



## Everybody Jam

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Danny lives on a cattle station in the middle of the Australian outback, where everyone's getting ready for the annual muster. But this year, everything is different: because Danny's beloved older brother Jonny has died in a farm accident, and nobody talks about it: because his fourteen year old sister is pregnant, and about to be packed off to Alice Springs in disgrace: because his mother can't cope, and has decided to hire a housegirl... and what they get is a wide-eyed English backpacker called Liz. She has no idea what she's let herself in for. Neither do they.

## Everybody Jam Details

Date : Published March 3rd 2011 by Andersen

ISBN : 9781849392488

Author : Ali Lewis

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Cultural, Australia, Realistic Fiction, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Everybody Jam for online ebook

### Alex Fairhill says

This book had me in two minds. It seems to be more a series of anecdotes than a complete narrative. The only real thread I can see drawing it all together is the impact of adult prejudices on children, through both their behaviour and attitudes.

Danny is 13, lives with his family on a cattle station in the Australian Outback, a couple of hours from Alice Springs. His older brother died six months earlier, and his 14-year-old sister is pregnant. The story covers the time between the family finding out about Sissy's pregnancy and the birth, which is due right in the middle of the station's huge muster - the last one before Danny goes to boarding school.

*Everybody Jam* - which refers to apricot jam, because everybody likes it - demonstrates that death is part of life on an isolated station. Animals are destroyed if they can't be saved, and the kids play games with body parts (such as throwing around testicles after the bulls have been castrated).

Many of the attitudes portrayed in this book - particularly towards Indigenous Australians - made me squirm, alongside the treatment of women and outsiders, mainly because, even though I hate to admit it, those attitudes do still exist.

There's a lot of slang in the book, much of which is italicised to make it stand out. I found this jarring, particularly as an Aussie reader who comes across these terms constantly, but it may not be the case for overseas readers.

There's a warning on the back about the book not being suitable for young readers, and I can only put this down to the f-word being dropped once. Overall, it's a good portrayal of life on an Outback cattle station, but some readers may find the treatment of animals hard to come to terms with.

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### Alison Brownlee says

A good book but just not great. It lost the pace a little round the middle then all of a sudden steam rolled to the end. I wanted to know what happened to the characters? Just felt a little flat at the end.

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### Caitlin Bennett says

This book provides an excellent glimpse into rural Australian life. It discusses poverty, racism, and the economics of the area. While it is certainly well-written with details and excellent character development, I found myself frustrated with the main character. This caused me, personally, to lose interest.

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### Joanne says

I'm not entirely sure what I expected from Everybody Jam, but what I got wasn't it. Although I enjoyed reading it, I finished it thinking, "That's it?"

The story is of several months in Danny Dawson's life, a cattle ranch owner's son in the Australian outback. His brother, Jonny, died a year ago, his sister, Sissy, is pregnant, and there has been a long drought - things are not looking great. But Danny is looking forward to this year's muster - where the cattle across the territory are gathered together and it's decided which should be kept and which should go to be slaughtered (it's actually a lot more exciting than I make it sound). When an extra pair of hands is needed to help them out at home, Liz, the "Pommie", is hired - the first of a number of events that change the life Danny is used to for several months

The book was really good. I loved Danny's voice, which was similar to that in *My Sister Lives on the Mantelpiece* by Annabel Pitcher; Danny is 13, so his voice is older and he knows more, but there is still the naivety and innocence. I loved the use of Australian slang, but sometimes it took a while to work out what some of them meant - I've watched a fair number of episodes of a popular Australian soap, but I still had some problems, and there was no glossary.

Although Jonny died a year ago, and Danny is still grieving for him, it's not the focus of the book, it's a subplot. Just like the "Pommie" arriving, Sissy being pregnant, the muster and the drought are subplots. There isn't one main plot for this story, just several little ones. What we do get of Danny's grief is really quite sweet. His family doesn't talk about Jonny, so neither does Danny, though he needs to. He shared a room with Jonny, and has kept his things - clothes on the floor, sheets on the bed, toys left out - exactly as Jonny left them, as a kind of shrine to him. He touches the photo of Jonny on the piano everyday, and doesn't feel right if he doesn't. There is one incident where Danny really blows up, and you see how badly he's grieving, yet unable to deal with it, because he can't talk about it - until the "Pommie" asks about him. It doesn't make things better, but it's like a release for him.

