

The prize-winning and best selling memoir

THE HATE RACE

*'She is not
quiet in
this memoir,
and we need
to hear her.'*

*—THE
AUSTRALIAN*

MAXINE
BENEBA
CLARKE

TEACHERS RESOURCES

THE HATE RACE

by *Maxine Beneba Clarke*

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SECTION A

BEFORE READING

1. PREDICTION ACTIVITIES

- What are the connotations of the title *The Hate Race*?
- How may a reader's interpretation of the title change depending on their personal and familial history?
- What aspects of history and contemporary politics may shape a reader's understanding of an Australian text that explores the impacts of racism? Consider:

- The Atlantic slave trade
- The impacts of colonisation on Indigenous Australian communities
- The White Australia Policy
- Australia's changing approach to refugees
- Patterns of immigration since British colonisation
- The Racial Discrimination Act
- Government policies of multiculturalism
- White supremacist political movements, including the Ku Klux Klan in the USA, Enoch Powell in the UK and Pauline Hanson in Australia

2. UNDERSTANDING THE MEMOIR FORM

A memoir is a first-person retelling of memories that are connected either by time or theme.

Generally, the author of a memoir:

- Uses a singular first-person narrative voice
- Is the protagonist of the text
- Covers a distinct portion of their life
- Draws a thematic connection between the memories they recount
- Writes in a literary style, utilising the range of descriptive techniques found in literary fiction

3. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maxine Beneba Clarke is a widely published Australian writer of Afro-Caribbean descent and the author of the poetry collections *Gil Scott Heron Is on Parole* and *Nothing Here Needs Fixing*. Maxine's short fiction, non-fiction and poetry have been published in numerous publications including *Overland*, *The Age*, *Meanjin*, *The Saturday Paper* and *The Big Issue*. Her critically acclaimed short fiction collection *Foreign Soil* (2014) won the ABIA for Literary Fiction Book of the Year 2015, the 2015 Indie Book Award for Debut Fiction, and Maxine was also named as one of the Sydney Morning Herald's Best Young Novelists for 2015, as well as being shortlisted for the Matt Richell Award for New Writing at the 2015 ABIA's and the 2015 Stella Prize. A collection of Maxine's poetry *Carrying The World*, her memoir *The Hate Race* and her first children's picture book *The Patchwork Bike* were published in 2016.

SECTION B

QUESTIONS FOR READING

PROLOGUE

- What role does the setting of the 'white-picket-fence, increasingly gentrified suburb of East Bentleigh' play in the prologue? (p. v)
- What is the 'chest-tightening feeling' that the author recounts? What themes of the text might this foreshadow? (p. vi)
- Do you believe that 'racism is a shortcoming of the heart'? Why or why not? (p. viii)
- How does Clarke reflect the notion that 'experiencing [racism] is an assault on the mind'? (p. viii)
- Why does the author emphasise that Australia is '[her] country — [her] children's country'? (p. x)

PART ONE

Chapter 1

- What did it mean to be 'Black Britain to a tee' in the 1970s? (p. 3)
- What are the implications of the idea that 'there are myriad ways of telling' a story? (p. 3)
- Why does Clarke detail the broader historical context to her family's history? (p. 10)
- What is the role of the refrain connecting storytelling and music? (p. 11)
- What is the significance of the use of irony in this chapter? (p. 11)

Chapter 2

- What do the Man Friday Hotel and the Coon cheese represent to Cleo and Bordy? (p. 16)
- What role does the setting of Kellyville play in the text? (p. 16)
- What is the importance of the Clarke family being 'inside the village'? (p. 17)
- Why might Clarke emphasise that her childhood home 'was packed with love, laughter, playdough and pride'? (p. 19)
- Why does Clarke note that she 'empathised with the Brethren children from an early age'? (p. 20)

