

**Creased up**



**Tickled pink**



**Gobsmacked**



**Swept away**



Quick Reads

**Get hooked on books.**



# *The Book Boy* Joanna Trollope



## Contents

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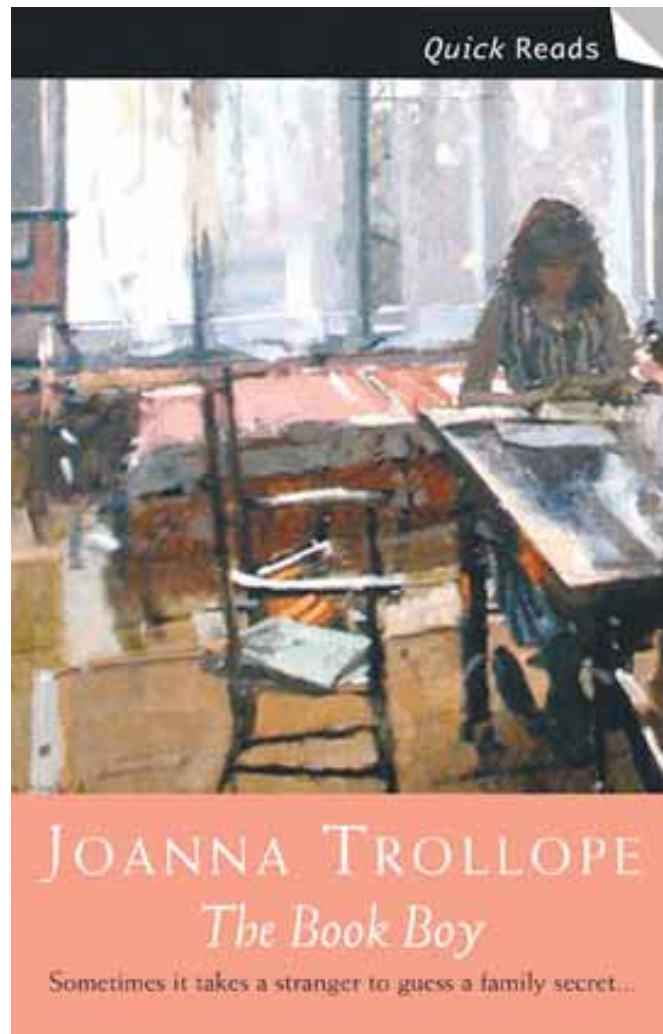
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**The  
Vital  
Link**

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### Blurb

Alice, 38, has a family, a house, and a secret. Joanna Trollope explores the emotions at the heart of Alice's predicament with the warmth and insight that have made her one of the nation's favourite writers.

### Synopsis

Alice is a wife and mother of two teenaged children. She worries about her son, Craig, because she thinks his friend, Scott, is a bad influence on him. But neither of her children takes any notice of her, and her husband is a bully, who tells her she is 'thick'. None of her family talks to her much and she feels forgotten by them all. Convinced it is her fault, she keeps her problem a secret – until her friend Liz presents her with an ultimatum: get 'sorted' or lose their friendship.

Alice also works part-time as a cleaner at a local Indian-owned shop. She is friendly with her employer, Mr Chandra, and his

family; she finds it easy to talk to them. With their encouragement, she finally decides to do something about her problem. She works out a way to get what she wants and also to improve her family life.

As well as portraying one woman and her personal journey, this story explores a number of wider issues: family relationships, self-respect and personal esteem, and inter-cultural relationships.

### Readability

10/11 Level E3

## Joanna Trollope

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Joanna Trollope was born in 1943. She taught for many years and worked for the Foreign Office before becoming a full-time writer.

She is best known as the best-selling author of eagerly awaited and sparkingly readable novels often centred around the domestic dramas of life in contemporary England. She is also author of a number of historical novels and of *Britannia's Daughters*, a study of women in the British Empire. Her books have been translated into over 20 languages and four of her contemporary novels have been made into critically acclaimed TV plays.

Joanna began writing 'to fill the long spaces after the children had gone to bed'. *The Rector's Wife* was her first best-seller and made her into a household name. She became a full-time writer in 1980, but says, 'My first novel was written when I was 14, all about myself of course ... I suppose I wrote it for the same reason that I still write – to communicate. I don't think we should ever underestimate the power of story – story is how we negotiate with each other, how we build up relationships, how we learn ... Nobody of any age can resist What Happens Next...'

Joanna lives near Oxford and in London. Among her hobbies she lists reading, conversation and 'very long baths'. She was appointed OBE in the 1996 Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Joanna Trollope also writes under the pseudonym of Caroline Harvey.

