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# Theme Analysis of Jasper Jones

## Themes of Jasper Jones

### Power

The adults have dominance over their children, whereas children attempt to strive for more freedom.

- Ruth decides Charlie's daily routine, what he can do and where he can go, and punishes him for disobeying her order. Despite that Charlie still manages to sneak out the house at night and meet with Jasper.
- Gwen scolds Eliza for running away to the library instead of staying at home, especially at a time when her another daughter is missing.

The powerless non-white is oppressed by the white.

Jasper has no power to argue for himself and can only bear all criticism on him as a scapegoat. He also has no power in front of the police who is able to hurt him cruelly.

### Quotes

- "Stupid, stupid little girl! Where have you been? ... Don't tell me lies! Come with me, now!"
- "I want you to stay on the street so I can see you. ... Because I said so."
- "Not anything that's a concern of yours."
- "Now, please, just do as I ask tomorrow."
- "Oh, Jesus Christ! Are you two ever gonna listen to me?! I am fed up! Fed up!"

### Prejudice

The social background – Corrigan is a profoundly racist community (racism/prejudice based on races is deeply rooted in townspeople's mind). In 1960s Corrigan, people with skin colour other than white are frequently targeted with racial discrimination by townspeople, such as Warwick Trend, who conducts cruel bully on Jeffrey's father. Charlie's friendship with Jeffrey and Jasper reinforces that people need to put an effort to be understanding and empathetic in order to overcome their prejudice.

### Jasper Jones

Both Jasper and his dead Aboriginal mother, Rosie, are discriminated against. As a scapegoat, Jasper is routinely blamed for others inappropriate behaviours or even crimes. Despite of his own experience, he also instinctive accuses 'Mad' Jack Lionel for killing Laura Wishart based on his bias knowledge about Jack. In this way, Perkins informs audiences that misunderstandings and prejudice are largely based on one's education and surrounding

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environment.

## The Lus

- Jeffrey's family is also frequently attacked by racists.
- The older cricket player calls Jeffrey 'Cong' and teases him, making him cannot reach his new ball.
- Mrs Findlay deliberately spills hot water onto Mrs Lu as a relief for her son's death in Vietnam War, yet the Lus are not responsible for the war which local people take it for granted based on their race.
- Although Jeffrey is shortly respected after he wins over a cricket match, his father, An Lu, is beaten at the same night. Hence Perkins shows audiences that respect is fragile in eliminating prejudice.
- Townspeople's attitude towards prejudice

Although some whites are willing to fight against racism such as Wesley and the Lus' neighbours, Corrigan is still a racist community where discrimination and harassment based on race are mostly tolerated. This is explicitly expressed when Mrs Findlay bullies Mrs Lu, among the others present in the hall, including the police sergeant, few of them recognise that this is inappropriate and are willing to stand up for Mrs Lu to punish Mrs Findlay.

## Quotes

- "They blame that poor kid for everything."
- "Who'd you blame first? I can't tell them the truth. This is Corrigan."
- "Your boy doing alright, eh? Stuffing his face like a pig. Is your boy alright? Cause Mine isn't. Mine's dead. My boy's dead!"
- "Yellow-skin bastard!"

## Sacrifice

- Parents sacrifice their freedom and aspiration for their children's better future.
- Ruth has been enduring the boring life in Corrigan for a long time in order to accompany Charlie and offers him a fine cared childhood.
- Gwen decides to endure the abuse from her husband both on herself and her daughter, in order to maintain a normality of her household for her little daughter's future. It will be harder for Eliza to find a good partner and live a joyful life in Corrigan if Pete's crime is uncovered.

## Quotes

"You should consider yourself lucky that you've got a mother that cares about you so much. A lot of people never get that. (implies Jasper)"

## Parents and ?hildren

- Charlie learns to see his parents as whole people with their own desires and may make

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mistakes.

Charlie discovers Ruth's betrayal to Wes by having an affair with the Sergeant and eventually, he accepts that even his own mother can have a different pursuit and aspiration. At the night when Ruth leaves, Charlie understands and shows empathy to her mother's dislike of the simple life in Corrigan, and fully respects her decision to move away into the city.

## Charlie and Ruth's Strained Relationship

At the start of the film, when Ruth punishes Charlie to dig a huge hole in their backyard without a clear reason, for being disobeying her order to stay on the street. At that time, Charlie could not understand Ruth's request and considers it as ridiculous. As the story unfolds, Charlie gradually learns that Ruth does care about Charlie's safety although her ways of education may be inappropriate and less respectful, which is likely due to her unawareness of how fast Charlie is growing up.

