

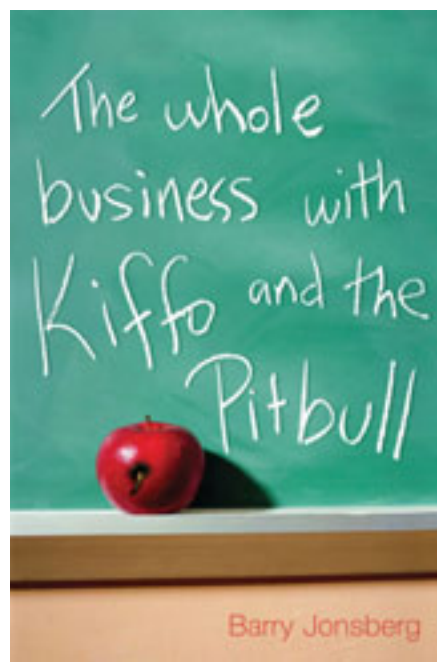
Teachers Notes (Secondary)
by Anita Jonsberg
The Whole Business with
Kiffo and the Pitbull
Barry Jonsberg

ISBN 9781741141122

Recommended for age 14 and over.

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Introduction	2
Pre-reading activities	2
During reading:	
Chapter activities	3
Post reading:	
Major assignment suggestions	9
Blackline Masters	
Chapter activity Assignment Sheets	10
Poem: <i>Timothy Winters</i>	14
Meet the Writers	15



INTRODUCTION

The Whole Business with Kiffo and the Pitbull is the witty, wild and surprising account of the friendship between Calma and Kiffo, two Year Ten students who appear at first to have little in common, but who are connected by past events. When a fiery and intimidating new teacher enters their classroom they are drawn together in a series of hilarious but increasingly dangerous escapades as they try to prove her involvement in a dark underworld. When tragedy strikes, Calma's wry narration never falters, and we are encouraged to examine our ideas about relationships. We become full of admiration for Calma, who wise-cracks her way throughout this comic and poignant tale.

Part journal, part detective story: the teenage narrator enjoys playing with the form of 'her' novel. The innovative structure of the book lends itself to formal literary analysis and fosters understandings about narrative perspective, register, genre and the use of flashback. Characters and relationships are complex: the range of young adult readers' reactions and insights will fuel rewarding class discussions. Issues such as social class, friendships and family dynamics encourage more creative responses and make the book suitable for the purposes of Personal Development and Social Education as well as English teaching.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

POETRY

Timothy Winters by Charles Causley (see blackline master below). Available from <http://torch.cs.dal.ca/~johnston/poetry/timothy.html>

This poem can be used to frame ideas around the issue of the 'haves' and 'have nots' in society. Timothy is abused at home and pitied in public. With students who are comfortable together, it is possible to hold a school welfare meeting about Timothy [a member of staff has reported bruising], with students taking roles such as Principal, School Counsellor, teacher, Grandma and father. Each student prepares his or her role and presents a report to the meeting before recommendations about Timothy's future are made.

Other activities:

- Write a short story about Timothy's life, from his perspective or that of his father or grandmother.
- Write the Welfare Worker's report or diary from the time he or she met Timothy.
- Create a painting or drawing which uses colour to express Timothy's state of mind.
- Script a conversation between Timothy and his father when his father has just returned from the pub.

PROSE

'My Family' from *Loveghosts and Nosehair* by Stephen Herrick. University of Queensland Press, 1998. ISBN 0-7022-2878-8

This section of the novel features three versions of a child's family: a 'dream' version (the family he would like to have), a 'real' version (diametrically opposed to the 'dream' one), and the 'truthful' version (as honest as possible).

- Have students write three versions of their own families. Emphasise that all three versions may be fictionalised, as some students will not want to share details of their 'real' family.

- Hold a class discussion about 'the ideal family' and make a composite family together. Help students to realise the implications of living in this 'perfect' family: the experience may not be as perfect as they imagine!

INTERNET AND EVERYDAY TEXTS

Provide students with up to date articles based around the breakdown of family and community, drug use in teenagers and/or featuring teachers and education. Students can use the net to research around these topics and present a point of view. Recent newspaper letters and Internet articles are useful as students can respond authentically to these texts.

