

HENRY HOEY HOBSON

CHRISTINE BONGERS



TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

by
Jean Yates

Jean Yates is a Secondary School English teacher and has taught at a number of schools in Queensland and the United Kingdom. She has a keen interest in children's literature and was formerly the Director of the Somerset Celebration of Literature Writers Festival. Jean has worked in a freelance capacity with a number of publishing companies doing manuscript appraisals and teachers' notes. She was a judge in the YA section of the 2010 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards.



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1. INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

When Henry Hoey Hobson and his mother move into their new Brisbane house, Henry is faced with the daunting prospect of starting at his sixth new school in seven years, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. To make matters worse, when he arrives at the school Henry discovers that he is in fact the only boy in Year Seven.

Determined to make the most of a bad situation, he refuses to be intimidated by Angelica and her cohort of Year Seven girls. But his nerves make his mouth dry, so that when he smiles, his new and ill-fitting braces cut his mouth. Sensing a new victim, Angelica, the 'lion queen of the jungle', labels him a vampire and he is immediately ostracised and humiliated. Hiding out in the toilets, he befriends Sebastian, a little prep boy who has braved rumours of the vampire lurking in there.

The surprisingly sympathetic and understanding principal, Mr Paulson, takes Henry under his wing. Perhaps being a 'ranga' (redhead) he has a greater understanding of what it is like to be different and the victim of constant teasing.

Henry's mother is a single parent who faces a constant struggle to provide for her son in either time or money. Lydia Hoey Hobson is a petite, bird-like blond who wears short skirts and killer heels and is not like any other mother Henry knows. She is currently working as a real estate agent, but has obviously tried a lot of different jobs since becoming a mother at seventeen and is constantly uprooting Henry and trying for a new start. She clearly loves her son, 'Triple H', and tries to do her best for him, but they are constantly short of money and spend little quality time together.

At school Henry is lonely and spends his lunch hours doing library duty in an effort to avoid the other students, his chances of joining the Year Six boys having been dashed by their leader, Joey, who clearly resents the arrival of the newcomer.

Late one night, Henry overhears voices next door and, looking out his window and listening in on their conversation, he convinces himself that a coven of vampires is moving in next door. Fearing for their safety, he tries desperately to warn his mother, but, as always she has to rush off to work and doesn't have time to talk to him. While trying to find out more about his neighbours, Henry is roped into helping them unload the truck. His discovery of a coffin does nothing to alleviate his fears, nor does the aloof manner of Anders, his new neighbours' friend.

That night, Henry is horrified to discover that his mother has agreed to join the neighbours for dinner. Certain that they are heading for their doom, Henry is surprised to discover that his neighbours, Caleb, Vee and Manny are personable and highly entertaining. His misunderstanding is made apparent when he discovers that they are all writers who prefer to work late at night and keep to themselves. Henry is delighted to see his mother enjoying herself for a change.

But his happiness is short lived when he realises that Angelica has been following him and has photographic evidence of him consorting with vampires. She even spreads the rumour that they sacrificed a blond child. Before long, Henry's already bad reputation is shattered.

In his sorrow and loneliness, Henry turns to the one thing that makes him happy: swimming.

Once in the pool he is able to drown out all external noise, and his sadness with it. He hopes to record his times to gain a place in the district swimming competition, but his mother has to sign the form, and Henry is certain that, as always, she will not get to the pool in time. Henry is surprised when he is approached by Jironomo Marquez (Hero), one of the Year Six boys. He admires Henry's swimming ability and expresses delight that for once, Joey may have met his match. As a poor swimmer himself, he also willingly accepts Henry's offer to train him, hopeful that their school team might be successful at the carnival for a change.

As predicted, Henry's mother lets him down, but, as always, her ability to make friends and find substitute family members wherever they live comes to the fore and she arranges for Caleb to record Henry's times. In his mother's absence, Henry's neighbours take on an increasingly important role in his life, often looking out for him and providing him with company and food when his mother is late home from work. He forms a particular bond with the broken and scarred Manny whose gentle nature belies his outward appearance. For all that Henry enjoys their company, he is angry that his mother never seems to be there for him.

When Henry's mum is badly injured in a car accident he is immediately taken in by his neighbours. He is surprised to see a softer side to Anders and by how well he knows his way around the local hospital. He soon discovers that the reason for this is that he became devoted to Manny while he was recovering from his own horrific accident. With his mother out of action, Henry takes the time to get to know all of his neighbours better, and is surprised to find that none of them is just as he expected.

In spite of their kindness, Henry still bemoans the fact that he has no family and no real friends. Unable to cope with the constant humiliation and bullying, he is determined not to return to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour.

But it is when Anders takes Henry to the hospital to visit his mother that he gets his ultimate shock. Anders is none other than 'Andy', his absent and supposedly hopeless father. He learns that Anders has spent the last twelve years desperately searching for Lydia and their son, but that she, terrified of losing Henry to his father, constantly moved to avoid him. Before long, Henry is forced to confront both of his parents and is torn between his loyalty to his mother, and his anger at her for having shut his father out for so long.

Finally, at the insistence of Caleb and Manny, Henry goes to the school, determined to tell the principal that he is leaving. He meets Sebastian and Hero, both of whom are excited at the prospect of Henry helping their house win. When he sees the tribute to his mother on the school sign, Henry realises that he has many friends. With Manny, Caleb, Anders and his mother all there watching him, and Vee there in spirit, he realises he has his own personal cheer squad.