As I said, there is no one main focus for this story, which is why I felt so bewildered when I finished. It was just ordinary. Obviously, I don't live on a cattle ranch in the Australian outback, so I can't exactly say what is ordinary or not, but the book felt like it was "this is a taste of what it's like". I can't summarise this story, because there's no main conflict. Is it the drought? The pregnancy? Jonny's death? What I'm trying to say is, even though I learnt about the outback, the book was just everyday occurrences in this boy's life. If an actual boy who lives this life was to pick up the book, I think it would be too much like their life to enjoy it - there was no event or conflict to make it different from the ordinary, to make it exciting, to make it an escape. Hence the "That's it?" feeling when I finished.

So yes, I enjoyed Everybody Jam, but came away wondering what the point of the story was - until I read in the Acknowledgements that Ali Lewis was a Pommie on a cattle ranche during a muster, and was inspired to write about it. Probably a nice summer read, as long as you don't expect anything huge. Worth a read.

From Once Upon a Bookcase - YA book blog

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## Rooserd says

<http://www.bol.com/nl/p/de-schoenen-v...>

De dertienjarige Danny woont op een Australische veeboerderij. Het is al wekenlang veel te heet, zijn ouders maken ruzie, zijn veertienjarige zus is zwanger. Maar Danny mist vooral zijn oudere broer Jonny die een jaar

geleden is verongelukt. Niemand wil erover praten. Daarom zoekt hij troost bij een bijzonder huisdier, zijn kameel Buzz. Samen met Buzz wil Danny bewijzen dat hij de plaats van zijn broer op de farm kan innemen. Wanneer Danny's moeder het werk niet meer aankan, wordt er een Engels meisje ingehuurd. Liz is niet zo handig in de keuken, maar ze blijkt veel stoerder dan ze eruitziet - en haar mond houden doet ze ook niet. Danny neemt haar in vertrouwen.

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[http://www.scholieren.com/boek/12509/...](http://www.scholieren.com/boek/12509/)

Danny is een dertienjarige jongen die al op vroege leeftijd zijn broer Jonny verloren is. Elke dag is Danny bezig met het verwerken van het verlies van zijn broer, en het verlies van zijn broer heeft dan ook een grote invloed op zijn leven.

Danny woont met zijn ouders, oudere zus en jonger zusje op een boerderij vlakbij een woestijn in Australië. Op deze boerderij hebben ze verschillende soorten dieren waar ze met zijn allen voor zorgen. Daarnaast breekt een bepaalde tijd van het jaar weer aan, namelijk de veetelling. Tijdens de veetelling moeten alle dieren op en rondom de boerderij geteld worden. Aangezien er ontzettend veel dieren aanwezig zijn, is de veetelling een enorme klus.

Dit jaar zal de veetelling anders dan ooit worden. Sowieso is het dit jaar het eerste jaar dat Jonny niet bij de veetelling aanwezig is. Normaal hielp Jonny altijd mee met de veetelling zodat de telling goed verliep, maar nu moet Danny per se van zijn ouders meehelpen.

Daarnaast is de oudere zus van Danny, Sissy, zwanger geworden. Van wie is nog niet helemaal bekend en het gezin vindt dat dat het er niet helemaal toe doet. Wat er wel toe doet is het feit dat Sissy tijdens de veetelling uitgerekend is. Omdat Danny en zijn ouders in een uitgestorven gebied leven, moet Sissy samen met haar moeder uren rijden om bij een ziekenhuis te komen. Er is dus besloten dat Sissy bij een aantal weken zwangerschap naar haar tante in Timber Creek vertrekt.

Een aantal dagen voor de veetelling komt er iemand uit de buurt met een kameel. Het is een verdwaalde kameel waarvan de gezondheid niet al te best is. De man vraagt of de kameel een tijdje op de boerderij kan verblijven om aan te sterken. Met beide handen grijpt Danny deze kans aan. Hij heeft het maar al te moeilijk met het verlies van zijn oudere broer, en zou graag een vriendje op de boerderij hebben. Danny besluit dan ook om de zorg van de kameel op zich te nemen. Hij noemt de kameel Buzz en probeert hem allerlei dingen aan te leren.

