**My Brother Jack**

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| **Year Level:** | Senior Secondary and Tertiary |
| **Curriculum Study Areas:** | Arts (Media); English; History; Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) |
| **Themes/Topics:** | Family, Identity, Intertextuality, War and conflict |
| **Description:** | Jack Meredith is an uneducated but hardworking and decent bloke whose life is battered by the Great Depression. |
| **Resources:** |  |

**The Novel**

Australian author George Johnston’s acclaimed novel My Brother Jack was first published in 1964. My Brother Jack is considered to have made a major contribution to Australian literature, winning the prestigious Miles Franklin Award in the first year of its publication. It was the first in a trilogy written by Johnston – the other books being Clean Straw for Nothing and A Cartload of Clay.

**The story**

Jack Meredith is an uneducated but hardworking and decent bloke whose life is battered by the Great Depression. His younger brother David, clever and ambitious, becomes a journalist and a celebrated war correspondent, but his success can never compensate for the hollowness of his personal life.

The series is a harsh picture of Australian society between the wars, a society harbouring many divisions, and highlighting issues of class and prejudice. The characters engage with historical issues and events. This connects students with the human drama of history enabling them to reach a level of social and historical understanding.

**Part One** of the miniseries follows the impact of Jack and David’s war damaged father return to their family. This personal impact of war on families offers students valuable insight into a topic that is seldom dealt with in history texts for this period. The father’s abusive behaviour leads to Jack leaving home to find work in the Wimmera. David’s father doesn’t believe in education so 14 year old David is apprenticed to a commercial art firm in the city but he has an ambition to be a writer. After having a story published in the Morning Post he becomes a journalist.

Differing effects of the Depression are represented. The US financial crash is signalled in newspaper headlines, and we glimpse evictions and hardship. Jack loses his job and heads for Chile to work on a pipeline. His girlfriend Sheila disappears. Penniless and ill, Jack is shipped back to Australia and Sheila comes home when David places an ad in the missing persons’ column of the newspaper. She brings Jack’s daughter Sharon into their lives.

**Part Two** follows David’s career as a talented journalist and Jack’s experiences when he joins the army at the commencement of World War 11. However, a training accident leaves him with a broken leg and out of the war. David, now a successful war correspondent, marries Helen but is unhappy with his suburban life.

Issues of war propaganda are explored when David is aware of the tension between the reality of the fighting around him and the function of his work as a war correspondent in New Guinea in 1942. David comes into contact with anti-Semitism when he reports on Jewish refugees arriving in Australia from fascist states of Europe in the 1930s. The depictions of the treatment of refugees and tensions between religious groups invite students to make comparison with similar situations today.

Mrs Meredith, Helen, Sheila and other female characters offer an opportunity for students to explore the differing experiences of women in Australian society between the wars.
Toward the end of the miniseries, David the war correspondent has become Jack’s hero, the soldier who did not see active service. When David visits his brother’s local pub, Jack proudly introduces him as my brother Davey.

**The series was produced by Film Australia and broadcast on the Ten Network in 2001.**