Back at Manny's house, Henry is delighted to be surrounded by all his friends and family. He is particularly pleased to learn that Anders and Manny will be joining him as his significant males on the school trip to Stradbroke Island, along with Hero and his grandfather.

USE OF HUMOUR

Humour is a vital part of *Henry Hoey Hobson*. Not only does it help establish Henry's voice and make the story entertaining for the reader, it allows the author to explore serious themes without alienating young readers.

2. GENRE, STRUCTURE AND STYLE

The story is told in the first person through the eyes of Henry Hoey Hobson, a twelve-year-old boy. As a result we see things the way he does. The language is simple yet effective, drawing the reader into his way of thinking. It also allows for a lovely contrast between the simple vernacular of the pre-teen and the more flowery, embellished language of the authors who live next door, hence adding to their characterisation.

Within the school setting, there are a number of characters students will easily recognise. Angelica, the leader of the girls, is a stereotypical 'it' girl. She commands and gains respect from the other girls in spite of her nastiness. Clearly her opinion is the one that counts and she carries a lot of power within the school. Similarly Joey Castellaro is the alpha male, the leader of the boys, and very unwilling to surrender this position of power. Between them they have the ability to make the new kid's life very difficult.

The little prep student, Sebastian, adds an element of humour to the story, but again is a readily identifiable character. His hero-worshipping of Henry is very typical of younger students.

Mr Paulson, the principal, may come as something of a surprise to students, as he is a gentle, approachable and empathetic character. Through him, many students may learn that responsible adults have their best interests at heart and should not be feared.

Lydia, the mother who works tirelessly to provide for her son, but consequently is often not there for him, and Andy/Anders, the devoted yet absent father, are also characters to whom students can easily relate.

While Manny, Vee and Caleb are somewhat stylised as characters, they clearly represent those in society who are readily identifiable as being different and are therefore judged and ostracised.

Henry Hoey Hobson is set in Brisbane, yet the situation can readily be applied to any city, either in Australia or overseas. Many of the themes in the novel – loneliness, family, working parents, schoolyard victimisation, poverty and acceptance – are applicable to students everywhere and, as such, make this novel easily accessible to all readers.

3. PRE-READING: BACKGROUND NOTES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Bongers has worked as a television journalist, documentary writer and media consultant, but is happier writing fiction. Her work was short-listed for the 2006 Varuna Manuscript Awards. She has a Master of Arts in youth writing. Her first novel, *Dust*, was published by Woolshed Press to critical acclaim and is a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book for Older Readers.

Christine enjoys life in Brisbane with her husband and kids, their ageing cat Al, and a very bad beaglier called Huggy. No-one listens to her at home. At Saturday swim club, she wields a megaphone and no-one listens to her there either. Find out more at www.christinebongers.com.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Reflection

- Think of a time when you were new to a group. What were your biggest fears? How well or badly did you manage to fit in?
- What is a family? These days we all live in different types of families – nuclear, extended, split, blended etc. What do we gain as a result of or membership of a family unit?
- Many people find that they are closer to their friends than their family. Is it possible to gain the same benefits from close friends as from those to whom we are actually related?
- Examine the cover of the novel. How would you describe the images, font and design? What predictions can you make about the novel based upon these features? Are there any expectations you may have for this novel, based upon your knowledge of this genre?

Read the first page of the novel

She was waiting with gaggle of mates, blocking the stairs leading down from our classroom. Golden in the sunlight, with that curious blend of stealth and grace that marked the lion queens of the jungle. I lumbered towards the all-female pride, a wildebeest, hell-bent on his own destruction. (p1)

What does this passage reveal about:

- Angelica, the 'lion queen'?
- Henry Hoey Hobson?
- the writing style?
- the setting?

Henry's school is Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. He calls it Perpetual Suckers.

- What does the term 'succour' mean?
- Henry's version is a pun, a play on words. What does he mean by this?
- What predictions can you make about the story?

4. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

CHAPTER	SUMMARY OF EVENTS
1.	Henry Hoey Hobson starts at his new school, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, his sixth primary school in seven years. As the only boy in Year Seven, he soon finds himself at the mercy of the girls, and in particular their leader, Angelica. When he goes to speak to the girls, his nerves cause his mouth to dry out, making his lips catch on his braces and bleed. Immediately he is labelled a vampire and exposed to further ridicule and humiliation.
2.	Henry seeks refuge in the boys' toilets, hoping to avoid the other students for as long as possible. He feels as miserable as he used to when the kids at his previous school called him Blowy Blobson. Clearly, in spite of his weight loss and his changed physique, Henry is not going to have an easy time at his new school either. He is surprised to meet a tiny prep student, Sebastian, who has braved the toilets in spite of having been warned about the resident vampire. In spite of his own fears, Henry decides that if Sebastian can be brave, so can he.
3.	Henry returns to class, miserable. He wishes Angelica would physically hurt him so that he could go home and show his mum the wounds and make her feel guilty for the pain she is inflicting upon him. The principal, Mr Paulson comes to meet Henry. He is an impressive man who knows every student personally. As a redhead, he seems to understand what Henry is feeling and offers to help him in any way he can. Henry is surprised by his kindness.
4.	Henry carries out a SWOT analysis on his current situation, as taught to him by one of his mother's previous boyfriends. Strengths: as the only Year Seven boy, he is the top dog in the school. Weaknesses: as the only Year Seven boy he will have to run his own race; he is <i>an abandoned son of a deadbeat dad, and the only offspring of a mum who was too in touch with her inner flibbertigibbet.</i> (p24) Opportunities: there is no competition. Threats: Angelica. He is horrified when Mr Paulson introduces him on assembly as a loner, convinced this will make the students stay away from him. <i>Being a Nigel-No-Friends stinks. Hanging around a Nigel-No-Friends makes everyone think you stink too. Stink by association. Stink squared. Basic maths.</i> (p26)
5.	At lunch, Henry is surprised to be invited to join the three Year Six boys' game of handball. But his happiness is short lived when it becomes clear that Joey Castellaro is determined to show Henry that in spite of being younger, HE is the top dog in the school. Again, Henry's braces are his undoing as a ball in the mouth causes further bleeding. He heads to the peace and isolation of the library.
6.	Henry's mother, Lydia arrives home from work, exhausted. As usual, Henry has prepared dinner, but Lydia pretends not to need any, in order to ensure that her son has lunch the next day. She is hopeful that the imminent sale of a house by the river will bring her a large commission and turn their fortunes around. Henry remains unconvinced, as all his life his mother has been chasing a better life for them both. In many ways, Henry is the adult in this relationship while his diminutive mother is <i>like a toy lady doll. More like little Kelly than big sister Barbie. Nothing like a mum, at all.</i> (p43)
7.	After his mum falls asleep on the couch, Henry takes himself off to bed. Before he falls asleep, he hears voices outside his window and looks out to see two men and a woman, an odd-looking trio at the empty house next door. He soon realises that these are to be the new tenants, but he is disconcerted by their appearance, by the woman's comment that she can't venture out during the day, and her promise to the two men, <i>Your reward for toiling while I sleep will be a full coffin, I think.</i> (p49)
8.	The next morning, Henry is determined to speak to his mother and warn her about their new neighbours, but as usual she leaves for work before he has a chance. Alone on the footpath, Henry bemoans the fact that his mother is never there when he needs her. He is approached by a man asking if he needs help. Henry is disconcerted to see that it the larger of the two men from the previous night and that <i>daylight hadn't done him any favours; he looked every bit as creepy by day as he had by night.</i> (p56)

9.	In spite of himself, Henry offers to help his neighbours unpack their truck and is unwittingly lifted into the back of the truck along with the creepy driver, Anders.
10.	With warnings of stranger danger in his mind, Henry is horrified to discover a coffin amongst his neighbours' possessions. Conscious that they don't seem to find this at all unusual, Henry decides to take a photograph to prove his suspicions to his mother. But to his absolute horror, before he can extricate himself from the situation, Angelica takes her own photograph, suggesting that Henry belongs with these odd people.
11.	Forced to choose between truancy and public ridicule, Henry fronts up at school determined to concentrate on his work. But, far from keeping a low profile, he finds himself paired with the teacher and then summonsed by the principal.
12.	Henry is excited when Mr Paulson tells him about the upcoming swimming competition. Always a keen swimmer, he has never been able to join a club due to constant lack of money. Mr Paulson also tells him about an upcoming trip for the boys to Stradbroke Island. Henry doubts whether he will be able to attend as it will depend upon the cost and upon the doubtful availability of his mother. He is particularly disheartened to discover that the boys are expected to invite a significant male figure in their lives. Knowing that their family consists solely of himself and his mother, Henry knows that this will not be possible for him.
13.	Henry is assigned to library duty by Mr Paulson, which allows him to avoid the other students (a situation he believes to be coincidental). Here he is a big hit reading to the prep children. At the pool that afternoon, Henry feels relaxed for the first time since starting at his new school, until Ma Mallory tells him his mother has to sign off on his time trials. Henry has an obvious affinity with the water and is clearly a skilled swimmer, unlike the boy in the lane next to him who splutters and splashes. Henry is disconcerted to discover the kid is Hero, one of the Year Six boys.
14.	When Hero is surprised that Henry (who he thinks is a vampire) can swim, Henry realises how bad the rumours at school actually are. Nevertheless, he offers to take Hero under his wing and teach him to swim before the upcoming school carnival. The boys spend two hours together, improving Hero's stroke and forging a friendship. Henry learns that Hero lives with his grandfather, who moved in when Hero's father died.
15.	Henry arrives home to a text from his mother telling him not to cook as they are eating out. Excited at the prospect, Henry dresses for the occasion only to discover that his clothes are old and ill fitting thanks to his recent weight loss. But the family finances mean he won't be getting any new ones. Henry is surprised to discover that they are eating at the neighbours' house – and even more so when Caleb greets them wearing a blood-red lined cape.
16.	When Manny appears wearing a t-shirt with a skeleton on it, Henry fears for their lives. The neighbours have completely transformed the house, with dozens of lit candles. A woman is playing the piano, but to Henry's horror, she is doing so without touching the keyboard. Lydia is enthralled by the house and its occupants, but Henry remains wary, much to his mother's embarrassment.
17.	Before long, Henry realises that the rumours and his fears are unfounded as the house and its companions prove to be fantastically entertaining. Lydia and Henry discover that their neighbours are Caleb Moore, a writer of dark, speculative fiction, the reclusive Violet Winter, a gothic romance writer and Manfred, who is working on his novel and is also a superb cook. They also talk about their absent friend Anders, an artist who had been going to join them for dinner, but had surprisingly failed to show. Henry is surprised to discover that the coffin he had unloaded earlier in the day is nothing more than an esky! Happy to see his mother enjoying herself for a change, Henry eventually leaves her to her new friends and goes home to bed.

