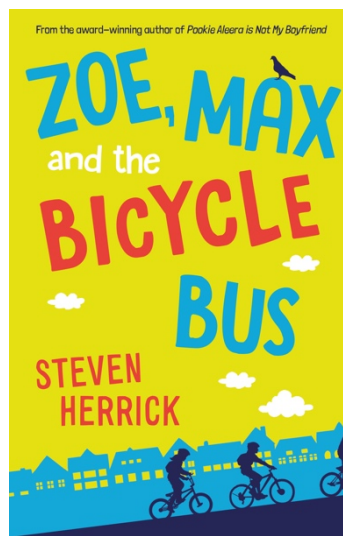


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

ZOE, MAX AND THE BICYCLE BUS

Steven Herrick



Teachers' Notes

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

ISBN: 978 0 7022 6300 2 / AUS \$16.99

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

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

SYNOPSIS

When Ms Dillon suggests riding their bikes to school, Zoe, Max and others from class 5D soon form a bicycle bus. The only problem is the narrow stretch along busy Fisher Road, where cars whizz by with little regard for cyclists.

This humorous and inspirational verse novel shows how positive change can be enacted through simple actions, giving younger readers agency to forge the future.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Sustainability
- Action
- Fathers
- Humour
- Poetry

WRITING STYLE

Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus is a verse novel told in first person, present tense. The poems are narrated by various characters, most of whom are Year 5 students at the local primary school. It is suitable for middle readers, and its themes of sustainability, relationships and action are incorporated with compassion and simple gestures. The narrative is a compelling, humorous and sensitive account of life in this community.

STUDY NOTES

- The verses in *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus* are written from different characters' points of view. For each narrator, create a character iceberg. Above the surface of the water, record the character traits we are told literally, and below the water level, those we must infer. Use excerpts from the text to help support your ideas.
- Why is Olivia finding it hard to sleep (pp. 1–3)? What can we infer from the lines 'Tomorrow is the first day of term/and for the past three hours/and fifty-eight minutes/I've been stuck on Stage Four' (p. 1)? Have you ever felt anxious before the start of a new school year? Discuss with a friend.
- Steven Herrick uses poetic devices such as personification, onomatopoeia, similes, metaphors, alliteration, imagery, repetition, rhyme and rhythm in his writing. Identify examples of these devices as

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

you read the text. How and why do they enhance the reading experience for audiences? Examples include:

- The clock on my bedside table/blinks (p. 1)
 - Wrestle with my doona (p. 1)
 - As a distant train rattles/through the darkness (p. 2)
 - He waves his hand in a circle,/conducting an orchestra in his dream (p. 2)
 - Their heads bobbing/like corks in a bathtub sky (p. 10)
 - My voice as brittle as frost (p. 22)
 - Creamily/colourfully ... a flourish of cupcakes (p. 35)
 - It's as quiet as midnight (p. 46)
 - In cricket, my leg spinners fizz and snap (p. 49)
 - Silence./Hot and/airless/silence (p. 54)
 - A caterpillar of clanking gears/and whirring pedals (p. 127)
 - A thought wheels into my mind/and it won't pedal away (p. 159)
 - It's raining shirts and shorts and jackets ... the flood/of clothes drowning my floor (p. 177)
 - The silence slithers between us (p. 233)
 - The paint on Fisher Road/is as bright as sunshine (p. 236)
- Respond to the following statement, using evidence from the text to support your views: *In many ways, Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus is a book about the relationships between fathers and their children.* Discuss Mr Bertoldi in light of this statement.
 - Using the opening stanza of Jordi's verse on p. 6, recreate this scene in a collage.
 - Why is Jordi's mother reluctant to let him ride his bike other than on Sundays? What can we tell about her character from the poem starting on p. 6?
 - Discuss the formatting of Zoe's poem on pp. 8–9. How does this reflect the subject matter of her verse?
 - Using Zoe's poem on pp. 8–9 and Dylan's on pp. 10–11, write these scenes in prose form to show the different points of view of these characters.
 - Max shows significant character development during *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*. What allows this development to occur? Give examples to support your thinking.
 - Why does Max want to prove to himself that he's 'worth more than kicking a goal' (p. 15)? What does his father have to do with this aim?
 - Just as Max does, add a new word each day to your class's Word Wall, being sure to use this word in coming days.
 - How would you describe Zoe's nature? What clues tell us more about her in *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*?