Chapter 3

- How does Clarke characterise Carlita Allen? (p. 22)
- How does Maxine view her skin colour at this point in the text? What might inform this self-perception? (p. 23)
- Why is Maxine's mother drawn to other black women 'lurking conspicuously on the periphery of [their] whitewashed lives'? (p. 24)
- How does Clarke characterise Mrs Allen? (p. 29)
- What is the significance of young Maxine experiencing 'smouldering stifled rage'? (p. 30)

Chapter 4

- How do you respond to the idea that 'at five and a half, racism had already changed [Maxine]'? (p. 33)
- Why does Clarke italicise the names that she was called? (p. 33)
- Why does Maxine want to share so much with her class when she is Student of the Week? (p. 35)
- What are the implications of Maxine being asked where she is from? (p. 37)
- What role do books play for Maxine at this point in the text? What are their limitations? (p. 41)

Chapter 5

- What does the Cabbage Patch Kid represent to Maxine? (p. 44)
- Why does Maxine think that the blonde hair of the Cabbage Patch Kid will annoy her mother? (p. 47)
- Why doesn't Maxine want a brown Cabbage Patch Kid? (p. 49)
- How is the Australia of Maxine's youth 'slowly changing'? What is the significance of this change to the text? (p. 51)
- Why does Maxine feel that brown people owning Australia will 'change everything'? (p. 53)

Chapter 6

- What is 'intergenerational trauma'? (p. 55)
- How do you respond to Maxine's father's claim that 'black kids don't do gymnastics'? (p. 57)
- How does Clarke characterise the gymnastics coach? (p. 58)
- What is Maxine's response to her experience with gymnastics? (p. 59)
- How does Maxine's approach to her leotard reflect her approach to daily life? (p. 63)

Chapter 7

- Why does Maxine pray to God? (p. 65)
- Why does Maxine believe that 'turning white' will make her life 'easier' than her parents' lives? (p. 67)
- How does Clarke characterise the relationship between racism and the desire to belong? (p. 68)
- Why are Maxine's parents worried about her experience with vitiligo? (p. 71)
- How do you react to the idea that Maxine's friends' parents consider her a 'bad influence'? (p. 72)

Chapter 8

- Why do the children at Maxine's school use her vitiligo as 'another source of harassment'? (p. 72)
- How do you respond to Maxine wanting 'out, to not exist anymore'? (p. 74)
- What lessons does Maxine learn from her teachers' response to racism? (p. 75)
- Why does Maxine 'feel tired, right down to [her] bones'? (p. 76)
- What does the game of Catch and Kiss symbolise to Maxine? (p. 81)

Chapter 9

- Why does Clarke believe that race relations took 'a turn for the worse' in 1988? (p. 83)
- How does Maxine challenge Mrs Hird about the colonisation of Australia? (p. 86)
- Why is Maxine's mother sceptical about the school's celebration of the colonisation of Australia? (p. 87)
- Why is Maxine unable to 'properly articulate or understand' her reaction to preparations for the Colonial Day parade? (p. 91)
- How does this experience 'fundamentally alter something inside' Maxine? (p. 93)

Chapter 10

- What does Maxine's bike symbolise? (p. 94)
- Why does 'the sudden escalation from words into physical bullying' scare Maxine? (p. 99)
- What does the silence of the McGuires represent to Maxine? (p. 100)
- Why might Maxine's mother be anxious about the children learning about racism? (p. 103)
- What impact does Maxine's experience of bullying have on her behaviour? (p. 105)

Chapter 11

- What does the school library symbolise to Maxine? (p. 107)
- How does Maxine respond to learning about the history of Jamaica? (p. 110)
- Why might Maxine feel that slavery was 'a shameful thing to be descended from'? (p. 112)
- What role does irony play in this chapter? (p. 117)
- What are the range of ways that Clarke's story of her childhood could be interpreted? (p. 124)

