



TEACHERS' NOTES

CONSPIRACY 365: January—December by Gabrielle Lord

SERIES SYNOPSIS

Conspiracy 365 is a crime thriller/ mystery for young adults in a unique series of 12 novels published in 12 months. Book 1 is *January* and Book 12 is *December*. From the second book, *February*, onwards each novel opens with a recap of the preceding month's instalment and the series website www.conspiracy365.com includes a members' area, with plot teasers, a guest book, competitions and 365 prizes to be won.

Callum Ormond (Cal) is 15. He lives in a fictional Australian city with place names that sometimes make it sound like Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane – the exact location is never specified, because like every other element in this fast paced series, it keeps shifting. And that's a matter of life or death.

Cal's father fell gravely ill last year when he was researching his family history in Ireland. Before his death he wrote Cal a letter and sent him some mysterious drawings. As Book 1 *January* opens, Cal is told by some anonymous psychiatric patient trying to escape from two paramedics that his father was murdered. As he is captured and being restrained, the patient says that Cal's father uncovered the secret of the Ormond Singularity, that the others – whoever they are – know that Cal was contacted by his father before he died, and they are now after Cal to find out what he was told. He must go into hiding for exactly a year, or he will be killed.

The series begins on New Year's Eve and counts down steadily, month by month, as Cal runs for his life. As the datelines progress, the page numbers of each volume count down in reverse numerical order. This clever device acts as a constant and chilling reminder of Cal's possible fate.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabrielle Lord has long been one of Australia's leading writers of crime fiction for adults. With *Monkey Undercover*, published by Scholastic in 2006, and now with the groundbreaking concept of *Conspiracy 365*, she has become an important writer for young readers.

Gabrielle started writing a serial when she was 11, but, like many Australian writers, had a variety of jobs before writing fulltime. She has worked in sales, fruit-picking, labouring, teaching and the public service, but read that Gertrude Stein decided to become a writer at the age of 30, so Gabrielle started writing a novel herself on her 30th birthday.

It was Gabrielle's third novel *Fortress* that established her reputation and became a set text. Her novel *Whipping Boy* was filmed for television, and subsequent novels for adults such as *Death Delights*, *Spiking the Girl* and *Baby Did a Bad, Bad Thing* have achieved international acclaim and been likened to the work of Patricia Cornwell.

Her website www.gabriellelord.com includes an entertaining interview and comments on her writing process.

GABRIELLE LORD SAYS

'I decided on first person narrative for *Conspiracy 365*, because that's often the most powerful voice... But big challenges loomed: how to create a story big enough, a hero and characters compelling enough, and maintain the very high energy level of story necessary to sustain interest over such a huge story arc? I also needed a huge amount of story. Then there was the challenge of maintaining tension over a very long time span. Most good thrillers have their action happening over a number of days, rarely weeks. I had to find ways of creating tension and suspense over a *whole year of books*.

'The structure I decided, would be based on the pursuit of a family secret, stretching back hundreds of years, forgotten by later generations, and one which created great danger to the seeker. There had to be high stakes – and there are no higher stakes than life itself – together with a built-in time limitation. Creating this secret, then hiding it deep within the narrative and putting lots of obstacles in front of it, as well as a ticking clock that is always getting closer to the secret's sunset clause—it becomes null and void on the stroke of midnight (remember Cinderella!) was one of the main challenges to the writer. The series had to start ticking away from the very first pages.

'How to do this?

'Many narratives use the device of "the gypsy's curse/warning" as a means of setting up the story in an exciting and provocative way. A portentous figure appears and makes a pronouncement, usually a curse or a warning – think the three witches in "Macbeth", the ghost in "Hamlet", the ancient mariner in Coleridge's mighty poem. The blind man Pew tapping along and handing out the fatal black spot in *Treasure Island* ... the list is a long one. The human condition, we are told in *Genesis*, derives from the failure to take heed of a warning: do not eat the fruit of this tree... In stories, warnings are never heeded, otherwise there'd be no story! I needed a phrase, too, something like "beware the Ides of March". So the Ormond Singularity was created, to lend gravitas and intrigue and kick-start the story of Callum Ormond. Within a few *hours* of the stranger's warning, Cal's world is literally turned upside down in a storm at sea where everything goes wrong, and within days of this, he's on the run.'

THE EDITOR, REBECCA YOUNG, SAYS

'The main challenges of editing *Conspiracy 365* related to the sheer size of the project. Our major focus was on building momentum for the major 12-book series story arc, while supporting it with 12 rich, satisfying and action-packed individual books. Another concern was maintaining continuity for the numerous characters, events, scenes, locations, information retrieval and so on. Recalling minor details is tough when you have 12 books to search through!

'Another challenge was maintaining the anxious pace and intense action, without jeopardising an acceptable level of believability, and without being overtly formulaic (although I imagine this forms some of the appeal of the series). Ending each story on the stroke of midnight on the final day of each month was particularly difficult. To avoid too much repetition, we switched it around in places so that it's not

always Cal's life that hangs in the balance—often it's his freedom, the life of a family member, or the life of a stranger who's unfortunately become entangled in the Conspiracy web.

'Despite the subject matter, no censorship was involved. We encouraged Gabrielle to feel at ease and unrestricted in her writing, as we didn't want her readers to feel as though the story had been dumbed down for them. That said, we were always confident knowing that our protagonist, Cal Ormond, was a good kid—a boy who knows right from wrong, and naturally makes 'moral' choices, whether he realises it or not. In Cal's new fugitive life he is understandably confronted by some violent characters and some colourful language, but he himself does not turn to violence or profanity.

'We've focused on descriptive tools to create a realistic underworld atmosphere and sense of place that does not necessarily require detailed acts of violence or language. Often the sense of anxiety is enough.

'We've always wanted readers to find this series edgy and without sugar-coating. We hoped that with a big readership, the pleasure of reading, the sense of achievement gained through the commitment to such a big series, and the building of reading stamina would deem the very few expletives admissible.

'A welcome surprise has been how much the plot has evolved. So many sub-plots have been given life and grown, and have affected the major story in a good way. Some minor characters have grabbed onto their roles and forced bigger stories for themselves. Winter, for example, slowly demanded more 'screen time', and in doing so has developed an intriguing story of her own—one of my favourites.'

SYNOPSIS BOOK 1: *JANUARY*



Fifteen-year-old Callum Ormond ('Cal') is being chased by a man in a cloak, which turns out to be a dressing gown as he comes closer. The man is a psychiatric patient, himself being pursued by paramedics, who restrain and sedate him. Just before he is bundled into the ambulance, he tells Cal that his father was murdered because he discovered the 'Ormond Singularity' in Ireland last year, that the mysterious 'others' know that Cal was contacted by his father before he died, and that Cal's life is therefore in danger for the next 365 days and he and his family must go into hiding.

On New Year's Eve, Cal's family travels to their beach house at Treachery Bay for their annual holidays. While he is there with his mother, his little sister Gabbi and Uncle Rafe – his father's identical twin – Cal goes out in the boat on New Year's Day with his uncle. They are attacked by sharks and survive a sudden storm. It's not a good start to the year!

Their house is broken into and trashed. Uncle Rafe may look like Cal's dad, but could hardly be more different. Dark and moody, he begins to act mysteriously and grabs an envelope from the mail that is quite clearly addressed to Cal. Cal was sent a letter and some drawings by his father before he died. Cal discovers that Uncle Rafe owns a gun.

Cal is contacted by a woman named Jennifer Smith, who says she nursed his father at the hospice.

With his best friend Boges, Cal breaks into Uncle Rafe's house and finds the envelope, but some of its contents have been removed. When Cal goes to meet Jennifer Smith he is kidnapped by thugs and locked up, but escapes through a skylight.

His mother discovers that her bank account has been cleaned out, apparently by Cal's father, and \$100 000 (their life savings) is missing. Cal discovers that Uncle Rafe is using the family vault at the cemetery to hide documents, including a copy of his father's drawings, which seem to contain messages in code. One drawing in particular haunts him: that of a World War 1 soldier with the wings of an angel.