18.	The next morning Henry realises he needs to line his mum up to sign his swimming trials, but she has already left for work. Henry calls Lydia on her mobile and she tells him that she has a house inspection that afternoon, but will sort something out. Knowing his mother's ability to conjure up a range of helpers wherever they live, Henry worries about what this might mean. But, determined not to rat on his mother, he decides to enlist Mr Paulson's help. At school he is horrified to discover that Angelica has photographs of him from the night before. Remembering his mother's words, <i>Never back down, never give in and remember: the best defence is always a good offence</i> (p144), Henry accuses Angelica of breaking the school's anti-bullying policy by stalking him. While Hero still won't talk to him at school, he almost smiles at Henry, but in doing so, incurs the wrath of Joey Castellaro. That afternoon, Henry is surprised to see that his mother has enlisted the help of Caleb Moore to be his adult guardian at the swimming pool.
19.	While Caleb seems happy to assist Henry, he refuses to swim himself, describing himself as <i>the antithesis of athleticism</i> . (p152) At the pool, Henry manages to complete time trials for both the school and the upcoming District trials, proving himself to be a formidable talent. For his part, Caleb finds inspiration at the pool that frees him from his writers block. Henry is surprised to discover that in many ways he and Caleb are similar. Caleb uses his writing as a means of blocking out the less favourable parts of his life, just as Henry resorts to his swimming. Things seem to be looking up for Henry, until he discovers that Angelica is at the pool.
20.	Hero tells Henry that Angelica is telling everyone that he consorts with vampires and between them they sacrificed a blonde child. He is clearly immune to Angelica's power, telling him that <i>she thinks that she and her friends are all on the A-team and that everyone else at school sucks</i> . (p162) But when Hero describes Caleb as a weirdo, Henry leaps to the writer's defence, telling Hero that Caleb is his friend. Henry is convinced that Hero is only using him to improve his own swimming, but Hero proves him wrong, telling him that he is happy to be on Henry's team. Henry is surprised to discover that he now has two friends at school – Hero and Sebastian. He is also surprised when Hero calls him Triple-H, the nickname his mother has always given him.
21.	Once again caught late at work, Lydia texts Henry, telling him to go next door where Manny will feed him. Anders, their artist friend, is at the house and while Henry still finds him aloof and intimidating, he is drawn to Anders' artwork and intrigued by the sadness in the images he creates.
22.	Manny tells Henry that Anders uses his art as therapy, but gives no more specific details. While Manny takes a phone call, Henry plucks up the courage to talk to Anders. Anders reveals little about himself, but tells Henry that life can be sad. Henry tells him that <i>it can be good too, if you let it</i> . (p186) Just then, Manny comes in to tell Henry that something has happened to his mum.
23.	Racing to an appointment, Lydia was involved in a car accident and is in hospital requiring surgery. Henry beats himself up for being angry with her and not having sent any kisses in his last text message. Anders takes him to see Lydia in the hospital and Henry is surprised by how well he knows his way around. He seems to understand how much Henry needs to be with Lydia.
24.	At the hospital, Lydia is anxious to find an envelope containing the signed documents for the house sale that would bring her a \$50,000 commission. Anders agrees to collect the contract from the car, but won't allow Henry to go with him. In his frustration and confusion, Henry tells Anders that nobody cares about him.
25.	With his mother in hospital, Henry moves in next door. While they make him feel welcome and comfortable, he still feels alone and determined not to return to school. He overhears a conversation between Anders and Caleb in which Caleb mysteriously tells Anders he needs to act and that staying away is no longer an option. Vee talks with Henry, revealing that she is not daunted by the fact that Angelica thinks she is a vampire. As she says, <i>illusions are more entertaining than the truth</i> . (p213) She tells Henry that she is unable to be in the sunlight as she has a rare skin condition. Refusing to give in to it, she became a writer, allowing her <i>to curl up with her characters and make more terrible things happen in their lives than ever happened in mine</i> . (p215) Forced to live her life at night, Vee tells Henry that she can <i>be there for you while the rest of the world sleeps</i> . (p216)

