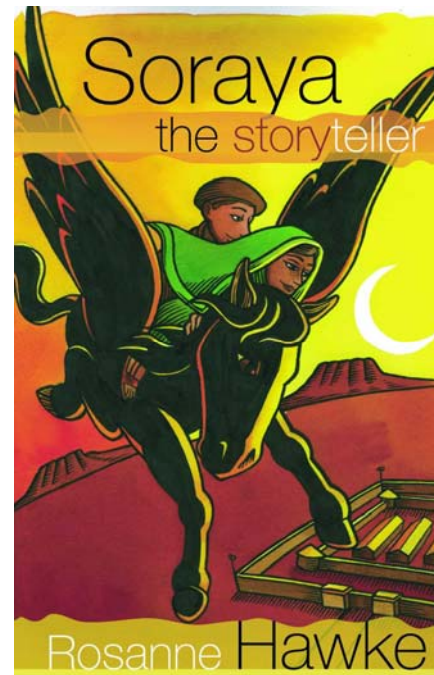


# Soraya the storyteller

Rosanne Hawke

Teacher's Notes  
Nancy Mortimer



This poignant and moving story gives a good insight into what it is like to be displaced from your own country because of terrorist activities against you. Soraya is a twelve year old Afghan girl. She and what is left of her family have fled to Australia seeking a safe place from the oppressive rule of the Taliban who have been responsible for terrorising her sister, enlisting one twin brother to fight for them, and the other brother, in trying to resist the taking of his twin, dying. Soraya's father has been imprisoned because he was educated in England and is thus considered a spy. Through Soraya's writing, the reader is able to see the family has a long tradition of education and there are glimpses of what her family life was like before things changed so drastically under the Taliban. After a hurried escape from Kabul, Soraya's family flees to cousins in Pakistan. They soon realise they cannot stay with them there, and the alternative is the refugee camp where conditions are appalling. Soraya's mother, who has been badly affected by what has happened to her family, makes a decision to pay and go on a boat from Indonesia to Australia, believing there will be a better and safe life there. On arrival they are put in the Woomera detention centre and now are on temporary protection visas that expire after three years. Soraya tries to adjust and adapt to her new country and longs to stay here in safety. Through her stories we learn about the bravery and the reality of Soraya's life, the fear and terror she and her family have left and the shocking uncertainty that they now face, still not knowing what the future holds.

**These notes can be photocopied for class use.  
They and other resources are available at no charge from the  
Lothian Books' website:  
[www.lothian.com.au](http://www.lothian.com.au)**

## READING

- How is the story told?
- What do we learn of Soraya's background?
- What picture does the reader have of the school?
- What has Soraya been taught in her culture about learning?
- How many languages does Soraya know? (page13)
- I draw lines in front of us without thinking, but then I rub them out.(13)*
- What is the significance of this act?
- What has happened to Soraya's father?
- What are some of the things she doesn't tell people?
- Why?
- What is Soraya writing in her book? (19)
- What was Soraya's life like, once, in Afghanistan?
- How did it change under the Taliban?
- How does Soraya interact with other children at school? (35)
- Who comprises Soraya's family?
- Khala says the stories keep us alive inside (37?)*
- Do you agree?
- How does Rafeeq react to stories?
- Why doesn't Soraya mention the past and her family who are no longer with them? (45)
- Why do you think Soraya finds stories make you happier? (64)
- What does Anthony's gift of the tree mean for Soraya?
- What does Soraya outline as her ideal place? (91-92)
- In many portions of the story we see things alter for Soraya in a positive way and she makes progress in her new life.
- Find some such instances.
- That night I bring Kamilah into our room and I tell a story.(130)*
- Why is this significant?
- What happens when Soraya meets Chris Brown? What does she say about Soraya's story? (139ff)
- Could Soraya's dream about the Prime Minister come true one day? (153)

## Vocabulary

- What is the meaning of the following words:
- *harem?* (34), *inconsolable* (104)
- What is *Qabuli Palau*?

## Title

- Explain in detail the significance of the title of this novel
- The last chapter is called Soraya's Story
- Is this where the name for the novel comes from?

