

BIFFY JAMES: COMPLETELY NORMAL (AND OTHER LIES)

COMING OF AGE

Completely Normal (and other lies) has themes of grief, love, mental health, friendship and coming of age. The latter is very common in young adult literature. What does 'coming of age' mean? Can you think of some examples of stories where the characters truly 'come of age'?

REFLECT AND DISCUSS

There's more to life than just feeling 'fine.'
(Biffy James)

What do you think Biffy James means by this statement? Reflect and discuss with your classmates.

AWARD-WINNING BOOKS

There are many prizes for children's books in Australia and around the world, but most of them are judged by adults. The Children's Book Council of Australia has a new award where the winners are solely chosen by young people. The program is called Shadow Judging, and Biffy James recently won for *Completely Normal (and other lies)*.

What do you think makes an award-winning book? What criteria do you think books for young people should be judged on? Write a list and compare it with a partner.

Why is it important for young people to reflect on literary values and for their opinions to be amplified in this way? As a writer for teenagers, how do you think Biffy James felt winning this prize?

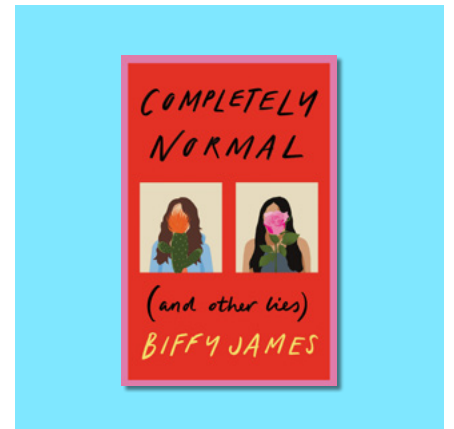
WHAT'S LEFT UNSAID

Think about a character in a book you've read who you didn't get to know much about, either because the book wasn't from their perspective, or because they were on the periphery, missing, or even passed away. It's likely you didn't get to know them as well as the main characters. What do you want to know about them but never got the chance?

Write a page from the perspective of the absent character, letting the reader (and yourself) get to know them a bit better. You may even like to publish this piece of fan fiction online!



Biffy James



KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

Learning areas: English, health and physical education

Capabilities: Personal and social

RELEVANT BOOKS

Completely Normal (and other lies)

About the Author

Biffy James is a high school English teacher with a not-so-secret addiction to retro YA series, Sweet Valley High. Her debut novel *Completely Normal (and other lies)* won the 2023 Griffith University Young Adult Book Award at the QLD Literary Awards, and the 2023 CBCA Shadow Judging Award in the Older Readers' category. It's a CBCA Honour Book that's been shortlisted for multiple other awards.

Curriculum Links

Identify features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text, and understand how texts vary in complexity and technicality depending on the approach to the topic, the purpose and the intended audience ([VCELA277](#))

Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships ([VCELT282](#))

Describe the effects of ideas, text structures and language features of literary texts ([VCELT283](#))

Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques ([VCELT284](#))

Create literary texts that explore students' own experiences and imagining ([VCELT298](#))

Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view ([VCELT306](#))

Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects ([VCELA339](#))

Identify and explain how analytical images like figures, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs contribute to our understanding of verbal information in factual and persuasive texts ([VCELA340](#))

Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots ([VCELT341](#))

Analyse strategies authors use to influence readers ([VCELY345](#))

Reread and edit own and others' work using agreed criteria and explaining editing choices ([VCELY359](#))

Understand the uses of objective and subjective language and bias ([VCELA364](#))

Explore visual conventions and use materials, techniques, technologies and processes specific to particular art forms, and to make artworks ([VCAVAV026](#))

Explore different ways of displaying artworks to enhance their meaning for an audience ([VCAVAP027](#))

Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to create artworks that express different ideas and beliefs ([VCAVAE029](#))

Create and display artwork considering how ideas can be expressed to an audience ([VCAVAP031](#))

Explore reactions to a given situation or problem and consider the effect of pre-established preferences ([VCCCTQ011](#))

Investigate different techniques to sort facts and extend known ideas to generate novel and imaginative ideas ([VCCCTQ012](#))

Identify and use 'If, then...' and 'what if...' reasoning ([VCCCTR016](#))

Investigate a range of problem-solving strategies, including brainstorming, identifying, comparing and selecting options, and developing and testing hypotheses ([VCCCTM020](#))

Experiment with alternative ideas and actions by setting preconceptions to one side ([VCCCTQ022](#))

Identify and form links and patterns from multiple information sources to generate non-routine ideas and possibilities ([VCCCTQ023](#))

Investigate thinking processes using visual models and language strategies ([VCCCTM029](#))

Consider the importance of giving reasons and evidence and how the strength of these can be evaluated ([VCCCTR025](#))