Ondertussen wordt er ook nog een Pommie aangesteld door de ouders van Danny. Een Pommie is een au pair. Na een advertentie in de krant heeft het Engelse meisje Liz gereageerd. Als ze wordt aangenomen door de ouders van Danny, moet zij de zorg van Danny, Sissy en Emily op zich nemen.

Al snel breekt de tijd van de veetelling aan. Danny heeft zich er ontzettend op verheugd. Toch vindt hij het ook een beetje lastig. Hij mist Jonny enorm en wil Jonny graag weer eens zien. Elke ochtend raakt Danny de foto van Jonny aan om hem in zijn gedachten in leven te houden, maar ondanks het aanraken van zijn foto mist Danny hem toch elke dag. Daarnaast is de zus van Danny ook nog eens naar zijn tante vertrokken en is Danny erachter komen van wie ze zwanger is geraakt. Sissy is namelijk zwanger geraakt door Gil.

Ondanks alle problemen verloopt de veetelling redelijk soepel. Elk jaar krijgt het gezin van Danny met tegenslagen te maken tijdens de veetelling en het is dit jaar niet anders dan normaal.

Als de veetelling net afgelopen is, krijgt de vader van Danny een telefoontje uit Timber Creek. Sissy is bevallen van een zoon en haar zoon heet Alex.

Bij terugkomst van Sissy wordt er een groot feest gevierd om de geboorte van Alex te vieren. Gil, de vader van Alex, is ook bij het feest aanwezig en wordt na een hele lange tijd eindelijk geaccepteerd door de ouders van Danny.

Na het feest moest er nog wel iets treurigs gebeuren: nu Sissy bevallen is, is Liz niet meer nodig in het gezin. Liz neemt dan ook afscheid van iedereen en vertrekt weer naar haar eigen land.

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<http://dieren4u.nl/krant/recensie/de-...>

Het harde boerenleven met een veestapel in de Australische streek waarbij de droogte en de hitte van de woestijn overheerst komt heel duidelijk over in dit verhaal. Hoewel het hoofdpersonage niet echt een persoonlijke ontwikkeling doormaakt, kun je het boek niet aan de kant leggen. Ook de cultuur verschillen tussen de blanken en de oorspronkelijke bewoners van Australië, de Aboriginals worden haarscherp afgetekend.

De spanningen binnen het gezin waar de 13-jarige Danny opgroeit, stapelen zich steeds verder op. Vooral zijn ouders maken veel ruzie terwijl ze er eigenlijk geen tijd voor hebben omdat de jaarlijkse veetelling voor de deur staat. Zijn oudere broer is een half jaar geleden verongelukt, en iedereen zit nog midden in zijn verwerkingsproces van het verdriet en het verlies.

Zijn 14-jarige zus Cissy die zich vooral opsluit op haar eigen kamer is zwanger en houdt angstvallig geheim wie de vader is. Voor de familie is de schok mogelijk nog groter als zij er achter komen wie de vader is van zijn toekomstige neefje of nichtje.

De moeder besluit een au pair in dienst te nemen omdat ze al het (huishoudelijke) werk en van de boerderij niet aan kan. Maar of dit nu echt van toevoegende waarde is in de hulp die ze hard nodig hebben, valt te betwijfelen.

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### Sara says

I received my copy of *Timber Creek Station* from Net Galley. Thank you!

This is the kind of book that I could really do with giving a second read, to fully work out everything I thought and felt about it. But there are many other books I am looking forward to reading at the moment, so I don't have the time to do that. I'll give my thoughts as they are and maybe come back to it later.

The best thing about *Timber Creek Station* is the narrator, Danny. Ali Lewis perfectly captured the essence of a thirteen-year-old boy in her writing of Danny. He's just the right mixture of naive and wise, starting to transform himself from a little boy into a young man. Just starting. And he's having a rough time of it. His older brother has died within the year, his older sister is pregnant, and he's just about to leave home to live 200 miles away so he can continue his schooling.