DURING READING

Below are suggested activities for use alongside specific parts of the novel. Major assignments are in a separate section (below). It is in no way suggested that you use all of the following activities, rather that you may choose those activities best suited to the make-up and level of your class.

CHAPTER 0

Briefly discuss students' initial reactions to a chapter that is labelled '0'. How is this different from beginning at '1', or with a chapter heading? What does it suggest about this section of the book?

- What impression of the narrator is given in this opening chapter and how is this communicated?
- Write a report on one of your teachers. [Volunteering yourself as the subject of student reports can be an enlightening experience!]

CHAPTER 1

- "The Boys at the Back of the Class" [see **Assignment One**]. This assignment asks students to describe the most irritating things other students do and how they are affected by it. This might be best done as a prose under supervision for no longer than forty minutes.
- Imagine that you are either Miss Leanyer or Kiffo. Write a short account of his/her thoughts during the scene described in chapter 1.

FLASHBACK

After reading the 'flashback' between chapters one and two, briefly discuss the following:

- What might be the purpose of the flashback?
- Ask students to articulate the questions they have about this piece – conclusions are unnecessary at this stage.

CHAPTER 2

Highlight the author's distance from the text in this chapter and then have students answer the following questions:

- What were your feelings when the story was suspended and Calma addressed you directly?
- Why do you think the author included this passage?
- Look at the register of Calma's writing. What can you tell about her personality?

Calma describes her mother as a 'Westinghouse refrigerator'. Brainstorm the possible connotations of this metaphor on a whiteboard. Ask students to write down their first impressions of Calma's mother. Encourage students to see possible positive connotations – a fridge contains food for example, and in the novel is a mode of communication between Calma and her mother. When they have completed this, get each student to create similar metaphors for three of their own relatives, or people they know, ensuring that the metaphor illustrates the positive as well as the negative traits of their chosen people. Ask students to write an explanation for each one.

CHAPTERS 3–5

In Chapter 3, Calma's class is introduced to its worst nightmare—a teacher who is determined to have the class regimented in behaviour and work habits, and who is punitive in style. After discussing the rights and wrongs of her behaviour, organise students into small groups and have them work on **Assignment Two**, which asks for some creative and fun thinking about how students would rid themselves of a teacher like this.

CHAPTER 6

By this chapter, the reader has awareness of Kiffo's character. It is clear that Calma feels protective of him—certainly where the Pitbull's treatment of him is concerned.

- Create human outlines [by drawing round a willing student in the class – you could use butcher's paper for this] of Calma, Kiffo and Miss Payne—'The Pitbull'. With students, fill in the outline with possible motivations for Miss Payne's behaviour towards Kiffo and add thoughts that she may be having. Fill in Calma and Kiffo's outlines with their feelings and thoughts at this stage. Leave space to add to the human outlines later.

"All the mothers with kids in strollers were going past looking at Kiffo like he was Osama Bin Laden."
(page 48)

- Pretend you are a middle-aged onlooker to the conversation between Calma and Kiffo outside of K-Mart. Write a first person narration to describe what you see and what conclusions you draw from the scene. What do you think of their behaviour, dress and body language? Would anything seem strange to you? Would you be prompted to take any action?
- In pairs, brainstorm a plan that would have enabled Calma to alert Kiffo that the Pitbull had returned home.

CHAPTER 7

Discuss Conversation Two, between Calma and the school counsellor, Mrs Mills (pp. 68-73). What is happening here? What conclusions is Mrs Mills drawing from Calma's answers to her questions? How is Calma attempting to deflect this unwelcome and misguided attempt at analysis? What effect does this conversation have on the reader's view of Calma? [Explore the notion of sympathetic characterisation and manipulation here—see also Chapter 17.]

- Why do you think the author chose to express this part of the narrative through conversations rather than straight narrative?
- Rewrite one of the conversations *as* narrative and compare the effect.

CHAPTER 8

Discuss the effect of this one-word chapter. What is the effect of the white space?

