

B. Jonsberg, *My Life as An Alphabet*: (pp. 3–9)

Ask students to read the section of the text you will be examining and to summarise the key events and record any insights or questions before the close reading session. This could be done as annotations using sticky notes.

When answering and discussing questions, encourage students to use evidence from the text to support their responses.

1. Draw student attention to the following passage:

‘But one of the things that makes Miss Bamford such a good teacher is that she knows exactly what I’m going to ask before I ask it. ... I kept my hand up, but I think she didn’t see it. It’s difficult to tell with her eye.’ (pp. 3 – 4)

Possible questions:

- What might the author be wanting to reveal to us about Candice in this passage?
- Can you imagine what Miss Bamford might have been thinking?
- Is there anything familiar to you about this scene? (e.g. school, relationships)
- Is there anything that is confusing or that doesn’t make sense to you?

2. Ask a student to read the following passage aloud, or alternatively read it to them:

‘Anyway’, Jen Marshall interrupted.

‘Yeah, shut up, Essen,’ she said, even though I hadn’t actually said anything.

There are several girls [and boys] in my school who call me Essen. It’s a phonetic representation of S.N. which is short for Special Needs. Many people think I have learning disabilities, but they are mistaken. ... I must confess that Jen Marshal is not *the sharpest tool in the shed*, as Rich Uncle Brian might say. But that’s not her fault. And she is very, very, pretty. So I like her. Then again, I like nearly everyone, as Mum often points out.’

‘Quiet!’ barked Miss Bamford.

‘Sorry, Miss. Are you talking to me?’ said Jen, and everybody laughed. Well, not everybody. Miss Bamford didn’t. So, nearly everybody.’ (p. 4)

Possible questions:

- What stands out to you in this passage? Why?
- Who are the two new characters introduced? What might their relationship with Candice be like?
- How do think Candice might have felt about being called ‘Essen’?
- Think about the first narrative style that Jonsberg is using to develop Candice’s character and the story line. Does Candice use any unusual phrases or vocabulary?
- What is mean by the phrase, ‘not *the sharpest tool in the shed*’?

- What have we learned about Candice?

3. Draw student attention to Candice's letter to her pen pal, Denille. (pp. 7 to 9)

Possible questions:

Candice writes regularly to her pen pal throughout the novel. Why might Jonsberg have included Denille as a character, and the series of letters? *Denille in some ways acts as a confidant for Candice's character and her letters reveal Candice's reflections about the way others perceive her and how she views herself.*

- What is happening in this text? What is it mainly about?
- Identify any vocabulary that is unfamiliar. Predict the meaning, refer to a dictionary and write two synonyms for each word.
- Underline what you think might be the two most important parts of the letter. Explain your selection.
- What does Candice reveal about herself in this letter? Select passages that provide new information or present a different perspective.
- What aspects of the letter might be considered rude or socially inappropriate? What might this suggest about Candice's character?
- Are there references in the letter to social or cultural norms or that set the story in a particular historical period?
- Find an example of Candice exaggerating for rhetorical effect. Why might Jonsberg have included these exaggerations in Candice's letter?

4. What is the general tone or mood being developed in this section of the text?

- What feelings do you have when you read this section?
- Which words or passages prompt an emotional response?
- Select ten distinctive words or phrases from the reading. Discuss why the author selected these words and the moods they portray.