

Born a Crime by Trevor Noah

Ideas for discussions and activities

Below are some ideas for discussions and story extension activities that encourage young readers to think more deeply about particular aspects of the stories and to focus on personal connection and interpretation. Most of the discussion questions are open-ended in order to encourage critical thinking.

Choose the discussion and activity ideas best suited to your children's ages and interests.

BEFORE READING THE COLLECTION



Discussion: *'I grew up in South Africa during apartheid'* is the opening of the first story in the collection. Invite the children to share what they know about South Africa during apartheid. Share your own personal experiences and encourage them to ask older members of their families to tell them their stories of apartheid too.

STORY BY STORY: ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR EACH STORY

1. Born a Crime



Discussion: How do you feel about all the ways Trevor's parents had to hide his identity? Was it fair that they had to do this? How do you think Trevor's mother might have felt about doing this?



Writing: Trevor describes himself like this: *'I'd read books, play with the toy that I had, and create imaginary worlds. I lived inside my head. I still live inside my head.'* Complete these sentences in a similar way to describe yourself as a young child and now.

I'd _____ and

_____.

I _____.

I still _____.



2. Trevor, Pray



Discussion: Trevor says: *'I knew there was no demon, but there was no way I could explain what had happened now. The hiding I would have got? Eish! Honesty was never the best policy when it came to a hiding. I kept quiet.'* What would you have done or said if you had been Trevor? Would it have made a difference if you knew you were not going to get a hiding? Was Trevor lying by not explaining what had really happened? Are lying and keeping quiet ever the same thing?



Drawing: There are so many lively scenes described in this story – for example, Temperance strolling through the streets of Soweto, Temperance wanting Trevor to box with him, Koko sitting next to the coal stove, a prayer meeting. Choose your favourite scene and illustrate it. Give your picture a caption or copy out some of the text from the story that goes with it.

3. The Second Girl



Discussion: Trevor's mother says: *'Learn from your past and be better because of your past ... but don't cry about your past. Life is full of pain. Let the pain sharpen you, but don't hold on to it. Don't be bitter.'* What do you think of this advice?



Vocabulary activity: Be a word detective! Go through the story and make two lists of words. On the first list, write down all the words that tell us what Trevor's mother's experience of childhood must have felt like for her. On the second list, write down all the words that describe the kind of person she was.

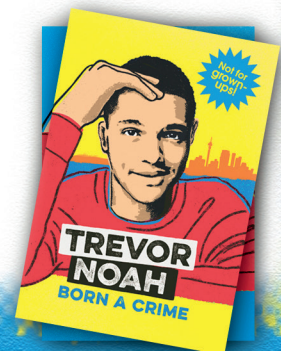
4. Fufi



Discussion: Trevor says: *'Fufi was my first heartbreak. I believed that Fufi was my dog, but of course that wasn't true. Fufi was a dog. I was a boy. We got along well. She happened to live in my house. That experience shaped what I've felt about relationships ever since: You do not own the thing that you love.'* Is it true that you do not own the thing that you love? Give reasons for your answer.



Writing and drawing: Create a comic strip. Start at the part of the story where Trevor's mom rings the bell of the other family's house and end where Fufi goes home with them.



5. Loopholes



Discussion: What is a loophole? Why do you think Trevor called this story ‘Loopholes’?



Discussion: Trevor says: *‘I didn’t feel bad about it at all. I still don’t. The lawyer in me still says that I am completely innocent. There were matches and there was a magnifying glass and there was a mattress and then, clearly, a series of unfortunate events. Things catch fire sometimes. That’s why there are firefighters.’*

Do you agree that Trevor was innocent? Give reasons for your answer.



Writing: Write a news report for an Orange Grove community newspaper on the house burning down. Remember: the reporter would not have known how the fire had started – and Trevor wouldn’t have told him/her!

6. The Mulberry Tree



Discussion: What is your experience of bullying? Who are the bullies in this story?

Is Abel a bully? Why/why not? Do you think the ringleader got the punishment he deserved? Give reasons for your answer.



Discussion: Trevor says: *‘[The ringleader had been] taught how to hate and how to hate himself. Who had bullied him that he needed to bully me?’* If there are reasons why you are bullying someone, does that make it acceptable? Give reasons for your answer.



Writing: You are the editor of the advice column of a magazine. Imagine that Trevor had written a letter explaining ‘the terrible thing’ that he had done and was asking your advice on how to deal with his feelings about it. What advice would you give him? Write Trevor’s letter and the magazine’s advice to him.

7. Run



Discussion: Why was it a huge risk to jump out of the taxi? Were there other choices Trevor’s mom could have made other than jumping out of the taxi with her children? What might have happened if she had made these other choices?



Writing and drawing: Make an illustrated timeline of the events in this story.

8. Chameleon



Discussion: Trevor and his mom use language to cross boundaries. What languages do you speak? Where and when do you



use them? Do you have experience in your own life of how languages can connect people? Can it also separate people? How would language separate people?



