



Teachers' Notes Boss of the Pool

ROBIN KLEIN

Teachers' notes by Victoria Hazell

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OUTLINE

Anne is a single parent who has found a part-time summer-holiday job. This affects her daughter Sally's plans for her own holidays, because she is not allowed to remain home alone in the evenings unsupervised. She must spend the evenings with Mrs Murray, the old lady next door, or accompany her mother to the hostel for disabled children and swim in the unused pool.

After a unsuccessful evening with Mrs Murray, Shelley decides to go to the hostel after all. Unfortunately, she is not alone at the pool and she has to cope with the unwanted attentions of Ben, who really likes her and is terrified that she will drown.

Shelley hurls abuse at Ben, hoping to make him go away, and then decides to get into the water to frighten him. She soon discovers, much to her surprise, that with certain persuasive tactics she is able to get him into the water up to his ankles.

The following day is Anne's day off, as on Sundays the parents of the residents come and take their children out for the day. Encouraged by the thought that the place will be deserted, Shelley decides she needs a swim. When she arrives at the pool, she finds Ben waiting at the door. Before she can get away he notices her arrival and is so excited that she decides to have her swim anyway.

Shelley bribes Ben with a silver and then a gold star to go further into the water. Finally, she gives him her gold medal with the words 'Boss of the Pool' engraved on the back. Such was Shelley's success with Ben, that when Anne is awarded a full-time position at the hostel, Shelley resolves to teach all the kids how to swim. With the help of the new Boss of the Pool!

THE AUTHOR

Robin Klein is one of Australia's best-known and most successful writers for children. Her books include the very popular *Penny Pollard* series; *Thing* (which won the Children's Book of Australia's Junior Book of the Year Award in 1983); *Alison Ashley*; and *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly*, which was the CBC's Book of the Year (Older Readers) in 1990. She has previously published four books with Omnibus Books: *The Princess Who Hated It*; *Birk the Berserker*; *Boss of the Pool* and *The Ghost in Abigail Terrace*. Robin is not writing currently. She lives in the Dandenong Ranges, east of Melbourne.

THE NOVEL

Novels written for the young, whether serious or light-hearted, cover a wide range of subjects, literary styles, plots, vocabulary and grammatical constructions. These aspects are important to the developing literacy of the reader, but it is the story aspect of the novel that hooks the reader into reading and into continuing to do so.

The story is the means of transport to far countries and strange lands. It creates introductions to different cultures and new people. Through stories a reader can meet again what is common or familiar, with altered vision and deeper understanding. New ideas and alternative opinions can open minds and broaden horizons, while the reader's ability to infer is increased and comprehension is deepened.

Shared novel reading brings the reading and sharing of this fiction within the scope of every student in the classroom. It is also one of the most positive and natural ways to foster continuing, individual reading development. Through this approach, reading is more likely to be established as an everyday activity outside of the classroom, as the reader's experiences with books in the classroom has been pleasurable and successful.

Shared novel reading ensures pleasure and success by:

- having in the classroom a selection of well-written novels likely to appeal
- promoting self-selection through book selling
- providing the support of a reading buddy, the group and the teacher
- setting reading goals (the number of pages to be read) and dates in consultation
- allowing for constant practice of sustained silent reading
- allowing plenty of discussion, questioning and meeting together, in which all members of the group can share as the book is read
- ensuring flexibility in the approach, so as to meet the needs of the students
- providing opportunities to express personal responses to the book through writing, drama, oral language activities, art, music, etc
- encouraging and supporting further reading.

THE READING BUDDY ROLE

Successful and meaningful reading and sharing of novels in the classroom is more readily achieved if the members of the group reading a particular title keep pace with each other. Reasonable goals for reading are set in consultation with the teacher, but some students request the support of a reading buddy in order to

keep up. The reading buddy, who has volunteered for the job, is available to listen to, read along with or read to any student in the group who requests support.

The detailed outline of the novel being shared is followed by suggestions covering five stages of shared novel reading.

Stage 1 – Book selling

Stage 2 – Before reading

Stage 3 – During reading

Stage 4 – After reading

Stage 5 – Further reading

These notes may be adapted or added to, depending on the needs of the students.

