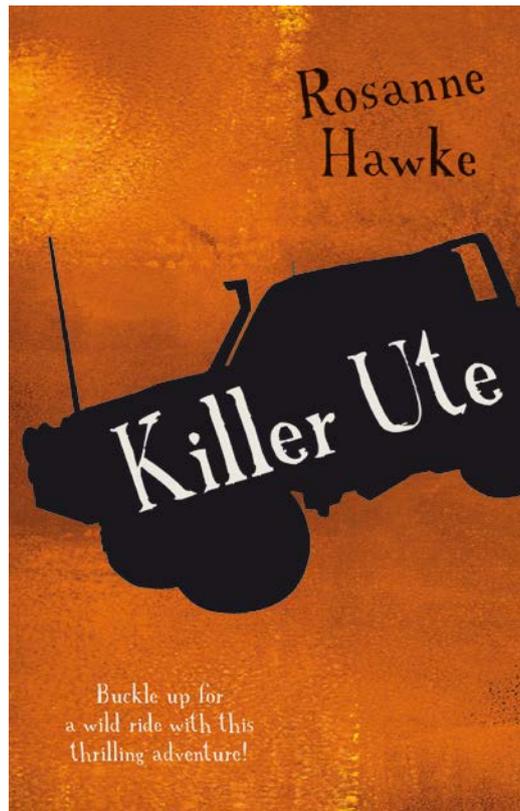


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KILLER UTE

Rosanne Hawke



Teachers' Notes

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

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SYNOPSIS

When Dev, Joel's foster dad, takes him on an unexpected holiday, little does he know what this adventure has in store. Not only does a 'killer ute' try to run them off the road, it seems determined to track them down for good.

Killer Ute is the third and final instalment in Roseanne Hawke's *The Keeper* series. It continues the journey that Joel began when he first advertised for a dad.

THEMES

Relationships:

- Joel hopes that his relationship with Dev will last forever
- Joel's relationship with Mei is changing as they mature
- Family is extremely important to Joel

Identity:

- Joel begins to feel a sense of identity as he now has a 'foster' dad and knows his biological mother
- Dev liked belonging to a club – it made him feel safe and as though he belonged

Anger:

- Joel is learning strategies to help deal with his anger

Bullying:

- The killer ute bullies Dev and Joel
- Joel is learning how to deal with bullies

Self Esteem:

- Joel's self-esteem suffers as a result of his past. In this story, he learns how to think more positively about himself.

Behavioural Disorders:

- Joel has a behavioural disorder. He is taking medication and learning to manage his impulsivity and control his thoughts.

Forgiveness:

- Joel has to learn to forgive his biological father in order to move on with his life
- Dev teaches Joel the importance of forgiveness

Happiness:

- Dev teaches Joel that happiness is something that doesn't just happen by chance – it starts in your head.

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WRITING STYLE

Killer Ute is told in first person, present tense. Joel's voice is sincere, honest and at times, raw. The narrative is realistic and tangible. Roseanne Hawke's use of dialogue and figurative language gives the text a literary quality that is both gripping and compelling.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I wrote *Killer Ute*, not only because lots of people wanted to know what would happen to Joel next but because I wanted to know too. I accompanied my daughter in giving evidence at court and that gave me the idea of the witness protection scheme.

I knew Scott would have a trial sooner or later, so why not in this book? I also knew Joel would need to be far away to be protected so I chose Beachport as that is where I remember spending my first family holiday. I was born in Penola nearby and *Killer Ute* is the first time I have visited the area in my work. I stayed in Beachport to research the area and get inspired before writing the first draft. I see so many utes where I live near Kapunda and maybe that's where I got the idea of having a killer ute. Some roo shooters outfits are truly killer utes. I knew Joel would like diving on wrecks as he's very adventurous. And sea lions? Who could resist one? Certainly not Mei and Joel.

I also wanted boys to like reading *Killer Ute* so I made sure there was action and adventure and scary moments, but funny ones too. I used shorter chapters and paragraphs to help with the suspense and also the interest of the reader. Most of all I think it is the relationship between Joel and Dev that is attractive. So many children don't have a dad living at home and these three books are a dream come true for fatherless kids.

STUDY NOTES

- *Killer Ute* begins with Mei and Joel diving on the wreck of the *Clan Ranald*. Joel – who normally struggles with following rules – mentions that there are strict rules associated with diving and that he doesn't mind having to follow those rules. Why do you think Joel feels differently about these rules? Why might he have problems following other rules?
- Joel thinks that Mei is brave because although she is scared about diving, she goes anyway. Do you agree with Joel? Discuss.
- Throughout The Keeper series, Joel is bullied by Shawn. Joel has learnt to ignore Shawn, but finds this difficult. Discuss why Joel feels this way. Have you ever felt like Joel? Write a reflection to explore this feeling.
- When the shark comes close, Joel mentions that he has his own shark to deal with – Scott. What does he mean by this?

