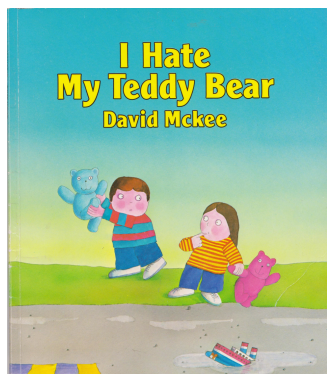


## Recommended Reads

**McKee, David (1982). *I Hate My Teddy Bear*. London: Andersen Press**

**Recommended by David A. Hill**



David McKee is best known as the creator of *Elmer* the patchwork elephant. However, McKee is the brilliantly inventive writer/illustrator of many different books. My favourite is *I Hate My Teddy Bear* because, as well as the main story, the illustrations contain a huge cast of characters all involved in their own stories which can be followed alongside the one written about in the 24 pages of the book.

The main story is ostensibly of Brenda coming with her mother to John's flat; they get sent out with their teddy bears. (Looking carefully at picture 2 we see John's mother is reading a letter while Brenda's mother weeps beside her; there is a picture of a man too... perhaps separation and divorce are upon her...) But wait! In picture 1, as Brenda and her mother arrive, amongst the ten other people illustrated in various actions in corridors and hall, three men are carrying a gigantic white hand down the stairs... and out of the balcony window behind the weeping mother, a giant white foot is being lowered on a rope... and on the next 19 pages there is always a giant hand or foot being carried somewhere, and it is left until the two teddy bears are talking (yes!) alone together on the balcony in the last picture, for us to see an exhibition of giant hands and feet in the park behind them. Completely uncommented on, but resolved.

Meanwhile, the children throw away their teddies, saying they hate them, but then try to outdo each other about things their teddies can do... but what about the lady with the pink hat, the woman with the ball of wool, the man with the harmonica, the woman who keeps finding things on the pavement, and... and... and... ??? Well far more than I can talk about here! So please find the book and share it with children you love. You and they will be intrigued and delighted.

Pedagogically speaking, as well as the amusing story McKee actually tells of the two children and their teddy bears, the real power of the book lies in the invitation it offers

young language learners for their own story-making based on observation of all the mysterious goings-on illustrated around the base story.

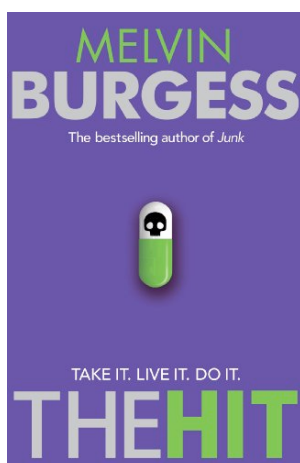
*I Hate My Teddy Bear* is currently out of print, but accessible through online second-hand bookshops.

#### **David A. Hill**

David A. Hill is a freelance teacher trainer and materials writer working out of Budapest, Hungary. He has spent much of his 44 years in education working with young learners and training teachers of young learners. As well as co-authoring many course books for different parts of the world, he has co-written the teacher's resource books *Writing Stories* (2008, with Andrew Wright) and *Traditional Folk Songs* (2012, with Andrew Rouse) both published by Helbling Languages.

#### **Burgess, Melvin (2013). *The Hit*. Somerset: Chicken House**

**Recommended by Fitch O'Connell**



Melvin Burgess is one of the pioneers of modern Young Adult literature, dealing with contemporary issues of interest to teenagers in well-crafted but simple prose, and expressing complicated and often controversial ideas in a way that is easily understood.

