

Mind over Matter

Author: Heather McQuillan

Synopsis

Jono Hettie has just moved to a new town and a new school, hundreds of kilometres from his old home, his old school and his old friends. He lives with his mum Angie and his younger sister Miranda. His dad Doug was involved in a horrific car crash years earlier and suffered severe brain damage. He is conscious but he is no longer the same man that Jono knew. Jono's family has moved to be near him.

One night a violent storm strikes and an amazing thing happens to Jono that will change his life forever. He is struck by what seems to be lightning and meets Arial-Su, an El-Frang from another universe. Arial-Su looks like a starfish but is really a combination of energies. He is able to morph into any shape, can travel at speed and become invisible at will - skills that Jono himself is also able to experience. Arial-Su has come to earth in search of his young apprentice Ducali-Su. Ducali-Su is evil and has come to earth to harness the energy of the sea for his own performance. His presence on earth is upsetting the natural balance and causing disasters to occur, so it is imperative that Arial-Su find him and destroy him. In order to do this he needs Jono's help to find his missing parts. Searching for the parts becomes an adventure for Jono. He makes new friends, discovers something sinister about a teacher at his school, ends up in jail and visits his father again for the first time in months. Arial-Su is able to get into Doug's mind and work to unlock his memories.

Jono is optimistic that Arial-Su will be able to fix Jono's father's mind but before he can do this tragedy strikes. Arial-Su finally locates Ducali-Su and he harnesses the energy of the sea to destroy his nemesis, but also destroys himself in the process. Jono is heart-broken and begins to resign himself to the fact that his father will remain lost to him forever. But then he discovers Glia, a new entity made up of both Arial-Su and Ducali-Su. Glia is young and inexperienced and tentatively makes her way in this strange new world. Jono is once again responsible for helping Glia find her missing parts and helping her return to her own universe, a task that proves not only difficult, but also life threatening. The story eventually screams towards an exciting conclusion in which Doug Hettie dramatically snaps out of his comatose state and two important characters are transported back to another universe.

Text Type

Mind over matter by Heather McQuillan won the Tom Fitzgibbon award in 2005. It is a fast-paced science-fantasy with broad appeal. The story is set in New Zealand and with this familiar backdrop it is easy for readers to take a leap of imagination into a world where parallel universes exist and entities are made up of combinations of energies and molecules. Arial-Su is a humorous and cocky character who helps build Jono's confidence by showing him what he is really capable of achieving.

Jono Hettie, the main character, is likeable and credible. Readers will relate to the challenges he faces when he starts a new school and is bullied by some of his classmates. Jono shows remarkable courage and perseverance throughout the story and through his friendship with Arial-Su, we learn about the devastating impact that his father's accident has had on him. Jono is a warm and caring character with strong loyalties to his friends and an understanding of the importance of family. Throughout the story Jono is on a spiritual journey that eventually leads him to a greater understanding of himself and his father.

Themes include growing up, dealing with tragedy, friendship and loyalty, being open-minded and believing in the impossible.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Part one: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-19), Chapters 3-17 (pp. 20-105), Chapters 18-28 (pp. 106-164). Part two: Chapters 1-19 (pp. 167-276).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas. Have them make inferences and apply their broader knowledge to the ideas and concepts introduced in the story. Students should be able to identify the elements of the story that make it a science-fantasy. Have them track the development of Jono throughout the story and identify the challenges that he faces. Students should understand the structure of the story, where the climax occurs and be able to identify important themes and ideas raised in the story.

Introducing the Novel

Study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What images can be faintly seen on the front cover? Why do you think these images are significant?
- What sea creature is sitting on top of the iris in the eye? Why do you think it is there?
- The paragraph at the top of the blurb comes directly from the text. What is this explaining and why do you think it is important?
- Who is the main character in the story? Why has he been having trouble lately?



- Who is Arial-Su? Why does he need Jono's help?
- What do you expect from a book described as a science-fantasy?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-19) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5-19)

- What causes the electricity to go out?
- Who does Jono live with?
- What evidence is there in the text to suggest that Miranda is much younger than Jono? Who is Dax Max?
- Describe what happens when Jono puts his head out the window. How does he explain his experience to his mother?
- Why does the family decide to sleep in the lounge? What does Jono hear that wakes him up? What images does he see that he thinks are "eye trickery"?
- What does Jono see on the hand towel that scares him?
- What damage does the storm cause? What other natural disasters are reported on the news?
- What happens when Angie goes in to wake up Miranda? What does Jono find in his sister's hair that is unusual? Why does he stay in Miranda's room after his sister goes for breakfast?