26.	That night, Henry looks through Anders' sketchbook and is surprised to see it full of images of a child, <i>all different, yet oddly similar</i> . Manny tells Henry that if he wants to know Anders' story he needs to ask him. Manny tells Henry his own story, that he was hit by a car and thrown into a shop window, breaking almost every bone in his body and spending six months in hospital. In all that time, Anders was constantly by his side and supported him in his recovery.
27.	The next morning Anders produces Henry's mother's contract – he was out all night looking for it. Henry still refuses to go to school, but decides to go swimming. Anders surprises him by not only driving him to the pool, but by paying for both of them to join the squad training. Anders warns Henry that it is not good to shut people out because of the risk of ending up lonely, like him.
28.	Anders drives Henry to the hospital to visit his mum. He tells Henry that he is not to worry about things. He has taken the contract to the real estate agent and the commission will be paid in thirty days' time. In the meantime, the rent has been paid for a month, Manny will feed Henry and he is to give Anders any bills. Henry is grateful, but tells Anders that his mum won't like it.
29.	At the hospital, Henry is surprised by his mother's reaction to Anders, whom she clearly dislikes. When Anders tells Lydia that she had <i>no right to keep uprooting this boy and running away every time I try to get in touch</i> (p245), Henry realises that Anders is his father!
30.	Unable to cope with this revelation, to face his neighbours or to return to an empty house, Henry runs away. He hangs out at a shopping centre, trying unsuccessfully to drown out his thoughts, before heading to the public swimming pool. Here Anders finds him and forces him to contact his mother, telling Henry that she has always been there for him.
31.	Lydia explains to Henry that he was all she ever had and she could never bear to let anyone take him away from her. Unable to face her, Henry returns home with Anders. He tells Henry that he let Lydia down. Convinced that Anders never wanted him, Henry is hurt and upset. Anders tells him that he was only seventeen and his own father was pressuring to go study medicine. With an unsupportive family of her own, Lydia ran away, taking Henry with her. Andy went on to study medicine, but found it impossible to be in a profession that required him to talk to people. But by then, Lydia refused to have any contact with him and his biggest regret is not having stuck around to get to know his son. When an exhausted Henry and Anders arrive home, they are met by Hero and his family who have brought them food and comfort. Still unable to face school, Henry tells Hero that he is not sure he will be able to make the carnival, as he will need to support his family. Hero agrees telling him family always comes first. Feeling guilty at letting down his friend, Henry takes Hero to the pool for training.
32.	At the pool, Henry sees Angelica and her father, a demanding, overly abrupt man who is very hard on his daughter. Henry develops a new understanding of Angelica and why she treats others the way she does. When Angelica approaches him, he is surprised that she is nice to him, even telling him that his Dad and vampire writer friend are really nice. Henry is surprised that Caleb has gone to his parents' house, as he always thought Caleb didn't get on with his family. Manny tells Henry that he loves them dearly, but is completely different from them. He fits in with Vee and Manny as <i>we are all the odd pieces of a jigsaw that somehow match up. Join us together and we look just like a happy family</i> (p269).
33.	At the hospital, Lydia continues to tell Henry that Andy never wanted them. When Henry points out that if that were the case, he wouldn't have kept trying to track them down, Lydia admits that she was terrified that if Andy ever found them he would want to take Henry away from her, even for some of the time, so she has stayed on the run, moving every time she senses he has discovered where they are. When Lydia and Anders finally speak, she realise she has been wrong about him all this time. He leaves Henry a sketch of him swimming butterfly, and a bank account into which he has been depositing money since Henry was born.

34.	On the day of the swimming carnival, Henry is torn. Manny has packed him a special lunch, while Vee has been out and bought him swimmers in the latest fashion, all in blue, his house colour. He doesn't want to let anyone down, but still doesn't want to return to school. When Henry goes up to the school to tell Mr Paulson he is withdrawing, he runs into Sebastian and Hero. He is also surprised to see the message on the school noticeboard sending best wishes to his mother. Realising that he has a whole team behind him, Henry agrees to compete.
35.	Back at Manny's house, Hero happily tells everyone how he won the all-age relay for their House, while Manny is clearly besotted with Hero's El Salvadorian mother. Henry realises that he is no longer alone, with both Anders and Manny signing up for the Stradbroke Island camping adventure, along with Hero and his grandfather.

5. THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

The pool

For Henry Hoey Hobson, the pool provides a form of escapism. Here he is able to remove himself from his unhappiness and fears and lose himself in the moment. Caleb and Violet find the same escape in their writing, while Anders uses his drawing as a form of therapy.

- Students could consider what forms of escapism they use. How do these activities help them to de-stress?

Activity

Design an advertising campaign explaining the benefits of your chosen form of relaxation (e.g. music, meditation, yoga, running, etc.)

The spoon

Henry looks into a spoon he is taken by the fact that when he looks into it from the other side, the image he sees is quite different.

- In what ways are people in this story different depending on which angle you view them from?

Masks

Vee says *People see the black clothing and make-up and say Goth. Witch. Emo. They are masks that I am happy to wear; tribes I am happy to belong to . . .* (p216)

- Why do we have a tendency to pigeonhole or stereotype people in this way?
- What groups can you identify within your school?
- What 'masks' or images do each of these groups wear? How are they clearly distinguishable?
- Why might some people be happy to be labeled by a mask or a group?
- Vee would suggest that it can be beneficial to be seen as belonging to a group. Can you understand her argument? What 'protection' might these groups provide for their members?

Witches

'In the olden days, they'd throw anyone suspected of being a witch in a lake. If she floated, it proved she had evil powers, so they'd fish her out and burn her at the stake. If she drowned, bad luck. She probably wasn't a witch, after all.'

Hero's frown unstuck his wet eyelashes. 'That's not very fair.'

'Witch-hunts aren't usually about being fair,' I pointed out. 'They're about people who think they're right, victimising someone they think is different.'

- What is a witch-hunt?
- Can you think of any that have occurred in modern society?
- Why do people start witch-hunts?
- Why do they often get out of control very quickly, with many people readily branding others as witches?

The lion's den

The image of the lion's den is reminiscent of the Bible story, Daniel in the Lion's Den, in which the underdog, the small, vulnerable Daniel achieved the impossible and emerged victorious and unscathed, just as Henry Hoey Hobson does in this story.

THEMES

Family

- What is a family? What are the benefits of belonging to a family?
- What might be the disadvantages?
- Does a 'family' have to be made up of people who are related to each other?
- What might this novel tell us about the notion of family?

Parents

In the story there are a number of different examples of parents. Henry Hoey Hobson feels that his mother is not like 'real' mothers.

- What does he think a 'real' mother is like?
 - In what ways is Lydia different?
 - Is she a good mother?
- Why would Andy have shied away from becoming a father? Did he do the right thing by staying away from Henry?
 - What evidence is there that he loved his son?
 - In spite of the fact that they have never lived together, Henry is in many ways very like his father. In what ways are they similar?
- For all that her father is definitely around, Angelica's father does not appear to be a great role model. In what ways is he a bad example of parenting?
- Why does Caleb avoid his family, even though he is clearly fond of them?
- In what ways can these characters all be seen to be the product of their parents?
- Is there a 'correct' way to be a parent?
- What would be the hardest parts of being a parent?