Cal finds the house broken into, Uncle Rafe in a pool of blood and his little sister Gabbi unconscious. Because Cal's fingerprints are all over Uncle Rafe's gun, he is the main suspect and goes into hiding. Even his own mother clearly believes he is guilty and is assisting the police. Cal breaks into his own house to get the address of a great-uncle who lives in the country, but before he can get away, he is kidnapped again and imprisoned in some sort of underground reservoir, which is rapidly filling with oil.

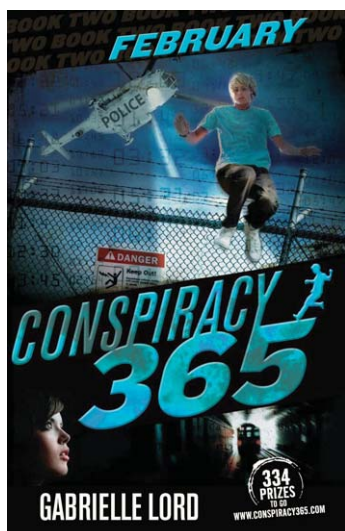
WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *JANUARY*

- Show your students the front cover of *January*. Ask them what sort of book they are expecting and why. (It's about a teenager, digital numerals suggest time and computers, the hot colour looks like fire, but there's lightning and the wake of a boat, so there might be a storm at sea, the boy looks worried and about to run)
- What does the word 'conspiracy' mean? (the combined action of persons for an evil or unlawful purpose; a plot)
- What is the significance of the number '365'?
- Read the back cover blurb: were your predictions right?
- Read the prologue to *January* aloud. Ask students what they think might happen.

Mysteries and action thrillers involving crime are particularly good for a combination of shared and individual reading. Reading a chapter or scene aloud to the class at regular intervals, particularly when you can end on a plot crisis, encourages students to continue reading in their own time. When they come together again as a class, they can discuss a variety of topics. For *January*, ask them:

- What is the significance of the page numbering?
- List 5 images that ramp up the eerie or frightening atmosphere in this novel. (eg 181 the sound of a dog barking, the rustling of leaves, 176 the darkening sky)
- List 5 examples of mistaken perception in the novel: what the character or the reader thinks he or she knows turns out to be wrong (Uncle Rafe is dead/ not dead; 138 Cal hears howling, but it isn't coming from him – it's a siren)
- 181 the 'Ormond Singularity' runs out a year from now. Ask, 'What do you think this phrase might mean?' (Sounds scientific – maybe biology, genetics, physics. We'll have to keep reading to find out!)
- Ask your students whether they have heard the term 'cliffhanger'. What does it mean? Where might the term have come from? (a character is in imminent danger, hanging onto the edge of a cliff by his or her fingers.) Cliffhangers often come at the end of a chapter, but not always. Ask students to find 3 good examples. (eg 28) What effect do cliffhangers have on you as a reader?

SYNOPSIS BOOK 2: **FEBRUARY**



Cal keeps his mouth shut tight so that the oil, which is steadily filling the reservoir and is now up to his neck, doesn't choke him. Suddenly he is aware that the oil flow has been switched off. It seems that someone has come to rescue him, but given the series of threats to his life in Book 1, he is cautious about masking assumptions.

He is surprised to hear a girl's voice. She won't tell Cal her name, because the underworld figure Vulkan Sligo, his captor at the end of Book 1, knows her and will throw her into the oil tank too.

Once Cal has escaped and changed his clothes, the girl tells him that her name is Winter Frey and Sligo is her guardian. She has lost both parents, says that Sligo worked for her father before the mysterious unidentified 'accident' and that although he is a crook, everything he does is aimed at regaining the community's respect and admiration.

Winter tells Cal that the media are portraying him as the 'psycho-teen' who shot his uncle and attacked his younger sister so viciously that she is still in a coma. She wants Cal to help her break into the house of one of Sligo's cronies known as the Toecutter and retrieve a locket that was stolen from her.

Cal's best friend Boges helps him create a blog that he can use to defend his reputation and protest his innocence.

Winter won't return Cal's calls. Cal sees a guy snooping round Sligo's caryard – but it turns out to be Winter in disguise.

Secretly Cal photographs a red-haired woman in the house where he was imprisoned. She is the one who interrogated him. Boges knows she is the criminal lawyer Oriana de la Force.

Cal sees his doppelganger – a boy who looks almost identical to him. Boges says this is always an ominous sign.

Cal and Boges overhear Uncle Rafe saying that he is signing his house over to Cal's mum.

Cal hides in a stormwater drain and almost loses the drawings when it rains and there is a flash flood.

Winter finally gets in touch and they go to see the Ormond Angel in stained glass at the Memorial Park.

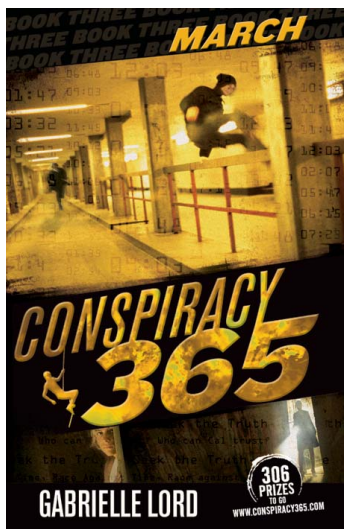
Cal is attacked by a lion in the zoo when he is on his way to meet Jennifer Smith. One of Sligo's thugs, Red Singlet, chases him into the underground railway, Cal fakes falling, jabs Red Singlet with a tranquilliser needle and then gets his foot caught in a rail as a train bears down.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: **FEBRUARY**

- Ask students what books they have read, TV shows or movies they have seen which they would describe as action thrillers. (Books by Anthony Horowitz, Robert Muchamore, Matthew Reilly, the 'Bourne' movies, 'The Fugitive', 'Law & Order'). There are many kinds of action thrillers: some involve spying, crime, mystery.
- Ask students to identify the text type of either *January* or *February*. Brainstorm on the smartboard the textual features that help them to decide their answer.

- Ask students how they would make a thriller more dangerous and frightening for the main character if they were writing. Brainstorm ideas on the smartboard. (Set scenes at night, places the character doesn't know, surround him or her with characters they don't know, make the character feel unsafe with even their friends and family, make all communication dangerous, create accidents, natural threats and disasters, the list of possibilities is almost endless!)
- Ask your students whether they have heard the term 'cliffhanger'. What does it mean? Where might the term have come from? (a character is in imminent danger, hanging onto the edge of a cliff by his or her fingers.) Cliffhangers often come at the end of a chapter, but not always. Ask students to find 3 good examples. (eg 116, 77, 1) What effect do cliffhangers have on you as a reader?
- In *February*, Winter Frey becomes an important character. Sometimes a word has associated meanings that we call connotations. How does the name 'Winter Frey' make you feel? (cold, winner, contradictory – 'winter' vs 'fry'; 'fray' – battle; 'free'). So it seems as though she is going to be a complex character. Find 3 examples of Winter being Cal's friend and 3 examples of her mocking him or treating him as a little boy (160, 159, 58)
- One of the main recurring patterns in *February* is problematic communication. Ask your students to find 3 examples of no information, incomplete information or misinformation
- eg 174 the girl won't tell Cal her name, 134 Cal is usually open with Bogen about girls, but he won't talk about Winter, 126 Cal is sure Winter has given him a dud phone number.
- Ask students how they feel when they are not understood, or their friends and family get the wrong idea about something they've done. Brainstorm on the smartboard.
- Ask students to find 3 examples of a character being misrepresented or misunderstood
- 162 Cal is being called 'psycho-teen' in the media.

SYNOPSIS BOOK 3: *MARCH*



Just as the train appears certain to take Cal with it, he is pulled to safety down into a water reservoir under the tracks. His rescuer is called Repro. Repro lives in a strange hideout that is reached through a filing cabinet. His hideout is crammed with railway lost property.

Uncle Rafe and Gabbi have been assaulted in a house invasion and Gabbi is in a coma. Uncle Rafe and Cal's mum suspect that Cal is the perp.

Cal studies the drawings and examines the photo he took of Oriana de la Force. He sees the letters 'IDDLE' on a paper in the photo and realises she has the Ormond Riddle.

