



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper secondary
Ages 14+ (Years 8–11)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Language, Literature, Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Analysing how language and writing evoke mood, tone, tension and characterisation
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing
- A powerful exploration of relationships, family and friendship set in Darwin.

THEMES

- Family
- Relationships
- Love
- Friendship

PREPARED BY

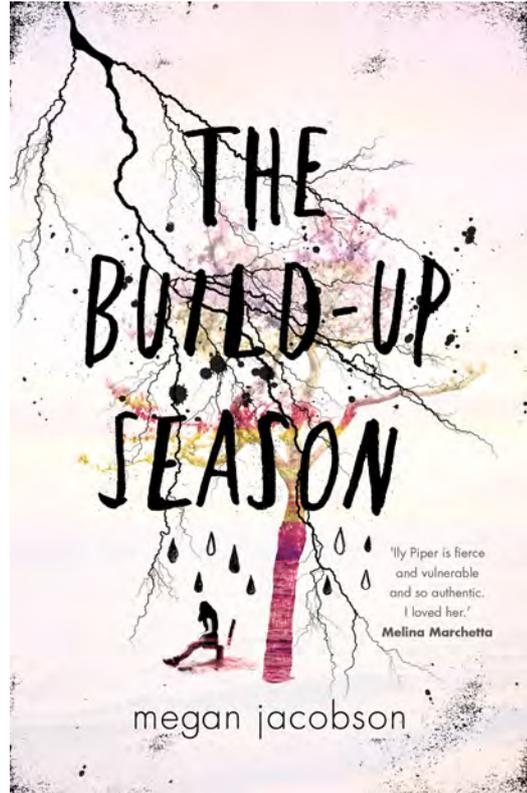
Penguin Random House Australia and Megan Jacobson

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The Build-up Season Megan Jacobson

PLOT SUMMARY

From the author of CBCA-shortlisted *Yellow* comes a powerful exploration of family and identity set against the humid build-up to the wet season in Darwin.

Seventeen-year-old Iliad Piper – Ily for short – is named after war and angry at the world. Growing up with a violent father and abused mother, she doesn't know how to do relationships, family or friends. Her love-hate friendship with Max turns into a prank war and she nearly destroys her first true friendship with misfit Mia. She takes off her armour for nobody, until she meets Jared, a local actor and someone who's as complicated as she is.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan Jacobson grew up in Darwin and the far north coast of New South Wales, and the pull and beauty of those natural environments play prominent roles in her writing. She loves travelling and has lived in London and New York, but now you can find her scribbling in her notebook by the sands of Bondi Beach.

Megan has always loved stories, and she started writing her own as soon as she could spell. At nine she won the Northern Territory Young Author of the Year competition for her hand-drawn picture books about pirates and monsters, and this gave her the confidence to believe she could be a proper writer when she grew up.

She has a journalism degree and currently works in TV news production at the ABC, though she has also worked as a question writer for television game shows and as an in-house script storyliner and script editor for several TV dramas. Her short stories have been published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Review of Australian Fiction*, aired on ABC radio, and appeared in the *UTS Writers Anthology*. Her first novel, *Yellow*, was a shortlisted book in the Book of the Year: Older Readers category of the 2017 CBCA Awards.

She loves reading and yoga and swimming in the ocean, and although she's now a city dweller, she still loves going camping in the outback and exploring the Australian bush. Her dream is to one day have a treehouse study where she can sit and write her books among the branches.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Megan Jacobson says:

Working for the ABC news I get exposed to a lot of confronting stories, but the Rosie Batty incident particularly affected me. After that, I was hyper-aware of the issue of family violence. The catalyst for writing *The Build-up Season* came when we did a news story about how women between the ages of 18 and 24 were statistically much more likely to experience intimate partner violence than their older peers. This struck me as significant, because I'd always assumed the main victims were older women with children. We rarely hear about young people experiencing domestic violence, and yet they're the ones who are the most affected. It made me realise how many films, TV shows and books for young

adults depict jealous and codependent behaviours as 'romantic', and how this, combined with a lack of experience, might contribute to young people not being able to identify an unhealthy relationship. I wanted to address this.

While researching the story I discovered that girls who were raised in violent households were more likely to experience violence in their dating relationships themselves, and I thought I'd explore this in Ily. Children of violent homes are also more likely to perform badly at school, suffer from anxiety and low self-esteem, withdraw from friends, and they're more likely to act out in a disruptive manner. I wanted to show how this manifests in Ily, but also to make the audience understand why she's behaving that way.

