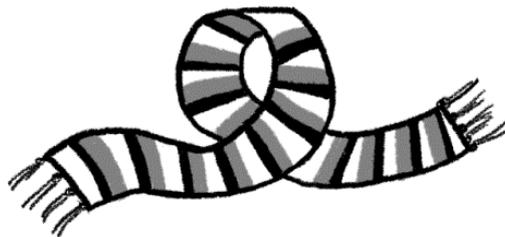


## Questions for discussion about

# JUST JACK



“... some things are worth taking with you when you leave, and some aren't. Like your hobbies and interests. Because if there's one thing I've learned more than anything else, it's this: If being yourself doesn't work out, try becoming someone else.” (Page 4)

### Questions:

- Do you think Jack is right to keep changing his hobbies after every move?
- Do you agree with him that pretending to be someone else helps you fit in?

“It was Moving Day and Mum was trying to find the mugs and teaspoons. If I didn’t help her she’d still be looking this time next Wednesday.

‘I don’t understand,’ she told me. ‘I opened the box labelled “tea stuff”.’ She gestured at the open box at her feet.

I peered inside at the pile of saucepans, two tins of baked beans, a tin opener and a bath sponge. ‘That was for dinner,’ I told her. ‘For later, remember? You didn’t want us to have to cook properly straight after the move.’ (The bath sponge was just the usual Mum wild card.)

Mum slapped her forehead. ‘Oh yes! Of course . . . tea not tea . . .’ She looked round her at the sea of boxes as if the right one might suddenly shout, ‘Here I am!’

I walked over to a clear plastic box by the door and lifted it up onto the kitchen table. ‘See? I told you this was easier.’ I pointed at the transparent walls of the box, which showed some bubble wrap around the edge of what was clearly a mug.

‘Jack, you’re a lifesaver.’ Mum started to prise off the lid.

Mum’s sure that everything has changed and that we’re going to stay settled here forever. But I know she’s wrong. We’ve moved so often in such a short space of time that I can’t imagine us doing anything else. Moving is what Mum and I do.” (Pages 5–6)

### Questions:

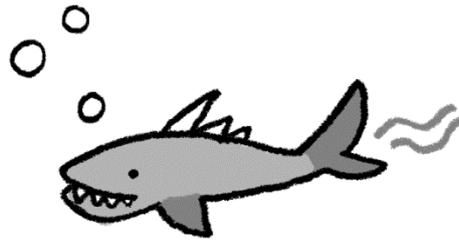
- What does this passage tell you about Jack?
- What does it tell you about Jack’s mum?
- Do you think Jack is right to assume that they won’t be staying long?

“Sherlock code is the survival strategy I came up with when I realised that we were going to be moving house as often as some people go to the dentist. The first part of Sherlock code is: Watch, Look and Listen. (This is also useful for crossing roads.) I took in as much as possible, shooting them sideways glances so they didn’t think I was staring . . .

When I left the shop I had more than a packet of biscuits; I had my first tips on how I was going to survive at School Six.” (Pages 7–9)

### Questions:

- Why do you think Jack developed his ‘Sherlock code’?
- How does Sherlock code work?
- Do you think Jack really enjoyed the activities at his previous schools?



“I’ve had to pretend to like a lot of things since we started moving. Starting a new school is like walking in to a jungle with an ‘Eat Me’ sign around your neck. And that’s the reason I take on a new personality every time we move. It isn’t because I believe in lying; it’s because I believe in surviving.” (Page 11)

#### Questions:

- Do you think Jack is right to take on a different personality every time he moves?
- Why do you think Jack thinks this is the best way to ‘survive’ at his new schools?
- Do you agree with him? If not, what do you think he should do instead?

“With Dad, ordinary routines turned into proper events . . . Words were funnier and brighter when he was the one saying them.” (Pages 12–13)

#### Questions:

- What kind of person does Jack’s dad sound like to you?
- What does this tell you about how Jack feels about his dad?



“Mr Tull took the rest of the register while Tyler sat down, mouthing a silence ‘hi’ to me. I nodded, thinking that although I’d love to know more about the toothpaste squeezer, Tyler definitely didn’t qualify as a safe friend.

Tyler didn’t qualify as shy either.

As soon as the bell rang for break, he appeared at my side, bouncing on his heels. ‘Hey.’

‘Hi.’ I glanced down and noticed his shoes. They were bright green trainers with laces that had lots of weird feathery things on them.

He saw me looking. ‘Fishing shoes,’ he said. ‘So you can go fly fishing at a moment’s notice. I invented them for my dad. These are just the prototype.’

I didn’t even know what fly fishing was (it couldn’t be fishing for *flies*, could it?) and I wasn’t absolutely sure what a prototype was either. I didn’t ask though. Not saying too much is part of Sherlock code.” (Page 23)

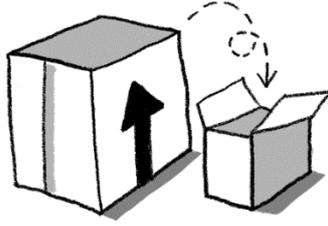
### Questions:

- What do we find out about Tyler in this extract?
- What do you think Jack thinks about Tyler?
- What are the benefits of Jack’s Sherlock code? What are the disadvantages?

“I wasn’t all that interested in hearing about Project Moneybags. Or in watching more SnarkyMark. But I knew that if I wanted to become part of a group, even a small one, I needed to do what Isaac and Libby wanted.” (Page 39)

### Questions:

- Do you think Jack’s approach to making friends is the right one? If not, why?
- What do you think is the best way to make a friend?