Cal hears from Jennifer Smith, the nurse who looked after his father in the hospice, but there are warning signs in a meeting she sets up.

Cal is trapped in a lab by Sligo's thugs and bitten by a snake there. He jabs himself with antivenom and finds Jennifer coming to: she has been attacked as well.

Winter discovers the squat where Cal has been hiding, the cops find the squat and Winter mysteriously disappears. Cal jabs the cop with a tranquilliser.

Repro and Cal break into Oriana's house and steal the Riddle just as she opens the door. Cal escapes. He is heading for his great-uncle Bartholomew at Mt Helicon and hitches a ride with Lachlan the truck driver.

They are being pursued by Sligo's thugs, Sumo and Kelvin, who keep ramming the pickup from behind – even at 200 kph!

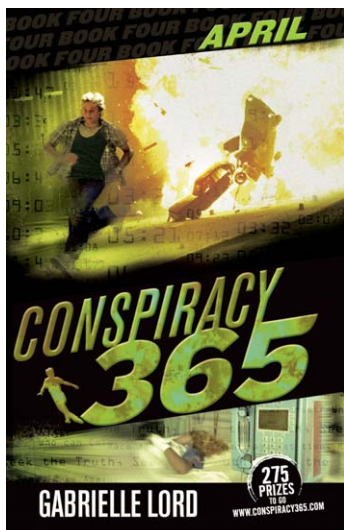
Finally the pickup is run off the road into the creek. Lachlan is trapped under the truck and unless Cal stays and supports his head for him, Lachlan will drown.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *MARCH*

- Gabrielle Lord says she kept in mind the question Alfred Hitchcock always asked himself: 'Why don't they go to the police?' What answers to that question might there be for Conspiracy 365?
- This series is so fast-paced the publicist's cliché 'breathtaking' really seems justified. Choose a page from March and ask the students to identify the narrative features that help create pace. (high proportion of verbs, alternation of long and short sentences and paragraphs, use of page numbers and clock to create 'countdown', use of short scenes and intercutting as in cinema)
- Read with your class the scene where Cal is going to meet Jennifer Smith: pp.90-75. Recap who Jennifer Smith is and why Cal wants to meet her:
- In what ways does the narrative ramp up the tension in the Jennifer Smith episode? List them on the smartboard as students suggest them.
[Cal is suspicious of the nighttime rendezvous, she gives him a mint, says she has left the memory stick she planned to give him back at her apartment, Cal wonders what the point of bringing him here was, she says she hears something, she says the security guards are out the back somewhere, a snake strikes at the glass, he loses Jennifer in the corridors, someone turns the lights out]
- Say to your students, 'Imagine you are Cal. Write a letter to your mum explaining exactly why you are not coming home.' OR 'Create a series of SMS messages texted to each other by Cal and Winter or by Boges and Winter, which show the differences between their personalities and the reasons for the tension between them.'

- Have your students log on to the *Conspiracy 365* website and write a report that clarifies the responses young adult readers are having to this series. Why do they like it? What don't they like? What suggestions do they make? Support your general conclusions with quotes from the guest book, mentioning the age of the reader posting and whether it is a boy or girl. Are there relevant age or gender differences?

SYNOPSIS BOOK 4: **APRIL**



The footsteps Cal heard ominously approaching the crash site were from a cop, who holds Lachlan's head to prevent him drowning. Cal takes the opportunity to escape.

The Ormond Riddle is revealed but as well as being puzzling, there are only 6 of the 8 lines. Two have been cut off.

Sligo's thugs catch up with Cal, but Sumo is shot. There must be some sort of army manoeuvres going on out here in the bush. Cal escapes and calls Boges. Boges urges him to come to the hospital because his mother and Uncle Rafe are going to switch off Gabbi's life support.

Cal calls his mother, but she is hysterical and accuses him of the crime.

Cal stows away in the boot of Melba Snipe's car. He gets sprung. Cal is having bad dreams or hallucinating: he wakes up a second time to see someone stealing his backpack. The guy's name is Griff. They find they have things in common, including mothers with new boyfriends.

They stow away in a truck. Cal gets an SMS to stay away, then another one to come urgently.

When he gets to the hospital, Gabbi and his mother look thin and frail. His mother says quite oddly that she blames herself because of what happened to Cal when he was a child.

Cal realises that his mother thinks he will assault her.

He escapes and hides in an old boathouse.

At the Memorial Park, Cal finds Uncle Rafe, escapes from him and the cops.

Winter finally calls him, says she doesn't believe all the rumours, asks for his address and when he gives it to her, she is suddenly vague about when she will visit him.

Sligo's car keeps hovering round: Cal suspects that Winter has told Sligo where he lives.

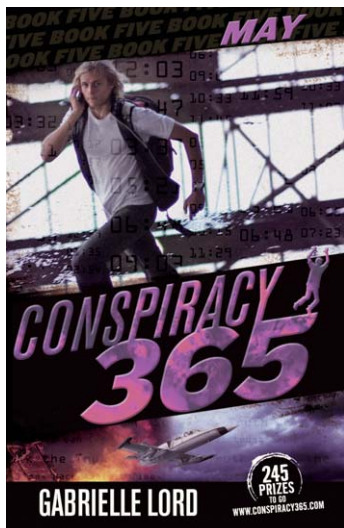
Cal wakes up in a strange white bed. He is in a straitjacket in a psychiatric facility and the name on the end of the bed is 'Ben Galloway'. Cal's identity has been stolen from him.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: **APRIL**

- Read the back cover blurb to your students. Project the front cover and then the back cover onto the smartboard. Ask students to consider the different ways information is conveyed in the design of a book. (words, images, framing and positioning of pictures, font choice, type size) Make a list of the design elements in April (consider as well the internal design) and say what each of them adds to the reading experience.
- *April* is partly about friends and family and who you can trust. Brainstorm with your students the names of new friends and old friends and create a graph of trustworthiness. Place each character on a scale of 1 to 10.
(Cal acquires new friends who seem ready to help him, such as Griff, Repro and Melba. But old friend such as Boges here have questions around them. Also Cal's mother no longer trusts him and although up till now we haven't trusted Uncle Rafe, here he defends Cal, although there is still the suspicion that he is faking and it is a trap.)

- Cal faces moral choices throughout *Conspiracy 365*, but in April he confronts matters of life and death. Novelists often ask themselves, ‘What is at stake here?’ when they are plotting the action. What choices does Cal face and what is at stake?
(whether to stay with Lachlan in case he drowns or be late to save Gabbi; whether to trust Boges and Winter, among other characters; whether to stay away from the hospital because he could be in danger; whether to allow his family to turn off Gabbi’s life support or stay and try to use his love to revive her; whether to fight against his new identity, or embrace it and use it as a cover)
- Research in the library and on the internet the issue of stolen identity. What are some of the ways it can happen in today’s society? Why might someone want to steal another person’s identity? How hard is to get your identity back? What relevance might this subject have in a book that will be read by teens?
- Ask your students to research ‘film noir’. If they can, suggest they watch an old action thriller or watch an episode of one of the TV shows discussed earlier in these notes. Using their own musical instruments – and improvising if they don’t have any – and sound effects, ask them to record a soundtrack for one of the scenes in April. Have them play it to their fellow students and discuss their responses. Advise the students strongly against breaking copyright: the music must be their own original compositions – not sampling.

SYNOPSIS BOOK 5: *MAY*



Callum is in a psychiatric institution called Leechwood Lodge. He has had his identity stolen and straitjacketed as Ben Galloway.

Seeing a news item about his mother being assaulted during a break-in, he contacts his best friend Boges and asks him to help him escape.

He hitches a ride to his Great-uncle Bart's place at Mt Helicon, escapes detection at a police roadblock, because his ID says he is Ben Galloway, and is shot at when he arrives. His uncle shows him the Ormond Orca, a plane with a rocket assisted take off that he has been building for many years.

His uncle tells him the history of the Ormond Jewel, given to an ancestor by Elizabeth I, and the Ormond Riddle. They need to be taken together if the code is to be cracked.

Cal is pursued to Mt Helicon by Oriana's thugs. He discovers he has been injected with a bug that has been transmitting his location, and he removes it. Bart feeds the bug to his pet magpie Maggers, who attempts to lure the thugs away, with temporary success.