Discussion

- Explain what we know about Jono so far. What kind of relationship does he have with his mother? How does he treat his sister? What kind of person does he appear to be?
- What do you think happened when Jono was "struck" by lightning? What are the strange things that he keeps seeing?
- Predict what is going to happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 3-17 (pp. 20-105) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-17 (pp. 20-105)

- Where does Jono go to school? How long has he been going there? Why do you think his family had to move?
- What does Jono say to his classmates about the storm? How do the other children react to his story?
- Who is Caleb Antwerp? Why doesn't Jono like him?
- What is Jono's new nickname?
- How does Jono know that the creature is on his head? How does he catch it? What is the name of the creature? What does he tell Jono about himself?

- How does Arial-Su show Jono what he knows about him? How does Jono react to the show? Where does Arial-Su get his information?
- Why does Arial like to touch Jono while he is talking to him?
- Where does Arial come from? What is he made up of? Why has he come to earth? Why does he need Jono's help?
- How does Jono know where one of Arial's missing parts is?
- How does Arial fall off Jono's wrist? What does Jono tell Eddie and Brigit that he is looking for? Describe the watch that Arial morphs in to.
- How does Caleb end up with the watch? What reason does Jono come up with for why Arial chose to attach himself to Caleb? How does he feel about this?
- What strange announcement does Caleb make during Art class? What does Arial do that encourages Caleb to confess to his crimes? What interesting information does Arial share with Jono about Caleb?
- What strange events are happening around the world?
- How does Jono retrieve the missing part from Miss Constance's garden? What does Miranda think she sees in the garden? What name does she give the creature?
- Where is Arial's second missing part? What plan does Jono formulate to retrieve it?
- Why does Jono become so upset when he thinks Arial has left him? Describe what happened on Jono's father's fortieth birthday. What injuries did the accident cause to Jono's father?
- Explain how Arial is able to disappear.
- Why does Arial think that humans have limited senses?
- Describe the sensations that Jono feels when he turns invisible for the first time.
- Why does Mr Malstrom pick on Troy? How does Jono stick up for him? How does Jono ensure that he gets sent to the Principal's office? How does Jono rescue the missing part?
- What does Jono overhear when he is invisible inside Mr Earle's office?
- How do the other kids react towards Jono when he returns to class?
- Why is Brigit so adamant that Jono is hiding something? How does Arial catch Brigit and Eddie up on what has been happening?
- Why does Jono need to get to the police station?
- Why was Ernest put in jail?
- Describe Eddie's plan to retrieve Arial's missing part. What goes wrong with the plan?

Discussion

- Have you ever been in the position where you needed to leave your old friends and home and start a new school somewhere else? How did you feel being in this position? What difficulties did you face starting a new school where you didn't know anyone? How does Jono cope with this situation?
- Caleb Antwerp is a bully. How does he bully Jono? Why do you think he acts like this? What do you believe is the best way to deal with a bully?

- Describe Arial-Su. What special powers does he have?
- In what ways has Jono's father's accident changed Jono's life? Why do you think that Jono sometimes wishes his father had died in the accident? Why doesn't Jono like visiting his father? Can you understand why he feels this way? Why/why not?
- Jono experiences what it is like to turn invisible. If you could choose one super power what would it be and why would you chose it?
- Who do you think the lonely figure is who is following Jono and his friends?

