

JULIUS AND THE WATCHMAKER

Tim Hehir

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Fiction, B paperback

RECOMMENDED AGE:

YEARS 7-9

SYNOPSIS

Julius Higgins runs errands for his grandfather's bookshop and is no match for Crimper McCready and his gang of bullies. That is, however, until the clock-collecting Springheel stands up to the bullies. Julius is instantly drawn to the mysterious stranger and offers to deliver his book order. He learns that Springheel is searching for the diary of watchmaker John Harrison and he makes a deal to help him locate this rare book. It is only after Julius has run away from home and tricked his grandfather that he realises the true power of the item, a manual for making a time-travel device. Julius becomes caught up in a dangerous adventure as he meets others who are also searching for the diary. Has the diary fallen into the wrong hands? Will Julius and the Guild of Watchmakers be able to avert catastrophe in time to save their future?

Julius and the Watchmaker is a time-travel adventure set in Victorian London. Hehir's detailed explanation of time will have students engrossed as they navigate through an intricate web of possible and probable realms of the future. They will also enjoy the imaginative characters, including Dickensian urchins, sharp-toothed Grackacks and the mechanical clockmen. The adventure structure allows for a discussion of how the author uses suspense as Julius moves backwards and forwards through time. This debut novel will appeal to lower secondary students, especially boys.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Hehir is an author of short stories and plays. His short story 'God Bless Us One and All' was published by *Structo* magazine (UK) and his play *Pride and Prejudice in 10 Minutes Flat* has been

performed in various countries and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Hehir is based in Melbourne. *Julius and the Watchmaker* is his first novel.

BEFORE READING

1. How do we know whom to trust? Do we all have the same understanding of trust?

Draw up a table with two columns using the headings trustworthy and untrustworthy.

Make a list of the personal characteristics that are applicable to each column. Share your answers with a partner and highlight the words that you both used. As a class, decide on the best five words that describe someone you can trust.

2. Is it ok to tell lies in order to keep a secret? In what situations would this be acceptable?
 3. As a class, brainstorm the structure and features of an adventure story and discuss how authors use this structure to create suspense. You may discuss other texts as examples of this structure.
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WHILE READING

1. As you read, keep a note of any language, objects, events or people that are unfamiliar: Hades, sovereigns, prototype, chronometer, costermonger, hubbub, *doppelgänger* etc.
 2. Keep a list of any intertextual references: other texts, fictional characters or quotes (Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, Shakespeare quote from *Hamlet*) and consider why they are included.
 3. For what purpose do you think the author is noting the date and time at the beginning of each chapter? At what point in the novel does this purpose become obvious?
 4. Choose a chapter and make a list of the similes used. What effect do these similes have on the depiction of the setting and characters?
 5. 'A fire crackled in the fireplace, its heat licking hungrily at Julius's face.' P.12 Make a note of the author's use of personification. How does this device add to the atmosphere of the novel?
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AFTER READING

Character

1. 'A real gentleman would know better. Neckwear comes in one colour and that colour is white...black is permissible if you are feeling rakish.' P.7 Mr Higgins judges the social standing of Springheel and Professor Fox on the colour of their cravats. How correct were his first impressions of these men?
2. Julius first appears in the novel as a cowardly figure. How does Julius change over the course of the novel? What contributes to this change?
3. 'Sure fmg squire,' said the girl. 'We got all night, we 'ave. Tell you wat, gov'. Give us a duce and we won't do ya down. Can't say fairer 'n 'at, can we?' P.24 Discuss the conventions of speech adopted by the street urchins. What does their language style reveal about them?
4. 'For special orders I always like to keep the customer waiting. It helps to *up* the price if it's difficult to find.' P.28 What do you think about the way Mr Higgins conducts his business? Find evidence from the text that Springheel is indeed 'free from remorse or fear'.
5. 'Julius was not close enough to see any eyes. From his vantage point he could only make out two shallow, brass cylinders like the ends of telescopes, dark but for the lamplight reflecting in their lenses.' P.248 How does the author influence the way we view Christian Machine and the clockmen?
6. 'They live tormented by unfulfilled longing for more and more of what they can't have. They become like ghosts, tortured souls who can never simply enjoy each pleasant moment because their hearts are set on the next imagined moment.' P. 83 The Grackacks are inhabitants from another world but they consider themselves human. The Tibetans refer to them as hungry ghosts. What message is the author sending about human nature?
7. How does the author influence our opinion about good and evil characters in the novel? Select three words each to describe Julius, Springheel, Clements, Flynn and the Professor.

