

Encounters

Jason Wallace

Winner of the **COSTA** Children's Book Award



Just because no one
believes you, doesn't
make you a liar

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Zimbabwe, 1994

A group of children spot peculiar lights in the sky over the grounds of their school.

From this moment on, six young people's lives are changed forever. Gary hides the anguish he feels now his mum's left, acting out in fury and hatred. Chloe has no words for the thing she fears most every day. Karl is the headmaster's son, now fallen from grace. Tendai knows he can never live up to his grieving father's ideals. And Sixpence watches all, knowing he'll never be like these other children. All of them have seen something they can't explain.

In amongst these tangled, tortured lives, comes a group of psychologists to verify the spookily similar claims of every witness. Their daughter, Holly, can tell there's more to it than aliens or mass hysteria – can she reveal the dark truths that haunt them?

ABOUT JASON WALLACE:

Jason Wallace was born in Cheltenham but moved to London after his parents split up. Aged 12 his life was turned upside down when his mother remarried and the family emigrated to Zimbabwe. It was this experience in a tough boarding school during the aftermath of the war for independence that formed the foundation of his incredible debut novel, *Out of Shadows*.

Out of Shadows went on to win the Costa Children's Book Award, UKLA Book Award and the Branford Boase Award.

Jason now lives in London with his partner and son.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

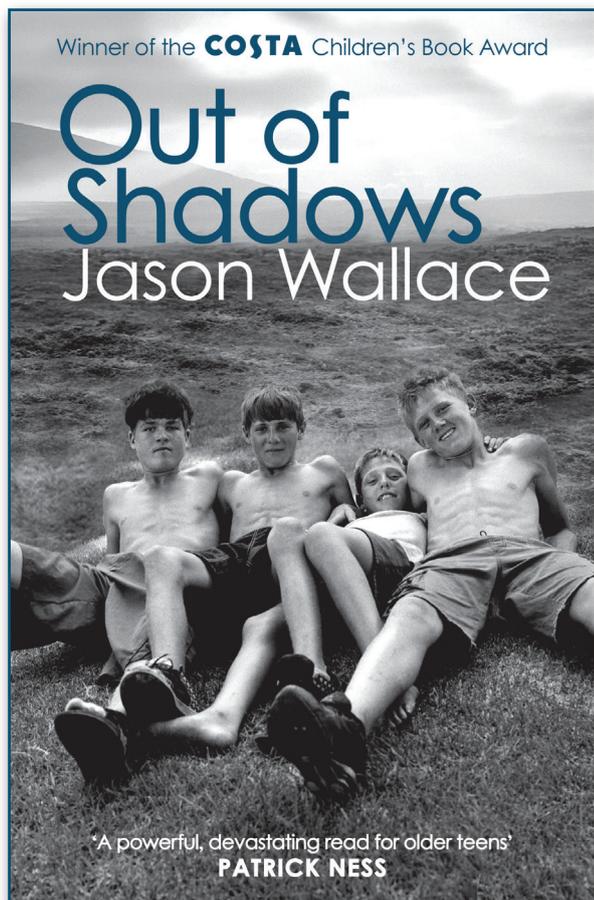
1. *Encounters* is told from the point of view of six young people, each building on the story we have heard from the previous character. Did you find this effective? Can you think of any other stories (books, films, television) with unusual structure like this?
2. Look at the author's note at the beginning. *Encounters* is inspired by a true story – though the characters are invented, the details of the close encounter with the unidentified flying object and what the children said about it are based on reality. How does this change your approach to the book?
3. 'You're a big fat liar, Chloe Pryor.' Lies are a major part of *Encounters*, and so is hiding the full truth. Discuss how each of the viewpoint characters lie, and why.
4. 'Do not be afraid to look to those who are outside your world, for sometimes it is only they who can help.' Many of the characters are outsiders, in different ways: Gary has rejected his friends, Karl is struggling with his sexuality, and Holly is visiting from America. Consider what the book is saying about outsiders – how do they feel about their status? How do they see things others cannot?
5. Look at how the black Zimbabwean characters, Tendai, Sixpence, Baba and the children's parents, experience life in this community. How is each of them affected by Zimbabwe's war-torn past?
6. Between each character's chapter, there is a page or so of dialogue. Who is speaking? Do you think the characters on these pages agree with one another?
7. Discuss the different examples of prejudice in *Encounters*. What do you think this novel is saying by representing so many different viewpoints?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

8. Gary misses his absent mother, while Tendai and his parents are coping with the murder, several years ago, of his brother Nelson. What other examples of grief and loss can you find? What do you think the book wants to say about this theme?
9. 'And all of a sudden he's the Gary Marston I met on our very first day at school.' Think about how each of the six viewpoint characters change throughout their stories. How do your sympathies change as you learn more about them?
10. 'It's Daddy's and my fault, so if anyone's to blame for your silly made-up drawings and your silly stories about aliens, it's us.' Many of the adults in the book fail to see the abuse that Chloe is suffering, and the problems that the other young people are struggling with. Why is this? What do you think needs to change in this community? Are there similar examples of this issue in today's world?
11. *Encounters* is set in 1994. Look through the book and find things that help build a picture of how life was then. They might be recent films, television, technology, fashion and even slang. How have things changed since the early nineties, and what has stayed the same? Do you think the events of the novel would be different with modern technology and culture?
12. Do you think aliens really landed near the playground of the school? If not, what do you think the children really saw?

***Encounters* by Jason Wallace is out now (ISBN: 9781783445288)**

ALSO BY JASON WALLACE:



A searing account of race, bullying and conspiracy in 1980s Zimbabwe

'Honest, brave and devastating - *Out of Shadows* is more than just memorable. It's impossible to look away.'

Markus Zusak, author of *The Book Thief*

Winner of the Costa Children's Book Award, Branford Boase Award and UKLA Book Award

The fighting has stopped, independence has been won and Robert Mugabe has come to power offering the end of the Old Way and promising hope for black Africans.

For Robert Jacklin, it's all new: new continent, new country, new school. And very quickly he learns that for some of his white classmates, the sound of guns is still loud, and their battles rage on.

Boys like Ivan. Clever, cunning Ivan. He wants things back to how they were, and he's taking his fight to the very top.

***Out of Shadows* by Jason Wallace is out now (ISBN: 9781849390484)**

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