PART TWO

Chapter 12

- What does Maxine's 'consciousness of being' at 13 foreshadow? (p. 127)
- Why does Clarke juxtapose the 'fleeting inconsequential commentary' of her peers with her own experience of racism? (p. 129)
- Why might 13-year-old Maxine characterise her experience of racism as 'just a bit of teasing'? (p. 130)
- How do the hallmarks of 90s pop culture shape the reader's understanding of Maxine's experience? (p. 132)
- What does the image of Selina's parents on stilts symbolise? (p. 133)

Chapter 13

- Why might Clarke outline the way that Maxine and Selina wore their hair on the first day of high school? (p. 134)
- What is significant about Maxine's experience in homeroom on her first day? (p. 135)
- What does the compass reflect of Maxine's experience of racism? (p. 136)

- What is ironic in how the peer support leaders treat Maxine? (p. 137)
- Where does Maxine feel she might belong at high school? Why? (p. 139)

Chapter 14

- How does Clarke characterise Mr Spencer? (p. 140)
- What is the implication of Mr Spencer suggesting that Maxine and her sister were 'built for' running? (p. 143)
- What does the interaction Maxine has with her parents about running suggest about their relationship? (p. 144)
- Why does Maxine want to 'grow wings'? (p. 147)
- Why might Maxine feel an affinity with 'any other child of difference'? (p. 147)

Chapter 15

- Why might Maxine have 'straightened in [her] seat' watching Paul Keating's speech? (p. 149)
- How do you respond to Greg Adams, whose 'hatred was wide, and loud, and vicious, and entitled'? (p. 150)
- What does Maxine recognise in Mr Chandra's 'weariness'? (p. 151)
- What is the impact of Clarke's repetition of the phrase 'somewhere along the line'? (p. 155)
- Why might the school counsellor characterise Maxine's experience of racism as 'a little bit of teasing'? (p. 157)

Chapter 16

- Why might Maxine's experience with racism have been 'unmentionable', even to Selina? (p. 159)
- Why might 'hurtful bystander complicity' be damaging to Maxine? (p. 160)
- What does straight hair represent to Maxine? (p. 161)
- Why does Clarke italicise certain words and phrases in this chapter? (p. 162)
- Why is Maxine's realisation that she preferred her own company 'bittersweet'? (p. 165)

Chapter 17

- What role did Cosmopolitan and Dolly play in popular culture in the 1990s? (p. 166)
- How do Maxine's memories of primary school inform her adolescence? (p. 167)
- How does Clarke characterise Michael Callingham? (p. 173)
- What is tangible about Maxine's experience of the 'uptight Christian whiteness' at Mick's school? (p. 181)
- What is Mick's legacy in Maxine's life? (p. 183)

Chapter 18

- What does Maxine's room symbolise during her adolescence? (p. 184)
- What is the implication of the note that Maxine received? (p. 187)
- Why is Maxine 'pissed off that the schoolyard had followed [her] home'? (p. 187)

- Why does Maxine start laughing in the school counsellor's office? (p. 191)
- What is the implication of the refrain 'this is how it haunts us'? (p. 193)

Chapter 19

- What do Maxine's skin ailments reflect? (p. 194)
- How does Clarke characterise Bhagita? (p. 195)
- How is Sydney changing as Maxine grows? (p. 197)
- Why does Maxine attack Bhagita? (p. 200)
- How did you respond to Maxine's actions? (p. 200)

Chapter 20

- How do Maxine and Selina make the school management 'take care of business'? (p. 204)
- Why does Clarke allude to Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr. and Desmond Tutu? (p. 205)
- Why does Maxine struggle with the debate about Australia Day? (p. 208)
- What is the significance of Maxine needing to 'beat back [her] anger'? (p. 211)
- What is the implication of Maxine's interaction with the Youth of the Year's dad? (p. 213)

Chapter 21

- Why does 'school [become] much more bearable' for Maxine? (p. 215)
- How does Clarke characterise Marcus? (p. 215)
- Why does Maxine worry about meeting Marcus's parents? (p. 217)
- What are the connotations of being 'some fascinating exotic thing'? (p. 220)
- How do you feel about Maxine's reaction to Marcus? (p. 223)