Writing: In this story, Trevor describes himself as an outsider. Give yourself five minutes to write down all the words you think of when you think of being an outsider. Now use them (together with other words) to write a short poem that captures what it feels like to be an outsider.

9. Valentine's Day



Discussion: Trevor says: *'As devastated as I was, I understood why Maylene made the choice that she did. I would have picked Lorenzo over me, too.'* What do you think of the choice that Maylene made? What would you have done if you were Maylene? Give reasons for your answer.



Writing: Re-read the part of the story where Trevor explains the process for getting someone to be your valentine. Now rewrite the process as a set of instructions, called 'How to get a valentine' that Trevor could have followed.



Writing: Imagine that Maylene had written a WhatsApp message to a group of her friends asking whether she should choose Trevor or Lorenzo as her valentine. Write her message to the group then write her friends' responses to her message.

10. Outsider



Discussion: This is how Trevor describes himself in Grade 8: *'Two things were true about me at that age. One, I was still the fastest kid in school. And two, I had no pride.'* How did Trevor use these things to his advantage? List two things that are true about you.



Writing: Imagine that Trevor was going to advertise his tuck-shop service at your school. What would be the best way for him to do this? Design an advertisement that he could use.

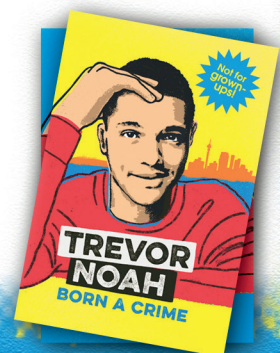
11. Robert



Discussion: Trevor talks about his favourite meal that his dad would cook for him. What is your favourite meal? Who prepares it for you? Who do you usually eat it with? For how long has it been your favourite meal?



Writing: Trevor says that these questions about his dad were in the back of his mind as a teenager: *'Does he think about me? Does he know what I'm doing? Is he proud of me?'* Write answers to these questions and include reasons for your answers.



12. The Crush



Discussion: Trevor says: *'You hang around long enough as the friendly good guy and the girl dates a bunch of handsome jerks, and then one day she turns around and goes, "Oh, it's you. It was always you. You're the guy I was supposed to be with all along." That was my plan. It was foolproof.'* Did the plan turn out to be foolproof? What would your plan have been?



Writing and research: What lesson did you learn from this story? Write this down then look for inspirational quotes on the internet that offer similar life lessons. Write down the three quotes you think are the most useful.

13. Colourblind



Discussion: This story is called 'Colourblind'. What does it mean to be colourblind? What other meanings does 'being colourblind' have? Why do you think Trevor chose this as the title for this story?



Drawing: Draw a map of the route that Trevor took from the mall to his home when he was being chased by the security guards.

14. The Dance



Discussion: Your matric dance is supposed to be a night to remember! In what ways do you think Trevor's matric dance was a night to remember? Do you think he enjoyed it?



Writing: Design and write the matric dance invitation that Trevor's school might have sent to all its matrics.

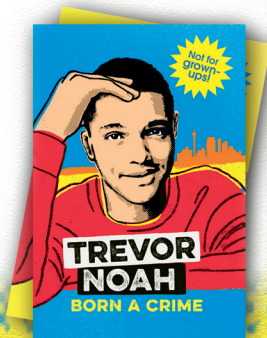
15. My Mother's Life



Discussion or writing: In this story Trevor talks openly about what it was like growing up in a home where abuse was happening. Talk about the feelings you experienced as you read the story. Or, if you don't want to share your feelings with others, write them down.



Writing: Choose one event that takes place in this story. If you had been a friend of Trevor's at the time of this event and he had told you about it, how would you have felt? Write down your feelings as a diary extract, starting like this: 'Dear Diary, Today Trevor told me ...'



16. Go, Hitler!

Discussion: What is an entrepreneur? Would you say that in this story Trevor was an entrepreneur? Give reasons for your answer.



Writing: Can you think of a different title for this story? Write it down.

17. The Cheese Boys

Discussion: Trevor says: *'Everyone has a different idea of what crime is and what level of crime they're willing to be involved in.'* Do you think this is true? What do you think crime is? Which of the things in this story would you say qualify as committing a crime? Give reasons for your answer.



Writing: Write a summary of this story using only three sentences.

18. The World Doesn't Love You

Discussion: When Trevor was arrested do you think he was more worried about going to jail or about his mother and stepfather finding out what had happened? Give reasons for your answer. What would you have been more worried about and why?



Writing: What do you think happened next? Add another paragraph to the end of the story.

AFTER READING THE COLLECTION

Discussion: Think about the ways in which your experiences of growing up are the same as and different from Trevor's experiences. Where are the similarities? Where are the differences? Why do you think some things are similar and some are different?



Writing: Imagine that you were going to interview Trevor about the stories in this book. Write down ten questions that you would like to ask him.



Discussion: The opening lines of the story 'The Second Girl' are: *'My mother used to tell me, "I chose to have you because I wanted something to love and something that would love me back."'* From the way Trevor talks about his mother as he tells his stories, do you think she got what she wanted – something to love and something to love her back? What words would you use to describe their relationship?