The emotional timbre of the writing was so good. I felt the frustrations of Danny, missing his brother whom no one will talk about and hating his sister for her sudden betrayal in the midst of everything. I felt his longing for his life to go back to "normal," his desire to please his father, and his confusion at everyone making decisions he can't understand (and not bothering to spare him any time for explanation.)

Something else I thought was interesting about this book is the way it portrays the racism of the Australian ranchers. Danny is such a young voice to have such distasteful opinions about the Aboriginals who are his "neighbors" in the desert, and throughout the story, only his family's British "house girl" stands in opposition to those views, though Danny spends much of the story thinking she's an idiot due to her vegetarian ways and pronounced lack of skills when it comes to their ranch life.

I think if there's one place the story could be improved, it would be in the handling of racism. The book ends with a sense of possibility that the relations will be improved between the white ranchers and the local Aboriginals; however, I am not quite sure what this means for Danny, who will be leaving the ranch for the city. I'm not convinced that anyone succeeded in starting to change his mind, and he's lost or is about to lose the other connections that might continue to work on unrooting his deep prejudices.

The other area that fell a bit short for me is in Danny's relationship with his family. I understand that they're all going through a hard time, with the loss of one child, the pregnancy of another, and the drought that threatens their livelihood, but they're really pretty terrible to Danny throughout the book. I was frustrated on his behalf at the number of times they call him selfish or fail to reach out to him. Is he selfish? Yes, and what thirteen-year-old isn't? I just hated their utter lack of effort at understanding his perspective or seeing how much he missed his brother.

This book is good. The story that is within the pages is compelling, emotional, and kept me reading even after I kept telling myself "just until the end of this chapter." What's there is worth reading, but in the end, I feel like it ends without being a truly complete story.

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### **Shazaan says**

Everybody Jam is a very different novel. It's unique and certainly 'broadened my horizons'. Ali Lewis has written a remarkable debut and definitely deserves to be on the shortlist.

It describes the transition of emotions in the everyday life of thirteen-year-old Danny Dawson. Living at Timber Creek Station in the Australian Outback, and certainly enduring more hardships than any other teenager I've known, Danny is determined to prove himself to the fellas at the annual muster.

The muster is the selection of cattle for slaughter. Various Australian slang phrases are used in the book, such as: Gin jockey, Sheila, Ute and loads more. This enhances to the effect of the location and atmosphere, yet it's not easy to understand.

Written in first person from the perspective of Danny, it's as if you're there- looking over his shoulder. Danny telling the story makes it emotionally intense. He sees life in a very individual way. And he narrates the story straightforwardly, as if the point is obvious, which leaves your imagination wanting more.

"My mouth fell open as Dick's laughter came through the radio. I lifted my hand up to my face to feel the smile I was wearing – like it suddenly belonged to someone else"

It would have been difficult to relate to Danny's life, I think, if it was written in third person as his life is so different from an average thirteen year old's there would have been no other way to convey his thoughts and

feelings. As he isn't exposed to the same things that some teenagers are, he tells the story from an almost innocent view.

Danny has valuable skills that undeniably benefit the station. He wants to work with the men at stock camp during the muster and hates having to study at home with his sisters. Subsequent to the death of his older brother Jonny, the family is mourning the loss in a hushed way. There's always something stopping them from saying what's on their mind.

"That was when Aunty Ve smiled and said it was nice to talk about Jonny. I told her no one else did and she nodded. She reckoned it was because everyone was so sad about him dying. I guess it was because no one had ever really said Jonny was dead to me before, but hearing those words made me blub. A red-hot tear burned a streak down my right cheek and then my chest heaved and I didn't think I'd ever breathe again." During all this commotion, Danny must accept the loss of Jonny and move on while supporting the station like a man before going off to boarding school the next year. Building to the tension, Danny's fourteen-year-old sister announces her pregnancy yet she does not reveal the identity of the father. The baby is due at the same time as the muster!

"When Mum and Sissy came back from the hospital they had a little black-and-white picture that was meant to be of the baby- but it was rubbish.