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Why does Jordi refer to Shaun as his ‘almost-dad’ (p. 6)? At what point does he think of him as his actual dad? Discuss the relationship Jordi and Shaun share.
- Initially, Dabir doesn’t know what his name means, but later finds out it means ‘teacher’. What does your name mean? Share with the class.
- Miss Dillon discusses homophones with the class (pp. 23–25). Add to the words given in this verse to display in the classroom.
- Why does Dylan hate cats? How does this influence the events that shape Dylan’s story throughout *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*?
- For each character, create a mind map showing the relationship they share with their fathers.
- Write a reflection about Mr Bertoldi, sharing your understanding into his character. If you had to choose a person who most resembles Mr Bertoldi in your life, who would it be? Why?
- How does Lily’s mum cope with the loss of her husband? Why does Lily find this difficult? How does Lily decide to remember her dad?
- At their Friday afternoon soccer game, why does Ms Dillon tell the story of the rich man who shares his wealth? How does this help the class have a more enjoyable afternoon? How does this help Max?
- Dabir’s family decide to make small changes to reduce their impact on the environment. What do they do? What can you and your family do? In what way does *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus* show the power of action at an individual and local level?
- When talking about his biological father, Jordi has ‘so many questions./All beginning with the word *Why*’ (p. 70). What do you think these questions might be?
- Discuss the growing friendship between Dylan and Mrs Chambers. How do they help one another?
- Sketch the scene described in the first verse of Olivia’s poem starting on p. 77. Use images from the internet to help.
- Make predictions about the white bicycle with the flowers left on Rosebud Avenue (pp. 82–83). Why has the ghost bicycle been included in *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*?
- Create an advertising campaign that promotes safer driving of parents around school grounds (see Mr Bertoldi’s poem starting on p. 84).
- Why does Max describe his favourite colour as the ‘colour of school’ (p. 88)? What is it about school that makes him respond in this way?
- How does Max feel about his father being his coach? How does he deal with this? What advice would you give Max about his situation?
- Discuss the special bond between Lily and Mr Bertoldi.
- Discuss the Japanese philosophy that ‘The children are taught independence ... and it’s the community’s job to keep them safe’ (p.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

102). How does this relate to the events and themes in *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*?

- When Olivia falls off her bike, her dad supports her. Write a recount of a time when one of your parents has helped you 'get back on the bike'.
- Like 5D, collect inspirational sayings and display on your classroom walls (see pp. 112–113, pp. 118–119 and pp. 199–200).
- How does remembering Trouble help Lily process the loss of her father?
- Write a reflection about the advice given to Lily by her father: 'Be brave. Take risks. We'll heal the bruises with love' (p. 141).
- What does the Dutch saying 'We are not made of sugar' mean (p. 142)? What can Australia learn from countries like the Netherlands about their management of cars and bicycles, and therefore the environment?
- Why has Dylan 'never felt prouder/or happier/or more like me/ever' (p. 163)?
- How has Ms Dillon's suggestion about the bicycle bus impacted the children in her class beyond the classroom?
- Why does Lily give Dylan a new fish? What does this mean to Dylan?
- What can we infer about the developing friendship between Zoe and Max? Why is it important when writing to allow readers the opportunity to infer, rather than always be told directly?
- While much of *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus* is light-hearted and humorous, it also contains sincere and poignant moments. Highlight those parts of the text that appeal to the emotions of the audience. Discuss the appeal of humorous texts that are anchored by serious moments.
- Re-enact one of Fire Officer Williams' safety lessons with the class (eg. pp. 72–74).
- Create an information report about a country of your choice (see pp. 213–214).
- Max describes himself as feeling 'jittery' on the day he and Zoe plan to paint the white line on Fisher Road. Why is he feeling this way? In the role of Max, write a recount of this day.
- Why is Mr Bertoldi described as 'a knight on a horse/with a lance' (p. 218)?
- Reread Mr Bertoldi's poem starting on p. 222. Why does he see the actions of Zoe and Max as 'the future fixing itself'?
- What does Max mean when he says 'everything/is better when it's shared' (p. 230)?
- Write some of the episodes from *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus* in prose form.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Which is your favourite character in *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*? Why? Which do you most relate to? Create a word cloud for this character using an online tool such as Wordle (www.wordle.net).
- Write a reflection on friendship, using examples from your own experiences as well as from *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*.
- Using the relevant organisation listed on p. 241, find information about bicycle education for your own riding safety. Integrate bicycle safety sessions into the reading of *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus*.
- Experiment using figurative language and poetic devices in your own writing.
- As a companion text, read Steven Herrick's *Pookie Aleera Is Not My Boyfriend*.
- Visit the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards website, which has extensive resources for exploring poetry <https://www.dorothea.com.au/Learning-Resources>.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

After many decades in the saddle, I've finally honoured my love of cycling in a book. *Zoe, Max and the Bicycle Bus* is a love story of a child and their bicycle; the endless adventures two wheels and a pair of strong legs can offer. No video game, Covid-19 lockdown, or computer simulation can replace the liberation of being on a bicycle, the senses tingling with possibility. I hope this book is a gentle reminder to us all that childhood should be a time of limitless possibility and adventure, when being alone, or in a group of peers, on a bicycle is where we learn the meaning of independence and joy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Herrick is the author of twenty-five books for children and young adults. His books have twice won the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards and have been shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards on nine occasions. He is widely recognised as a pioneer of the verse-novel genre for young adults. He is also the author of six travel books. He spends nine months of the year visiting schools in Australia and three months on his bicycle, travelling around, pedalling slowly and thinking about his next book.