



Book Club Book of the Month: October 2019

Invisible Boys, Holden Sheppard (Fremantle Press)

Summary

In a small town, everyone thinks they know you: Charlie is a hardcore rocker, who's not as tough as he looks. Hammer is a footy jock with big AFL dreams, and an even bigger ego. Zeke is a shy over-achiever, never macho enough for his family. All are struggling with questions about their sexuality while living in a small country town, and find it necessary to hide who they really are. When the truth is revealed, will it set them free or blow them apart? At times confronting, with its gritty sex scenes and a discussion of suicide ideation, *Invisible Boys* nevertheless offers a raw and authentic portrayal of growing up gay in rural Australia by a talented new voice in YA fiction. *Invisible Boys* is not only for young people coming to terms with their sexuality, but for anyone who has felt invisible and longs to be seen. This is a powerful and compelling read, with one reviewer describing *Invisible Boys* as 'one of those books that only comes around once in a generation'.

About the author

Holden Sheppard is a YA author, born and bred in Geraldton, Western Australia. His debut novel, *Invisible Boys*, has won the 2018 City of Fremantle T.A.G. Hungerford Award and the 2017 Ray Koppe Residency Award, and was Highly Commended in the 2018 ASA Emerging Writers' Mentorship Prize. Holden's novella *Poster Boy* won the 2018 Novella Project competition and was published in *Griffith Review*. His short fiction has been published in *page seventeen* and *Indigo*, and he has also written for *Ten Daily*, *Huffington Post*, *ABC*, *DNA Magazine* and *FasterLouder*. Holden serves as the Deputy Chair of Writing WA, and is an ambassador for Lifeline WA.

Questions for discussion

1. Which character/s did you most identify with or have empathy for? Why?
2. What aspects of being a teenager do you identify with in one or more of the boys?
3. If you have spent time living in rural communities, what elements or quirks of a country town did you recognise in *Invisible Boys*?
4. What is the effect of telling this story from the perspectives of Hammer, Charlie and Zeke, rather than in a single voice?
5. Considering the secondary characters, such as family members, friends and teachers, whose reaction to Hammer, Charlie or Zeke being gay was most surprising or unexpected?
6. Why do you think Holden included the sex scenes as he did? How much of the risky sexual behaviour do you think would have occurred had the boys felt more able to be themselves?
7. Discuss the levels of hope and hopelessness in the main characters. How does this change between the beginning and end of the novel?
8. At what point did you discover who had written the letters? Were you surprised?
9. Holden Sheppard now speaks openly about his own experience of growing up gay in the country, particularly of his struggles to accept his sexuality and his past suicide ideation (he is now an ambassador for Lifeline). How does knowing this impact the way you read the novel?
10. At one point, Zeke comments that he and the other boys were 'invisible to the rest of the world, but we saw each other'. When have you felt invisible and who helped you feel 'seen'?
11. Some of Holden Sheppard's readers have commented that reading *Invisible Boys* has made them feel less alone. What's one story that has left you thinking, 'Ah, I'm not the only one.'

If you liked this book, you may also like...

If I Tell You, by Alicia Tuckerman, Pantera Press

Losing It, by Julia Lawrinson, Penguin

Boy on a Wire, by John Doust, Fremantle Press

Meet Me at the Intersection, edited by Ambelin Kwaymullina and Rebecca Lim, Fremantle Press

Saving Jazz, by Kate McCaffrey, Fremantle Press