- [Whole Class] Write into the space. Describe Calma's possible thoughts, facial expression and body language at this point.

CHAPTER 9

- Re-write a scene from a Shakespearian play in a similar style to Calma's rendition of *Macbeth*.
- **Assignment Three:** Compose a bullying letter and swap with a same-sex partner [if possible]. After swapping, annotate your partner's letter with details of words and phrases that seem particularly hurtful and state why. After annotation, compose a reply to the letter which is designed to defuse the situation. Swap back and evaluate the impact of your own initial letter and of the reply written by your partner.

N.B If teachers are aware of any bullying problems in the class, think about using this exercise and whether you need to provide any extra materials or exercises to make this a 'safe' activity.

- Write a detailed description of a no-go area in your town or city and explain why you avoid it.

CHAPTER 10

Here, Calma escapes into a fantasy world reminiscent of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* by James Thurber.

(*The Secret Life of Walter Mitty and Other Pieces*. Penguin paperback. ISBN 0141182911

Also available at <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Cafe/6821/thurber.html>)

It is clear that Calma is adopting a persona in order to cope with a situation that she finds unsettling, frightening even, 'as herself'.

- Discuss the change of genre at the beginning of this chapter and what this 'fantasy' tells us about the seemingly confident young woman we have got to know.
- Storyboard the action sequence in this chapter. Detail camera angles, camera shots and sound effects.

CHAPTER 13

- Describe an incident when you told a huge 'untruth' and got away with it. Alternatively, describe a time when you told an untruth and *didn't* get away with it! [What might you have done differently?]

Scene 141, Take 1 & Take 2 (pp 141-3)

This is another of Calma's fantasies and this time she sees events as part of a movie. Does this indicate that fantasised events are more essential and vivid? What does this suggest about Calma's relationship to real events? What is the significance of 'take two'?

- Read *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and write a similar narrative, or present your 'daydreams' as scenes from a film, complete with script and stage directions.

CHAPTER 14

"I don't know what I have done to deserve this," said the Pitbull. Her voice was very quiet and there was a catch in it, like she was on the point of crying." [page 145]

- How do the events in this chapter influence the reader's view of the Pitbull? What doubts do they suggest about Calma's version of events? [Think about the positioning of Calma

bumping into the Pitbull and the Pitbull's reaction, just after we have witnessed Calma's flight of fantasy in the previous chapter – does it affect our opinion of her as narrator? Look also at Calma's more objective point of view when she makes notes about 'evidence' for Kiffo.]

- Update your character outlines (from Ch. 6) of Calma, Kiffo and Miss Payne with the characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations at this point in the novel.

CHAPTERS 15–16

Calma is struggling between guilt at her responsibilities towards her mother and defensiveness when faced with that guilt.

Lead students through a discussion of Calma's conflicting thoughts in these chapters. Have them draw up two columns and fill in possible 'compliant' thoughts in one column and 'defiant' thoughts in the other. The thoughts may be expressed as phrases or as single words.

Next, have students form a Conscience Corridor. One student is chosen to be Calma. The others form two lines facing each other between which 'Calma' will walk. [Students in each line should be at least one foot away from each other.] As 'Calma' walks between the two lines, each student in one line whispers to her the evidence of her guilt, while students in the other line whisper her 'defensive' thoughts and why she shouldn't be treated this way –literally like having angels and devils sitting on her shoulders. Once the exercise is complete, have Calma give feedback to the class about how she felt during her walk. Encourage several students to take on the role of Calma.

How has the author created atmosphere in these two chapters?

- How have your particular experiences affected your understanding of what happened in these chapters?

CHAPTER 17

"...I didn't have to tell you all that. I could have toned it down, made myself look more reasonable than I was, and you would never have known the difference." [page 167]

- **Assignment Four:** Discuss the notion of reliable and unreliable narrators, list the evidence about Calma in a table and write a conclusion based on your findings.

CHAPTER 18

Look carefully at Calma's description of the setting of Jonno's house.

- Draw an 'artist's impression' for a property magazine and create a real-estate salesperson's description to accompany it, which, unlike the description in the book, is designed to sell the property.
- Describe what you think Jonno will be like just from the description of his home.