Chapter 22

- How does the changing political climate impact Maxine? (p. 225)
- How does the high school's celebration of Multicultural Day differ from the primary school's celebration of Colonial Day? How is it similar? (p. 226)
- Why does Maxine volunteer to do tribal dancing? (p. 229)
- Why does no one at Maxine's school challenge her about her dancing? (p. 234)
- What possible reactions might Maxine's mother have had to her tribal dancing? (p. 235)

Chapter 23

- Why is Maxine excited about the prospect of being called 'metalmouth'? (p. 236)
- Why are Cecelia's parents reluctant to allow her to enter Model Quest? (p. 237)
- How does Clarke's understanding of her parents change? (p. 239)
- What is Maxine's understanding of the reasons that her mother stopped acting? (p. 240)
- Why does Cecelia lose the modelling contest? (p. 241)

Chapter 24

- Why might Maxine be attracted to acting? (p. 242)
- How does Maxine's experience with the play reflect her self-perception? (p. 244)
- Why does Maxine's mother respond with 'excitement and disbelief' to news of her part? (p. 245)
- What does Maxine's father believe is the burden of being a black girl? (p. 248)
- How does Maxine's father's departure frame the ending of *The Hate Race*?

Epilogue

- How does Clarke draw connections between the moment in the petrol station and the episodes that shaped the text? (p. 255)
- Why does Maxine hug her son? (p. 255)
- Why does Maxine emphasise that Australia is her 'children's country'? (p. 255)
- What is the role of violent imagery of the Atlantic slave trade? (p. 256)
- What is the importance of positioning Clarke's children as 'the descendants of those unbroken'? (p. 256)

SECTION C

AFTER READING

1. THEMES

A. *The impacts of racism*

- The Hate Race explores the institutional nature of racism.
 - The text is framed by the racist policies and politics that define Australian history — from the colonisation of Indigenous lands to the rise of Pauline Hanson. These broad social experiences form the backdrop to Maxine's childhood and shape the views of the individuals that she encounters.
 - Maxine's schools at worst propagate and at best ignore the racism that she experiences. Teachers exoticise and other Maxine, providing a platform for classroom bullies. Her primary school principal and her high school counsellor trivialise and mock her experience, reinforcing the sense of an individual's powerlessness in the face of institutionalised racism.
 - Maxine's family history is directly shaped by the racism that underpins world history — from the Atlantic slave trade to the difficulty that her father faces in trying to secure an academic position in Australia. The global movement of her family reflects the complex and far-reaching effects of systemic racism.
- Clarke explores the interpersonal experience of racism. Throughout the text characters battle both resilience and prejudice passed through generations.
 - Maxine explores the range of impacts that racism has on her emotional and social development. From her relationship with her physicality to her interactions with another student of colour, Clarke tracks the personal toll of racism on a young person's development.
 - The attitudes and actions of many of the young people in The Hate Race are directly shaped by their family's attitudes. Carlita Allen's racist bullying becomes understandable when set in the context of Mrs Allen's attitude towards Maxine. Conversely, Maxine's bond with Selina is solidified by the ways in which her family also sits outside the norm in Kellyville.

B. *The gaps between generations*

- The Hate Race reflects the gaps that can form between generations of families due to shifting geography and social norms.
 - The Prologue and Epilogue reflect the complex ways in which Clarke's position as a parent interact with her own understanding of racism in Australian society. She explores the tension between her family's rightful claim to an Australian identity and the ways in which mainstream Australian racism seeks to invalidate that very existence. Central to this tension is the seemingly impossible desire of parents in the text to simultaneously shield their children from racism and equip them with the tools to manage its impacts.

- Chapter 1 reflects the complex dynamics of a family whose history is spread across the globe. Each generation of the family seeks to find their place within complex historical forces that push and pull people of colour across the globe.
- Maxine's interactions with her parents reflect the complexities faced by the children of migrants. Maxine and her siblings have a fundamentally Australian childhood (albeit one shaped, at least in part, by their experiences of racism), whereas Bordeaux and Cleopatra retain the references of their lives in the United Kingdom.

