



TEACHER'S NOTES



Finding Kerra

By Rosanne Hawke

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Reading Level: 15+ years

It's been six months since Jaime Richards' best friend died. Everyone still gives the incident a wide berth with a polite, 'How are you now?' But she's not okay.

So for the school holidays, Jaime decides to head Far North to Blake Townsend's station home. He's always been the one to listen, but she soon realises that Blake isn't the guy she knew at school.

Not only does she find out he has a sister, Kerra, who he's never mentioned, but Jaime discovers what a devastating effect a mysterious secret has on the Townsend family. Kerra has believed a lie all her life and through storytelling, Jaime hopes to unearth the secret before it's too late.

Themes

- Multiculturalism • Belonging • Family • Cultural Heritage • Outback
- Self-identity • Stereotyping • Tradition • Friendship • First Love • Storytelling

Discussion Questions & Classroom Activities:

1. Jaime went through 'culture shock' when she first arrived in Australia.
 - Define 'culture shock'.
 - Have you ever experienced 'culture shock'? Where? Why?
2. When Richelle learns that Jaime lived in Pakistan, she is quick to stereotype.
 - What does Jaime mean by, 'No, I'm not black but I feel like I am at times'? (p.5)
 - Have you ever perceived someone through the lens of a stereotype and then realised you were wrong?
3. Jaime is sick of people giving Liana's death a wide berth. Why do you think our culture uses euphemisms about death? Do you think we should?
4. Jaime uses stories to connect to and relate with Kerra. Explain how the story of Prince Hamid, told by Jaime, reflects Kerra's situation.
5. 'The stars fascinated me. How small we are—how big God's universe.' (p.46). What other observations in life make you think about your place in the universe?
6. Why does Blake get so angry about Kerra leaving the hose on? Would he have the same reaction if the Townsends lived in the city?
7. Jaime often refers to the idea of 'outback mateship', which is an Australian cultural idiom.
 - Research the origins of Australian 'mateship'.
 - Is there something similar to this type of friendship in the urban areas of Australia?
 - Do you think 'mateship' still has a place in Australian culture and identity?
8. How does the Townsends' way of life differ from that experienced by families living in the built-up areas of Australia? Give evidence from the text.
9. There is evidence to suggest that the farm environment is harmful to mental health. Give evidence from the text that might support this claim (i.e. think about social norms, isolation, etc.)
10. Jaime talks about the 'faces' of Pakistan (p.75).
 - Do you believe countries can have two faces? Explain this idea.
 - Are the faces of countries presented in tourism advertising and media accurate?
 - What face does Australia portray to the world? What face does Australia not show the world?
11. There is a culture of silence in the Outback and Townsend family that Jaime can't understand. How does Jaime try to break this silence? Give evidence from the text.
12. Jaime finds it weird explaining what Afghanistan is like to Afghans.
 - Explain the idea of identifying with cultures that you weren't raised in. I.e. 'Cross Border Experiences'
 - Jaime is a third-culture kid born in Australia but raised in Pakistan. Explain how she combines multiple cultures into her identity. Give evidence from the text.

About the Author

Rosanne Hawke is an Australian author of thirty books, among them *Shahana: Through My Eyes*, *The Messenger Bird* (the winner of the 2013 Cornish Holyer an Gof award for YA literature), and *Taj and the Great Camel Trek* (winner of the 2012 Adelaide Festival Children's Literature Award).

Rosanne was awarded an Asialink Fellowship to write in Pakistan in 2006 and the Carclew Fellowship in 2008. She was also an aid worker in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates for ten years and now teaches Creative Writing at Tabor Adelaide.

Rosanne is a bard of Cornwall and lives in rural South Australia in an old Cornish farmhouse with underground rooms.



Author Motivation

The seed idea behind *Finding Kerra* sprang from my childhood, growing up in the semi-outback of central Queensland. My father was a grazier and we lived about ten kilometres from a hot, little town called Banana, where I attended a one-teacher school. I rode to school on a converted cattle truck and it took an hour to pick up all the kids from the neighbouring properties. I was the first one on in the morning, and fortunately, the first one off in the afternoon.

Some of the events in *Finding Kerra* happened in my childhood: drawing on a windmill platform (I never told my mum, of course), riding horses (didn't tell Mum that I fell off), a haystack fire in winter, helping with a muster, nearly drowning in a dam. But the setting for *Finding Kerra* came from my love for the Australian Outback that has increased ever since I rode the Ghan (and a bus) through the desert to Darwin when I was fifteen.

Some years ago, my husband and I took a road trip up past Port Augusta, Beltana, Farina and Marree. We even went to the Camel Cup at Maree to watch camels race and stayed at a station for a few nights. Since then we have travelled up that way again and further north up the Oodnadatta and Strzelecki tracks, Coober Pedy, Uluru and the Alice. More northern treks are planned. Maybe more stories will appear too.

One of my favourite memories of the outback as an author is speaking on School of the Air. I was talking about *Mustara* and Ernest Giles' trek to Perth. Students replied interactively that they had ridden camels and one boy had seen Ernest Giles' tree where he left a saddle. I was moved that these kids who couldn't play with each other still had a school community online.

I love the space and atmosphere of the Outback. I like to be able to see the horizon and the further away the better. What some call 'empty spaces' I think are places full of the magnificence of creation; at Uluru I felt the awe of sitting in a natural cathedral. When I lived in Pakistan, it was this space and huge sky that I missed.

Now I live in rural SA. People here still drive utes and lift a finger in greeting as they pass, and the Outback is only a day away. *Finding Kerra* is my attempt at catching a small part of the Australian Outback for those who can't make the trek and for those who will be inspired to go.