

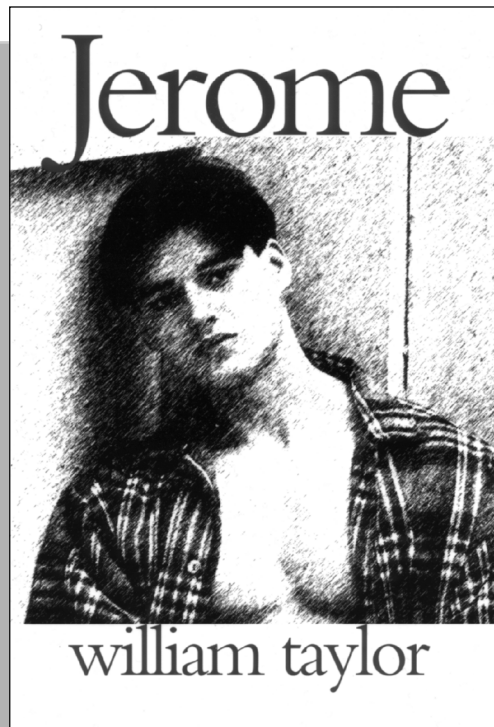
# Jerome

by William Taylor

**M**arco and Katie, devastated by the death of their friend Jerome and separated by thousands of miles, turn to each other for comfort and answers. Marco, in New Zealand, and Katie, in America as a foreign-exchange student, converse through a series of online chats, faxes, and e-mail messages. As they explore the nature of their relationships with Jerome, denial gives way to truth.

“Although Katie and Marco’s grief over Jerome is the seed for the extended conversation, the novel is ultimately about confusion, disbelief and eventual self-knowledge, and is told with sensitivity and humour.” *Listener, November 1999.*

“*Jerome* is presented... harshly, like a Greek tragedy, rich in the irony that we, the reader, deduce the truth halfway through but must wait for Marco to catch up. Jerome is as real a character as either Marco or Kate, and Marco’s story is excellently balanced by Kate’s major role as mentor and counterweight.” *Viewpoint, Summer 1999.*



197 x 130mm. 95pp, paperback.  
ISBN: 1 877135 29 1 RRP: \$14.95  
Readership: young adults

## Resource Kit

for use in schools

**Includes:**

- About the author
- Chapter by chapter study of the novel
- Comprehension exercises
- Essay topics
- Extension projects and activities

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# About the author

WILLIAM TAYLOR is the author of some thirty novels, for which he has won many awards. Formerly a school teacher, he has made his living as a writer of humorous and more serious fiction for fifteen years. He is the father of two sons, and has a grandson. He lives in a spectacular setting near Mt Ruapehu in the central North Island of New Zealand.

## *In his own words:*

### ***Why did I want to write this book?***

In all of my fiction, particularly the young adult books, the search for personal identity is crucial, central. I feel this is particularly marked in my novels *The Blue Lawn* and *Jerome*. In these two books I deal with what it is like to discover you are gay; in other words different from the norm. The pressures inherent in such a discovery may be traumatic.

### ***Was it difficult writing in the form of e-mails, faxes etc?***

No, it was incredibly easy! I have used the form of communication that is now increasingly a part of so many of us. I quite enjoyed exploring the concept and found the challenge of telling a story in this way very rewarding.

### ***How controversial has Jerome been?***

Some controversy can be expected when a writer for young adults chooses, firstly, to employ the language that young adults commonly use and, secondly, decides to explore elements of sexuality that continue to offend persons with closed minds!! Both of these factors can, of course, be easily grasped (and used) by people who choose to ignore the other central issue of the novel – that of youth suicide. This is certainly an issue that our particular society needs to address!

I was amused that a large bookstore chain demanded that the novel be stickered ‘Contains Explicit Language’. A more appropriate label may have read ‘Contains excessive consumption of alcohol’!!

### ***Do I like the characters – even the misguided Marco?***

Of course I do! Misguided Marco may well have been... but he certainly grows as a human being – both in understanding and sensitivity – during the course of the book. Kate I find very appealing, very strong. Both are good people. Jerome himself? Jerome is more shadowy; quite deliberately so.

### ***Has there been much feedback from readers?***

Yes, already quite a lot... and I expect more. I have had quite a few letters, calls, from adult readers of the book. One young reader stopped me in the street to discuss the novel. I have accepted several invitations to talk about *Jerome*.