C. *The power of language*

- Language is central to Maxine's experience in *The Hate Race*.
 - In many respects, language acts as a refuge for Maxine. She seeks comfort in literature when she is excluded from the social worlds of her schools. She also seeks and finds the history that is omitted from the public narratives of her education – an experience that is not comforting, but is empowering in its own way.
 - Language is a weapon in the text, wielded by children and adults alike against children of colour. The corrosive impact of these insults is immediately clear to the reader, who watches Maxine wrestle with the implications of the weight of the words that are used against her from a very young age. We see her briefly experiment with what it feels to hold this power herself as she turns her own words against Bhagita, only to be confronted by the ramifications of this choice.

D. *The struggle of being an outsider*

- Many of the characters in *The Hate Race* sit on the margins of society, whether by choice or by design. Their experiences are paradoxical, reflecting both the power and danger inherent in this position.
 - Maxine's family has been shaped by successive generational experiences of being cast as outsiders. The family's movement around the globe reflects the weight of this burden for people who are simply attempting to make lives for themselves against the harsh forces of colonisation and oppression.
 - Maxine's childhood is shaped by her position on the periphery of her school environments. From a very young age she is aware of the fact that others perceive her as different. The experience of being on the outside is shaped by the attitudes and expectations of others, rather than something inherent to her personality.
 - The text explores the way that individuals on the fringes of the mainstream may find common ground with others in the margins. From Maxine's mother seeking other people of colour to Maxine's experiences with Bhagita, the text reflects the complex and often contradictory ways that marginalisation may impact relationships.

E. *The formation of national identity*

- From the prologue to the epilogue Maxine's experiences illuminate the centrality of racism in Australian society. The contest over Australian identity unfolding as Maxine grows has very concrete impacts on the space she is afforded in her world.
 - Maxine's interaction with the history she is taught in school reflects the impact of the whitewashing of Australian history on generations

of people of colour. Her curiosity and struggle with her own identity propels her to conduct her own research into what she knows to be a fundamental part of the Australian story.

- Throughout the text, Clarke ties socio-political developments such as the rise of Pauline Hanson to the everyday lived experience of her family. Making these connections between the political and the personal highlights the role of debates about national identity in stoking and legitimising racist sentiment the Australian suburbs.
- Clarke's chosen structure for the text reflects the cyclical and resurgent nature of Australian racism, ensuring that the reader has a sense of the complex experiences of people of colour in modern Australia. By foregrounding her experience as a parent, Clarke draws attention to the legacy of the experiences of racism that she faced growing up.

2. LITERARY FEATURES

A. Form and structure

- The memoir form solidifies the reader's understanding of the events depicted in the text.
 - Clarke vividly recreates the Australia of her childhood and adolescence, asking readers to locate her personal experiences within broader social, cultural, political and historical narratives. The pop culture references throughout the text help to bring alive the suburban Australia of her youth.
 - Sharing raw personal experiences of the toll of institutional and interpersonal racism reconfigures what can otherwise be an abstract, academic debate about the role of race in Australian history. The memoir form is a crucial reminder that we are discussing the lives of real human beings.
- The largely chronological structure encourages the reader to follow the cumulative corrosive effect of racism on a human being.
 - The text largely follows Maxine as she moves through childhood and adolescence. This serves to illustrate the way that children of colour may be exposed to the horrors of racism at a time in their lives that is traditionally depicted as period of innocence and joy.
 - The chronology of Maxine's experiences also illustrates the way that these experiences of racism interact with each other as she grows and matures. The reader is exposed to the toll of each of these experiences, which seem to expand exponentially, robbing a young person of their right to find their own way in the world free of racism and oppression.
 - Bookending the text with contemporary scenes depicting her own experiences of parenting, Clarke reflects the legacy of her childhood and adolescence in her adult life. These scenes serve to illustrate the continual experience of racism in modern Australia and her fears for the innocence of her own children. Leaving the reader with these contemporary images acts as a challenge to the reader to understand the text as more than a historical document – to take the lessons of the text and examine the corners of their own life.