## Quotes

- "The boy's growing up, Ruthie."
- "I want you to stay on the street so I can see you. ... Because I said so."
- "Not anything that's a concern of yours."
- "Now, please, just do as I ask tomorrow."
- "Oh, Jesus Christ! Are you two ever gonna listen to me?! I am fed up! Fed up!"
- "Today was ... just her way of telling you all that. And I don't blame her."
- "You should consider yourself lucky that you've got a mother that cares about you so much. A lot of people never get that. (implies Jasper)"
- "Oh, God. You're growing up so fast. What happened to my little boy? You've got your whole life ahead of you, all you kids. You're so free."
- "You know, when I first heard that Laura Wishart might have run away... I was jealous. That's an awful thing to say, but I just... it's how I feel. I love you... so much. And I love your father. I just can't be in this place anymore. "I know."

## The Hero

### What is Superhero?

Over the course of the film, Charlie progressively learns that people can never escape their fears entirely, and in contrast, it is the capability to live with fear makes heroes great. As Charlie argues with Jeffrey, Batman is the greatest superhero because he "does not possess any superpower", which means he is mortal, allowing him to be injured and killed. In fact, it is human beings' instinctive fear to death and their ability to overcome fear make them "greater than normal", giving them the opportunity for feats of courage and bravery.

### Jasper as a Hero to Charlie.

Jasper behaves as a hero in Charlie's eyes, who is able to, or at least seems to be calm, casual and skilful in dealing with Laura's dead body, whereas Charlie is depicted as being terrified and slightly effeminate. When Charlie eventually sees Jasper cry as Eliza reads her

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sister's letter to him, he realises that even heroes seem fearless are not completely brave as they look like.

## Jeffrey as a Hero to Himself

After undergoing the prevalent racism from townspeople, Jeffrey decides to stay at home at the New Year's Eve, "honing [his] skills to keep the streets safe" just as a Kungfu master, which in fact his intention is to protect his parents from the other bullies in the town.

## Wesley as a Hero to Charlie

When Wes helps Jeffrey's family to defend them from a group of local racists, Charlie realises that his father is braver than he originally thought.

## Quotes

- "Superman is boring. He's invulnerable. That's why they invented kryptonite, so he has some kind of weakness. Batman, he's the best superhero, because, well, he's just a guy like me or you."
- "Batman does not possess any superpower."
- "Given that 'super' only means 'greater than normal', by that definition, Batman can only be described as a superhero."
- "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."
- "Superman doesn't need courage to stand in front of a bullet because it can't possibly harm him. But Batman, on the other hand, he has more to lose. He has to overcome his fears to save people."

## Change

Charlie's changing attitudes towards Jasper and Jack Lionel. (starting to be empathetic)

- Initially Charlie is still suspicious about Jasper's motive, then he admires Jasper's calm and masculinity in dealing with Laura's body. Eventually he realises that Jasper is not so fearless as he seems to be, which in fact he also has weakness and experiences grief when losing his loved one. This confirms Charlie's belief that Jasper is a hero who can master fear.
- When Charlie and Jasper visit 'Mad' Jack Lionel, they learn that Rosie's death is completely an accident which in fact Jack is a lonely and harmless old man who loves her dearly and he is extremely guilty about this incident.
- Changing family dynamic and Charlie's attitude towards his parents

## Forgiveness

Teenagers learn to understand and be empathetic to other's experience and decisions.

- Jasper forgives Jack Lionel for his guilt of pre-conceiving and mis-killing Rosie, Jasper's Aboriginal mother. He learns that Jack "realised how wrong [he]'d been about her" and

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then decides to forgive him and starts a new, amicable relationship with his grandfather.

- Charlie forgives Ruth for her own desire and dream to have a wealthy life. He understands that even though her ways of education may not be perfect, because it is her first time being a mother and hence she might make mistakes.

## **Coming of Age**

### **Leaving Familiar Place**

At the night when Laura died, Charlie first sneaks out of his room and starts an adventure with Jasper. Charlie's action of squeezing through the tiny window symbolises his reborn and the beginning of turning adulthood.

## **Seeing Parents as Whole People**

### **Trying to Fit In**

Charlie, who is attracted by literature and bad at sport, tries to fit into the friendship group with other children in the town, which is one of the main reasons behind his motive to join Jasper. He attempts to prove he is as brave and courageous as others by finding out the truth of Laura's death.

### **First Crushes/Developing Sexuality**

Eliza is Charlie's first crush, and their awkward and inappropriate behaviours are shown through their conversation and Charlie's promise to accompany Eliza at the firework.

### **Experiencing Guilt**

- Charlie is guilty for Jasper and Jeffrey's suffering and miserable experience of racial discriminations, yet he is unable to support them when they are in trouble.
- Charlie is guilty for his mother when Ruth eventually decides to move away from Corrigan.
- Jeffrey is guilty for her parents being discriminated against by the townspeople, yet he is unable to support them, illustrating through his practice of cricket and Kungfu in order to protect his family.

### **Experiencing Prejudice**

- Jasper
- Jeffrey
- Charlie (not himself directly, but his friends)

## **Questioning Social Rules**

Charlie is the only one at the town hall who expresses his indignation for Mrs Lu's injustice treatment when Mrs Findlay spills hot water onto the later. He also continues asking and

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questing his father for why the police says and does nothing to punish Mrs Findlay for her racist behaviour.

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