Students read Chapters 18-28 (pp. 106-164) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 18-28 (pp. 106-164)

- What happens to distract the policeman and allow Jono to get through the door? Why does he need to be careful not to bump into anyone?
- What happens that allows Wally to see Jono? How does he react when he sees him? Why doesn't anyone take any notice of him? How does Jono escape?
- How does Ernest react when Jono ends up in his cell? Why does Ernest think Jono is there?
- Why does Jono feel sorry for Caleb? Why does Arial encourage Jono to keep Caleb around?
- How does Arial get Jono home quickly? Describe the sensations that Jono feels during the experience.
- What earthly disturbance occurs that Arial believes Ducali-Su is responsible for?
- Why did Angie take Miranda to the doctor? How has she been acting? Where does she want to go so badly?
- Why is Arial so fascinated by the ocean? Why does he think Ducali-Su will try and reach the ocean?
- Describe Miranda's paintings. Who does Miranda think drew them?
- Why does Miranda throw a tantrum?
- What does Arial believe a person's essence is? How does Arial plan to heal Doug's brain?
- Who does Jono meet again at the nursing home? What does Jono say to him?
- What memories does Arial find when he enters Doug's brain? What does he think is wrong with Doug's brain? What advice does Arial give Jono about how to help his father?
- Why is Arial hesitant about promising Jono that he will continue to help Doug?
- What mission does Jono give Ernest before he leaves the rest home?
- Why has Jono become a star in Arial's world? Why does Arial have to sacrifice himself to save the world? What will happen to Arial when he enters the ocean?

- How does Arial help Jono reach Miranda when she is caught in the rip? Why did Miranda venture out into the water? What do we learn about Ducali-Su and his motives from his conversation with Arial? Why isn't Ducali-Su able to return to his own world?
- What causes the whirlpool to appear? How does Jono manage to keep himself and Miranda from being sucked into it? Who comes to their rescue?
- What does Miranda remove from the ocean before the family leaves the beach?
- Why does Jono receive so much attention after the incident at the beach?
- How was the baby El-Frang created? What is its name?

Discussion

- Does Caleb deserve Jono's forgiveness? Why/why not? What does Jono's willingness to forget what Caleb has done in the past reveal about his character? Find examples in the story that illustrate how Caleb is trying to change and become a good friend to Jono.
- What do you think might have happened if Miranda had managed to locate Ducali-Su's missing parts?
- Why do you think a new El-Frang was created when Arial and Ducali-Su were destroyed? What do you think its purpose is on earth? In what ways is this new El-Frang different from Arial?
- Predict what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 1-19 (pp. 167-276) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 1-19 (pp. 167-276)

- Why do you think Miranda no longer needs blankie?
- Why does Jono want to keep Glia on earth?
- Why does Jono walk to school with a spring in his step?
- What bad news does Brigit give Caleb and Jono by the bike sheds? Why does this news create a problem for the group?
- Why is Glia so unsure about her ability to help Jono's father? Why does Jono often feel frustrated with his new El-Frang friend?
- Why do you think Jono is so reluctant to share Glia with his friends?
- What startling admission does Glia make when Jono asks her if the Elders have tried to contact her? What further information does he learn from Glia in the sickbay?
- Why does Bradley tease Jono? How does Caleb stick up for Jono?
- How does Jono know that Mr Malstrom has evil intentions?
- Who pops into Mr Malstrom's class to "see how things are going"? Why is he really there? In what ways does Mr Malstrom's behaviour change when he is being watched? How does Mr Malstrom try and frame Jono? How does Glia save him?

- What interesting discovery does Jono make in Mr Malstrom's back room?
- How does Jono know where Glia's missing part is?
- What exciting news does Angie give Jono when he arrives home?
- What had Ernest been doing in Jono's absence?
- What improvements has Doug made since Jono's last visit?
- What images does Glia send Jono from Doug's brain? Why does Glia believe that there is still hope for Doug? What causes Doug's seizure?
- Why do you think Ernest is able to hear Glia too?
- Why does Glia have so many questions about herself and her purpose on earth? What does she believe is the reason why she hasn't heard from the Elders? What changes are taking place in Glia's world?
- Why does Jono decide to finally tell his friends about Glia?
- What does Jono do while his friends are in detention? Why do you think it is getting easier for him to use his powers?
- How does Jono discover the location of the church in Miranda's drawing?
- What roles do Jono and his friends assign themselves to make sure they are prepared for their mission?
- What early birthday present does Angie give Jono? How does this create a problem for Jono? What does Jono give Miranda as a peace offering?
- Why aren't Eddie and Caleb able to help Jono with the mission?
- What does Glia sense about Jono's feelings for Brigit?
- Where is the final El-Frang piece located? Why can't it climb up to meet Jono and Brigit? Why does Jono make the decision to lower himself over the cliff edge?
- How does Glia fall off Jono's wrist? What does Jono do that causes him to lose his footing? How long does Glia tell Jono he has to hang on for?
- Why does Jono believe that Ducali must go down and meet Glia? Why is Ducali so reluctant to do this?
- Who gathers at the bottom of the cliff to watch the drama unfold?
- What happens to cause Jono to fall just before the rescuer reaches him?
- Describe the sensations that Jono feels when he falls down the cliff face.
- How does Ernest help save Jono?
- What does Glia show Jono before she takes him back? What does Glia mean when she says "we have over-compensated you"? What does Glia need to do to correct the balance?
- What cover story does Glia create so that the witnesses don't know what really happened to Jono?
- How does Doug react when Jono is rescued? Why does Glia attach himself to Doug before Jono is taken to the hospital?
- Why does Brigit believe that Jono needs to stay on earth and she should be the one to go back with Glia?
- How do Brigit's friends plan to explain her disappearance?