Bart tells Cal to retrieve family legal papers from the next property, and Cal gets them without being attacked by the guard dogs. When he comes back he finds Bart collapsed on the floor upstairs, while the thugs break in downstairs and set the house on fire. Cal gets instructions from Bart just before he dies and manages to escape by flying the Orca out of there.

He heads for Dimity Airfield as Bart has told him to, but since it is swarming with police, Cal flies on and crash lands. As the cabin fills with smoke, the novel ends.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *MAY*

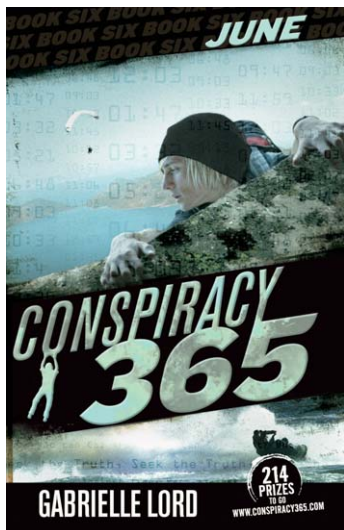
Book 5, *May*, is driven by the consequences of identity theft foreshadowed at the end of Book 4 *April*.

- Tell your students that you are going to follow up the work they started to do on identity in *April*. Ask what they understand by the concept of your 'identity'.
- Who decides what your identity is: you, other people, the government or other authorities? Some or all of these? Can you have more than one identity? Can the way you define your own identity be different from the way others define it? What might be some results of such differences in perception?
- Can you change your identity? Can you lose your identity? (How?)
- 'Who has heard of identity theft? What does identity theft mean and how can it happen? Why would people want to steal someone's identity?'
Ask your students to list some of the points at which Cal feels uncomfortable about his identity. (for example pp 171, 163) Ask them to list points at which his false identity is an advantage (pp 91, 87)
- On page 37, Cal accidentally comes across a newspaper clipping. What does Great-uncle Bart tell him about it before he dies? (p.18 that one of the twins was Cal.) Ask, 'What more do you expect to learn about this story of abduction?'
- One of the themes in Book 5 is being believed. Ask your students how they feel when someone doesn't believe them. What can they do to persuade others that they are telling the truth? (Make sure that they always tell the truth. Admit that although they may not always have been truthful, this time they are.

Get physical proof that what they are claiming is true. Get someone who is trusted to by their friend to vouch for them. Get written references. Change their behaviour.)

- Ask students to list scenes in which Cal or another character is not believed and scenes in which Cal is believed. (Not believed: pp162, 160, 84/83; believed: pp92)
- To make an ingenious plot development believable or acceptable for the reader, a novel needs to set it up in advance. Ask your students to brainstorm examples of this novel setting up a scene in advance. (eg Brian the truckie and Great-uncle Bart both comment on static interference – then later we learn about the bug implanted in Cal's body; Cal is swooped by a magpie as he enters his uncle's property, the magpie reappears – then later Uncle Bart feeds Maggers the bug so he can fly away and lure Oriana's thugs into following him; Cal is given the name Ben Galloway, so he has a double identity – then he discovers the clipping about two babies being abducted.

SYNOPSIS BOOK 6: *JUNE*



Callum escapes from his great-uncle's plane, the Orca, as it explodes.

His best friend Boges arranges for him to hide out in a mansion at the beach. His uncle cleans the place and the owners are away for six months, so Boges sneaks the key.

Cal needs to find out Sligo's address and by chance Boges knows someone who can tell him, but the guy wants \$400. Where are he and Cal going to get money like that? A job crops up, but it turns out to be carjacking. Cal tries to disrupt the scam, but gets beaten up.

He is convinced that either Oriana or Sligo has the Ormond Jewel. He wants to break into Sligo's safe to retrieve the Jewel and asks Repro for help.

When he finally succeeds in opening the safe, there is the Jewel along with a photo of Winter wearing it.

When they hear Sligo returning, they jump off the balcony into the back of a garden waste truck and use it to escape. Pursued by Sligo, Repro pulls off the road sharply and gives Sligo the slip. But the road leads to a cliff above the beach. Repro bolts for the bush, but Cal sees an old hang-glider and launches himself into the air.

Back on land, he is picked up by the police, who identify him as Ben Galloway. As they are about to go through his backpack, they are repelled by the stench of some rotten food that Cal has forgotten. So his drawings, the Riddle and the track detonators stay put. Nevertheless the police have been told to take him into headquarters for questioning.

Cal steals some car keys and at the first opportunity steals a squad car, is chased all the way to a waterside park, where he finds a jet ski by the jetty and takes off in it. He dives into the water, but as he swims upwards, finds himself caught in a fishing net that is slowly being hauled to the surface.

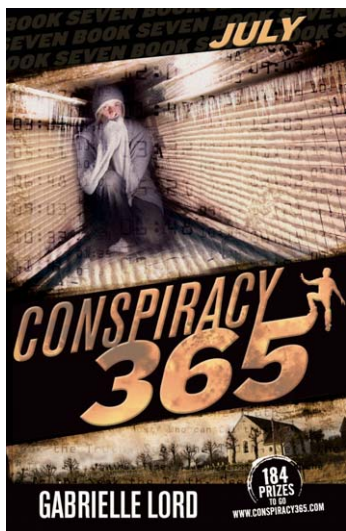
WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *JUNE*

One of the key questions for Cal in Book 6, *June*, has been simmering away throughout the series: how do you know who your real friends are? There is also the continuing question of whether Cal will do whatever it takes to ensure his survival.

- As a class, brainstorm on the smartboard the qualities that your students think identify good friends. Do they believe that a good friend should do absolutely anything to support you, even if it goes against their own values?
- Following this discussion, suggest each student thinks of one friend who is important to them and, without disclosing the friend's name, write a personal or character reference for that friend, telling 'To whom it may concern' what this friend's best character traits are.
- Discuss with your students 'buddy movies' and some of the great friendships they have encountered in books, movies and TV shows. What factors draw these friends together? Is their friendship always plain sailing? If not, what factors are the source of conflict?
- In *Conspiracy 365 June*, compare the friendship between Cal and Boges and the friendship between Cal and Winter. Discuss the sources of attraction and conflict in each friendship. What sort of future do you predict for each of these friendships?

- Narratives of mystery and detection feature both concrete evidence that acts as proof of someone's actions or helps the pursuers track down those they are pursuing, and also ways in which those who are being pursued can escape detection. Brainstorm examples of both in this novel. [eg evidence: p.146 guardian angel pin, p.103 Griff's sudden wealth, p.132 photographs; means of escape: p.167 lighting the fire, p.157 scout hall, p.155 train tracks, p.94 fake loop in the CCTV at the mansion]
- Choose one of the moral or ethical dilemmas that Cal faces in *Conspiracy 365 June* and discuss the various issues he is led to consider: eg the theft of cars p.86. Is it a victimless crime? etc
- One of the strengths of *Conspiracy 365* is the dialogue. What is the function of dialogue in a narrative text? What are the features of good dialogue? Eg are the words different from those used in the implied author's written narration? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using current colloquialisms or slang? How does the sentence construction of dialogue differ from that in the narration? What kinds of attributors are used – if any? (ie the 'he said' bits) Look at the ways attributors or details in the narration are used to interrupt dialogue and change the rhythm. As a class, brainstorm answers to some of these questions by referring to dialogue exchanges such as those on pp.140-139 or pp.132-131

SYNOPSIS BOOK 7: *JULY*



As Cal is hauled up in the fishing net, the crew hides him from the police. They tell him that everyone on board has a reason to hide. Back on land, Cal is helping one of the deckhands to load fish into a freezer room and is deliberately locked in. He uses the track detonators, from Repro, to blast his way out.

Boges gives him Great-aunt Millicent's address, and – giving Sligo, Zombie and the cops the slip on the way – Cal heads for her place.

He confronts Winter about the photograph of her wearing the Jewel, and she denies it: hasn't he heard of digital manipulation?