# Activity 1

## Can you tell a book by its cover?

<p><b>Purpose</b></p>	<p>→ To help the reader develop confidence in formulating and valuing his/her own judgements about books by pre-reading.</p> <p>→ To explore some techniques and clues that the publisher provides, which can help the reader to select 'the right book'.</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p>	<p>Copies of <i>The Book Boy</i> or the downloaded, colour version of the cover big enough for legibility.</p>
<p><b>Activity</b></p>	<p>Show the group the cover of <i>The Book Boy</i>. Tell them that they can learn a lot about the book before they start reading it. Through oral questioning, help them to recognise the kinds of visual clues an author provides to attract the reader, e.g. picture, font, colour, design, quotes.</p> <p>Working in pairs, ask readers to use these clues to answer the following questions:</p> <p>When/where is it set, e.g. is it modern, historical, foreign?</p> <p>What kind of book do they think it might be, e.g. romance, adventure, mystery? How do the words at the bottom of the page influence their opinion?</p> <p>What can we tell about the story from the cover picture and the title? Who are the main characters? What do we know about them? Do the cover and the title suggest different answers to these questions?</p> <p>Who would like to read the book?</p> <p>Encourage readers to provide reasons for their answers and to note them down.</p> <p>Tell them that they will return to these notes after they have finished the book to check whether their judgements were correct.</p> <p>Share the findings as a group. Does everyone have similar ideas, or are there different views about what things mean?</p>

continued →

<p><b>Reflection</b></p>	<p>Hopefully, readers will now have a clearer idea about the book. They could discuss whether they feel they want to read the book or not after looking at the cover in this way.</p> <p>What sorts of books (stories, film, TV programmes) do they read/watch? How do they choose what to read or watch?</p>
<p><b>Development</b></p>	<p>When everyone has completed the book, ask them to take out their pre-reading notes and compare their earlier answers with what they now know.</p> <p>What differences have they discovered? Where there are differences, why do they think this happened, e.g.: Were the clues misleading? Did the author give insufficient information? Did they misinterpret the clues? What could the author have done to avoid giving out 'wrong' clues?</p> <p>Possible development activities could include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designing a new cover</li> <li>• suggesting an alternative title</li> </ul> <p>These findings can lead to further group discussion about the validity or appropriateness of advance publicity or promotion, particularly where there is a tie-in with television or film (e.g. recent productions of <i>Bleak House</i>, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>, <i>Harry Potter</i>, <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>).</p>

## Activity 2

### Character map

<p><b>Purpose</b></p>	<p>→ To help the reader to work out what relationships there are between the various characters.</p> <p>→ To decide who the book really is about.</p>
<p><b>Resources</b></p>	<p>Flipchart or copies of character map provided.</p>
<p><b>Activity</b></p>	<p>First impressions, based on the title and the jacket picture, are conflicting. The title suggests that a young man is the main character of this book. However, Joanna Trollope is best known as a ‘woman’s writer’. The cover illustration is of a young woman reading, and the blurb talks about a young mother named Alice.</p> <p>Ask readers to fill in, on the sheet provided or in boxes on a flipchart, the names of each character as they come across them.</p> <p>Ask readers to plot the connections between characters, and label the relationship (friends, employer, daughter, etc). Some connections may have more than one label.</p>
<p><b>Reflection</b></p>	<p>Discuss who has the most extensive network of relationships, and what this means in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who the book is really about</li> <li>• any effect the number of connections a character has makes on the reader.</li> </ul> <p>Do they help us get to know a character better or are they confusing?</p>
<p><b>Development</b></p>	<p>The character map could lead on to further discussion around the visual clues to content given on book covers and in other reading materials (see Approach to Reading for Pleasure file for activity ideas).</p> <p>Readers can also be encouraged to explore how their feelings about various characters changed as they discovered the nature of their relationships with each other through the book.</p> <p>Another discussion topic could centre on how readers respond to Alice’s secret. Were her actions believable?</p>