"Mum showed it to me and Emily. She kept pointing to where she said the baby's head was – but I reckoned she'd got it wrong. It was just a load of black and grey blobs- there was no way that was a picture of a baby. I told her I reckoned there must have been something wrong with the camera or they'd printed it out wrong. They all laughed, but I knew dad would agree with me when he saw it."

The genre of this novel is family drama.

Eventually, Danny's mother admits that she cannot manage looking after Sissy as well as Emily, their younger daughter, and hires a Pommie. Liz. Liz's first impression wasn't that great. According to Danny, she was inexperienced and oblivious to anything from making toast to gathering cattle.

Danny gets exasperated when Liz keeps asking annoying questions, but Liz's queries help readers to understand. They also help the Dawsons understand themselves.

The Northern territory of Australia in the dry and parched desert is a setting that grips you into the story. The ranchers worry about the rain not coming, the boreholes drying and the cattle dying while the sun glares at the scorching desert ground.

"I looked up at the sky and the sun caught on my face and made my eyes sting even more than the smoke did. I hoped Jonny was paying attention up there about getting us some rains- just because he was in heaven, it didn't mean he couldn't help."

Danny's coming of age happens as he develops relationships with people around him...well, not always people. Danny took Buzz, the orphan camel under his wing and held regular training sessions. These were particularly entertaining because watching their relationships grow to such an extent was truly heart-warming.

"I dunno what it's like to land an aeroplane, or how it feels when you dive with sharks, but I reckon it's probably a bit like the feeling you get when you teach a camel something new.

Being out in the desert with Buzz felt good. As I ran with him it was like my asthma was a bad dream I'd just woken up from – I could run forever"

Lewis manages to oppose many concerns such as teenage pregnancy, racism and loss as well as keeping it light and humorous at the same time, which demonstrates an excellent novelist skill. But perhaps she wouldn't have been able to accomplish that if Danny wasn't the narrator.

Lewis used to work as a journalist; this is shown in some of the parts of the book. The imageries that Danny puts in your mind are beautifully detailed. Everybody Jam started out as a slow paced novel that got quite dull at one point, but as I read further on the pace increased quite dramatically, with a fantastic climax.

To conclude, I think that Ali Lewis has written an incredible novel that is worthy of the Carnegie award.

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## Francien says

Er stond bij roman, maar al gauw merkte ik dat het meer een boek was voor jongeren.  
Toch uitgelezen en was een aardig verhaal.  
Zeker de moeite waard om te lezen door jongeren.

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## Big Book Little Book says

Alison: [www.bigbooklittlebook.blogspot.com](http://www.bigbooklittlebook.blogspot.com)

When Danny's mum admits she can't cope, the family hires a housegirl to help out - a wide-eyed English backpacker. She doesn't have a clue what she's let herself in for. And neither do they.

Danny is thirteen and still trying to cope after the death of his older brother last year. He has an older sister Sissy who is pregnant at fourteen. Its summer in Australia and the rains aren't coming. The annual muster at the cattle station at which Danny lives is about to happen and Danny is determined to show his Dad that he is growing up and that he can live up to the shadow of Jonny, his older brother. Amongst all of this enters an English housegirl, she hasn't got a clue how an Australian cattle ranch his run. But maybe she is what Danny needs to help both him and his family heal.

I really struggled to get into this book. It took me over a week to get to page 50 which is most unlike me. In fact had it not been on the Carnegie shortlist I probably would have given up. I am however glad I didn't, although slow to start Everybody Jam turned into a poignant coming of age tale that grew and grew on me. I found the language hard to start with, Ali Lewis seems determined to get as much Australian slang in there as possible, you won't forget where the book is set, but after a while this ceased to matter.

Danny is a very strong protagonist and a typical young boy. Lewis has captured the confused nature of his emotions incredibly well and whilst he isn't always likeable, he is an incredibly real character. Everything is told from his point of view, so the story comes out in stages, I think this did contribute to the slow start but was effective by the end. In spite of this supporting characters are also drawn very well. Lewis uses the drought at the ranch to show the state of Danny's family. As the cracks show in the earth, so they do in the household. It is only when the family starts to heal that the rain comes too.

It won't be my favourite off the list, I've already read better. But Everybody Jam is worth getting through a slow start.