When Cal gets to the address Boges has given him, he discovers it is a convent. His great-aunt has joined an order and taken the name of Sister Mary Perpetua. She has not spoken about family matters – or anything

else – for 20 years. His aunt breaks her vow of silence and tells him that she has put all family papers in an envelope and warns him that everyone who investigates the Ormond Singularity ends up dead. She also reveals that Great-uncle Bart and she were twins. Cal is still haunted by the idea that he may be a twin himself.

Cal finds the envelope and in it are letters from Piers Ormond and a scribbled family tree.

He wakes during the night to find Zombie poking around the convent dressed as a nun. Zombie chases him into the bell tower, swings the bell at him and Cal returns it – knocking Zombie out of the tower and onto the ground below – dead.

Cal borrows a motorbike and escapes when one of the nuns suggests he talk to the police.

He contacts Sheldrake Rathbone, the solicitor who has the Piers Ormond will. He tells Cal that his client knows he has the Jewel. He doesn't tell Cal who his client is, but he does say 'she'. The client turns out to be Oriana. She tells Cal he must form an alliance with her or he will lose everything.

Cal's mother posts a message on his blog telling him to come home. He thinks it is a trap and that he will be arrested.

Winter tells him how her parents died – in a car crash that she blames herself for – and says she must see the wreck so she can move on. She thinks it is in Sligo's car yard.

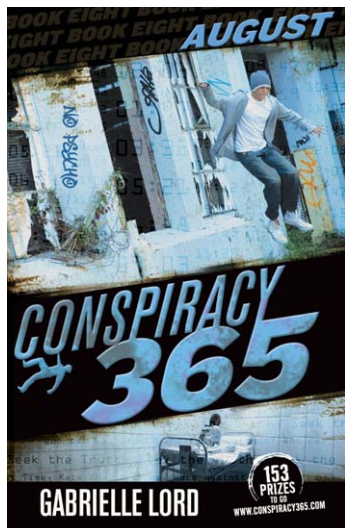
Rathbone says he must meet Cal and see the treasures so his client can be confident he really has them. Cal goes to the shop where they are to meet, but realises it is a funeral parlour. Inside are coffins and a body rises out of one and captures Cal. He loses consciousness, and when he comes to, he realises that he is being buried alive in a coffin.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *JULY*

Gabrielle Lord says that the biggest challenge she faced in writing a series of 12 novels was the enormous amount of plotting such a narrative would consume. In *July* the series is just over halfway through, and it sometimes feels as if Cal has had to jump through every hoop a thriller writer can come up with! And from time to time Gabrielle Lord is clearly amused by the same thought, too.

- Looking back: on the smart board, brainstorm with your students any or all of the following:
 - List the forms of transport that have appeared in the series so far
 - How many scrapes or near-misses can you remember? How has Cal been rescued?
 - List the ways Cal could have died and the ways other characters have died in the series.
 - Make a list of the important revelations in the series so far.
- Sometimes in a mystery or thriller, the reader can see what is about to happen before any of the characters do or the narrator/ implied author does; sometimes the reader can't predict what is to happen or makes a wrong prediction. Either way, the narration engages the reader's interest constantly. In *Conspiracy 365 July*, identify two points in the narrative where you could see what was coming but a character couldn't, and two points where you were surprised by events in the plot. [eg *reader is aware*: p.164ff. Cal seems unaware that the character who asks him to load fish is dodgy and that when he enters the freezer room he could be locked in; p.4 Cal seems unaware of the danger in meeting Rathbone; *reader is surprised*: p. 105ff. Great-aunt Millicent is a nun who has taken a vow of silence. She and Great-uncle Bart are twins; p.18 Winter feels responsible for her parents' death. Perhaps this is why she is so strange].
- Do you think Oriana's offer of an alliance with Cal is genuine and likely to be to his advantage?
- Great-aunt Millicent's silence is one example of the many silences in this series. What are some others?
- One of the simplest ways the action in a narrative text can be moved along is by the use of a high proportion of verbs in the vocabulary. Photocopy a scene such as the one on page 78. Using a highlighter or a pencil, identify the action verbs.
- Compare the cover illustrations on *Conspiracy 365 June* and *July*. What settings and moods are suggested by the imagery and design? [*June* is outdoors, a cliff, parasailing suggests wind currents, the sea, a small speedy craft; *July* is an enclosed space cramping the main character, maybe claustrophobic, like in a small room or box, the hoodie suggests hiding, fear, maybe cold, the old church and sepia tones suggest the past, maybe a religious tradition or a scene from history.]

SYNOPSIS BOOK 8: **AUGUST**



Boges and Winter use Cal's mobile to track his coffin down in the cemetery, but there are lots of new graves and Cal will run out of air before they find the one he is buried in.

Cal wakes to find himself in a hospital with his hands restrained. His friends have had to get the help of the police. Cal is being interrogated because his little sister Gabbi has been kidnapped and he is the prime suspect.

A former detective Nelson Sharkey helps Cal escape. Cal meets up with Boges and Winter and they try to figure out how his DNA could have been found at the scene of the kidnapping. Does Cal have a double or twin?

Sharkey arranges for Cal to meet an underworld character called Ma Little, who will get a message to Gabbi's kidnappers. When Griff promises information about her kidnapping, Cal is surprised to find out that he is Ma

Little's nephew. They are sprung by the police, but Sharkey rescues Cal once more.

Cal offers himself to the kidnappers in exchange for Gabbi. He sees the 'No Psycho' tagger and chases him. The tagger is his double and his name is Ryan Spencer. He owns the toy dog that has been featuring in Cal's nightmares.

Cal sees Sumo buying an intravenous supplement and guesses that Oriana has Gabbi. He calls the kidnappers and sets up a meeting, where Sharkey, Winter and he will doublecross them.

During the ambush, one of the kidnappers picks up Gabbi's sleeping bag and throws her off the bridge into the river below. Cal dives in, finds the sleeping bag empty and realises he has now lost everything.

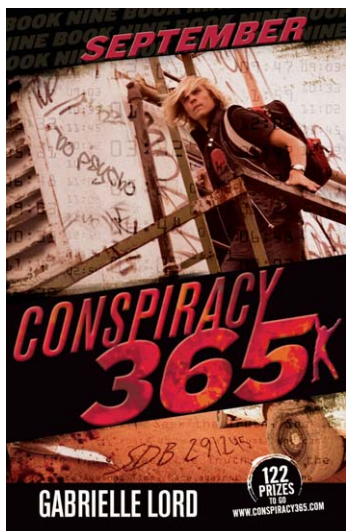
WITH YOUR STUDENTS: **AUGUST**

Suspense in a narrative text is created by several different techniques:

- use of grotesque imagery
 - ominous character names or place names
 - contrast in sentence lengths
 - use of unfinished statements and ellipses or dashes
 - repetition
 - sudden disruptions to the rhythm
 - keeping the reader unable to predict the ending or letting the reader know the ending right from the start and taking a long or indirect way to reach it
- Which techniques are used to create suspense in the opening chapter of *Conspiracy 365 August*? Give examples. (One to start you off: find out why the echo of the name 'Dorian Gray' is significant in the naming of the police officer, Dorian McGrath.)
 - Looking back over the first 8 books in this series, list as many scenes as possible in which mobile phones have been important. What properties or functions of mobile phones have been used to develop the plot?
 - With your students brainstorm the possible courses of action a character can take when he or she is up against lies. Ask how it feels to be lied about – without specifying the circumstances (which could be sensitive) ask your students to share the feelings they have experienced in having lies told about them, their feelings as they tried to counter the lies with the truth, and their feelings once their good name had been restored. How will Cal prove that he is not the kidnapper?

- On 6 August, why does Cal feel doubly betrayed? [Because a mother normally stands by her child and defends him or her, rather than being the one who accuses. Perhaps her attitude to Cal has been poisoned by Rafe.]
- On p.89 Cal says 'I knew all about sharks'. Do you believe him? Why – or why not?
- Looking ahead: once Cal has found Gabbi's sleeping bag empty on the final page of *Conspiracy* 365 *August*, what do you expect will happen in the opening scene of *September*?

