



# The Itchy Jumper

by Lucy Thorpe, St John Paul II College - Shortlisted Year 11-12 category, 2025

1. Everyone in our town wears jumpers. It doesn't matter whether the sun is too hot, or the rain is pouring down. Everyone in our town wears jumpers and we never take them off. Not even when we're bathing or swimming or sleeping. Never. No one can remember where the jumpers came from, just that they've been there as long as anyone can remember.

2. But I have a problem. A problem that began roughly a year ago. As I turned to look at my reflection in a mirror, the jumper began to itch. It began as a small itch but it quickly spread across my entire body. The itching became agonising, like my very body was screaming for help. And for a split second, I wanted nothing more than to take off my jumper, until something stopped me. After all, I didn't know what would happen if someone took off their jumper. And so, I decided to find out.

3. Three weeks later, it was me, my mother and total silence. "Mum?" I asked. "What would happen if I were to take off my jumper?"

She looked at me as if I was mad. "Please don't," said my mother.

"Just keep it on. Unless there's something I'm missing." She stared at me. "Is there something I'm missing?"

"No," I said quickly. "I was just curious."

"Good," mother continued. "You remember the rules. Everyone must wear their jumpers."

Strong **opening** sentence through a short statement that links to the story's main complication.

**Setting** established – 'our town'; time could be the present (present tense) or the future (speculative fiction **genre**).

First person **point of view** through 'our' and 'we' creates a close social distance between the narrator and reader, increasing empathy for the narrator.

Introduction of the jumper as a **symbol** of societal conformity. It is a recurring symbol, also called a **motif**, in the story. Could relate to teenagers in general or LGBTQIA+.

Emphasis on this conformity through **repetition** of 'everyone' and use of negative words – never (twice), not even, and no one. Also note emphasis in single word sentence of 'Never'.

The **complication** is stated explicitly – 'I have a problem' and developed further through the effect of the itch and the fear of what might happen if the narrator took the jumper off.

**Characterisation:** The reflection in mirror is another symbol. It shows how a character's actions/behaviour serve as a mirror for an internal struggle. Introduces **theme** of identity as the narrator is torn between who they are and who others want them to be.

Focus on **sensory writing** through words such as 'agonising' (feeling) and 'screaming' (hearing).

Through **dialogue**, another character is introduced – the mother – who advances the **theme** of conformity/following societal rules further.

The reader learns more about the narrator who is likely a teenager as they are starting to question conformity to societal rules and explore their personal identity.

4. It had been a few months since the itching began. Throughout those months, it felt like something was stuck on the tip of my tongue, and trying to keep it there along with trying to hide the itching of my jumper was quickly becoming exhausting.

5. The next few hours are a blur. TV blaring, Grandma wheezing and dad yelling at me over a tired misunderstanding. The street lights fly past; I am in the car in tears with my dad and sister, with that thought still on the tip of my tongue.

6. My dad turns around to look at me. I'm a mess of tears and snot, and he asks the dreaded question. "Is something wrong?"

I feel it now. Those seven words waiting to leap out of the throat. "I want to take off my jumper."

But the fear cancels out the temptation. Because by saying those words I am risking it all. The close bonds I'd made with others could all come crashing down. People may come for me. People who want to try and get that jumper back on me.

7. I'm in my room now, not knowing what the future holds for me. But I do know one thing. One day I will become brave and one day I will take off my jumper regardless of what others might say about me. I would indeed be risking it all, but I would be risking it all to be the person I want to be. Everyone in our town wears jumpers, but maybe just maybe. There are others out there who don't. A new society waiting to be found.

8. Well, it's two months later and... I finally did it. I've only had the jumper off for a few hours and I still don't really know how to feel about it. Last night, mum told me that she'd noticed the itching and... she understands, although I'm still not certain that she does. I was too distressed to properly spell it out for her. But, as I write this, one thing is for sure. I finally feel like me.

**Metaphor:** 'stuck on the tip of my tongue' meaning wanting to say something but holding back. Could be seen as a **cliché** (an overused or unoriginal phrase e.g. as cold as ice, scratch the surface, in the blink of an eye, green with envy). Here it communicates meaning clearly and the author reinforces the meaning and makes it more original through 'trying to keep it there'.

**Descriptive language** that makes the writing interesting and engaging:

- **Onomatopoeia** and strong verbs: blur, blaring, wheezing.
- **Personification:** 'tired understanding', 'street lights fly past'.
- **Repetition** of 'on the tip of my tongue'.

Father, grandmother and sister reinforce the narrator's struggle by not understanding what they are going through.

More descriptive language:

- **Emotive sensory language:** 'mess of tears and snot', 'dreaded question', 'exhausting'.
- **Personification:** 'words waiting to leap out of my throat' effective synonym for 'tip of my tongue'.
- **Onomatopoeia:** 'crashing'
- **Motif** of itchy jumper.

Strong **abstract concepts** – fear, temptation, close bonds, risk - to capture the fear of the narrator and link to themes. Also complements the more **concrete emotive language** that appeals to senses such as snot and tears. Good writing has both.

**Climax** of story captures the distress of the narrator in the dilemma they are facing.

**Variety in sentence lengths and types** (simple, compound and complex) to make the writing more interesting.

**Character development:** the narrator is gradually becoming more confident in confronting their identity crisis. The repetition of 'risking' emphasises the character's challenges. Plus the link to story opening through repetition of opening sentence.

Focus on identity **theme** and cultural norms of a new society. Connection to speculative fiction **genre**.

**Resolution** in final sentence linking to theme of confronting their identity to 'finally feel like me'.

**Character development:** narrator takes action and parents become more understanding.

Note the use of present, past and future **tense** in the story. They are used effectively to show time sequences.