## Activity 3

### Cultural differences

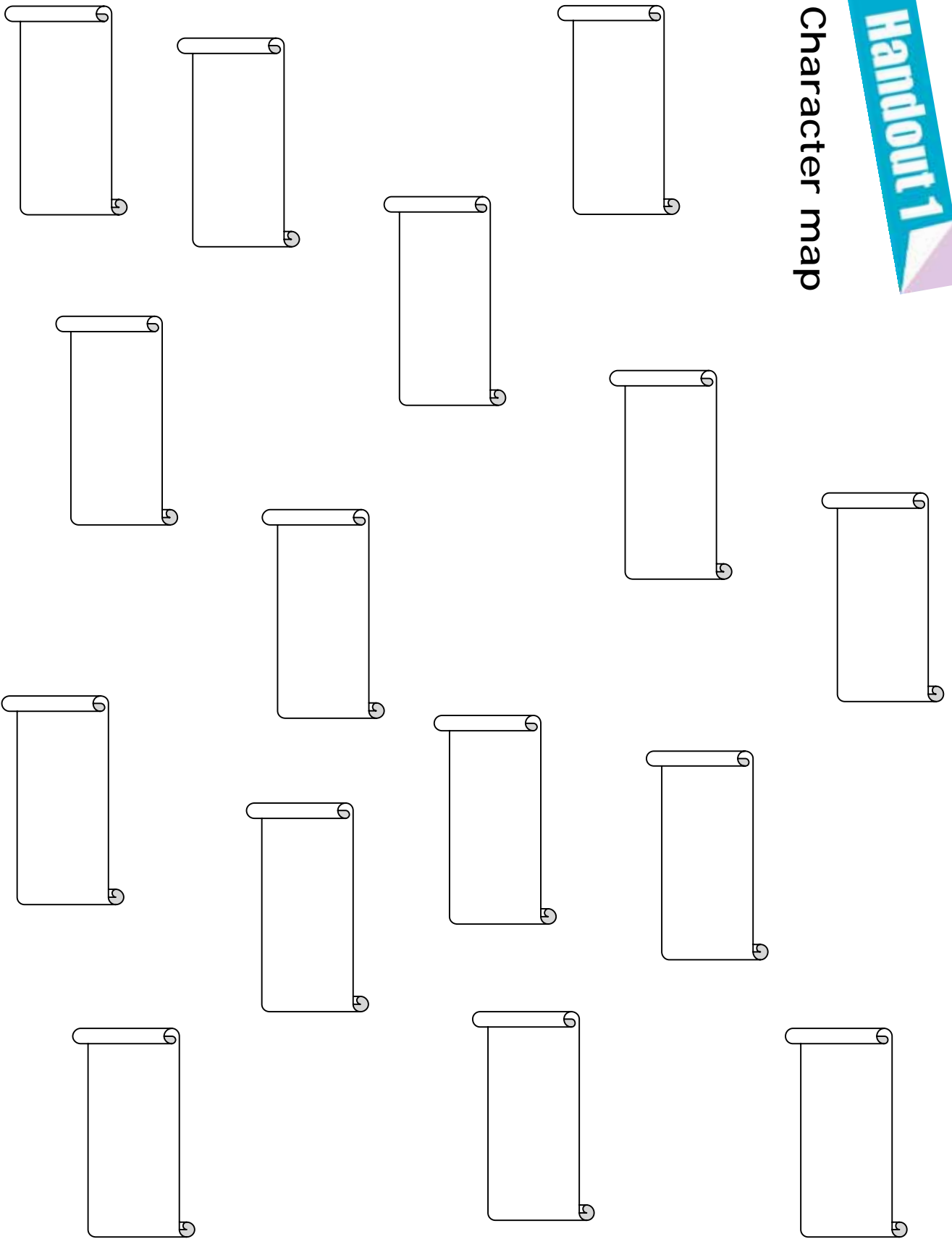
<p><b>Purpose</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ To help readers identify how some of the differences and similarities of family life and attitudes to women and learning in the two different cultures are presented.</li> <li>➔ To explore how these differences help or hinder the relationships between the characters.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Resources</b></p>	<p>Copies of <i>The Book Boy</i>. Copies of completed character maps from Activity 2.</p>
<p><b>Activity</b></p>	<p>Alice works in an Indian-owned shop and is friendly with her employer and his family.</p> <p>In pairs, with the help of their completed character maps, ask the readers to create brief pen-portraits of Mr and Mrs Chandra, and Alice and her husband, pointing out their main characteristics. In what ways are their relationships similar and in what ways are they different? Is there respect, equality, friendship between the two partners? How do we know? Ask readers to select phrases and descriptions from the book to support their views.</p> <p>NB: these portraits can be simple lists or bullet points; the main objective is to identify individual characters. If appropriate, these lists can be developed later into more detailed written portraits.</p> <p>Alice's family do not like her working for the Chandras. Why not? What do they say about them? Are their attitudes based on fact? Again, select phrases and descriptions from the book to support views.</p>

*continued* ➔

<b>Reflection</b>	<p>The following questions could be explored through discussion and debate. An initial idea storm, captured on a flipchart, could establish main points and focus.</p> <p>Alice finds it easier to talk with the Chandras about her problems than she does with her own family. Why is this – does it have anything to do with their view of 'family'? Alice is also friendly with Ram Chandra. In what ways have his own family problems helped him to understand hers?</p>
<b>Development</b>	<p>Different cultures have different views about the role of women. In which family does the woman have more independence?</p> <p>Readers in the group may come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, know others who do or have personal experience of living with more than one culture within their own family and home. They may like to describe and compare some of the differences from their own experiences. Issues of 'Englishness' and 'citizenship' could be explored.</p>



Character map



## Further development

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### Other possible activities

This book's main character is a woman. Does this make the book "a woman's book"? Readers could explore other books with female main characters, and/or domestic settings, and decide whether this necessarily limits their appeal to a primarily female readership.

