- Where does Josie go while her father is being sentenced in court? Why does Ellen want to take Nell with her?
- Why is Josie worried that Hannah might not want to be friends with her anymore? How does Hannah react when she sees Josie?
- Why does Josie yell at Hannah?
- Who approaches Josie as she is queuing up to buy her movie ticket? What do they say to her? How does Josie react to their comments? Is her reaction justified? Why/why not?
- Where are Josie and her mother moving to? What will happen to their house?
- Why is Josie so dismayed when she arrives in Pleasant Valley? Describe her new house.
- Why does Josie's mum want Nell to sleep in with her? Why does Nell let her go without complaint?
- Describe the river behind Josie's house. How does she feel as she looks at it?
- How does Josie feel on her first day at school? What realisation does Josie come to when she walks into school by herself?



- Who does Josie sit next to in class? Describe the girl. Why doesn't Josie tell her about her father?
- How does the class react when Jamie stands up to introduce herself? Why do you think they react like this?
- Why does Josie enjoy her first week at school so much? How do the other kids at school treat her? How do they treat Jamie? What reason does Josie come up with for the other students' treatment of her friend?
- How does Josie's mum change once the family moves to Pleasant Valley? Why is Josie worried that her mother might be depressed? How does she improve after she goes to the doctor?
- Why do you think Josie is so reluctant to go and visit her father?
- What does Josie's mum tell her about the prison after the visit?
- What excuse does Josie give Jamie for why she has to leave school early on Wednesday? Why do you think Jamie goes quiet when she says this?
- How does Josie feel before the visit to the prison? Describe what happens when Josie and Ellen reach the prison. Why do you think Josie reacts like this?
- Who arrives at the prison while Josie is waiting in the car for her mother? Why doesn't she want them to see her? How do their attitudes to where they are differ from Josie's?
- Why does Josie want to go and visit Jamie when she arrives home from the prison? What does she discover about Jamie's father during the visit?

### Discussion

- Describe how Josie feels when she finds out that her father is guilty of receiving stolen property and has been to prison. Why does she feel this way?
- Josie's father has betrayed her trust - "I don't believe anything he says anymore". Why is it so important to be able to trust your parents? Why is trust so hard to get back once it has been lost?
- Why do you think Josie's mum stands by her husband despite the fact that he broke his promise to her?
- Why do you think Joseph was so easily lured back into his own life? What does he stand to lose?
- Josie is bullied by some kids because of what her father has done. Why do you think this happens? What is the best way to deal with a bully?
- How does Joseph's crime and prison sentence affect Ellen? What signs of depression does she exhibit?

- What challenges does Josie face when she moves to Pleasant Valley? Why is starting a new school so challenging? What is the best way to make new friends?
- How does Josie's character develop and change in this section of the novel?
- Why is it significant about the fact that Jamie's dad is a cop?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

*Students read Chapter 9-Epilogue (pp. 85-135) independently before the next shared session.*

## **Comprehension Chapter 9-Epilogue (pp. 85-135)**

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- What does Josie do when Jamie's dad speaks to her? Why does Jamie have a horrified expression on her face?
- What does Jamie's dad talk to Josie about down at the river? Why does Jamie get bullied at school? Why does Josie's conversation with Mr Denton make Josie feel like all the air had been sucked out of her?
- How do Josie and Jamie react when Jamie comes down to the river to find her? Why do they apologise to each other? Why does Josie feel so much closer to Jamie after this incident?
- Why does Josie begin to feel distanced from Hannah?
- Why does Josie's mother suggest that Josie no longer come to prison on visiting days?
- How do Josie's feelings toward her father begin to change during his sentence? Why do you think this is?
- What is the first thing that Josie sends her father in prison?
- What is the school play called? Why doesn't Josie want to take part in the play? How does Jamie convince her?
- Who wins the lead role in the play? Why is she unsure if she wants to do it or not? What does Josie agree to do to help her friend?
- How does Josie feel when she sees that the letter from her father has already been opened? What does her dad tell her in his letter?
- How does Josie's letter writing to her father help her forgive him for what he has done? Why does she think that her dad is miserable?
- Why does Ms Bailey begin to get frustrated with Jamie? Why do you think that Jamie's performance is suffering?
- How do the other students treat Jamie? How does this treatment contrast with how they treat Josie?

- How does Josie feel when Ms Bailey suggests that she may have to take over from Jamie? Why does she react like this?
- Why does Josie feel so strongly that she needs to be there to help Jamie?
- How does Josie stick up for Jamie after rehearsal? Why does she call the kids a "bunch of hypocrites"? What does this reveal about her character?
- What does Josie discover when she arrives at Jamie's house? What explanation does Jamie give for her poor performance? What decision has Jamie come to?
- How do the other students treat Josie after her outburst? How do they treat Jamie?
- Why is Josie's mother unsure about when her husband will be released? How does this uncertainty affect her?
- What daydream does Josie have about her father's release? Why doesn't she want to return to the city?
- How does Jamie feel on the day that her father is supposed to be released from prison? How does Jamie help make her feel better? How does she feel when she arrives home and he isn't there?
- Describe the opening night of the play.
- What does Josie notice about Jamie on the second night that the play is performed? Why does she think that Sean has a crush on Jamie?
- Why can't Jamie act in the final performance of the play? Why do you think Jamie isn't upset about not being able to perform? How does Josie feel about taking her place?
- How does Josie's mum react when Josie tells her that she is going to play the lead in the play?
- How does Josie know that her performance is successful? What sort of feelings does she experience on the stage?
- Why does Josie get worried when she can't see her mother in the audience? Who does she see walk into the back of the hall?
- How does Josie feel about performing in front of her father? Describe Josie's reunion with her father.
- Why doesn't Joseph want to live in Pleasant Valley? How does Josie feel about leaving her friends? What concerns does Josie have about returning to her old life? How is Josie different from 'Jojo'?

### Discussion

- What lessons do you think Josie learns from her experiences? Use quotes and examples to back up your ideas.
- Describe Josie's relationship with Jamie. In what ways do they help each other? What qualities does a real friend possess?

- Identify an important theme in the novel and explain how this is developed by the author?
- In what ways do you think Josie's family will be different when her father gets out of prison? What positive things have come out of Josie's father's imprisonment?

## Activities

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**News Article** - Write a news article about the events that occur on the night that Joseph Wilding is arrested. Remember to use the inverted pyramid style of writing and include the 5 W's and H. Include quotes from people involved in the incident.

**Static Image** - Design a static image that illustrates an important theme or idea from the novel. Use verbal and visual features to convey your idea. Include a written commentary that explains the theme that your static image depicts and the reasons why you chose to display your ideas the way you have.

**Plot** - Design a storyboard that shows 10 important events from the story in the order that they occur. Under each illustration include a brief description about what is happening.

**Letter** - Imagine that you are Josie. Write a letter to your father that clearly expresses your thoughts and feelings about what he has done.

**Writing** - Write an epilogue for the story a year after the original events took place.

**Review** - Write a book review for *Don't Call Me Jojo*. Include a brief plot summary. Explain the setting and the themes of the story. Include information about the main characters and explain whether you believe the characters are credible. Remember to include your personal opinion about the novel.

**Writing** - Write a poem that expresses Josie's thoughts and feelings about moving to Pleasant Valley.

**Issue** - Choose an important issue presented in the story and create a role play about it.

**Character** - Draw a picture of Josie on a piece of cartridge paper. Around her picture write as many adjectives as you can that describe her character.

**Writing** - Rewrite a chapter in the novel from a different character's point of view.

*Notes written by Vicki Williams*