SYNOPSIS BOOK 9: *SEPTEMBER*



Cal worries that he is losing it, when he thinks he sees Gabbi in the bushes near the river. She must have survived the attempt to drown her! But it's nothing. Then she comes to him in a dream – it's getting worse – but this time his eyes are not deceiving him. Gabbi asks him why they went swimming suddenly in the middle of the night. She is alive. As Gabbi begins to tell Cal everything that has happened to her, he realises that there is an 8-month gap in her story. She simply has no idea what she has been through.

Cal gets a message from Theophilus Brimley, the Keeper of Rare Books at Trinity College in Dublin. He says he can help with the Riddle, but for the moment Cal realises there is no way they can get to Ireland. They decide to focus on Oriana instead.

It is now clear that Oriana is the villain. When Maggers the transmitting magpie suddenly reappears, Boges and Cal get the idea to bug her house. Boges has bought a new microtransmitter, the latest in Russian nanotechnology.

Winter tries to find the wreck of her parents' car in Sligo's yard. She wants to be sure that her parents did actually leave money to Sligo in their wills, and suspects he was responsible for their accident and deaths. She and Cal are sprung by Zombie Two – Zombrovski's lookalike brother.

Cal wants to track down his double, Ryan Spencer, and find out more about him. Because Cal has nowhere to live, he goes to Repro's hideout, but they are hounded out of it and barely escape through a tunnel that collapses as Cal ends up back at the water collection area under the railway lines.

With Winter, Cal and Boges set up a watch on Oriana's house, fire the bug into it and hear her say she has deposited the Jewel, Riddle and drawings in Zurich Bank. Suddenly Sumo reports to Oriana that there is an unauthorised transmission from the house, so their eavesdropping comes to an end.

Cal follows Oriana and steals a handbag she has considered buying in a shop. If they can harvest her fingerprints from it, they are part of the way to gaining ID access to her bank safety deposit box – and the Ormond treasures. But he is captured and thrown in a car boot on Oriana's orders. She wants him driven to the desert and killed.

When Cal comes to, he realises that someone has cut the ropes and set him free in the desert. Maybe it was one of Oriana's thugs. As he walks in search of water or civilisation, he notices that someone has written some numbers and letters in code on his ankle. He finds a ghost town and two mad old prospectors, Snake and Jacko, who say they came here looking for Lasseter's Reef. Cal wants to make a call, but they tell him there is no reception. Cal hears Snake talking on a phone and knows they have lied. He is saying that they have fooled Cal into thinking they are mad, when what they really want is reward money for capturing him.

The only way out of here is a bus the next day. Cal confronts Snake and escapes, but as he runs, Snake yells after him that when Jacko and their dog Sniffer return, they will track him down with their sawn-off shotgun and he will discover that escape is not as easy as he imagines.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *SEPTEMBER*

While the mysterious business of twinning and '*doppelgangers*' (or doubles) that we looked at earlier in the

series continues without resolution, it is now clear that after a brief period when she appeared to be helpful, Oriana de la Force is one of the true villains of Cal's story.

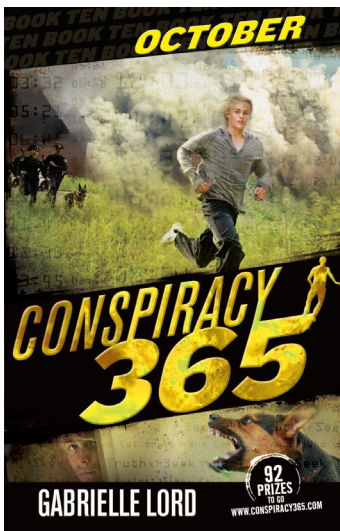
The novel opens with Cal wondering whether he can really believe his eyes, and it ends with an old prospector who is pretending to have lost his mind so he can capture Cal and get the reward money for finding him. So three-quarters of the way through the series, the question of how we interpret the world around us by making connections among all our scattered experiences is becoming more intense. As we search frantically for answers and meanings, we begin to wonder whether it is our way of seeing, or the world that is the problem.

- With your students, list on the smart board all the examples they can think of in *Conspiracy 365 September*, where vision is unclear or contradictory. [eg p.180 Gabbi is alive by the riverbank, p.178 Gabbi comes to Cal in a dream, p.151 is this magpie Maggers or not? p.94 Uncle Rafe senses that someone is in his garden, but he cannot see who, p.19 Cal sees that someone has cut the ropes that had been tied round him, but how can this be and who would have done it? There are lots more examples!]
- Review with the class the theme of twins or doubles in the series and make a list of the main references to doubles or look-alikes. What do your students think this theme is leading up to?
- [p.136 Boges reflects on the fact that Uncle Rafe and Cal's dad were identical twins, p.114 Zombie Two – Zombrovski's brother – is going to kill Cal and Winter to avenge Zombie's death, p.89 Cal wants to find out more about Ryan Spencer, p.31 the locket in the early portrait of Queen Elizabeth I is the same as the Ormond Jewel etc]
- It is always clear that Gabbi is Cal's younger sister, but how old did you think she was earlier in the series? Consider her dialogue in the early scenes of *Conspiracy 365 September*: does this change your view? If you thought of her as being young before, what might have contributed to that impression? [stereotyping – she is portrayed as a victim, she doesn't speak, Cal feels protective of her, she is the passive female member of his family] What features of Gabbi's dialogue in *Conspiracy 365 September* make her sound older?
- What is 'nanotechnology'? [p.130]
- Look up 'Lasseter' and 'Lasseter's Reef' in the library or on the internet. How does it contribute to the meaning of the final scenes in *Conspiracy 365 September*?
- Photocopy or draw a rough map of Australia. On p.8 we read that it will take Cal 7 or 8 hours to get back to the city. Which 'city' is not specified, but assume that it means one of the capital cities on the coast. Estimate how fast a bus might go and the distance it would travel in 7 hours. Now shade in the area on the map where the fictional 'Dingo Bones Valley' might be located.

CONSPIRACY 365

TEACHERS' NOTES

CONSPIRACY 365: October by Gabrielle Lord



SYNOPSIS BOOK 10: *OCTOBER*

Pursued through the desert night by two mad prospectors, Snake and Jacko, and their dog, Sniffer, Cal hides among prickly bushes and hopes that somehow he won't be seen. Much to his surprise, when Sniffer locates him, as Snake warned Cal he would, the dog sticks its head into the bushes and quietly licks him instead of giving the game away.

Cal finds the road and jumps on board a truck when the driver makes a toilet stop. It's a water delivery truck, so his needs for a drink and for transport to the city are satisfied in one go.

In Winter's apartment, Boges has been experimenting with gases that will fix Oriana's fingerprint, so they can use it to gain access to her safe deposit box at the bank. But they're still going to need Oriana's PIN.

When Snake lunged at Cal, he upset a table with his gold nuggets laid out on it, and Cal grabbed a handful before he ran off. Cal takes the gold to a dealer, who offers him \$500 – less than a quarter of its worth, because he suspects Cal has stolen it. Cal refuses, but finally accepts a compromise of \$600 to prevent the dealer from calling the police.

Keeping Rathbone under surveillance, Cal and Winter notice that he switches briefcases with a man he meets in a restaurant. Then later at night Rathbone digs up a box in his backyard and transfers wads of cash into it. Cal and Winter photograph him and make a run for it.

Cal bumps into Repro – literally – and when he helps Repro to move into his new place, Repro sees the code on Cal's ankle and tells him it is a PIN: the 'SDB' before the numbers stands for 'safety deposit box'. Obviously Kelvin hates Oriana enough to have written her PIN on Cal's leg and set him free as well.

Disguised as Oriana and Sumo, Winter and Boges get the treasures from Oriana's box, only to discover that they are fakes. Sligo must have switched them somehow, or else a third party is involved. Winter and Cal only just escape detection as the real Oriana and Sumo turn up to the bank and pass them on the way out.

Sligo has organised a huge business dinner and invited all sorts of shady characters, including Oriana. Perhaps he is going to make a triumphant announcement about having the Ormond treasures in his possession. It is decided that Winter should go along, wearing a bug to pick up any useful information about what these two villains are up to. She finds evidence that Sligo faked her father's will and is likely to have been involved in her parents' death, but before she picks up any other information, their bugging is identified and they have to leave.