“I’d be like Tyler was – friendly with everyone but no one’s best friend. Keeping my distance just enough to keep to my code.” (Page 55)

**Questions:**

- Do you think Jack is making the right decision here?
- Do you think ‘keeping your distance’ is something you should do with friends?

“I realised that Tyler reminded me of my dad. Somehow he could make ordinary days brighter and more fun than anyone else could.” (Page 77)

**Questions:**

- What does this tell you about Tyler’s character?
- What does this tell you about how Jack feels about Tyler?





“I’d try to distract Dad by telling him stories of my own, but my stories didn’t seem to make him laugh and I couldn’t keep his attention any more . . . He seemed to have used up all the patience he had when I was little. Or maybe I’d stopped being fun to be around . . . Then Mum and Dad stopped waiting until I was asleep to fight and it felt like it wasn’t only Mum who made a mess. It was the two of them and the tangle of ugly words between them. And eventually I realised they might not be able to clean it up.” (Page 87)

### Questions:

- Do you think Jack thinks his dad’s behaviour is his fault?
- What is Jack realising about his mum and dad here?

“Dada kept asking me the same questions – how was school, how was Mum, how was I – and I kept giving him the same answer. Fine. I tried to sound as if I meant it, because I could see he was miserable and I wanted him to feel better. But the more I said it, the more miserable he sounded. I realised I was making him feel worse. Then I wondered if he wanted to be here at all. Maybe he was fed up with me. Maybe he wanted the visit to be over. Maybe he couldn’t wait to be off to start his new life. I told him I didn’t feel well and he asked if I wanted to go back early. I said yes.

I haven’t seen him since.” (Pages 92 – 93)

### Questions:

- Do you think Jack is being honest with his dad when he says he’s ‘fine’?
- What do you think Jack’s dad might be feeling here?

“I’d done it again – said the first thing that came to mind instead of following Sherlock code and keeping my mouth shut. But Tyler was grinning. He didn’t seem to mind. It was weird. The only person I’d normally joke around with like this was Mum. And even though Tyler wasn’t a safe friend according to Sherlock code, I was realising that that’s what he made me feel: safe. Safe to say what I thought, safe to joke around, safe to relax.”

### Question:

- Why is this an important moment for Jack?

“I wondered if he still did funny voices and whether he knew what had happened to the stripy scarf he used to wear. I wondered if he actually missed me or whether the postcards were something he thought he had to write because he was my dad, like grown-up homework.” (Page 133)

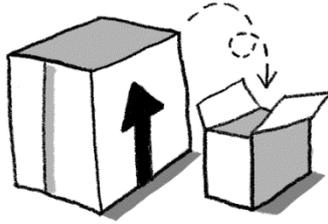
### Questions:

- Do you think Jack’s dad thinks of writing to Jack as ‘grown-up homework’?
- What do you think the postcards tell us about how Jack’s dad might be feeling?
- Why do you think Jack has not replied to the postcards?

“If Mum left her job that would mean another move. We’d go and that would be it. I’d made a big mistake by not following Sherlock code. I’d forgotten why I’d made it up in the first place, what it was protecting me from. I’d forgotten that the biggest danger was letting yourself care.” (Page 139)

### Questions:

- Do you agree with Jack that he’s made a ‘big mistake’ in letting himself care?
- Do you think it’s possible to protect ourselves from ever feeling upset? What could be the consequences if it was?
- Why is caring about people important – even if it hurts sometimes?



“I knew what I had to do. If Mum and I were going to move, then the more I hung out with Tyler, the harder it would be when we left. The sooner we both got used to it the better. I had to go back to following Sherlock code – properly.” (Page 142)

**Question:**

- Do you think Jack has made the right decision here? If not, why not?

“Mr Tull didn’t say anything for a minute. He put the dustpan and brush away. ‘I think maybe you need to talk to your mum, Jack,’ he said. ‘And I think maybe you need to talk to Tyler too. It strikes me that you’ve been coping with things for a long time and that you might not realise that situations can change. That even people can change.

I nodded like I understood and we finished clearing up. Teachers know a lot of things, but that didn’t mean Mr Tull was right.” (Page 154)

**Questions:**

- Do you think Mr Tull is right when he says things can change?
- Do you think talking to people about problems can help solve them?

“Tyler looked at me. ‘Why should I believe you? You go around pretending to be different people to make sure everyone likes you. You drop friends as soon as you think you’re going to be moving on.’ He pointed at me. ‘You do whatever it takes to make sure you’re all right, without caring about anyone else.’ (Page 163)

**Questions:**

- Can you understand why Tyler is upset with Jack?
- What do you think Jack is realising at this point in the book?



“... not one thing about us breaking up was your fault, Jack. *Not one thing.* There was nothing you could have said or done to make the situation turn out differently – do you understand? You didn’t do anything wrong. He loves you every bit as much as I do.

Hearing that made me feel a bit like I had when Tyler and I went out on his Skater-Flyer Shoes and we’d gone really fast. A bit dizzy and out of control – as if I might actually take off and fly. I’d thought if maybe I’d been a different person, a different, better version of myself, that Mum and Dad would still be together. But I’d been wrong about that as well.” (Page 173)

### Questions:

- Why is this such an important moment in the book?
- Can you name some of the emotions Jack might be feeling here?

“... it took time to get used to the idea of home being really home. Basically, I wasn’t used to the idea of belonging.”

### Questions:

- Why is feeling like you belong somewhere so important?
- What can help you feel like you belong?
- Can we help other people feel like they belong (the way Tyler helps Jack)?