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- Joel thinks that his problems at school will disappear if he has a dad. Why does he think this? Is he correct in his line of thinking? How has Dev helped Joel deal with his problems at school? Discuss.
- Several times throughout the text, Joel describes a battle that is going on inside his head. Examples include:
 - ‘Even though he’s in police custody, he can get me anytime he wants – in my head.’ (p15)
 - ‘Dev tells me that the fight is in my own head.’ (p16)

Discuss the power of internal thoughts and how individuals can counteract the mind games that bullies play by using their own positive thoughts.

- Roseanne Hawke uses figurative language such as similes and personification in her text. Discuss how and why she has used this technique to help develop Joel’s character. Examples include:
 - “Weeds and kelp wave at me and fish flash by” (p4)
 - “My legs feel like they’ve been shoved into a hornet’s nest” (p5)
 - “But he looks like a dog that’s pulled a sausage off the barbecue” (p14)
 - “There are a few looks swinging in the air like monkeys between Gran and Dev” (p17)
 - “He’s like a tyre with too much air – one prick and he’ll pop” (p22)
 - “The familiar feeling of letting someone down slithers over me” (p24)
 - “If I can’t get to the sea and drop in a line I’m sure I’ll frizzle up like a landed fish” (p26)
 - “Joel here is a lot like a seal – if he doesn’t get his skin wet every now and then, he blisters in the sun” (p30)
 - “It sits on the sand like the rusted carcass of a dinosaur” (p45)
 - “The floor is wavering and rolling like there’s a flood” (p54)
 - “I’m stunned like an owl in torchlight” (p55)
 - “The thought flaps around and grows bigger by the second” (p59)

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.

- Joel says that he often acts before thinking twice. He goes on to say, ‘I once was told to proofread my thoughts but it’s hard to slow down long enough sometimes.’ (p18) Have you ever felt like Joel? Write a reflection about a time you acted before thinking twice. Discuss how ‘proofreading your thoughts’ could help you in a range of situations.
- On p23, Joel describes the feeling of riding on Dev’s motorcycle. Re-read this passage, taking note of the comparisons between music and the feeling of riding on the open road and the wind in Joel’s face feeling like sailing. As a class, brainstorm some other activities and interesting ways in which these could be described using comparison.

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- Joel often comments that he lets people down. Who is he letting down? Why does he feel like this? Is he being a little tough on himself? Discuss.
- What does Joel mean when he says, 'it's an incredible world under all that water; makes you forget whatever's bothering you on the surface'? (p46) What is bothering him? Why does he want to forget it for a while?
- When the killer ute runs Dev and Joel off their bike, they don't stop. Joel calls them cowards for not stopping to see if they are ok. (p47) Do you agree with Joel? Discuss in small groups.
- What does Dev mean when he says, 'no one can live with bitterness – it destroys you in the end.' (p51)
- On p59, Joel writes a letter to Mei. In the character of Joel, choose another scene from the book from which to base a letter to Mei.
- Challenging unhelpful thoughts is something that Joel is working really hard towards. Dev helps him with this, teaching him to think, 'I am not stupid and this situation is not my fault', and 'this is hard but I will do my best'. Re-read this passage on p60. Apply this technique to daily situations as they arise. Consider inviting a school counsellor to talk to the class about positive self-talk and challenging unhelpful thoughts.
- Dev describes belonging to a riding club as giving him a sense of belonging. Discuss the importance of a sense of belonging.
- Joel has a nightmare about the killer ute on p77. Discuss and illustrate this passage using the description of the ute as a giant squid as a guide.
- Why does Joel feel like a rabbit being chased by a fox? (p89)
- Why does Joel wish that Felicity was not quite so nice? Why does he want to keep his 'guard up'? (p96)
- Re-read p101, in which Dev talks about happiness. In your own words, explain what you understand happiness to mean. How can it be achieved?
- The Keeper series features fishing. On p115, Joel says that, 'I feel like a fish that's swallowed a hook with the worm. And I'm about to find out what the worm feels like too.' (p115) Discuss the metaphor of Joel being used as bait during the final scenes of *Killer Ute*.
- Draw a Venn diagram to compare Shawn with the killer ute.
- Create a guidebook for happiness that includes lessons Joel has learnt throughout The Keeper series.
- Why does Joel work at making his face 'like a calm sea'? (p130)
- Create a list of things you have learnt about bullies and handling bullies from *Killer Ute*.
- Forgiveness is a key theme in *Killer Ute*. Re-read the passage on p52 in which Dev explains the importance of forgiveness. Create a visual representation of this theme.
- In what ways in The Keeper series about hope and understanding?
- Write an epilogue for *Killer Ute*.

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- How is the notion of 'You can't judge a book by its cover' addressed in the book *The Keeper*?
- Write a reflection of the way in which your mother or father or another family member have helped you in your 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.