Boges now tells Cal what he has known for a while: Uncle Rafe is about to marry Cal's mother and the wedding will take place on Halloween. Cal goes to the chapel, spots a gunman in the congregation and sets off smoke screen canisters that Boges has been developing as a disruption. He yells out that there is a gunman present, but someone else yells that the Ormond criminal Psycho Kid is here and Cal needs to escape.

As a helicopter buzzes overhead and spotlights Cal, and a SWAT team head straight for him, he throws a third canister, but Boges has warned him that the idea is still in development and may not work. It doesn't. The canister is dead – just as Cal fears he is about to be.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: *OCTOBER*

Conspiracy 365 October features more comedy than earlier volumes in this series, and an unusual number of coincidences. Sometimes the comedy is in response to those coincidences – almost as if the author is laughing at herself for daring to include them, and reminding us that this is all just a wonderfully engaging romp. For all its dark corners and serious themes, it's entertainment and not to be taken too seriously.

In this volume, while the question of whether there is a third party involved in the scheming hangs over the plot, there is no mistaking the fact that Sligo and Oriana are the two arch-villains. They stand over proceedings like dark titans of the underworld and have a loud slanging match at an important occasion arranged by one of them.

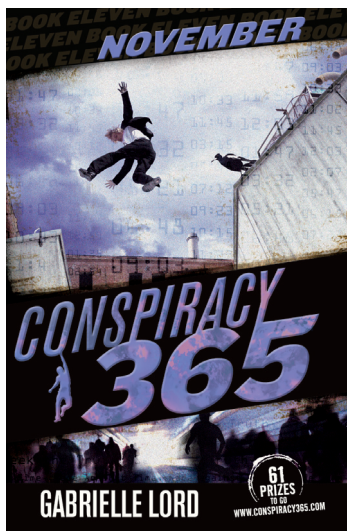
One theory of the reason crime fiction and mystery thrillers are so popular is that they are comforting for readers. They start with the society in disorder, and by logical tracking down of the reasons for the chaos, set things right again and restore order, with all the baddies safely locked away by the conclusion and consensus values reinstated.

- On the smartboard, ask your students to brainstorm a list of the questions that have been resolved by Book 10 in this series and the questions or problems that are still unresolved. Ask which of those they expect to be cleared up by Book 12, and which they do not expect answers to.
- Discuss with your class the functions of coincidence in a narrative text. Do they like it? Does it irritate them? Some readers have interpreted coincidence in fiction as demonstrating a belief that life is orderly and reasoned. Others interpret coincidence as demonstrating the exact opposite – that life is totally random. Suggest that they list some of the coincidences in *Conspiracy 365 October* and discuss the effects these features had on their reading.
- Identify some of the funny moments in *Conspiracy 365 October* [the dog licking Cal, Oriana's dress sense, the disguise]. What is their function in the story?
- Being able to predict what will happen before the characters can do so makes readers feel engaged with the narrative text and powerful. Ask what your students were able to predict in October. [that the numbers on Cal's ankle are Oriana's PIN; that inside her safe deposit box will be only fakes; that the real Oriana and Sumo will turn up at the bank before Winter and Boges have finished etc]
- One of the repeated values in this series, endorsed by characters such as Winter, is 'Do whatever it

takes for what you really believe in', 'Don't give up'. Sometimes the moral and ethical values of what Cal does are not clearly defined. Ask your students to list some of the morally 'grey areas' in October. Since it is usually important that readers like, or relate to, the main character in a narrative text, why do we hang in there with Cal, despite the possibility that he is stealing, breaking into other people's property, lying, causing physical injury or chaos, and so on?

- Ask your students to look up 'reprobate', 'biometric scanner', the origins of Halloween, the 'Caesar Shift'. How has their research helped to deepen their reading of *Conspiracy 365 October*?

SYNOPSIS BOOK 11: **NOVEMBER**



Boges's last canister does eventually explode, and Cal uses the smoke as a cover for his escape. During the confusion, he hears Ryan Spencer's voice calling out to him. Ryan is his identical double and suggests they swap clothes, so he will act as a decoy and lure the police into following him. Cal wonders why for the first time Ryan is trying to help him, rather than running in the opposite direction.

The trick works, and at Winter's apartment Cal sees Ryan being pursued on the TV news. Winter has noticed a change in Sligo's attitude: maybe he is onto her. On his blog, Cal finds that someone has hacked in and the date '11 November' keeps scrolling down over the screen.

The police surround Winter's building and Cal escapes by jumping onto the roof of the building next door. Running through the streets, he sees Ryan's building, goes in, meets his mum, who passes out, and notices the birthday on Ryan's bus pass: 11 November. Cal's birthday is in July.

Cal tells Sharkey that he needs money to get to Ireland (Sharkey is going there himself for a family reunion). Sharkey gets Cal \$1000 for part of the gold and agrees to help get him a fake passport. Cal needs a lot more and Winter steals \$10 000 for him from Sligo's 'scram bag' which is hidden in his wardrobe. She sets it up so that Oriana looks like the thief.

Cal hides out in the treehouse.

Winter is quite certain that Sligo has arranged her parents' death. He gave their house away to pay off some debt, so now Winter has nothing – only the truth that she is hanging onto.

Cal is nabbed by Griff and Ezekiel and taken to see Toecutter Durham, who is dying. Toecutter confesses that he was involved in abducting twin boys. He couldn't face disposing of them, so one was returned to his family; the other was adopted out (with fake papers) to a friend of Toecutter's sister. That twin was Ryan – though his real name is Sam.

Cal has arranged to meet his dad's friend Eric Blair and recognises him as the crazy man in the dressing gown who started this whole story off a year ago. Eric cannot remember. He gradually remembers that Cal's dad got a virus in Ireland and then *he* got a virus. Maybe this was no accident. Eric has heard Cal is on his way to Ireland – Cal wonders who has ratted, since it is a secret plan: Boges, Winter, Sharkey?

Pursued at a football game, Cal ends up on the big screen, with the crowd chanting his name.

Rafe says he knows Cal stopped the sniper killing him and thanks Cal.

Winter texts Cal to meet her, but Griff meets him instead and tells him Winter is in trouble. They go to Sligo's yard and find Winter's body in a shipping container. A voicemail from Winter goes off accidentally on Cal's mobile, telling him she has proof that Sligo cut the brake cables on her parents' car.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: **NOVEMBER**

Only a month to go!

- Ask your students which important bits of new information are revealed in *Conspiracy 365 November*. [p.136 11 November is Ryan's birthday; p.98 Winter remembers that the day her parents died, Sligo appeared almost immediately with the news; p.76 Toecutter Durham confesses to abducting the twins]

on 11 November years ago – one was Cal, the other was Sam, now known as Ryan; Toecutter hacked into Cal’s computer; p.57 Eric Blair was the crazy man in the dressing gown who warned Cal about his fate almost a year ago; p.42 someone has told Eric Blair about Cal’s secret plans to go to Ireland – it can only be one of Cal’s closest friends or associates; p.2 Winter has proof that Sligo sabotaged her parents’ car].

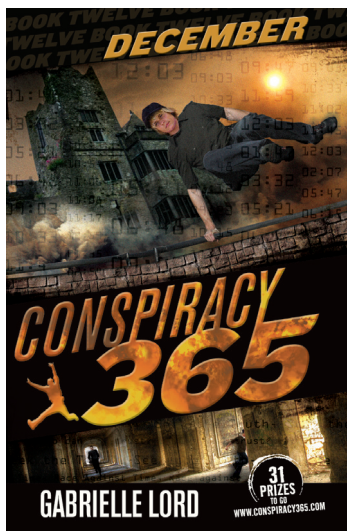
- As some of the pieces start to come together in *Conspiracy 365 November*, once again the question of who you can trust becomes important. On the smartboard brainstorm the characters in *Conspiracy 365 November* who are faithful and the moments when some characters come under suspicion.

[*Faithful*: p.172 for once Ryan helps Cal instead of running away; p.76 Toecutter comes clean – he was the hacker; p.36 Cal feels guilty because he can’t help Boges, whereas Boges has done nothing but help him for a whole year; p.32 Cal feels bad for doubting Sharkey.