Bullying

Angelica, the 'angel child', seems to have everything going for her. She is clearly a leader and as such, has the power to make other people's lives a misery.

- What do Angelica and Joey do that could be regarded as classic bullying behaviour?
- As a teacher or a friend, what advice would you give Henry Hoey Hobson to deal with the bullying he experiences?
- His mother's advice is *Never back down, never give in and remember: the best defence is always a good offence.* (p 144)
 - Do you agree with this piece of advice? How did it help Henry?
- Like most bullies, it appears that Angelica is actually a victim as well and that is why she treats others so badly.
 - Consider the way her father treats her at swimming training. What behaviours has she learnt from him? Why do you think she likes to be the leader at school?

Activity

Design an anti-bullying campaign for your class or school. Make posters explaining the dangers and consequences associated with bullying.

Financial hardship

Henry Hoey Hobson and his mother manage to come up with a number of techniques for dealing with his mother's lack of money and their constant struggle to survive. For example:

- getting a paper round to earn pocket money
- using as much natural light as possible to avoid wasting electricity
- swimming beside the training squad and picking up tips from their trainer, rather than having to pay to join
- not eating to ensure that Henry has lunch the next day
- working long hours at a number of different jobs

Henry has clearly suffered as a result of their financial hardship.

- In what ways would this have had an impact on his childhood and his self esteem?
- How would Henry's lack of money have impacted upon his ability to fit in?

Being different

Many of the characters in this story are seen, or see themselves as being 'different' for one reason or another.

- For each character, explain how he or she may be regarded as being different. (If something is 'different' it is not as we would expect it to be.)
- If so many characters in this novel are 'different', what is the norm to which they are being compared?
- What might this novel suggest about the notion of difference?

Judging others

Within this story, many of the characters are quick to judge other people, making decisions about them based on very little real information and drawn largely from inferences, gossip and fear.

- In what ways is this typical of our wider society?
- Why do we tend to judge others so readily?
- What might be the negative impact of this behaviour in society?

Making the most of a situation

All of the characters in this story have crosses to bear – things in their lives that are not how they would wish them to be. But as Vee says, *We all must play the hand we are dealt in this life, Henry.* (p216)

- Make a list of all the problems faced by the different characters. How does each character manage to deal with his or her problems?
- What message might this book be giving about life in general?

6. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Henry Hoey Hobson

Henry is a likeable twelve-year-old boy who struggles to fit in with his peers, mainly because his mum is constantly uprooting him and moving him to a new neighbourhood and a new school. He has low self-esteem that is not helped by his body shape or image, having gone from being a chubby youngster to a gangly pre-teen seemingly overnight. His new, ill-fitting braces certainly don't help matters either. In spite of Henry's best attempts to be friendly, he is automatically ostracised by the students at his newest school, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, which he readily dubs 'Perpetual Suckers'.

In many ways, Henry is the adult in his family. With his mother constantly working, it is Henry who cooks many of the meals and looks after himself in the afternoons. He clearly takes on added responsibilities and believes himself responsible for his mother's constant struggle to stay afloat.

Henry is initially suspicious of his new neighbours, but soon takes them on board and becomes quite close to them all. For all that he tries to get to know them all better, it is clearly out of genuine affection rather than as a source of gossip and ridicule. While Henry is clearly likeable, his low self-esteem prevents him from accepting his new acquaintances as true friends, finding it hard to believe that people want to be there for him. His reaction to the discovery of his father shows his compassionate nature as, in spite of his own confusion and anger, he feels sympathy for both of his parents.

Lydia

Henry's mother is a tiny, delicate woman who does everything she can to try to create the best life for her son. While her actions may be seen to be wrong, it is clear that she did what she did out of pure love for her son. She may not have been the mother Henry felt he wanted, but there is no doubt that she devoted her life to him.

Angelica

Angelica is the stereotypical 'it' girl, physically attractive, outgoing and a definite leader. Her opinion is the only one that counts. Yet, like many bullies, she clearly has her own demons and her harsh treatment of others can be directly attributed to the way her own father treats her.

Joey Castellaro

Like Angelica, Joey likes to be the leader and resents Henry's arrival at school. While we don't know his story, we can guess that there are reasons behind his behaviour as well.

Jironomo Marquez (Hero)

Hero shows a lot of courage in befriending Henry, knowing how Joey is likely to react. He appreciates Henry's patience and the fact that he is prepared to help rather than mock Hero. Like Henry, Hero lacks a father, a fact that may help the boys to bond. He understands the power of family and the importance of having people to support you. In his own quiet way, he proves himself to be a true friend to Henry.

Mr Paulson

Mr Paulson is the principal every child needs to have. He is caring and considerate, yet manages to be so in a low-key way, such that the students are never really aware of his input. He has an innate understanding of Henry and subtly manages to help him navigate his way within the new school community. His empathy for Henry gives the reader the feeling that he may have experienced his fair share of bullying in his life and has a keen understanding of the situation. His mature and measured approach to all situations helps to bring out the best in all his students, while helping them reach their own conclusions.

Caleb Moore

Caleb is a highly regarded writer of dark speculative fiction. Yet his true persona is much gentler than his writing might suggest. He is a recluse, shying away from all physical activity and preferring the solitude of writing. As such, he is in direct contrast to the rest of his energetic family. Despite having no children of his own, he is caring towards Henry and immediately offers him support and hospitality when his mother is injured.

