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# Start looking into Alibrandi and Melina Marchetta

Copy the following plot summary into your workbook. Use the words listed below to fill in the blank spaces. You will find the correct answers to this task on [www.hi.com.au/engproj](http://www.hi.com.au/engproj).



*Looking for Alibrandi* tells the story of \_\_\_\_\_ Alibrandi, a \_\_\_\_\_ year-old schoolgirl who is being raised by her single mother, \_\_\_\_\_. Josie's \_\_\_\_\_, Katia Alibrandi, is fiercely protective of the family reputation and Josie regards her regular \_\_\_\_\_ visits to her grandmother with deep \_\_\_\_\_. She is \_\_\_\_\_ by her \_\_\_\_\_ heritage and the restrictions it imposes on her social life. Josie's life is complicated when her \_\_\_\_\_, Michael \_\_\_\_\_, returns to Sydney and enters her life for the \_\_\_\_\_ time.

Josie is a \_\_\_\_\_ student at the exclusive St Martha's Catholic School for Girls and is studying for her Higher School Certificate. Josie is \_\_\_\_\_ and inquisitive but unsure about her \_\_\_\_\_ status at the College; consequently her closest friends (Sera, Lee and Anna) are 'wogs' and 'outsiders' like herself. Her chief \_\_\_\_\_ at school is Ivy Lloyd, known as \_\_\_\_\_ Ivy. Josie is a passionate \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ which she views as practice for her chosen career as a \_\_\_\_\_. Her friend and rival from the boys' college is John Barton, a young man who seems to have all the attributes Josie thinks she wants for herself. John is the son of a \_\_\_\_\_ minister who has high expectations for him. Josie's first \_\_\_\_\_ is Jacob Coote, a 'skip' working-class boy who attends a public High School and has little \_\_\_\_\_.

During the year of her Higher School Certificate Josie learns to \_\_\_\_\_ the disparate influences in her life. She becomes \_\_\_\_\_ to her father and learns that she is loved by both her \_\_\_\_\_. Her greatest \_\_\_\_\_ is from the \_\_\_\_\_ in her life, especially her grandmother, who gradually reveals family secrets and personal \_\_\_\_\_. Through her \_\_\_\_\_ with her father Josie comes to understand the \_\_\_\_\_ Christina made to bear and \_\_\_\_\_ her. Her relationship with Jacob teaches her that she is unwilling to \_\_\_\_\_ herself and that her ambitions are intact, while John Barton's \_\_\_\_\_ death teaches her about her own \_\_\_\_\_. Josie Alibrandi's \_\_\_\_\_ year at school is a year of challenge and discovery.

public	parents	relationship	sacrifices
Josie	strengths	lesson	seventeen
women	final	ambition	boyfriend
rival	embarrassed	untimely	sorrows
Andretti	raise	compromise	barrister
scholarship	debater	grandmother	first
Italian	closer	father	Poison
enforced	social	resentment	intelligent
reconcile	government	Christina	speaker



Using the Internet as a starting point, find out as much as you can about Melina Marchetta and the awards she has won.

	<b>M</b>	anuscript was sent to four publishers
	<b>E</b>	nglish teacher
	<b>L</b>	eft school because she did not think she would pass Year 12.
	<b>I</b>	talian background
<i>Looking for Alibrandi</i> was her first	<b>N</b>	ovel
<i>Looking for Alibrandi</i> is not	<b>A</b>	utobiographical
	<b>W</b>	on
	<b>M</b>	ulticultural Book of the Year Award
	<b>A</b>	ttended business college
	<b>R</b>	e-wrote the novel three times before finalising the manuscript.
Is a practising	<b>C</b>	atholic
	<b>H</b>	as written a second novel, <i>Saving Francesca</i>
	<b>E</b>	ducated at an all girls' school
Loves writing for	<b>T</b>	eenagers
	<b>T</b>	eaches in an all boys' school
Won many different	<b>A</b>	wards for her book

# Themes of *Looking for Alibrandi*

A theme is a significant issue that a text talks about. It is the key idea or subject of a text and is explored by the characters in a variety of events and interactions. In *Looking for Alibrandi* the themes are 'fleshed out' through the characters' tales of love and marriage, birth and death.