STAGE 1 – BOOKSELLING

- In an effort to create interest in the novel, draw students' attention to the title, without revealing the illustration on the front cover. Pose the question: 'What do you think the outline of the story will be?' Students should then break up into small groups and choose a speaker to represent each group. Each student gives the speaker their opinion of the story's content. When all students have relayed their opinion to the speaker, all the speakers report back to the rest of the class. A vote could even be taken as to which version may in fact be the closest to the author's own. Read it and see!
- Read aloud to students a passage of the story to motivate them to read the story for themselves. The paragraph beginning on page 57 '*No I won't!*' ... *Ben took one more haunted step.*
- Any student who has read the book, written a report, or noticed it on the shelf in the library, might like to share their thoughts on the novel.

STAGE 2 – BEFORE READING

Activities outlined below are for the first conference with those students who have decided to read one of the multiple copies of *Boss of the Pool*.

- Once the group is established, a conference with the teacher should be held to determine reading goals and the dates for further conferences. It should be decided if any member of the group needs support, in the form of a reading buddy – and, if so, what the nature of that support should be.
- Read aloud the first paragraph of the back cover blurb to the group, without revealing the front-cover illustration. Then, as a *speed writing*

exercise, give students 10 minutes to write what they think might happen at old Mrs Murray's house.

- Before revealing the front cover of the story, students could be asked to draw a caricature of what they think the 'Boss of the Pool' would look like. After completion of the activity, discussions could be held about such issues as: Why most students drew a *male* in the role. What kind of clothing they drew their character in and what would have been more appropriate.
- Discuss with the group:
 1. that *Boss of the Pool* is set in present-day Australia
 2. that the main characters are Shelley, Ben and to a lesser extent Anne, Shelley's mother. As a single parent, Anne needs to work and it is as a result of this situation that the story arises.
- Finally, pose a question for the group to reflect upon as they read the story. For example, was Shelley's anger understandable given the situation?

STAGE 3 – DURING READING

- Ensure that each of the reading conferences are brief, interesting and entertaining.
- Always allow students the freedom to begin the conference discussion with questions or reflections they are keen to share.
- During the first conference, discuss students' opinions in response to the question raised at the previous conference. Responses might be recorded for each of the questions posed in the previous conference and throughout subsequent conferences. Other questions that may be posed and explored throughout subsequent conference meetings might include:
 - What motivated Ben to overcome his fear of water?
 - Why is it that some people are nervous or repulsed by the sight or presence of disabled children and adults?
 - What are the benefits of institutionalising students?
 - What are the negative aspects of institutionalising students?
 - Some people say that it takes a special person to work with disabled people. Do you think this is the case? Was Shelley special all along and just didn't realise it, or is there more to it than that?
 - What sort of relationship did Shelley have with Ben?
 - What has this experience done for Shelley? Will it affect her life, and how?

- Do you think her mother knew of Shelley's efforts all along, or do you think it might come as a surprise to her to know what Shelley had been doing with her time in the pool room?
- What do you think Anne's response would have been at the end of the story?
- At each group conference, invite students to predict what will happen next in the story.
- Monitor students' reading behaviour as they progress through the novel. This can be done by noting individual students' progress on a regular basis, and by discussions with students about their progress.

STAGE 4 – AFTER READING

Students should be given freedom to design their own activity as a follow-up to the story they have been reading, or to select an activity in consultation with the teacher. Some suggestions are outlined below:

1. *Debate.* Pose the question, 'If you had a child who was disabled, would you institutionalise them?' Students should then be assigned to teams for the debate and told which side of the argument they are on. Teams prepare their cases and the teacher chairs the debate and adjudicates the outcome.
2. *Biography.* After discussion or research about what a biography entails, students are asked to write a biography about the person who resides in room 24 down the corridor, on the left, at the nursing hostel.
3. *Written conversation.* With a friend, decide to take on the role of Shelley or Anne, Shelley's mother. Read the last chapter of the novel and imagine that the final sentence reads, 'Just then Anne walked into the pool room.' What would the conversation be? Each taking a turn with the pen, write a response to each other as though you were the characters.
4. *Persuasive arguments.* At each stage of Ben's development of skill in the water, Shelley used persuasive arguments. Find them and comment on the strategies she used and their effectiveness.
5. *Editorial.* During the course of the reading conferences, many questions were posed for you to think about. Pick one that you had strong views about and write an 'editorial' for a newspaper regarding that issue. You may find it helpful to read some editorials in various leading newspapers, to gain a sense of the writing style.

FURTHER READING

The October Child by Eleanor Spence, Oxford University Press

My Simple Little Brother by Lilith Norman, Collins

I Own the Racecourse! by Patricia Wrightson, Puffin