

SECONDARY GRADES 7–10

Representation Matters

“I was interested in exploring a diaspora, biracial experience like my own. My main character Joan is biracial – half-English and half-Chinese, as well as being half-monster and half-human. I wanted to depict the experience of being immersed in cultures, while also being removed from the original contexts of those cultures.”

—Vanessa Len

When Vanessa Len was growing up, there weren't many people who looked like her in popular culture. Why is it important that we have diverse representation in books, movies and TV shows?



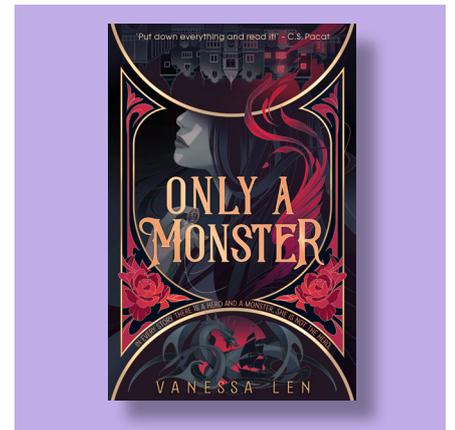
Vanessa Len

Heroes and Bad Guys

“Monsters are the bad guys,’ Joan said sceptically. In cartoons, monsters lurked under your bed. They had scary laughs that went on too long. They ate people.”

—P. 2, *Only a Monster*

In her debut novel, Vanessa Len gives us a different protagonist than what we're used to. Why do you think most stories are told from the point of view of the 'hero'? Can you think of a story where we see the perspective of the 'bad guys' instead? How is it different?



Genre Fiction

What genre do you think *Only a Monster* fits into? There may be more than one. What are the stylistic features of the genre/s? Write down at least three and then compare lists with your classmates.

A book doesn't need to be realistic to teach us something. What can we learn about our own lives or our own world from genre fiction?

Research: The Hero's Journey

Research The Hero's Journey, a concept developed by scholar Joseph Campbell. Draw a diagram to illustrate the concept, using descriptions and images to highlight the key stages. What are some of the classic novels that follow The Hero's Journey? Does *Only a Monster* follow this journey?

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS
Learning areas: English
Capabilities: ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, personal and social

About the Author

Vanessa Len is a Melbourne author and educational editor of Chinese-Malaysian and Maltese heritage. Her first novel, *Only a Monster*, explores themes of heroism, monstrosity and representation, and it has been translated into nine languages.