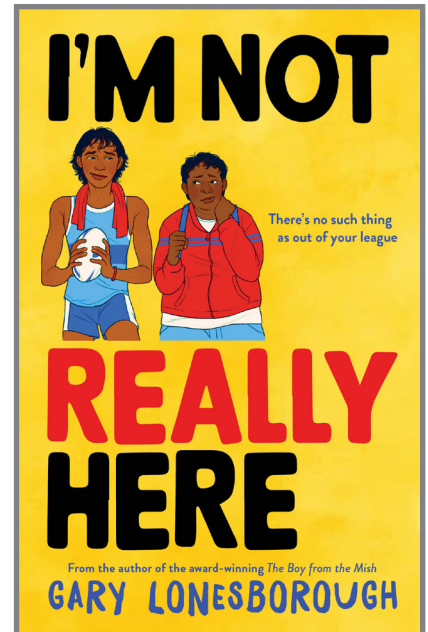


# I'm Not Really Here

AUTHOR

**GARY LONESBOROUGH**



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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Sexual References, Drug and Alcohol References, Suicide Reference, Language)

## SYNOPSIS

When 17-year-old Jonah arrives in a new town—Patience—with his dad and younger brothers, it feels like a foreign place. A new town means he needs to make new friends, which isn't always easy. Especially when he's wrestling with his body image, and his memories of his mother.

When he joins the local footy team, so he can spend more time with his new crush, Harley, he feels like he's moving closer to something good. But even though he knows what he wants, it doesn't mean he's ready.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Lonesborough is a Yuin man, who grew up on the Far South Coast of NSW as part of a large and proud Aboriginal family. Gary was always writing as a child, and continued his creative journey when he moved to Sydney to study at film school. Gary has experience in youth work, Aboriginal health, child protection, the disability sector (including experience working in the youth justice system) and the film industry, including working on the feature film adaptation of *Jasper Jones*. His debut YA novel, *The Boy from the Mish*, won the Booktopia FAB Debut Book Award and the Ena Noel Award and was shortlisted for the CBCA Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, the Indie Book Awards, the Adelaide Festival Awards, the NSW Premier's Awards and was selected as a White Raven. It was published in the US in 2022 under the title *Ready When You Are*. His second novel, *We Didn't Think It Through*, was published in 2023.

## STUDY NOTES

**It is important to first consider any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young adults reading this book and how the perspectives and themes could impact them. Accordingly, it is strongly recommended that before work on *We Didn't Think It Through* begins, teachers and librarians read ACARA'S Guiding principles for promoting and implementing the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.**

- Why do you think Gary Lonesborough called his novel *I'm Not Really Here*?
  - This sentence is repeated throughout the story, what does it tell us about Jonah?
  - What are some of the triggers for Jonah to feel he is not really present?
  - Might the title reflect a theme or themes within the novel?
- If a 'coming of age' novel is one in which the protagonist is transformed from child to adult, would you describe *I'm Not Really Here* as a 'coming of age' novel? In your response discuss Jonah's journey in terms of his:
  - Ability to be comfortable with himself

- Ability to connect with people
- Grief for the loss of his mother.
- Which other characters, in the novel, make the transformation to adulthood and which remain trapped in a child-like state? Compare and contrast the characters of Harley and Jack.
- Jonah's dad is portrayed as a loving parent who tries his hardest to be a good father but, like everyone in the novel, is fallible. True or false?
- Gary Lonesborough says that he deliberately wrote the novel without putting a focus on racism to show 'that Aboriginal stories can be told in many different ways'. Do you agree with his decision? Why?
- Do you think the novel portrays the world teenagers navigate today accurately? Give some examples of things that characters have said or done that seemed particularly accurate.
- Jonah is comfortable telling people he is gay. How might he have been portrayed if he were in a novel written thirty years ago? More broadly, how has today's societal attitudes changed the way LGBTQI+ characters are portrayed in novels, music and film?
- How have the issues of 'toxic masculinity' and 'slut shaming' been explored in the novel?
- Social media is an important way for Jonah to keep in contact with his friends, but is there a down-side to it when he feels uncomfortable about himself.
  - Make a list of the positives and negatives of his use of social media in the novel.
- Read the scene on pp 357–358, where Jonah realises he isn't ready for sex with Harley. What does this scene tell us about what is considered necessary in a respectful and loving relationship today?
- How does Jonah's unresolved grief over his mother's death impact on his life for much of the story? What would you say is the main reason he is able to face his grief honestly by the end of the story? How does writing his letter help him?
- Jonah is finally able to write his story at the end of the novel. Why might the opening lines he writes on p 369, 'It was a warm Thursday afternoon when we pulled up out the front of our new home in our new town—the town of Patience' be described as a circular narrative? What effect does this literary device create?
  - The final line in the novel is, 'Two boys holding hands, walking down the street.' How does this circle back on an earlier part of the novel?

AUTHOR OF NOTES

**CAROLYN WALSH**