*The Hit* is a full-length novel in this genre, and takes a peek into the near future in Manchester, where the recession is into its twentieth year and the divide between rich and poor is wider than ever. The Zealots are provoking civil disobedience through violent acts and there is revolution in the air. Into this scenario is introduced Death, a drug which, once taken, will cause the user intense highs for a week, followed by rapid demise. It has become the drug of choice for the disaffected. Teenagers Adam and Lizzie are in love but are divided across the rich/poor line; their relationship seems doomed, especially when Lizzie is propositioned by Christian, the psychotic son of the major drug baron in the city. Adam takes Death and draws up his bucket list – the 10

things he wants to do before he dies in one week's time. Enter Janet and a bleak and dangerous container park as the fast paced novel reaches its climax amid the disintegrating social order in the city.

Melvin Burgess cleverly presents the consequences of crucial, life-and-death choice in a world which is driven by love, sex, drugs, crime and revolution. He offers the reader an intimate glimpse into the intense lives of those affected by the unfolding drama, carrying the action forward through the eyes of the protagonists, making it real and personal. The language used is contemporary yet simple and direct and relies on a lot of fast paced dialogue for its action, making it quite accessible to confident intermediate learners, while the subject matter is a sure hook for adolescents. The choices being made by the protagonists create ideal material for interactive class work.

#### **Fitch O'Connell**

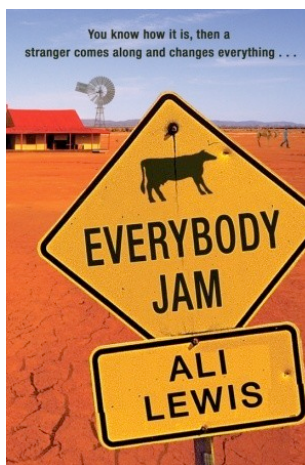
Fitch O'Connell has been a teacher, trainer and materials writer for much of the past four decades. He is the creator of the British Council BritLit project and wrote, contributed to or edited all of the current *BritLit* list. He has actively promoted the use of short stories in language teaching, bringing authors and teachers together in classrooms, at conferences and at literature festivals. He lives quietly in northern Portugal, surrounded by books.

**Lewis, Ali (2011). *Everybody Jam*. London: Andersen Press.**

**Recommended by Liesel Hermes**

The author of this young adult novel was born in Yorkshire in 1976. After studying journalism she travelled extensively and worked on an Australian outback station. This experience was the inspiration for her first novel.

*Everybody Jam* is set on a fictional outback cattle station, 200 miles west of Alice Springs. The story is narrated by the 13-year-old Danny Dawson, a somewhat naïve boy who talks about six important months in his life. Shortly before the beginning of the action his elder brother Jonny died falling off a roof. His 14-year-old sister Sissy is pregnant and refuses to admit who the baby's father is. The family are preparing for the annual



mustering of a huge number of cattle, which happens against the backdrop of a period of extreme drought in the Northern Territory.

When Danny's parents hire a young woman from England to help on the station, Danny, who calls her 'the Pommie', is full of contempt and convinced that she is useless. But while it falls to him to explain life and work on the station and how to drive in the desert, she manages to win his confidence by tactfully delving into the past and Jonny's death.

This has been a family taboo so far, and Danny is relieved to be able to talk at last. The two form a non-erotic friendship that rests on mutually supporting each other. They find out that a former Aboriginal friend of Jonny is the baby's father. The mustering, which is presented in vivid detail, is fraught with drama, and the family finally overcome their taboo and also accept Sissy's baby.

I am currently preparing this novel for a German school edition, and have therefore read it several times and discovered numerous weighty topics well worth discussing in school: life and death, guilt and atonement, revenge and forgiveness, assimilation and resistance, intercultural learning and responsibility. With a male narrator and a female 'mentor' it is a convincing novel of initiation that should appeal to female as well as male students.

### **Liesel Hermes**

Liesel Hermes is retired President of the University of Education Karlsruhe, Germany. Her special interests are contemporary Australian literature, teaching literature, teaching methodology of EFL and the professional development of future teachers of English. Her recent publications include:

Hermes, L. (2011). Reading Qaisra Sharaz's 'A Pair of Jeans' with German Students. In Abdur Raheem Kidwai and Mohammed Asim Siddiqui (Eds), *The Holy and the Unholy. Critical Essays on Qaisra Shahraz's Fiction*. New Delhi: Sarup Publishers, pp. 121-145.