Suspicious: p.96 Winter remembers Sligo’s suspicious actions on her 10th birthday; p.42 who is the mole? Someone has told Eric about Cal’s plans for Ireland; p.34 Sharkey has dogged on Cal; p.16 Rafe has known about the threat all along – why didn’t he intervene to help Cal?]

- Like any crime thriller, the *Conspiracy 365* series reminds us to ‘read’ our surroundings carefully. We need to observe concrete details that are unusual or different, if we want to understand or solve mysteries. But sometimes, when such details are not obvious, we need to take notice of a general feeling or intuition that things are not right. Trust your feelings! [This is the essence of warning young people about ‘stranger danger’.] List the moments in *Conspiracy 365 November* when a character senses danger, but doesn’t know the exact cause.
- [p.150 Winter senses a difference in Sligo’s attitude to her; p.145 Cal senses he should steer clear of Winter’s apartment; p.12 Cal senses danger as he sees Griff]
- Some of the scenes in *Conspiracy 365 November* are almost begging to be adapted for film. Ask your students to suggest scenes that have strong cinematic potential. [p.142 Cal jumps to the roof of the next building; pp.131-130 climbing down and back up the laundry chute; pp.27 Cal is seen on the big screen at the football game; pp.3-1 finding the shipping container, Cal’s voicemail goes off accidentally on loudspeaker]
- Using improvised sound effects and traditional or improvised musical instruments, ask several groups of students each to choose a scene from *Conspiracy 365 November* and record an appropriate soundtrack for it. Create a live performance of reading plus soundtrack for the whole class to enjoy.

SYNOPSIS BOOK 12: *DECEMBER*



Sealed up in a shipping container ready to go on his final journey, Cal is told by Griff that Winter is not dead after all. She is breathing. Sligo has spiked her orange juice. Cal remembers the micro distress beacon that is embedded in his shoe. He uses it to call Boges. Eventually Boges and Sharkey rescue their friends.

Boges and Cal break into Winter's apartment and find the money she hid, but her notes and the drawings have gone. Sligo now has all the information he needs to beat them to the Ormond Singularity. Cal works out that he himself is the 'Little Prince' on the list: that leaves only 'Deep Water' and 'Double Trouble' to be decoded.

Gabbi is worried about a screaming fight between their mum and Uncle Rafe. Cal leafs through old albums and discovers to his dismay that it was his father, not Uncle Rafe, who walked away from their close relationship.

Then in his mum's handbag he finds an envelope from Rathbone, containing the Jewel, the Riddle. He can't believe that his mother is a villain after all. He tells Ryan the whole story, then calls his mother to tell her Sam is alive, but she hangs up on him.

Ryan creates a diversion by pretending to be Cal and getting himself arrested. So Cal and the others slip through the extra airport security and fly to Ireland. In Dublin, Brinsley, the Keeper of Rare Books, is evasive about the two lines of the Riddle he assured them he had. He tells Cal to meet at his house and Cal finds the house trashed and Brinsley murdered.

Brinsley didn't actually have the book with the Riddle in it: it is up for sale. Cal tracks the book down just in time and finds the missing two lines hidden in the spine of the book. At the guesthouse, Winter finds a map in the wardrobe and by comparing it with Cal's dad's transparency, they learn that they need to go to Inisrue Marsh, where one of several ruins has the final clues they are looking for.

Sligo dumps Cal into an oubliette – a medieval dungeon – and Uncle Rafe rescues him. Maybe he is the Ormond Angel. Rafe has been putting various pieces together and has followed them to Ireland. Cal finds Rafe shot dead in his car.

On their way to the ruin of Cragkill Keep, Cal, Winter and Boges avoid being captured by Sligo, Zombie Two and Sumo, who sink into the marsh. When the friends get to the Keep, it is surrounded by fences and there is a bulldozer ready to demolish it for shipping to the United States. Clues hidden in the tiled floor come to nothing, but as the demolition begins, they find a wooden chest full of gold. They learn that Black Tom was Queen Elizabeth I's lover, and the inheritance was for the love child that she could never acknowledge.

Sharkey insist that they load the gold into his ute, then he turns a gun on them. He is 'Deep Water' after all, and has masterminded the whole scam. But when the bulldozer heads for them all, they discover Rafe behind the wheel. He was not dead after all. Rafe employed Sharkey to tail Cal and the others. He is in fact the final piece, 'Double Trouble' – the twin who has plotted to get his brother's inheritance. A section of the building – a statue of an angel - falls on Rafe and pins him down long enough for Cal to exact a full confession from him – which Boges films – along with proof that Cal and his friends found the Ormond Singularity before midnight, so it is rightfully his.

The family are back together, Rafe is dead, Winter will get her inheritance, Cal will set Boges up financially so he can go to university and study the science he has used as an amateur to get them all out of so many scrapes, and Ryan/Sam gets to know the real family he has never had.

WITH YOUR STUDENTS: **DECEMBER**

Naturally, because it ties up so many threads of a plot that extends across 12 novels, *Conspiracy 365* *December* is the longest book in the series. It offers your students the opportunity to look back on the 11 books leading up to it, predict the conclusion and evaluate their predictions.

Before the class reads *December*, ask them what they think the Ormond Singularity will turn out to be and which character has masterminded the plot to prevent Cal getting to it. [Some students will guess that it is money – a one-off gift, hence the term ‘Singularity’ – that Cal stands to inherit. There are clear indications earlier on that Queen Elizabeth I is the source of the gift, and some might guess that, since it is pointed out she was the ‘Virgin Queen’, the gift might have something to do with an affair – and even a child. But this revelation is one of the twists that will surprise most readers.]

- Ask your students will Cal survive? [Yes – because even though the synopsis at the beginning of each book is in the present tense, he is telling the story in retrospect. So he made it long enough to write the story down. It’s possible that he died after doing so, but that would make Lord a cruel author indeed, since most of the deaths in the series turn out to be apparent, and the victim in most cases turns out to be alive. We expect him to live too.]
- Who did you think was behind the plot to rob Cal of the Ormond Singularity? [Possible answers: Rathbone, Sligo, Oriana, Sharkey, Cal’s mum, Rafe.]
- For each possible answer, brainstorm on the smartboard the clues that lead you to suspect the character in question.
- On p.187, Cal says ‘dark questions had taken over’. Why does he say that and what are the questions? [He has found an envelope from Rathbone in his mum’s handbag, containing the Riddle and the Jewel. He is wondering whether his mother and Rathbone are the villains. His mother has been acting irrationally.]
- When Cal meets Brinsley, the Keeper of Rare Books, the text leads the reader to suspect that Brinsley may be a crook. Which words on pp.146-145 create this inference? [‘his eager eyes shone’, ‘greedy’, ‘he leaned over it, fervently’, ‘breathed’, ‘snatched’, ‘shining’ etc]
- Sometimes Cal refers to Nelson Sharkey as ‘Sharkey’; sometimes as ‘Nelson’. Is there a pattern to the variation? [when he seems to be their friend, it is ‘Nelson’, but when his behaviour is suspect again he is often ‘Sharkey’]
- Looking back over the series *Conspiracy 365*, you may have noticed a number of general themes or values recurring. What are some of the main ones? [use the key words in the following suggestions as prompts for your students if necessary]
 - » pursue the truth
 - » keep going towards your goals, regardless of the obstacles
 - » there is usually a solution, but you might have to think laterally or creatively to come up with it
 - » education is valuable
 - » it is important to hold onto, or clear, your good name
 - » you might have to break some rules or disobey authority in a higher cause
 - » trust your senses of sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste as much as you trust reason
 - » trust your instincts – if you feel that danger is imminent you are probably right
 - » be aware of all the information in your surroundings: even minute details can be significant
 - » language is a code – be aware of its subtleties
 - » value your friends – be there for them when they need you. Guilt later on is pointless.
 - » some people will value money above everything else – even family, friendship or life
 - » eventually, criminals are consumed by their own malevolence

- Does *December* resolve all the main plot lines set up in *Conspiracy 365*? If not, which threads left you feeling a bit puzzled or frustrated? [eg Oriana disappears suddenly. Why didn't Cal's mum sense Rafe's intentions earlier?]
- Write a short news report for a Dublin paper, explaining the death of Rafe.