



# **Cleverman Monday 20th November 2017**

**SLQ Wiki Fabrication Lab 2026/04/26 20:22**

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This book club session was lead by Grace Lucas Pennington from Black & Write! SLQ  
<http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/whats-on/awards/blackwrite>

## materials needed

Comfortable seating

Music playing in the space

Projector with computer set up

Water dispenser and glasses

Chips and bowls

## Preparation

Watch season one of Cleverman

## Book club outline

Greet people as they arrive

Offer to help selves to the drinks and chips

Place ship bowls within easy access of the group

Introduce the person who will be leading the discussion

## Reflection

We had three participants to this Book club session. One has been to two previous book club events and two were new to the book club series. I found out that one attendee comes in to use the computers in the DML and found out about the book club that way. He had not seen Cleverman at all. He left early. Grace really kept him in the loop of the conversation and the back story of the series, however he left saying that he would go and watch the series now!

The remaining two engaged in conversation until well after finish time. It is hard to get people to leave book club!

## Photos



## Discussion

Creator: Ryan Griffen. Directors: Wayne Blair Leah Purcell

Writers: Jane Allen Michael Miller Jon Bell

### INTRO

Indigenous storytelling still radical? Discomfort for audience?

Indigenous worldview perspective brought mainstream TV for first (?) time. Interrogates assumptions/beliefs. Black Comedy.

Indigenous filmmaking in Australia e.g. Sapphires, Samson & Delilah, Bran Nue Dae

*"As First Nations people, the creative team behind the series is familiar with apocalyptic disruption to culture and community — for them it is not an imagined future scenario, but a non-fictional reality of intergenerational trauma from dispossession. As such, there is a rich vein of lived experience and narrative involving both contemporary interventionism and past policies of genocide and removal, informing an innovative approach to the overworked dystopian genre."*

<http://www.realtime.org.au/not-so-fictional-cleverman/> Gumbanyggirr/Bundjalung

Living stories. Protocols and cultural safety: appropriate custodians.

THEMES • Power/Greed- ZONE, fear, safety, security, Handmaid's Tale, border protection, money

o SLADE: I need access to the Dreaming... (not asking)... "unlock" 50,000 years of knowledge

o KOEN BLAIR and ASH sell out a family of Hairies for money

o New appetite for this genre of political/dystopian drama e.g. House of Cards/Handmaid's Tale/Borgias/

• Individual agency/Free will- Robert Jordan's Wheel of Time, Tolkien

o AUNTY LINDA: We don't always get a chance to do good. If I was you, I'd grab this one with both hands.

o Every single character is good AND bad... Game of Thrones

o Actions in Cleverman have consequences = opposite to marvel-style superhero movie (destroy the

city? Its back next week. Kill a bunch of supervillains- no jail!)

o “Jacky Jacky character”- WARUU sells out, turns against his brother KOEN and eventually his community leadership suffers as he grows selfish and weak.

- Identity - national, political, community, media, self, cultural,

- o Discrimination: segregation

- o Removal of people who don't conform to an identity

- o Previous Australian government policies: Eradication, Protection, Assimilation, Integration, Genocide. Segregation. Miscegenation.

- o John Howard famous quote repeated... “We get to say who lives here, and who doesn't”

- o Show very much about identity... what do you think makes your identity? The way you look? The choices you make? Do you think other people can change your identity or is it self-directed?

- o Why do we have stereotypes? Are they a timesaver or a hindrance?

- Violence: physical, sexual, structural, individual,

- o Police brutality

- o Black lives matter movement

- o Araluen as Matthew's sex slave, strangles him and escapes... OK with this violence?

- Coming-of-age

- o Cain & Abel brothers- KOEN and WARUU. Koen reluctant leader, WARUU ambitious and self-appointed leader. KOEN has rejected his culture, lives outside the ZONE, and betrays the Hairies for money in beginning, slowly grows to opposite while his brother Waruu's journey mirrors Koen's but subverted.

- o Balance in Sc-fi/fantasy; powers/magic emerges at puberty and the chosen one must sacrifice/change to reach maturity/adult identity

- o Personal responsibility/choices

- o Child-adult

- Aboriginal culture (s)

- o Language

- o History (Australian government policy, civil rights, NT Intervention)

- o Allegory? Satire?