CHAPTER 19

Kiffo is impressed with Calma's suggestion that she write everything down. Highlight his sudden concern about his brother being mentioned by name.

- Contrast Kiffo's character at the beginning of the novel with his seriousness here. How has your impression of him changed and what events in the novel have caused this change?

CHAPTERS 20 & 21

Having realised Kiffo's need to pursue the Pitbull to the bitter end, and because of her strong bond with him, Calma agrees to 'One Last Go'. She realises that the two of them have little hope of conclusively proving the Pitbull's guilt one way or another, and is continuing because of Kiffo's passion.

- Predict what will happen as the resolution of the novel approaches.

CHAPTER 22

Having nearly been killed, Calma is catapulted into reality: Kiffo, however, is not. The reader's interpretation of their relationship is cemented by the security that becomes apparent in Calma's patient and reasoned explanation to Kiffo, of what has taken place. The shock to the reader occurs just when their friendship finds its closest point: they are both free to express indignation and disgust and do so by rolling their eyes. It is at this point that their relationship is ripped apart. The ending of this chapter, with Calma's assertion that 'The last [she] saw of Kiffo was a glimpse of red hair beneath a tide of white uniforms' (p. 216) almost eludes the reader. Carried along by the pace of the preceding events, it does not seem possible that this was really 'the last [she] saw' of him and the last the reader will see of him.

This 'pause' while the reader prepares for the last chapters echoes a cruel reality: there is rarely any warning when a young person dies—it is often quick, brutal and unexpected.

CHAPTER 23

The full impact of Kiffo's death is to be found in the first sentence of this chapter. At first there is a feeling of confusion—compounded by Calma's reference to the 'Adult Shop'.

- How does Calma's narration of events keep the tone of the novel constant? (Calma refers to how funerals are represented in the movies, which link back to her former 'daydreams' and action scenes. Her thoughts about 'opening times' for the church and her empathy for the woman who emerges from the church are all in keeping with her previous perceptive and sometimes cynical narration.)
- What are your initial reactions to the fact that Kiffo is dead?
- Did his death surprise you? If so, why?
- How does this event differ from the predictions you made after Chapter 21?
- What kind of message do you think the author is trying to communicate by having Kiffo die?
- Do Calma's thoughts as she is waiting for the funeral to begin relate to any of your own experiences? Explain why or why not.
- How does the Principal's behaviour at the funeral make you feel?
- Show how all the characters (except Calma?) stay 'in role' during the funeral. Match their behaviour at the funeral with examples of their previous behaviour. Do you consider Calma's behaviour at the funeral to be characteristic? Why? Why not?
- Why has Calma 'let the side down' as far as dress is concerned? What is she trying to do?
- As she enters the pulpit, Calma once again moves into fantasy—what does this particular fantasy communicate to the reader?

CHAPTER 24

In this chapter, the Pitbull offers an explanation for her actions. Calma listens and seems to accept that it is 'game over'. There is a feeling of resolution here (and we are led to believe that the situation between Calma and the Pitbull *is* resolved): the reader is decentred by such a sad and empty 'dénouement'. It seems impossible that our indomitable heroine has not only lost Kiffo, but also the battle they fought together.

- Reflect on your feelings at this point in the novel. How do the events narrated here compare with your expectations? What elements of plot, tone and style affected your expectations at the beginning of the novel? Did your expectations change as the story progressed?
- There is more of the novel – what could possibly happen now?

CHAPTER 25

Calma begins her wrapping-up by seeming to accept the 'gloss' put on events by those around her, that she was suffering from "sunstroke and post traumatic stress". This is disappointing to the reader until we hear Calma's 'usual' voice suggesting that the reason she was given time off school was because she was "an embarrassment that they could do without".

Calma's reason and cynicism is clearly intact as she talks to the reader about conditioned expectations of an upbeat resolution: "What about the Fridge?...I bet you're hoping for a happy ending with that one." She then provides a parody of what she imagines the reader is thinking, which serves instead to foreshadow the more realistic outcome. Having once again gained the reader's trust, Calma issues an invitation to 'come along with [her] one more time...' to be shown the actual ending to the story.