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# Chapter by chapter study

## Pages 7-35

- What is ‘Jim and Jack’?
- Why does Marco choose Kate to talk to/confide in?
- Why didn’t Marco or Jerome’s parents cry at his funeral?
- What is significant about Kate’s message at Jerome’s funeral – her self-title as Jerome’s ‘very close friend’?
- List several of Jerome’s faults. How do Marco and Kate see Jerome differently?
- Does Marco think Jerome is still alive in some way? What indications are there of this?
- What is our first impression of Kate from her fax?
- What is the first disagreement Marco and Kate have about Jerome? Why is Marco so reluctant to accept Kate’s point of view?
- When Marco sees Jerome’s mother staring at him, he assumes that she is wondering why he didn’t get killed, instead of her son. Do you agree with Marco’s assumption? What other explanation could there be, for the way she looks at him?
- Kate describes Jerome and Marco as ‘two little rich boys who always got everything you wanted’. Is she right?
- Do you approve of Kate being so honest so soon

after Jerome's death, even though she is 'speaking ill of the dead'? Why/why not?

- What is the most important thing about honesty, in Kate's opinion? How does honesty help?
- Why doesn't Kate initially tell Marco the truth about her encounter with Bull Johanson?
- Why does Marco deny having done anything wrong to Nathan Smart? How does he justify his and Jerome's behaviour?
- How does it change our attitude to Marco, knowing he was a bully?
- Was Kate right to reprimand Marco for the way he treated Nathan?
- Why is the reference to the movie *Ghost* ironic in Jerome and Marco's case?
- Why doesn't Marco feel comfortable with his father being a 'flat-mate'?
- Why is Marco worried about Kate moving in with a lesbian couple?

### Pages 35-64

- Do you think Kate was wise to tell Marco the truth about her being gay? Should she have told him earlier, even knowing that he wouldn't understand?
- When Marco doesn't write back to Kate for a few days, she is genuinely worried. Do you think she truly values Marco's friendship, despite all the misguided, unfair things he has said to her? Why does she persevere with him, in this context?
- Once she has revealed her homosexuality, how does she redefine her relationship to Jerome?
- Do you think Marco is genuinely homophobic, sexist or racist? Why/why not?
- How are the towns Atherton (in New Zealand) and Lake City (in America) similar?
- Is Kate being sarcastic when she suggests that Marco and Jerome 'helped' Nathan Smart grow into a stronger person?
- Why won't Marco accept that Kate is gay? What are some of the reasons he offers why she can't be?
- Why does Marco think he is a liberal? Is he one, in your opinion?
- When trying to argue Kate out of thinking that she is gay is Marco motivated more by prejudice or genuine concern for her?
- Do you think Kate is revealing her own prejudice when she admits that she would rather have gay friends visit her at home, than straight ones?
- Do you think Kate and Jerome were right to pre-

tend to be together, when they weren't? Do you see it as a wise choice, or a cowardly one?

- Do you think that Jerome's parents knew he was gay? Why/why not?
- What is significant about Marco killing rabbits at the cemetery? Why does he throw them away?
- Why does Marco persevere with the friendship, even while he disapproves of so many things about Kate?
- Marco is prejudiced about appearance. He claims that good looking people can't be gay, and that gay men look like girls and talk with high voices, and that lesbians are always masculine-looking. What is the danger of judging people's sexuality based on the way they look or speak?
- List some examples from this novel where the sexuality/appearance stereotype is reversed.
- Why doesn't Marco initially want to visit Jerome's parents?
- Do you think the visit helps him? How does his attitude towards Jerome change?
- When is the first moment that Marco suggests being gay might not be all bad?
- Why does Marco question Kate about how she discovered she was gay, and who helped her through it?
- Do you think Marco misses his mother and sister?

### Pages 65-95

- What is significant about Marco's failure to sleep with Caroline, and Jerome's response to him saying he did?
- Why is Kate nervous about describing her feelings for Ann to Marco?
- Kate decides to stay in America because she doesn't feel she can live her life 'honestly' in a small town like Atherton. What does she mean by this? Do you agree?
- Why does Marco finally admit that he knows Jerome killed himself?
- Do you think he is wise to go back to Kate to hear the rest of the story? Why/why not?
- Why does she advise him not to?
- Had you, the reader, guessed some of the secrets by this stage? If so, why were you able to guess, while Marco was still unsure, when you had been given access to the same information he had?
- What is symbolic about Kate giving Marco's present back to him?

# Comprehension Exercises

## MULTI-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Tick the box you think is most correct.  
(Answers on the next page).

**1. The police didn't file Jerome's death as a suicide because...**

- (a) They weren't sure that it was.
- (b) Jerome's father was the mayor and it might have caused a scandal.
- (c) A suicide would have meant more paperwork to fill out.
- (d) One of the policemen knew Jerome and didn't want people to remember him badly.

