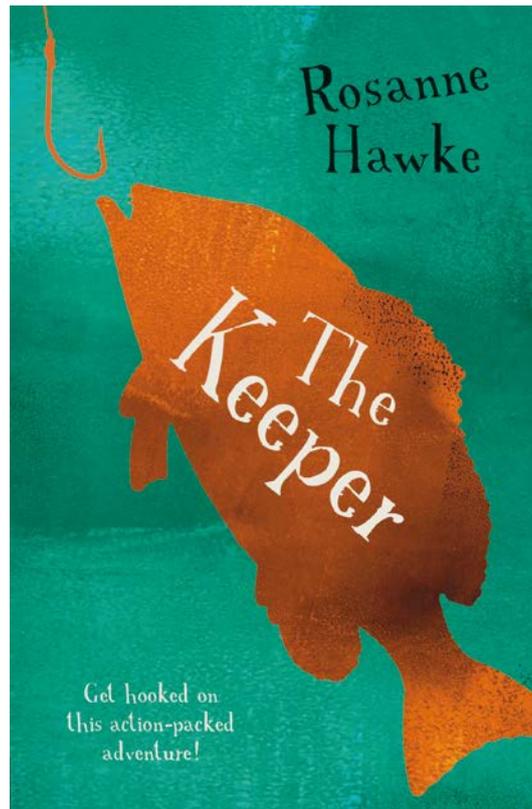


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THE KEEPER

Rosanne Hawke



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Writing Style	2
Author Motivation	2/3
Study Notes	3
About the Author	6

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SYNOPSIS

Joel lives alone with his grandmother in a small coastal town on the York Peninsula in South Australia. Sticking up for his best friend Mei often gets him into trouble with the principal, as does fighting his own battles with the school bully, Shawn.

Thinking that his troubles will disappear if he finds a dad, Joel advertises for a father in the paper. When Dev Eagle rides into town on his Harley Davidson, Joel's world will never be the same again.

THEMES

Relationships:

- Joel has a very close relationship with his gran
- Joel is good friends with Mei
- Joel desperately wants a father

Identity:

- Joel feels incomplete as he does not know his biological parents

Anger:

- Joel loses his temper easily

Bullying:

- Shawn bullies Mei and Joel
- Joel's biological father, Scott, is also a bully

Loneliness:

- Many characters in the book experience loneliness.

WRITING STYLE

The Keeper is told in first person, present tense. It is an adventure story suitable for younger readers. It also focuses on the importance of healthy self-esteem and relationships. Joel's voice is sincere, honest and at times naïve. The narrative is realistic and tangible. Rosanne Hawke's use of dialogue and figurative language gives the text a literary quality that is both gripping and compelling.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I was inspired to write a story about a boy with ADD after relief teaching one day and a six-year-old boy with ADD swore at me. I met so many boys in schools who didn't have dads, and yes, just like Joel, I met one with ADD who had a dad in jail. I wanted to show that a boy like Joel deserves a life too. I wanted to write a story about a boy and a man and show how their relationship

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enriches both their lives. I also wanted other young people to understand that someone with problems can be a good friend, that with understanding, acceptance comes; and with acceptance, caring is born. I tried to do this with a fun plot and a touch of mystery, using fishing and bikes as a hook to gain young readers' interest. I wondered how far a boy would go to find a dad. When I was reading the *Sunday Mail*, I saw the Connections page and that was when I got the idea of Joel placing an ad for a father. That was when *The Keeper* was conceived.

At the time I had a little cottage not far from the sea in Edithburgh which had once been the last lighthouse keeper's house. I wrote most of *The Keeper* in this cottage and it is also Gran's house where Joel lives in *The Keeper*.

STUDY NOTES

- The opening two paragraphs describe Joel performing a stunt on his bike. Re-read this passage and highlight the language features that help bring this scene to life. Discuss the choices of vocabulary, sentence structure and pace.
- We find out very early that Shawn bullies Joel. Track Shawn's tactics as you read *The Keeper*. Use this list as stimulus for a discussion about bullying. Record any suggestions the text offers as to how to deal with bullying.
- Do you agree with Joel when he says that Mei will forever get bullied because she doesn't defend herself? Discuss this in small groups, then as a whole class. How are Joel and Mei different in the way they handle bullying? Whose strategy is more effective?
- Why does Joel always feel like he's played into Shawn's hands? What would you suggest to Joel to stop him feeling this way?
- Speculate on what may have happened to Joel's parents. Why does Joel live with Gran?
- What does Joel mean when he says, 'all my problems come from dad running away. Now I have to fight his battles as well as my own.' (p8) How does this way of thinking impact on Joel's daily life?
- Joel sometimes imagines that he is in another time and place, for instance in Chapter 3 when he imagines his fishing rod is an M16 weapon. Why does he do this?
- Describe the relationship that Gran and Joel share. Give examples from the book to support your ideas.
- How important is Joel's relationship with Mei? Record your thoughts as you read *The Keeper*.
- Rosanne Hawke uses figurative language such as imagery, similes and analogies in her text. Discuss how and why she has used these techniques. Examples include:

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- “The awesome silence of hanging on nothing” (p1)
- “Trouble follows me like a blowfly buzzing over a sheep’s backside in summer, and is just as hard to shift” (p2)
- “His head’s as empty as a sink without a plug” (p2)
- “Ms Headley waits, eyebrows hovering like little McDonald’s arches” (p3)
- “It rises in me sometimes as if I’m on a boat in a huge swell” (p7)
- “She... just stands hovering like a mother eagle over a nest built too low on the cliff” (p11)
- “Changes tack like a ketch has to before a storm” (p11)
- “Looks as crumbly as a Roman aqueduct” (p16)
- “Ms Colby’s been watching me like I’m a goldfish in a food processor” (p16)
- “My words come out like a cat spitting before a fight” (p31)
- “I make a noise on the way to the bathroom that would make an erupting volcano sound like a delicate *pop*” (p37)
- “Dev’s a bit like a box with a lid on” (p42)
- “My grunts sound like a wild pig surrounded by twenty dogs” (p46)
- “Gran used to watch me like a one-legged gull at a picnic” (p49)
- “Gran’s a big red panic button in a tracksuit” (p49)
- “Skirting around it as delicate as a shark circling a school of snapper” (p51)

As you read the text, keep a journal of the figurative language used. Which are your favourites? Why? Try experimenting with some of these techniques in your own writing.

- Throughout *The Keeper* runs the analogy of wild horses galloping in Joel’s mind. Rosanne Hawke uses this to help the reader understand how Joel’s mind operates and why he sometimes lets his emotions dictate his actions. As you read the text, keep a journal of this analogy. Discuss how it has been used.
- Joel says that ‘every day’s such a battle, one I can never turn my back on.’ (p11) Put yourself in Joel’s shoes. How does this make him feel each day?
- Why does Gran worry so much about Joel?
- Joel has a lot of energy and sometimes gets himself into strife by being impulsive or feisty. Share a time when you have found it hard to concentrate or have done something without thinking it through. Discuss how Joel must feel battling with this on a daily basis.
- Joel doesn’t enjoy meeting new people. He says, ‘it’s not long before they look at me differently.’ (p17) What does he mean by this? He goes on to say, ‘it doesn’t hurt as much if I attack first.’ Knowing this about Joel, discuss how the author has shaped his character and conveyed his thoughts and feelings to the reader.

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- Make predictions about Zoe. Who is she and how does she fit within the narrative?
- Write a paragraph that explains the role fishing plays in Joel's life. Consider the old days when he fished with his grandfather, as well as how fishing has helped Joel throughout *The Keeper*.
- Joel has very low self-esteem. He says, 'I'm just Joel Billings, the uncontrollable idiot ... a useless jerk.' (p29) Why is his self-esteem so low? If you were Joel's friend, how would you help him think differently about himself? Do you sometimes talk to yourself like Joel does? If so, what can you learn from *The Keeper*?
- Dev doesn't always say a lot, but when he does, Joel listens. What are some of the important lessons that Dev teaches Joel?
- Keep a list of any vocabulary from the text with which you are unfamiliar. Add these words to a 'vocabulary wall' in the classroom. Use this wall as the basis for word building and spelling activities.
- Do you agree that you can change what's going to happen by thinking first? Explain your thoughts to a friend.
- Why didn't Grandad ever go to Rogue's Point on his own?
- Re-read the description of Dev being swept off the rocks at Rogue's Point. Look carefully at the author's choice of sentence length, sentence structure and descriptive techniques. What happens to the pace of the story in this passage? How have the author's choices helped affect this pace?
- Re-read p46 when Joel has just rescued Dev from the ocean. Why does the hug from Dev make Joel feel like 'something big' has just happened?
- How important is it to know who you are and where you are from? Why does Joel feel so incomplete not knowing anything about his biological parents?
- Occasionally throughout *The Keeper*, Mei narrates the story. Why has the author chosen to break up the narrative in this way? What do we learn about Joel through Mei's narration?
- Are any of your concerns about Dev echoed in Mei's narration? Discuss.
- Do you agree with Joel that there must be 'different kinds of "lonely"'? (p62) What does he mean by this?
- What impact does Dev's comment to Joel that he's 'a smart kid' have? (p62)
- What is it about Dev that Joel likes so much? Keep a list of Dev's attributes and the influence he has on Joel.
- When Dev and Joel are fishing, a salmon gets away. Discuss the analogy that Joel is worried that Dev will also 'get away'.
- Why does Dev want to be a part of Joel's life?
- Why is this book called *The Keeper*?
- How is Dev being in jail like Joel going to the focus room?

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- Why does Dev have tattoos of eagles on his body? How is Dev an eagle?
- How important is the fishing competition to Joel's self-esteem and sense of belonging?
- How significant is it that Shawn is on Joel's side for once when they battle with Scott?
- Write a newspaper report of the father-son fishing competition.
- For each of the characters in *The Keeper*, create a list of questions you'd like to ask them. Hold an author's chair session with various characters sitting in the focal position.
- With a partner, create a digital story to retell the main plotline of *The Keeper*. Use a program such as Photostory.
- Choose a minor character and write a chapter from their perspective.
- Discuss the notion that 'You can't judge a book by its cover' in relation to *The Keeper*.
- Make a list of the way your dad (or mum) has helped teach you about life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosanne Hawke is an award-winning South Australian author. She lived in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates as an aid worker for ten years. Her books include *The Messenger Bird*; *Soraya, the Storyteller*; *Mustara*; and *Taj and the Great Camel Trek*, which won the 2012 Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature and was shortlisted for the 2012 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. She is a Carclew, Asialink, Varuna and May Gibbs Fellow, and a Bard of Cornwall. She teaches Creative Writing at Tabor Adelaide, and writes in an old Cornish farmhouse with underground rooms near Kapunda.