## Family and relationships



*My mother and I have a pretty good relationship, if a bit erratic. One minute we love each other to bits and spend hours in deep and meaningful conversation and next minute we'll be screeching at each other...*

Marchetta, p.5

Marchetta raises the issue of family and questions traditional ideas of what constitutes an ideal home life. The text presents us with many versions of family relationships and while some are healthy (although still passionate like that of Josie and Christina) there are many fractured relationships in the novel. Josie is at first embarrassed by her illegitimacy and her Italian Nonna, but as the text progresses her preconceptions are challenged and she has to rethink her ideas about her own family life and those of her school friends.



### questions activities tasks

- 1 Draw a family tree that represents Josie's family relationships.
- 2 How did your parents meet? Find out how your grandparents met. Are they willing to share details? Please check with them about the level of privacy they want about their story. Report back to the class if they agree to it.
- 3 The media likes to portray a vision of the 'perfect family'. Television, especially in sit-coms, likes to show the 'nuclear' family as the ideal unit for both family life and teenage upbringing. Do you agree that teenagers need this 'perfect' family unit in order to flourish?
- 4 Go to [www.hi.com.au/engproj](http://www.hi.com.au/engproj) and connect to the Australian Bureau of Statistics website. Find any information that you can on what the actual statistics for Australian families are, for example, how many single-parent families are there? How many divorces are there per year? What other types of family are represented in the statistics?



A 'nuclear' family is defined as parents and their children. It does not include 'extended' family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.

# Culture and tradition

*Like all tomato days we had spaghetti that night. Made by our own hands. A tradition that we'll never let go. A tradition that I probably will never let go of either, simply because like religion, culture is nailed into you so deep you can't escape it. No matter how far you run.*

Marchetta, p.175



Many of the characters in the novel face the problem of reconciling their family's past with their individual futures. One of the challenges Josie faces is in balancing the demands of her Italian heritage with her ambitions in the broader community. Many of her school friends also find their personal choices are subject to the traditions and unique cultures of their families. While much of the emphasis is on the Italian–Australian clash exemplified by Josie, there are a number of other traditions and cultures at play in the text. John Barton, for example, is subjected to intense pressure to conform to the traditions of his Anglo-Saxon, highly-politicised family and Jacob Coote is reluctant to 'rise above' the expectations of his own culture.

## Growing up



*I knew deep down that I was wrong and I think that my emancipation began at that moment.*

Marchetta, p.185

Josie tends to talk about her maturity in terms of freedom. When the novel begins she is just seventeen and still a schoolgirl; by the end she is eighteen, a legal adult and free to make her own choices about her future. During her HSC year Josie casts off her self-imposed preconceptions and limitations and takes responsibility for herself. Josie's maturity is hard-won and she struggles with several issues during the year – chief among these is her ability to accept the adults in her life as flawed people and to understand that each life holds its own secrets.

### questions activities tasks

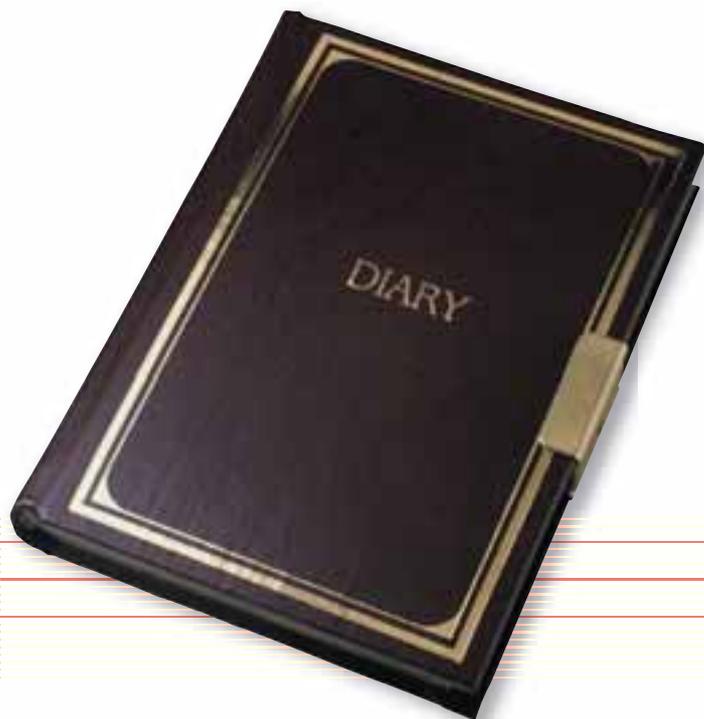
- 1 Make a list of all the traditions/cultural events you and your family celebrate. Work with a partner to combine your lists. Investigate the origins of all the items on the list. Is it possible to argue that any of them are uniquely 'Australian'?
- 2 As a class activity make a list of the cultural and/or ethnic groups represented in the room.
- 3 Look at the images of families portrayed in the media. In groups investigate images of family in magazines, newspapers, on television programs and on television advertisements. How culturally diverse are the family portraits provided?
- 4 Compare your media findings with the list you made in Question 1. How realistic is the media's interpretation of family in Australia?