Troy is domestic violence taken to its extreme conclusion, however, I primarily wanted to explore how that violence begins. I wanted to show, through Jared, how the bad behaviours 'build up' over time, and how emotional abuse and control can escalate. I wanted to show young women the warning signs so they can know what to look out for before it's too late.

I also have Indigenous nieces, nephews and great nephews, and they rarely get to see their stories depicted in our books or on our screens. I wanted to help remedy this by creating a positive Indigenous representation in Max. I wanted to accurately portray the type of Indigenous families I grew up with, capturing their humour, love and pride in their heritage, and I wanted to highlight how important family is in their culture.

I'm also a yoga-loving vegetarian who was incredibly into crystals, auras and tarot cards in my youth. A lot of *Eve* is me poking fun at myself. While many aspects of new-age teachings have been proven to have measurable positive impacts, including meditation, yoga and clean eating, there are also some teachings that are scientifically and ethically dubious. In *Eve's* teachings, I wanted to explore the different ways individuals seek hope and faith, and their own personal ways of healing.

WRITING STYLE

Having grown up in Darwin, I feel a connection to the harsh beauty of the landscape, and that connection is evident in the way the natural environment in *The Build-up Season* almost becomes a character itself. I wanted to use the weather as a metaphor. When Ily meets Jared it's the dry season,



with its endless sunny days, but as the humidity and pressure start to build up, so does Jared's bad behaviour. As the muggy air becomes increasingly oppressive and claustrophobic, so does Jared's grip on Ily.

I used first-person present tense so that the audience can be inside Ily's head and therefore understand the reasons why she's acting out and making questionable choices. From an outsider's perspective, Ily's abrasive behaviour and inability to apologise can come across as rude and unfeeling. However, by being inside Ily's head, we can see how a tough exterior can be a defence mechanism to mask a vulnerable and sensitive interior.

I also wanted to stay inside Ily's head to keep the story limited to her own perspective. Her opinions of her mum, Nan and Max are coloured by her own prejudices and assumptions, however as the story unfolds and secrets are uncovered, Ily realises that 'sometimes seeing isn't really seeing' and she is forced to question her own preconceptions, and in turn, how they've affected her relationships with other people, and with herself.

I was greatly inspired by the insta-love trope, and the way that jealous and codependent behaviours can be portrayed as 'romantic' in popular teen culture. I wanted to use those tropes to present a 'love story' between Jared and Ily for the first half of the novel, then flip that idea on its head halfway through, and to highlight how those behaviours aren't romantic, they're the early stages of abuse.

Each character has individual wants which help drive the narrative forward. Ily wants to move to Sydney with Jared next year, and that is the catalyst for her to call a ceasefire with Max while she learns to film. However, I also wanted to highlight how internal and external wants don't always match up. Ily thinks she wants Jared, but at the core of it, Ily just wants to feel lovable. By the end of the novel she learns that this can only come from within, and not from anyone else.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the title *The Build-Up Season* relate to the book? What does it signify?
2. After Cyclone Tracy in 1974 nearly all of Darwin was destroyed and had to be rebuilt stronger, so the town can withstand future cyclones. How is this setting a metaphor for the novel?
3. When Ily learns the truth from Eve, she realises that 'sometimes seeing isn't really seeing'. How can this be applied to the relationships between Ily and other characters in the book, such as Max and Jared?
4. The idea of love is a main theme of the book. How are the different types of love explored in *The Build-up Season*, including romantic love, possessive love, selfless love and self love?
5. Ily is studying *Macbeth*, and Jared performs as the title role. In which ways does *Macbeth* relate to the events of *The Build-Up Season*? What roles do fortune tellers play in both?
6. Ily often talks about wanting to leave her childhood behind her to step into the adult Iliad's skin. In which ways does she think this might happen? How does the concept of virginity relate to this? What does Ily discover? Can you ever become separate from your history?
7. Eve and Ily have different ways of masking their trauma, however their internal stress is physically manifested through their 'scuttling hands'. What are the coping mechanisms that they each use?
8. Ily refuses to ever say sorry. In what ways does she use action to apologise for her behaviour? What are some examples in the novel? What is the significance when she is finally able to say sorry to Eve?
9. Ily is often described as looking just like Eve. How is Ily repeating her mother's decisions? What does Ily learn about herself when she finally understands Eve's perspective?
10. The theme of being 'broken' is repeated throughout the book. How does Ily's perspective of being 'broken' change over the course of the novel?