B. Narrative voice

- Clarke's narrative voice synthesises the experiences of the periods depicted in the text with the reflection from her position writing the text as an adult.
 - Following Maxine's childhood experience, Clarke works to reconstruct the sense of innocence and wonder that typically permeates childhood.
 - Writing from the perspective of a reflective adult, Clarke is then able to situate that child's experience against the backdrop of both historical events and contemporary racism.

C. Characterisation

- Characters in *The Hate Race* sit on the margins of society, whether by choice or by design. Their experiences are paradoxical, reflecting both the power and danger inherent in this position.
 - Maxine is a complex protagonist. The reader sees her grow and grapple with the insidious and sometimes overt challenges of racism. This constant threat permeates all experiences that come with her growth – from her time at school to her first romantic relationship. The synthesis of childhood experiences and Clarke's often self-deprecating reflection serves to give the reader a rich understanding of her development.
 - The cast of supporting figures in the text illustrate the full spectrum of humanity. From those close to Maxine, like her family and her best friend Selina, to those who represent the worst parts of her treatment, like playground bully Carlita. These characters all make their own choices, but not always in circumstances of their own choosing, as Mrs Allen's parenting of Carlita demonstrates.

D. Figurative language

- Clarke explores the ways that an individual may construct their own understanding of their past through the refrains that refer to storytelling and musicality throughout the text. This acts as a reflection on the memoir form itself, and serves to remind the reader that Clarke is exploring the legacy of her own experiences of racism.
- Clarke's text reflects the ways that popular culture can symbolise the core values of a society.
 - Cleo and Bordy encounter symbols of the racist infrastructure of Australian society upon their arrival at the Man Friday Hotel, and their encounter with Coon cheese.
 - Maxine's obsession with Cabbage Patch Kids demonstrates the homogeneity of Australian culture in the late twentieth century.
 - Maxine's schools emphasise the oppressive and archaic view of Australian history in their celebrations of colonisation.

3. CREATIVE RESPONSES

Students may be asked to respond creatively to *The Hate Race*. This means working with the themes and literary features of the work. Some possible tasks:

- Write the scene of the prologue from the perspective of the fellow parent that Clarke encounters.
- Explore Maxine's initial experiences of preschool from the point of view of her teacher.

- Construct the story of Maxine's student of the week speech from Jennifer's perspective.
- Write about Maxine's diagnosis with vitiligo from the perspective of one of her parents.
- Write about Maxine's challenge to Mrs Hird from the teacher's point of view.
- Depict Maxine's friendship with Selina from the perspective of one of Selina's parents.
- Construct the story of Maxine's experience with running from her sister's point of view.
- Write Bhagita's account of her interaction with Maxine.
- Explore Cecelia's experience with modelling from her perspective.
- Construct the story of Maxine's father's departure from his point of view.

4. ANALYTICAL RESPONSES

Students may be asked to respond analytically to *The Hate Race*. Some possible essay questions:

- 'Clarke's work reflects the impact of racism on an individual.' Discuss.
- To what extent do the parents in *The Hate Race* shape the experiences of their children?
- 'The Hate Race is a cautionary tale for modern Australia.' Discuss.
- To what extent is Maxine's childhood characterised by a 'smouldering stifled rage'?
- 'Clarke's memoir reflects the struggle to find a place to belong.' Do you agree?
- To what extent do Maxine's characters display 'weariness' in response to their experience of racism?
- 'The Hate Race reflects the impact of institutional racism.' Discuss.
- 'The Hate Race shows how little has changed with the role of racism in Australia.' Do you agree?
- 'Clarke's memoir reflects the importance of history.' Discuss.
- To what extent do peers shape Maxine's development?