## Characters

- Do a pen portrait of Soraya, telling as much as you can about her as a person
- What is her brother, Rafeeq, like?
- Is he aptly named?
- What are some of the ways he adjusts to fit into his new country?
- Talk about their mother and the way she is portrayed
- What is Khala's role?
- Discuss the possum man, Anthony and the part he plays in Soraya's story  
Look at Ebony
- Is she a friend?

## WRITING

- Describe Soraya's first day ever at school
- What does her writing do for her?
- Make a list of some of the differences in Soraya's ways and yours
- Relate her family's escape from Afghanistan and why they fled their country

## SPEAKING / LISTENING

- Talk about stories and what you have seen they do for people in this novel
- Drawing on the numerous stories in the novel consider what ingredients comprise a story  
There are many places in the story where Soraya is aware that her way of behaving according to customs and traditions of her culture are different to the new ways she has to learn and adjust to.
- Outline some of these.  
There are constant reminders in Soraya's writing of what she has been through and experienced.
- Write down some of these and talk about them as a class  
There are many words of wisdom in the story.
- Find some and say why you chose them  
In parts, the novel indicates that what has happened in people's lives affects people, especially if they are children.
- Look at how children are affected and what some of the things that Soraya reacts to with fear because of what she has experienced in the past
- Recount the dream Soraya had and how it progresses throughout the novel, what it means and why it changes  
*For that is what we did in Afghanistan; we recited poetry and told stories (29)*
- What values and practices are spoken of and are of importance in Soraya's culture?

The incident on page 71 that Rafeeq relates outlines clearly what the author emphasises several times – how attitudes change once an individual is known as a real person and not just one of those boat people.

➤ Discuss this in detail.

Talk about:

- the examples of racial intolerance in the novel
- the place of memories
- the place of family
- names
- the importance of love 159
- hope
- peace
- What are some of Soraya's thoughts about war?
- What are some of yours?

There are a few places in the story where Soraya feels happy *I feel happy that there are people who have tried to understand* (158) This is most important to refugees in Soraya's position because they then know: *We are not alone*

➤ Discuss why this is important

## THE CRAFT OF WRITING

This is a complex story with many layers.

Rosanne Hawke imparts a great deal about Soraya and her life in the way the story is told.

- As a class talk about how the novel is written, what happens and the way in which the reader finds out things
- Look closely at the methods the author uses and how the reader knows so much about Soraya's innermost feeling, desires and life.
- Examine the different layers of story in this novel

The author often refers to sounds and things that remind Soraya of her past.

- Find some instances of this from the text
- Look at the way Rosanne Hawke uses facial expressions and the eyes in particular to show how people are feeling and what they are thinking

In this powerful story Rosanne Hawke conveys a great deal about the position of refugees and so the reader has a greater understanding of what they have been through

➤ What did you learn about them?

Rosanne Hawke uses vivid images to create a picture in words, such as:

*He hissed it like a cobra ready to strike* (63)

*This time Modar was like a reed broken off in the wind She had lost her eyes* (80)

*He doesn't answer straightaway, as if he has to download the information from a far away website* (100)

- Find more examples of graphic images that you found were effective whilst reading.
- From the story, what picture do we have of Afghanistan?

- What is the moral of the story of the Arab Prince and the Moghul Princess? (108).
- Many of the stories that are age-old have morals – determine what these are and discuss why they exist

There are many wise words in the novel.

- Look for some and relate them to the class
- What would it be like to be in Soraya's family's position?

Trees and snow are used by the author as symbols in the story

- What do these represent?

## FIND OUT MORE ABOUT

- The Arabian Nights
- Parables
- Refugees (use the resource list at the back of the book)
- Afghanistan

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosanne Hawke was an ESL / Special Needs teacher and has worked in Pakistan, the United Emirates and Australia. She now writes full time and runs writing workshops for young people in South Australia. Her published works include ***Across the Creek***, ***Wolfchild*** (shortlisted in the Aurealis Awards), ***The Keeper*** and ***Sailmaker*** (a CBCA Notable Book in 2003) in the *Takeaways* series; the Young Adult titles ***Zenna Dare***, ***A Kiss in Every Wave*** and ***Borderland***; and ***The Collector*** in the *Start-Ups* series, which will be published in June 2004.

Rosanne lives near Kapunda, South Australia. Visit [www.rosannehawke.com](http://www.rosannehawke.com) for background notes on themes covered in this book.