Manfred

With his physical impairment and obvious scarring, Manny has a disconcerting appearance. yet underneath it lies a heart of gold. He develops an instant bond with Henry, providing him with companionship and meals while his mother is at work. In the same way, he is the caring and nurturing 'mother-figure' in his unusual household. In many ways, he is the glue that binds them all together.

Violet Winter (Vee)

Vee has minimal physical presence in the novel because of her need to stay out of the light. Like her housemates, she carries her own burden, unable to be in the light because of a rare skin disorder. Yet she refuses to succumb to her condition and simply finds ways to adapt her life to ensure that it is fulfilling and enjoyable. She has pursued an occupation that not only allows but benefits from her working at night, she enjoys evening dinner parties with friends, and she is even able to take advantage of night-time shopping. Her kind, calm and understanding manner helps Henry to grapple with some of his own demons.

Anders/Andy

Anders is an imposing, dark and reclusive figure of whom Henry is somewhat uncertain. His sketches, while revealing definite talent, are all sad, depicting a forlorn figure of a boy. Clearly Anders has been scarred by the events of his past and he carries his sorrows heavily. Yet he is never a scary character and indeed when Henry's mother is injured it is Anders who goes to great lengths to help Henry and Lydia, searching for the missing real estate contract and providing financial support. The revelation that he is Henry's father immediately makes him an even more sympathetic character, as it is clear that his absence from his son's life has not been of his design.

INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGES

On Henry's first day at school, Mr Paulson gets him to help him change the Thought for the Day on the sign at the front of the school. It now reads:

TODAY'S A GIFT
THAT'S WHY
WE CALL IT
THE PRESENT (p21)

- Do you have any favourite inspirational sayings?
- What is the benefit of such sayings?
- Many athletes surround themselves with these types of sayings in the lead-up to a big race. Why might they do this?
- Create your own inspirational Thoughts for the Day. (They might be ones you have seen on other signs around you, or ones you make up.) Write them in the squares below.

CREATING A SAVINGS PLAN

In the novel, Henry Hoey Hobson proves to be very resourceful when it comes to saving money.

- What evidence is there that Henry and his mother have very little money?

How much do you think you could save? As a small group, set a challenge to save a specified amount of money. You need not actually collect the money, but keep track of how much you have saved. How much would you need to save per week to make your target?

Think of as many ways as possible in which you could save money, e.g.

- Bring lunch instead of buying from the canteen = \$3
- No takeaway this week = \$20
- Put on another blanket instead of the heater = \$1
- Cycle to school instead of driving = \$1
- No magazine purchase this week = \$5.95

Group name

Amount of money to save

\$

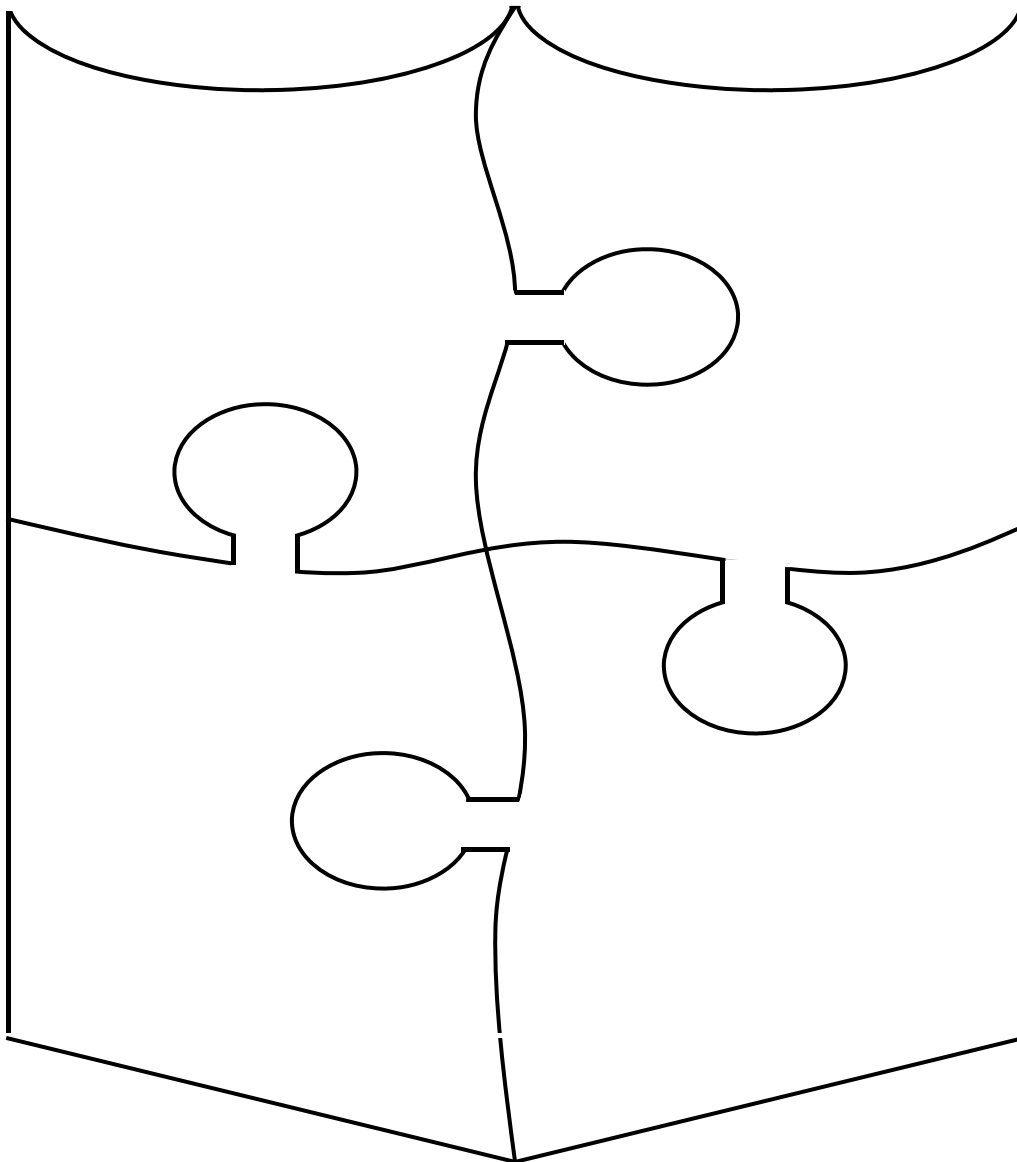
How are we going to do it?