**2. Marco's sister was called...**

- (a) Sheryl.
- (b) Sharon.
- (c) Cherie.
- (d) Cassie.

**3. Kate wanted to stay in America because...**

- (a) She was in love, and wanted to live somewhere where she could be openly gay.
- (b) She didn't like New Zealand.
- (c) Her father was American and she wanted to learn more about the country he came from.
- (d) She was offered a scholarship at university there.

**4. Bull Johanson tried to force himself on Kate because...**

- (a) He thought she fancied him.
- (b) He was trying to punish her for making fun of his family.
- (c) He wanted to see what it was like being intimate with a lesbian.
- (d) He wanted to 'straighten her out' of preferring women.

**5. Marco and Jerome's favourite pastime was:**

- (a) Drinking and then getting into fights.
- (b) Vandalising gravestones in the cemetery.
- (c) Shooting rabbits.
- (d) Hunting ducks.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### *Exchange students*

What are some risks, and benefits of taking part in an exchange program? Would you like to take part? Why/why not? Describe a good story you've heard about exchange programs. Describe a bad story.

### *Being spoilt*

Kate thinks that Jerome and Marco were spoilt – with cigarettes, alcohol, guns, clothes. Does being spoilt necessarily make people worse, in your opinion? Think of somebody you know who you think was spoilt (but don't name names!). Has it damaged them in any way? How?

### *Speaking ill of the dead*

Does it help to remember the negative things about people who have died, as well as the good things? Did your attitude toward Jerome change throughout the book as you learned more about him?

### *Narrative forms*

Think about all the different kinds of narrative forms – such as phone-call, fax, e-mail, on-line chat, and the third-person technique. Discuss which of these types of communication tells the reader the most information. Did you see a different side of Marco or Kate through the different narrative forms? Explain how. Who do you empathise more with? Why?

# Essay Topics

**Opposites Attract.** When Marco and Kate meet in the airport, Marco refers to them as being ‘opposites’. Write an essay explaining what you think he means. List the ways in which you think he and Kate are opposites? Why are they still friends despite these differences? What things do they have in common? What other opposites are present in the novel?

**Definition of Friendship.** Explain in an essay what friendship means to you. Think about one of your friends and describe how they are a good friend. Then consider whether Kate and Marco are friends for more reasons than the shared link to Jerome. How does Kate help/change Marco? How does Marco help/change Kate? Were Kate and Jerome genuine friends? Is friendship always a two-way thing?

**Understanding Prejudice.** Once Marco accepts that Kate is gay, he attempts to come up with reasons why she might have become so, for example that Bull put her off men, or because her parents died when she was young. Write an essay describing Marco’s attitude. Why is he so prejudiced? Is it a common attitude? How do you think people become gay? Do you think they are born that way, or could develop into a gay person because of experiences they have had?

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## Extension Projects and Activities

### ART-WORK

**Illustrate** a scene from the book, such as:

- Marco and Jerome painting the cat piebald.
- Kate and Marco by Jerome’s grave.
- Marco shooting rabbits in the cemetery at night.

### CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISE

**E-mail correspondences/pen-pals.** Get into pairs and write a fictional e-mail correspondence between two friends who are both hiding something. This should take up at least three pages. Develop the conversation to the point where they both have to reveal their secrets.

Follow this exercise with a short conclusion as to what you consider are the positive features of developing a friendship through e-mail? What are some negative features? How easy (or difficult) was it to hide your secret?

**Points of view.** Try to imagine the story through the perspective of different characters.

- Write a letter on behalf of Jerome from ‘beyond the grave’, including personal comments to Kate, Marco and his parents.
- Describe Nathan Smart’s perspective concerning seeing Marco again, hearing about Jerome, and later visiting him to have a friendly drink.
- Write a diary-type account of Kate’s stay on the chicken-ranch, from the point of view of Pearl. Describe why she didn’t like Kate, how she felt about Kate’s treatment of her brother, and whether she was pleased when Kate left.
- Write an e-mail from Marco to Kate from Australia, explaining how he is getting on hunting kangaroos, how he feels about Jerome now, and his hopes for the future.

### DRAMA EXERCISE

**Dramatise** a scene from the book, either with words, or silently.

- The scene when Jerome tries to talk to Marco about being gay.
- When Marco visits Jerome’s parents.
- Kate ‘dealing with’ Bull Johanson.
- Marco and Jerome discovering Mr Parsons and Mrs Harvey underneath the angel.
- Kate and Marco meeting at the airport.

<b>Answers to multi-choice:</b>
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- |        |
|--------|
| 1. (b) |
| 2. (c) |
| 3. (a) |
| 4. (d) |
| 5. (c) |