**Shimura, Takako (2011). *Wandering Son* (Vol. 1). Seattle: Fantagraphics**

**Recommended by Christian Ludwig**



Takako Shimura is a female Japanese LGBT manga artist who, even among avid manga readers, is scarcely known outside of Japan. In addition to her serialised manga *Sweet Blue Flowers* (2004-2013), featuring a lesbian high-school girl, she started the *Wandering Son* series in 2002. In 2006, *Wandering Son* was selected as a recommended read by the Japan Media Arts Festival jury. In 2012, the US Young Adult Library Services Association, YALSA, selected the manga for its list of *Great Graphic Novels Top Ten 2012* <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists/ggnt/2012/topten>. The anime adaptation first aired in Japan in 2011.

**Class teacher:** ...you were a girl. I thought... Oh. Oh, my.

**Shuichi:** ...I'm Nitori Shuichi. (p. 12)

The two main protagonists of the manga series, Shuichi Nitori and Yoshino Takatsuki, have the secret desire to be different. Shuichi is a boy who wants to be a girl and Yoshino is a girl who wants to be a boy. In one of the very first scenes of the manga, Mrs Nakazawa, the class teacher, mistakes Shuichi for a girl. While Shuichi reacts with indifference, Mrs Nakazawa is clearly ashamed of her 'mistake'.

The Japanese manga series *Wandering Son*, both written and illustrated by Takako Shimura, tells the story of Shuichi and Yoshino, two transgender children who struggle to be themselves. On the first day at the new secondary school, Shuichi is sat next to Yoshino. They become close friends and quickly learn that they hide the same secret. Together they share their first cross-dressing experiences, for example when Yoshino furtively wears her older brother's school uniform, and gradually, though not always voluntarily, opens to classmates, friends and family. Apart from the two main protagonists, the manga also offers other gender nonconforming children who explore non-stereotypical

behaviour. In addition, there are also other ambiguously queer characters, including Shuichi's older sister Maho who shows bisexual tendencies, approaching the issue of queer identity from a broad and sometimes ambiguous perspective. While Shuichi and Yoshino curiously explore their 'new' identities, the fact that Takako Shimura refers to Shuichi as 'he' and Yoshino as 'she' throughout the volumes, however, hints that life will probably not always be as easy as it looks if you realize that you are different and that it is going to cause trouble if you do not fit into the box of socially constructed gender. Throughout the series, Shuichi and Yoshino experience increasing physical and social gender dysphoria and family pressure.

The issue of gender continues its advance into the language classroom. Comics, or in this case manga, provide a suitable medium for dealing with gender as the medium provides the opportunity to visually construct and contrast identities that manifest themselves phenotypically. The topic of 'gender bending' has remained important in Japanese comics until today. However, gender has always been fluid in mangas, often making it difficult to deal with transgender issues. *Wandering Son* is one of the very few that takes the subject seriously. Takako Shimura follows the children's journey of self-recognition and coming-out of the closet in insightful, mostly black-and-white panels. The series (seven volumes are so far available in English) is an easy read for learners of English (for example, 14 years upwards), and comic/manga novices alike, and Volume One is sophisticated kick-off reading for teachers who would like to deal with queer issues in their language classes.

### **Christian Ludwig**

Christian Ludwig currently works at Koblenz-Landau University. His research and teaching interests extend to a range of topics in EFL-Methodology, including graphic novels, gender construction in literature/film and learner autonomy. His most recent publications include the co-edited volume *Teaching Comics in the Foreign Language Classroom* (2013) and articles on *The Taming of the Shrew* and Mary Talbot's graphic novel *Dotter of Her Father's Eyes*. When he is not busy researching and teaching, he is an active member of the IATEFL Learner Autonomy Special Interest Group.