How long will it take?

JIGSAW PUZZLE

Manny tells Henry Hoey Hobson, *we are all the odd pieces of a jigsaw that somehow match up. Join us together and we look just like a happy family.* (p269)

What do the pieces of your own personal jigsaw look like? In each piece of the jigsaw below, draw something that represents a significant part of your life, that helps to make you the person you are.



MISUNDERSTANDINGS

There are numerous instances of misunderstanding in this story, all of which have a marked effect on people's lives. Henry says, *sometimes it helped to look at a problem from a different angle*. (p61)

For each example below, consider how the situation is interpreted. Then, by looking at it from another angle, consider what the real meaning was.

EVIDENCE	ASSUMED MEANING	INTENDED/REAL MEANING
Henry's mother keeps moving him		
Anders unloads a coffin from the truck		
The blonde-haired girl who goes into the 'haunted house' does not leave		
Caleb has little to do with his family		
Anders is a recluse who refuses to talk about his past		
Angelica is clearly the leader of the pack.	She has everything going for her.	
Lydia spends all of her time at work	She has no time for her son and finds him a burden.	
Violet does not go out in the sun	She is a vampire	She has a skin condition that must not be exposed to sunlight
Caleb is unnaturally pale		
Hero befriends Henry at the pool	He wants Henry to teach him to swim	
Caleb is cranky when he takes Henry to the pool		
Andy never found his son		
Henry has blood dripping from his mouth		

THE POWER OF WORDS

Vee, Manny and Caleb speak differently from those around them, which is one of the reasons they are branded as being different. We soon discover that this is because they are writers and hence use words in unusual ways.

For example, Caleb refers to taking Henry swimming as: *A surprisingly edifying experience. Not my milieu, obviously, but oddly stimulating nevertheless. I was able to jot down a couple of ideas, betwixt and between your natatorial exploits. I do believe those plot snarls are beginning to unfurl.* (p157)

What does he mean by this? Rewrite this statement in your own words. Consider the differences in meaning and nuance between your version and Caleb's.

Creating characters

Devise three different characters and have each one say the same thing. (For example, you may choose to make one an educated, upper class, professional; one a moderately educated student and the third a homeless person with no education.) Through each person's words, clearly show their characterisation by your language choices.

Situations

Thank your hostess for a delicious meal

CHARACTER ONE	CHARACTER TWO	CHARACTER THREE

Invite someone on an outing

CHARACTER ONE	CHARACTER TWO	CHARACTER THREE

Describe your new house

CHARACTER ONE	CHARACTER TWO	CHARACTER THREE

CREATING A STORYBOARD

The writing in Henry Hoey Hobson is very descriptive, creating strong images or word pictures. It is also written in such a way that each chapter is a little scene in its own right, as it would be in a film.

Imagine that you are the director of the film version of this novel. Choose which chapter you would like to concentrate on and design the storyboard for that chapter. In each frame, consider what the key image needs to be to convey the real meaning in that chapter.

ANALYSING PERSPECTIVE

The story is told through the eyes of the main character, Henry Hoey Hobson. As a result, we see things the way he interprets them. For example, Henry thinks that his mother is never there for him or interested in him. How would she see this situation?

By analysing perspective we need to consider how someone else might view the same set of circumstances. For example, imagine that there was a break-in at school and the police interviewed people about a possible suspect who had been seen around the school.

THE SUSPECT: Male, 25 years old, with blond/brown hair, Caucasian appearance, 165 cm tall, weighing approximately 90kgs and wearing jeans and a T-shirt.

How might he be described by the following people?

Year 5, 110 cm tall, female Asian student
Year 12, 170 cm tall, blonde-haired girl
40-year-old, blond-haired, 110 kg man in a business suit

How might *Henry Hoey Hobson* be different if we could see it through another character's eyes?

- What might Angelica's story be?
- How about Joey's?

The idea of seeing things through another person's eyes is prevalent throughout the story. Consider the different interpretations of Henry's childhood that Lydia and Anders supply. Both of them saw the situation very differently.

Hotseat activity (oral)

Each student is to take on the persona of one of the characters in the novel. They are to sit in the allocated 'hotseat' in front of the class. Other students are to ask the character questions about how they see their situation.

Consider how different their interpretation may be from the one Henry gives.

Written activity

Choose an incident from the novel and rewrite the same scene through the eyes of a different character. How does the scene change?