Style and Structure

1. Look at the chapter endings and identify how the author creates suspense.
2. 'I believe he took the life of the poet, Percy Shelley. Killed him for his pocketwatch.' P.85 Identify places in the text where the author has made connections to historical people or events—John Harrison, Julius Caesar, Percy Shelly, Mary Shelly, Lord Byron. What effect do these real historical elements have on this work of fiction?
3. 'On the bare landing four greasy window panes let some light in. *This is it. Now, don't make a complete fool of yourself, Higgins.* He knocked on the door.' P.11 The story is told using third-person point of view. How is the author able to limit the view of the third-person narrator? How does the author give insight into Julius's thoughts?
4. Re-write a passage of the novel from first-person POV. What effect does this change have on the reader? Which style do you prefer?
5. Map the possible and probable futures and pasts that Julius visits in a tree formation by representing the present timeline as the trunk, the past as the roots and the future as the branches (see pages 121-122)

Themes

Trust

1. In chapter 6 when Julius is considering his options for the future he wants to be with someone he can trust. Who do you think is the most trustworthy character in the novel and why?
2. 'Flynn tricked you, Julius. He made you trust him, but it was all to his own evil ends.' P.165 How do Springheel and Clements deceive Julius into believing that they are more trustworthy than Flynn and Professor Fox?
3. 'I suppose I always knew he would, in my guts.' P. 366 What role do our gut instincts play in our lives?

Time

1. **As** a class, discuss what we know about time travel from other books and movies (*When You Reach Me*, *Back to the Future*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* etc.) How does this novel compare?
2. Discuss the many representations of time in the novel: the Professor and the Watchmakers Guild trying to protect time, the Grackacks not appreciating time, Flynn and Julius wanting to make up for lost time etc. What is an overall message about time represented in the novel?

Bullying

1. Julius runs away from school to avoid dealing with the bullies. What other approach could he have taken?
2. Describe the bullying tactics that Springheel and Clements use to manipulate Julius.
3. 'That...with Crimper. It was amazing. You really put the wind up them.' P.15 Consider how differently Springheel and Flynn approach the bully Crimper. Discuss the pros and cons of each method and decide who was more effective.

Family

1. Julius does not take his grandfather's advice of hitting the bullies back. What is some good or bad advice that you have received from your family?
 2. 'The time had come to say what he had been rehearsing in his head over and over again—to tell Mr Flynn that he knew that he was his father—as the bells of St Paul's rang out to celebrate the moment.' P.371 Why does Julius think Flynn is his father? How does Flynn recreate a sense of family in the novel before Julius comes to think that Flynn is his father?
 3. 'What do you think your grandfather will say when I turn up for tea?'
'He'll be delighted to see you, honestly. And he'll be delighted with me for inviting you.'
P.376 Write the reunion scene between Julius, his grandfather and Flynn that could take place after the end of the novel.
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RESPONDING

1. Time travel only exists in fiction. What is your view on the possibility of time travel?
2. How would it affect your present actions if you could go back in time and change the trajectory of your future?
3. The inner thoughts of the minor characters are somewhat unknown due to the narration style. Write and perform a monologue as either Mr Flynn or Mr Higgins that shows their relationship with Julius. You can base your monologue on their reaction to a specific incident or create a broader discussion of their feelings.
4. Julius gains a new understanding of time. Can you explain the concept of parallel realms and time travel from the novel in your own words?
5. Write a newspaper article that reports the arrival of Grackacks into London.
6. The schoolmaster, Whacker O'Bryne, enjoys using the cane on his students. Research past and present corporal punishment laws in Australia and discuss their main differences. Develop an argument, in the form of an essay or debate, either for or against using the cane as a discipline tool.