Verdict: Slow to start but the effort is worth it. A moving, poignant tale of a boy coming of age and family relationships.

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## Michael Cattigan says

So now I've finished, did this novel improve?

Unfortunately no!

It is entirely the fault of the narrator I think and just shows how hugely important the narrative voice is in a first person narrative. Here it is the voice of a thirteen year old boy and he just annoyed the hell out of me (and as a parent and teacher, I have quite a high threshold for teenage annoyance!)!

The episode where he stole a ute and drove into a stampede of cattle in order to save his **camel** left me speechless for all the wrong reasons! He needed a good slap for endangering himself, the cattle and the car. And if he told me once more that being allowed to do something adult made him feel "taller" I may have put the book on the fire!

The descriptions did improve from page 91: the descriptions of the cows being burned - reminiscent of foot-and-mouth pyres - were gruelling. But the language was almost completely bereft of adjectives or figurative language. I do accept that the choice of a down-to-earth home-educated teenage boy narrator limits the literariness of the writing but, even so!

And the obvious device of using the rain to conclude the book felt clumsy.

I also had a problem with the language here: there are many Australian slang terms littering the book but they didn't strike me as authentic, more as if they had been shoehorned in to give a veneer of authenticity (to mix my own metaphors!). Cliche was also a difficulty here: Danny's father seemed to speak in them which Lewis then highlighted by putting them in *italics*!. The rain at the end of the book, the pathetic fallacy of the deepening drought that reflects the deepening rifts within the family all struck me as cliched.

I feel I'm being unfair! This is not a bad book. I just did not gel with it. Two more on the Carnegie list to go!

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Ok, I'll be honest, I'm not thrilled with this book. It's set in the Australian desert in a family run cattle station, not dissimilar to that shown in Baz Luhrman's film Australia.

It is narrated through a first person voice of Danny, the middle son who is struggling to come to terms with his older brother Johnny's death (apparently by falling off a roof, memories of The Archers' Nigel Pargetter spring unbidden to mind) and his sister's pregnancy.

Actually, that seems unfair: save for a couple of conversations and references the death and pregnancy have been hardly dealt with at all. Perhaps this is because 13 year olds do deal with things by ignoring them - mine does - but it means that the book seems to do no more than recount the day to day minutiae of ranch life... and it's really rather dull!

And descriptions seem to be lacking. The butchering of the killer could have been described in detail but is instead only obliquely referred to. Again perhaps this reflects the matter-of-fact nature of death on a cattle station. Perhaps it is a nod to the sensibilities of a young adult audience (who have a stronger stomach than

this book may assume).

Perhaps I am being unfair: I am only 91 pages into it. But I'm not gripped by the narrator or the writing ...

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### **Caren says**

This book is shortlisted for the 2012 Carnegie Medal, which is how I heard of it, as it apparently hasn't been published in the USA. The author has worked in journalism and did actually spend time on a cattle station in Australia, so the story is told in a quite straight-forward way, almost as a piece of journalism. It is a sort of slice of time on the ranch, as seen through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old boy. In that way, it could be considered a coming of age sort of story. The back cover warns that it is not suitable for younger readers, and, indeed, there are some mature themes in the book, so it is really meant for teens. Other reviewers have complained that there isn't a real plot to the book, but that it is a series of incidents strung together with no real resolution to any of the threads. This gives it a real-life feel to me, though. I was quite fascinated to be able to spend time on a remote Australian cattle station, seeing it all through the teen protagonist's eyes. Throughout the book, there is a lot of Australian slang, with no glossary to define the terms. Mostly, you can guess their meanings from the context, but not always; a glossary would have been nice. Still, you do feel as though you are immersed in the culture of the place. Upon finding out at the end of the book that the author had spent time on a cattle station, I naturally wondered if she had written herself into the story as "Liz", the 'Pommie' household help, whom Danny derides in the beginning, but for whom he feels great affection by the end of the book. The reader can relate to the unfamiliar feel of the place through Liz's reactions. We learn, along with her, what "everybody jam" is (a jam, such as apricot, that everybody likes), along with lots of other colloquialisms. I was most taken aback by the apparently still strong racism the ranchers feel toward the aborigines, or "gins". Some of the other mature themes are handled in a stark, no-nonsense way. Danny's sister (just fourteen years old) is pregnant, his older brother has died from a horrific accident on the ranch, a drought has decimated some of the cattle herds... You begin to wonder what else could go wrong for these people, but life goes on, and, as the book ends, these events just seem to be a part of the flow of time, coursing onward with new challenges to weather. In that way, the book feels very real. I think this would be a great book for discussion and for learning about another way of life on the other side of the world.