# Identity

*I've figured out that it doesn't matter whether I'm Josephine Andretti who was never an Alibrandi, who should have been a Sandford and who may never be a Cootie.*

Marchetta, p.261

Josie learns throughout the text that, ultimately, the most important thing is that she must be true to herself, her beliefs and her ideals. The title of the novel reveals this search for self. Josie changes throughout the text as her ideas and beliefs are challenged by her experiences. Many of these challenges are accompanied by huge emotional upheavals. In processing her feelings about these experiences, Josie must unveil and accept her true self. Her journey to adulthood is fraught with challenges, but she is a stronger person for the experience.



## questions activities tasks

You will need poster paper, glue, newspapers and magazines. Working in small groups of two or three, create a poster on the themes of *Looking for Alibrandi*.

Using the newspapers and magazines, tear out any words or images that are appropriate to your theme/ideas. For example, you might rip out the word 'tragedy' from a headline to describe John's death or the heading 'Exams start today' to describe Josie's HSC. Collect as many **relevant** words/pictures/cartoons as you can to describe your ideas about the themes.

You will need to arrange these selections on your poster in a **detailed, eye-catching manner**.

When you have completed your poster, you and your partner(s) should explain your poster to the class. For instance, you will need to explain why you selected certain words or ideas and what this tells us about your understanding of the themes.

Remember to speak clearly and directly to your audience. At the end of your presentation you will be expected to answer audience questions.



# Character studies

*Looking for Alibrandi* is teeming with interesting characters. Melina Marchetta uses these characters to inform Josie's learning process; each character helps her accept and understand herself. So who are these exciting people? Let's look more closely at several key characters in the text.

## Josie Alibrandi

- Seventeen years old
- Scholarship student at a prestigious Catholic girls' school and school vice-captain
- Intelligent and her ambition is to be a barrister
- She thinks she needs to escape from her Italian heritage
- Raised solely by her mother, Christina
- Doing her Higher School Certificate (HSC)
- Opinionated and passionate
- Has a competitive, potentially romantic relationship with John Barton
- Jacob Coote is her first boyfriend

## Katia Alibrandi

- Josie Alibrandi's Nonna and Christina Alibrandi's Mama
- Married to Francesco Alibrandi and was treated cruelly by him
- Had a secret relationship with Marcus Sandford
- Opinionated and passionate
- Concerned with others' opinions of her and her family
- Katia and Josie fight over many issues

## Christina Alibrandi

- Josie Alibrandi's Mama and Katia's daughter
- At 16 she had a secret relationship with Michael Andretti which resulted in Josie
- Raised Josie as a single mother and sacrificed her own ambitions
- Ignored and mistreated by her father, Francesco Alibrandi
- Has worked hard and purchased their house in Glebe
- Is a strict, caring mother who insists on high standards of behaviour for her only child

## Michael Andretti

- Josie Alibrandi's father
- At 16 he had a secret relationship with Christina Alibrandi which resulted in Josie
- Is a successful barrister and works in a prestigious firm. Has recently returned from Adelaide where he was working
- Assumed Christina had not proceeded with the pregnancy and was unaware of Josie's existence
- Does not want to be a father when first told about Josie
- Gradually becomes a part of Josie's life and accepted by her as a father.