Demonstrating her confidence in the reader, she moves immediately into a fantasy in which she is, as we suspected, a true heroine of great intellectual capacity. She plays Sherlock Holmes to the police officer Alyce Watson, and, as in all the Holmes novels, this part is narrated by Watson. In keeping with Calma's love of the English language, the major clue in the story hinges on a homophone – Payne/pain.

- Write the actual newspaper article "Schoolgirl in Church Bondage Horror".
- What is so poignant about Calma finishing the novel, only to look at a photograph of Kiffo and her?

Students could be prepared for this chapter by reading or listening to a Sherlock Holmes story, written in the distinctive voice of Dr Watson. Now out of copyright, these are available in many editions and on the Internet at:

<http://www.bakerstreet221b.de/canon/danc.htm>

<http://www.sherlockian.net/canon/index.html>

CHAPTER 26

- Why do you think the author chose to include this part? How does it help the narrative?
- Discuss the effect of seeing Kiffo's simile exercise and its grade at the end of the book: what themes and ideas are reinforced by this?
- Consider the book from Chapter 24 onwards: is there anything you would change? Explain why.

FLASHBACKS

- Read the flashbacks chronologically. What can you find out from them? Why do you think they are there?
- Suggest why the flashbacks are not placed in chronological order – what is the effect on each chapter?
- What is the effect of them being written in second person narration?

POST READING

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

- I. [Imaginative] Write a parallel narrative about one of the events in the novel from the point of view of William Kiffing or the Fridge.

You will need to consider what your character knows about the chosen event in the novel and what they think about what is happening. Try to create a world for them outside of what you know from the novel.
- II. [Analytical] Is this a humorous novel with some serious parts, or is it a serious novel with some humorous parts?

Write your answer using evidence from the text.
- III. [Argumentative Oral] “She was up to her wrestler’s armpits in illegal stuff.” (p. 146)

Pretend you are counsel for either the prosecution or the defence. Present a closing address to the class concerning the Pitbull’s guilt or innocence. Use only evidence from the text.
- IV. [Creative] Produce full-length photofits of Kiffo, Calma and the Pitbull.
- V. Write a commentary to accompany your photofits explaining the choices you have made concerning appearance, expression, dress and hairstyle. Take note of descriptions from the text and say which elements you have added yourself.
- VI. [Analytical] How does the relationship between Calma and Kiffo change over the course of the novel? (Encourage students to construct a graph which plots the points of change in their relationship, and then to use evidence from these points in their essays.)
- VII. [Analytical/Imaginative] Write an extra chapter to be inserted into the novel.

Your chapter must work with the novel overall and make sense in terms of the preceding and succeeding chapters.
- VIII. [Analytical/Imaginative] Re-write the flashbacks in first-person narration from Kiffo’s point of view.

Keep Kiffo’s voice consistent and bear in mind that he tries hard to avoid talking about emotions.

The Whole Business With Kiffo and the Pitbull



Assignment 1

THE BOYS AT THE BACK OF THE CLASS

You know the ones—just like Kiffo: feet up on the desk, basketball in hand, gum in mouth. Speaking of mouths, theirs are always the biggest and are always open, particularly if you need to listen to the teacher or concentrate on work.

In this chapter, Kiffo is introduced as the typical ‘boy at the back of the class’, the most common stereotype of an annoying student.

Task

Write a description of the type of student whose classroom behaviour annoys *you*. What do they do that really frustrates or infuriates you? How does their behaviour affect or influence *your* classroom experiences and behaviour? What would you like to do or say—or have your teacher do or say—to them?

You have ten minutes to plan and forty minutes to write this piece.

YOU WILL BE MARKED ON:	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
DESCRIPTION				
IMAGINATION				
VOCABULARY				
GRAMMAR				

/20

The Whole Business With Kiffo and the Pitbull



Assignment 2

OPERATION EXILE!

You have just met your new teacher—what a disaster this term is going to be! There are detentions for *everything*, put-downs, snide remarks and shouting every lesson. Even the ‘good’ kids hate this teacher!