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### **Anke says**

Leuk boek, maar ik denk dat het soms wat dieper had kunnen gaan.

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### **Inés Arriero says**

La historia de los personajes y el trasfondo que esconde me ha gustado mucho. Las descripciones son tan minuciosas y realistas que han hecho que me costara bastante leer ciertas partes. No recomendada para personas especialmente sensibles con el tema de los animales.

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## **Becky says**

Everybody Jam is a poignant, funny and earthy coming-of-age story. I found it utterly mesmerising.

Danny is thirteen and this is the last year he will be at home on the cattle ranch for the annual muster. Next year he will be off at boarding school in Alice Springs. But this year everything is different because this is the first muster without Johnny. Danny is struggling to cope with the loss of his older brother and so are the rest of his family but no one talks about it. It is not only Danny's life that is changing, his sister Sissy is pregnant and no one knows who the father is. When Danny's mum decides that she needs help to run the house while Sissy is pregnant, a Pommie comes to stay at the ranch and it soon becomes apparent that she knows nothing about cattle mustering or anything else that might help you survive in the Australian outback.

Reading this story was a truly wonderful experience from the very first word until the very last. I was transported to the Australian outback and found reading about the workings of a cattle muster enthralling. Danny's story of a boy who wants to be a man but doesn't quite know how is touching and compelling. There are funny moments like when Danny teaches the Pommie how to drive in the outback. This is no suburban England! There are some gruesome moments which had me squealing just like the Pommie – think cattle body parts. Then there are some real weepy moments when your heart catches in your throat and you realise that Ali Lewis is an incredible storyteller.

The setting of this book is a much a part of the story as all the eccentric characters. The Australian outback is a desert so dry and arid that the ranchers worry about the bore holes drying up and the cattle dying, the sun beats fiercely down and they work through the sweat and then there is the worry of a bush fire.

Danny's true coming-of-age happens through his relationship with his camel and with the Pommie. Now being a Pommie myself reading this story through Danny's Aussie eyes was a thoroughly captivating experience. I loved how the novel was more about Danny than it was about grief. It touches upon many issues – teenage pregnancy, racism, loss, familial relationships – but doesn't force upon you any sense of right or wrong. Everybody Jam is a special book that I'll read again and again. For me it is a prize winner. I haven't read a coming-of-age story this brilliant for a very long time indeed. It's breathtaking when you realise that Ali Lewis is a debut author. An absolute keeper!

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## **Alex Horsewell says**

Everybody Jam  
by Ali Lewis  
published by Andersen Press

This book was a funny one.

This book includes a lot of Australian slang which makes it harder to read than a usual book, its confusing at times and can make following the story difficult. I feel like as the story goes on you begin to understand the

language a little more.

I do not like the writing style, it is written in the first person, which I prefer to third, however, the writing in places doesn't flow very well. I enjoy prose and poetry, I like my writing to flow and have a consistent rhythm to it, whereas the rhythm here was bumpy and uneven. The writing is undescriptive, but I suppose that it is the way an Australian 13 year old would talk.

My last criticism is that the story isn't a story as such, its kind of messed up. I have talked about the idea of a story mountain before in a previous blog post so I will not go into detail here.

A normal story has a beginning, a middle and an end, a build up, a conflict, a resolution. This book felt more like a lot of short stories with the same underlying themes were strung together into a novel, with lots of mini conflicts and resolutions rather than one big conflict and resolution. This made the book confusing and busy with a lot of things to follow at once.

However, with all my criticisms I still enjoyed this book. I thought that the characters were written well, it was realistic and it was interesting, providing a fascinating in-sight into life on a cattle station.

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