- o The Dreaming

o Provoking empathy with sci-fi may be easier way to achieve it (fake world can hit home where a viewer might take umbrage at real-world... didactic, etc.)

o Eucalyptus leavessmoking ceremony o Purchasing Hairies as slaves • Death: o Western compared to Indigenous views... rebirth/destruction... acceptance/fear o Messiah trope e.g. Harry Potter, GOT John Snow + Daenerys o Deaths of ASH and Hairy girl as catalysts for KOEN and BLAIR changing o DJUKARA kills KOEN with a gun but he doesn't die- KOEN wishes he did Characters: • Why do characters do what they do? • Are their actions justified? • Do you agree with their choices? • Does their status affect their choices? How? • Did any of the characters remind you of anyone? PLOT • Does the plot unfold slowly with a focus on character, or fast with a focus on the storyline? Is it a mixture? Why? • Did you find the plot predictable? Camps/outcasts in sci-fi and spec fic e.g. Star Trek, Battlestar, Stargate, X-men, District 9, Teen Wolf, Night of the Living Dead, HEROES, 28 Days... Shows to explore question: how do we live together as humans (or otherwise)? What does it mean to be human? In real life? Media embargo reminds you of...? "Superhero story without a supervillain" (villain is society/mainstream etc, but differs from other 'minority' superheroes e.g. X-Men ) Clearly the villain is Jarrod Slade? Would you agree? He is bad guy but not evil... wants power... Yet we get to see the motivations for each character "In mainstream superhero stories, the protagonists don't need to fight the law, because they're on its side." X-Men very similar in terms of 'subhuman' people who have powers humans don't. Cora is tied to a bed in a lab and has tubes put in her by scary government techies. Powers: super healing, foretelling, contact with spirits, time travel, astral travel, can't die. KOEN is not your typical superhero. He doesn't seize power, it's a surprise to him and everyone else, he resists the responsibility initially but grows into it. At first he says 'I'm not the one' and tries to get his older brother or older men to do the role e.g. smoking ceremony. • Hairy drug development SLADE funds and runs research into Hairypeople DNA and ways to turn it into an enhancing drug for humans. He figures out how to inject the Hairy genome into a human egg, as well as creating a procedure that de-powers Hairypeople. In season 2, SLADE experiments on KOEN's blood to learn more about the Cleverman's abilities. • SLADE offers WARUU money to provide housing for The Zone people. And in return, SLADE wants KOEN. Structure • Why might the author/director have chosen to tell the story the way he or she did? • What difference does the structure make in the way you read or understand the story? Setting For years, (producer) Blight says, broadcasters have been asking for the Australian equivalent of Merlin or The Walking Dead. Real-world/urban/future. Imaginary world only has impact if the audience believes the story can take place, what's known as suspension of disbelief... How does this story pull you in and make you believe it is real? Familiar settings: carpark, strip club, highway, morgue, office, construction site, soccer pitch, train yard Very 1st scene, public transport, gritty, urban area, racially motivated attacks - resonate with you? FUTURE imagined dystopian society, security drones and cameras are everywhere. Tech advanced but not impossible. Political. Social Commentary. Orwellian.... In this way it works like Gotham city of DC comics... can be ANY CITY. "From the rail sheds of Redfern to the former cliff-top home of advertising giant John Singleton (Coogee)" Language Normal state of existence for humans is multi-lingual. Only speaking one language is very recent in human history. "Subhumans". 1984, Brave New World. Doublespeak e.g. containment authority, retrievals, contain. Cold bureaucratic euphemisms. Gumbangyirr and Bundjalung. Cleverman and Hairies speak different language. Koen can't understand Cora (ancient spirit) Hairies and nomodorr in Cleverman are amalgamations of stories from many nations. "no jungle talk"- GUARD "people can be animals"- KOEN Slurs e.g. monkeys, rugs, subbies Humour Did you find the series funny? Parts? e.g. GUN "I know how to hold one" ep 1. Is Cleverman a satire? Or is it too real? KOEN gives WARUU the finger at Uncle Jimmy's funeral - showing him the finger has grown back after being torn off. Pace Were you bored? Did the story move too slowly? Too quickly? Use of... Cliff-hangers, suspense, fight scenes. Music changes pace. General Questions a. What observations are made in the book? b. Does the author criticize or admire the culture? Does he/she wish to

*preserve or change the way of life? Either way, what would be risked or gained? c. What is different from your own culture? What do you find most surprising, intriguing or difficult to understand? • What is the author's worldview? • How does this book fit into or fight against a literary genre • How does this book compare to other books you've read? • What is the great strength - or most noticeable weakness - of the book? • Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?*