- In what ways does Mr Malstrom behave strangely in class? Why does Mr Malstrom want to see Eddie and Jono at lunchtime? How does Eddie react to Mr Malstrom's admission? What does Mr Malstrom want the boys to stay and do?
- How do Brigit and Caleb get into Mr Malstrom's room? What preparations does the group make for Glia, Ernest and Brigit's departure? What goes wrong?
- How does Brigit feel when she realises that she has been left behind?
- Why does Glia get rid of Mr Malstrom's car?
- Describe how Doug has changed since Jono and Angie last saw him. What information does the doctor give them about his progress?
- What rumour has been circulating the hospital since Jono's escapade on the cliff?
- What bad news does the nurse give the family about Ernie?
- Who does Doug credit with playing a huge role in his recovery? What does Jono learn about Glia's name when he mentions it to the nurse?
- Why isn't Jono overly concerned that he no longer has powers?
- Why does Jono believe that change is inevitable?

Discussion

- How have Jono's experiences in helping Ariel and Glia changed him? Why do you think his confidence has increased so much? What has he learnt from his adventures?
- Describe Mr Malstrom. What sorts of things does he say and do that make him a bad teacher? Why do you think he has it in for Jono so much? Do you think he got what he deserved at the end of the novel? Explain your answer.
- Do you agree with Glia when she says *"Everything you do affects the rest of the world. Some effects are big and instantaneous while others are small and take a long time or need a chain of events to show their impact"*. Why/why not? Explain your answer.
- How does Jono's relationship with Brigit develop during the novel? Why do the pair have such a connection? What does Brigit's willingness to sacrifice herself so that Jono can remain with his family reveal about her character? What would you do if you were in her position?
- Identify the climax in the story. Why is this event important?

Activities

Story Board – Choose 15 important events that occur in the novel. Draw a story board showing these events. Under each illustration include a brief explanation about what is happening.

Diary Entry – Imagine that you are Jono Hettie. Write a diary entry for the night that the cliff edge escapade occurred. Include information about the events that occurred and Jono's thoughts and feelings about the experience.

Character – Choose your favourite character from the story and write a description about them. Explain their role in the story and the qualities and characteristics they possess. Explain why you choose them as your favourite character.

News Report – Imagine that you are a news reporter. Write an article about the events that occurred at the beach on the day that Miranda and Jono nearly drowned. Use the pyramid structure of writing where all of the most important information is contained in the first 2 paragraphs of your article. Include quotes from witnesses and people involved in the rescue.

Promotional Poster – Create a promotional poster for Arial-Su the performer.

Theme – Identify and explain a major theme that is developed in the novel.

Web Page – Design a web page advertising the novel. Include information about the setting, plot and characters. Explain the main themes and ideas that are developed in the story. You could also include links such as information about the author and awards that she has won. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Talk Show – Your class is going to present a talk show Oprah Winfrey style. Choose someone to be the host or hostess. Choose students from the class to be main characters in the novel. Each chosen student needs to study their character and be prepared to act in-role. The rest of the class is going to be the studio audience and needs to prepare questions to ask the guests. You might like to video tape your class's performance.

Board game – Design a board game based on the novel. For every positive event that occurs reward the player. For every negative event penalise them. Illustrate your game with important settings and scenes from the novel.

Personal Effects – Put together a list of items (bedside table, school bag, presents) that are significant to Jono and explain the importance of them.