Task

In your groups, create a realistic plan to rid yourselves of this teacher. How will you achieve your goal without being found out? Who might you enlist to help you? Will the whole class be involved or just your group? What props will you need to make your plan work?

Your plan must be presented as a report, with diagrams if possible. Make sure that each member makes notes of your plan in case one of you is ‘out of action’ for a lesson.

Credit will be given for the group which works most successfully together, as well as for excellent plans.

YOU WILL BE MARKED ON:	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
WORKING AS A GROUP				
INGENUITY				
WORKABILITY OF PLAN				
PRESENTATION				

/20

The Whole Business With Kiffo and the Pitbull



Assignment 3

BULLYING—NO WAY!

We have all seen or heard of bullying notes, e-mails and even text messages. They are hurtful and uncalled for. In this assignment you are going to take the parts of both the bully and the bullied. The object of this exercise is to realise the effects of what we write—and how those effects can be worse than we intended.

Task

Write a letter in which you intend to hurt another student. In order to avoid being too personal, your teacher will not tell you whom you are going to be paired with for the next section.

Swap your letter with the student nominated by your teacher. Annotate the letter you receive with comments about the parts you find particularly hurtful or nasty and write why.

Write a reply to the letter-writer [bully] which tries to defuse the situation.

Swap back the letter and the reply and write a short reflection on how *your* letter was annotated and the effectiveness of the reply written by your partner and comment on how you felt during the exercise.

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
ANNOTATION				
REPLY				
REFLECTION				

/20

The Whole Business With Kiffo and the Pitbull



Assignment 4

RELIABLE OR UNRELIABLE—THAT IS THE QUESTION!

Calma ‘seems like a nice girl’—but is she a reliable or an unreliable narrator?

Task

Using evidence from the text, make a list in the table below concerning how reliable you think Calma is. The evidence may come from things she does and says or *how* something is said. Evidence may also come from what other people say about her—but remember, Calma has written the narrative, so everything is related by her.

RELIABLE	Page No.	UNRELIABLE	Page No.

/20

Timothy Winters

Timothy Winters comes to school
With eyes as wide as a football-pool,
Ears like bombs and teeth like splinters:
A blitz of a boy is Timothy Winters.

His belly is white, his neck is dark,
And his hair is an exclamation-mark.
His clothes are enough to scare a crow
And through his britches the blue winds blow.

When teacher talks he won't hear a word
And he shoots down dead the arithmetic-bird,
He licks the pattern off his plate
And he's not even heard of the Welfare State.

Timothy Winters has bloody feet
And he lives in a house on Suez Street,
He sleeps in a sack on the kitchen floor
And they say there aren't boys like him anymore.

Old Man Winters likes his beer
And his missus ran off with a bombardier,
Grandma sits in the grate with a gin
And Timothy's dosed with an aspirin.

The Welfare Worker lies awake
But the law's as tricky as a ten-foot snake,
So Timothy Winters drinks his cup
And slowly goes on growing up.

At Morning Prayers the Master helves
For children less fortunate than ourselves,
And the loudest response in the room is when
Timothy Winters roars "Amen!"

So come one angel, come on ten
Timothy Winters says "Amen
Amen amen amen amen."
Timothy Winters, Lord. Amen

Charles Causley

MEET THE WRITERS

BARRY JONSBURG

Barry is an English teacher, originally from the UK but he has lived with his family in Darwin NT since 1999. His first book was called *Defoe And Casuistry—A Consideration Of Morality In Some Of The Writings Of Defoe*. Despite the snappy title, this never became a best-seller and now it gathers dust in Liverpool University Library. Barry is a supporter of the greatest soccer club in the world—Liverpool FC. He also enjoys watching cricket and hopes to see England beat Australia before he dies. At the rate things are going he might have to live to be 186.

ANITA JONSBURG

Anita is a high school teacher in Darwin NT. She is currently working with senior Indigenous students in a small room in an excellent high school. Anita lives with her husband Barry, daughter Lauren and son Brendan. There are various people and animals around her home, some of whom she knows: all, she finds, are worth knowing. She feels like a hotel laundry service, but aspires to become a Buddhist (she just needs to give up a few earthly pleasures).