It might also be interesting to look at titles by Caroline Harvey and consider why Joanna Trollope writes under this other name.

### Further reading and websites

If readers liked this book and want to know 'What can I read next?' by Joanna Trollope, try this website for other titles they may also enjoy:

[www.nelincs.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/JoanTrollope.htm](http://www.nelincs.gov.uk/leisure/libraries/JoanTrollope.htm)

As well as learning more about Joanna Trollope, you can find out what the press have said about her and also read extracts from some of her other books on the following websites:

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/authors/microsite.asp?id=50&section=1>

<http://www.booksattransworld.co.uk/joannatrollope/>

## More reading

March title	Author	ISBN
<a href="#">The Thief</a>	Ruth Rendell	0091796865
<a href="#">A Woman Walks into a Bar</a>	Rowan Coleman	0099492288
<a href="#">Blackwater</a>	Conn Iggulden	0091907039
<a href="#">Star Sullivan</a>	Maeve Binchy	0752879545
<a href="#">Hell Island</a>	Matthew Reilly	0330442325
<a href="#">The Book Boy</a>	Joanna Trollope	0747582114
<a href="#">Don't make me Laugh</a>	Patrick Augustus	1902934466
<a href="#">Someone Like Me</a>	Tom Holt	1841494461
<a href="#">Screw it, Let's Do It</a>	Richard Branson	0753510995
<a href="#">How to change your life in 7 steps</a>	John Bird	0091907039
<a href="#">Chickenfeed</a>	Minette Walters	0330440314
<a href="#">The Team</a>	Mick Dennis with the Premier League	0552153729
May title	Author	ISBN
<a href="#">Danny Wallace and the Centre of the Universe</a>	Danny Wallace	0091908949
<a href="#">Desert Claw</a>	Damien Lewis	0099493535
<a href="#">Cleanskin</a>	Val McDermid	0007216726
<a href="#">Name You Once Gave Me</a>	Mike Phillips	0007216718
<a href="#">Grey Man</a>	Andy McNab	0552154334
<a href="#">I Am a Dalek</a>	Gareth Roberts/Dr Who	0563486481
<a href="#">Poison in the Blood</a>	Tom Holland	0349119643
<a href="#">I Love Football</a>	Hunter Davies	0755314700
<a href="#">Winner Takes All</a>	John Francome	0755329481
<a href="#">The Dying Wish</a>	Courtia Newland	0349119635
<a href="#">Secrets</a>	Lynne Barrett-Lee	1905170300
<a href="#">The Corpse's Tale</a>	Katherine John	1905170319

See [www.quickreads.org.uk](http://www.quickreads.org.uk) for information on these and future Quick Reads

See First Choice library booklist at [www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk](http://www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk) for mainstream books selected against criteria for their suitability for emergent readers

Audio version of the Quick Reads are available from W F Howes Ltd as part of their Clipper Emergent Reader programmes ([www.wfhowes.co.uk/ceerp/](http://www.wfhowes.co.uk/ceerp/))

Other publications for emergent readers include those from Sandstone Press ([www.sandstonepress.com](http://www.sandstonepress.com)) and New Island's Open Door series ([www.newisland.ie](http://www.newisland.ie))

## Adult Core Curriculum References

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### Activity 1

#### Can you tell a book by its cover?

Rt/E3.6, 3.9 of particular relevance  
Rt/L1.3

#### Speaking and listening

SLIrE3.1–.6  
SLc/E3.1–.4  
SLd/E3.1–.3  
SLIr/L1.1–.6  
SLc/L1.1–.4  
Highlight SLc/L1.4 important element required for reflection and feedback activities

### Activity 2

#### Character map

Rt/E3.1, 2, 4, 7, 8  
Rt/L1.1–3, 5

#### Speaking and listening

SLIrE3.1–.6  
SLc/E3.1–.4  
SLd/E3.1–.3  
SLIr/L1.1–.6  
SLc/L1.1–.4  
Highlight SLc/L1.4 important element required for reflection and feedback activities

### Activity 3

#### Cultural differences

Rt/E3.1, 2, 4, 7, 8  
Rt/L1.1–3, 5

#### Speaking and listening

SLIrE3.1–.6  
SLc/E3.1–.4  
SLd/E3.1–.3  
SLIr/L1.1–.6  
SLc/L1.1–.4  
Highlight SLc/L1.4 important element required for reflection and feedback activities