

## DRESS REHEARSAL

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### From the Author

I grew up in Sydney at a time when the new wave of Australian theatre brought exciting original work to the stage and many small theatres flourished. From this time I developed a love of theatre, attended Australian Theatre for Young People and went to the University of New South Wales to study Psychology and Drama. After several years I left Sydney to travel around the country and live in the bush, eventually settling in Perth where I finished my degree and taught Drama in high schools.

While teaching, I wrote and directed plays for my students and was lucky to meet lots of creative people doing wonderful work in Youth Theatre. This inspired me to keep writing and I produced scripts for school productions, community theatre, professional development and a primary school education package. I also worked with Playback Theatre and enjoyed hearing and performing the personal stories of audience members.

#### Author Motivation

I wrote the book during a break in drama teaching, and the ideas flowed from my work in schools and from the dilemmas my students faced. I saw them struggling to establish their friendships, interests and sense of self in confusing and competitive environments.

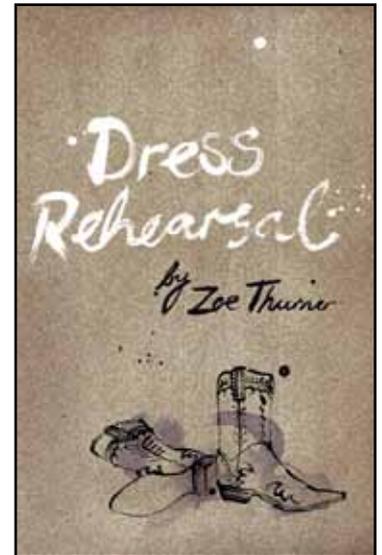
I am attracted to the battles people conduct in the course of ordinary life and I wanted to write a story that was both uplifting and real. I love the way people can be highly contradictory and also capable of great adaptation and change. There are no true heroes in the novel and the main character is spirited and flawed. My aim was to write characters who would discover how to face life in a way that is honest and engaged.

### ABOUT THE BOOK

#### Synopsis

Lara Pearlman lives in a windy coastal town where her father manages the local bank and her overbearing mother wants to set the rules. But Lara thinks that rules are meant to be broken and she breaks them loudly and often. Lara raids the pantry, skips school, goes to a beach party and rides on a motorbike – which disappoints Mrs Pearlman.

Lara flirts with Nathan but really likes Blake. She loves acting, vintage clothes and her best friend Oggy. But when Oggy is involved in a bank robbery and Blake becomes the prime



suspect, the drama escalates. At the bank, the robber uses Oggy as a human shield and during the getaway Oggy is rewarded with a fat roll of notes. Though Lara does not want to see it, Oggy shows her the money and Lara feels torn between friendship and duty.

Lara's life revolves around her friends and the school play. While Nathan works the lights and waits patiently in the wings for Lara's affection, she enters the production to get close to Blake, with his Ford ute and dubious past. But there is a lot of competition for Blake's attention. Lara is rejected and upset by Oggy and Blake as they work closely together to build ideas for a play based on the theme of World Poverty. The play is finally brought together under the erratic genius of their teacher but the process makes Lara very uncertain of the people around her.

Oggy is no stranger to poverty. She struggles to survive on her mother's meagre income as a violin teacher. And Oggy is not the only one struggling to survive in a town divided into the haves and have-nots.

But wealth is no protection against misfortune either. When the girls go to a beach party with Chelsea, the daughter of a powerful land developer, Chelsea accepts a lift home with three drunken louts. Lara's father is late coming to fetch Lara and the girls follow Chelsea into the car. The driver detours down dirt roads. Lara is terrified. She has to jump from the moving car to escape and rescues Oggy by dragging her into the bush. But Chelsea is too drunk to flee and does not return home.

In the aftermath of the abduction and through the course of the play Lara's beliefs are turned upside down. She comes to realise that being reliable is not as boring as it seems. Then as the town continues to hunt for the robbers Lara stumbles across their identity. It is the final moment of discovery for Lara about herself, her circle of friends and what she truly values.

## STUDY NOTES

### Overview: the use of the book in the curriculum

The book lends itself to study in the following areas:

#### I English

- Study of characterisation: dialogue, action, appearance
- Study of setting: place, natural environments
- Study of plot development and structure: plotting a mystery
- Study of figurative language: metaphor, simile, assonance, personification, symbol

#### II Drama

- Study of the processes and problems of producing youth theatre
- Ideas for developing drama based on the theme of the Depression
- Study and performance of dramatic monologue and duologue

#### III Values in Education

- Exploration of the problems related to the use of drug and alcohol during adolescence

(in particular those related to driving)

- Learning protective behaviour
- The importance of making discerning choices
- Comparison and exploration of conflict resolution in families

## I English

### COMPREHENSION

#### Pre-reading

1. Before you start reading the novel, have a look at the cover. Look closely at the textures, patterns, colours, font and illustration. What style is evoked by the cover? What do you think the novel could be about? Who do you think the target audience for this novel might be?
2. Have a look at the title: Dress Rehearsal. What ideas does it give you about the story? What is a dress rehearsal? On p. 252 the main character is told: 'You treat your friendship with Nathan like it's some sort of dress rehearsal.' What do you think this means?
3. Read the blurb. What do you learn about the story? Does the blurb make you want to read the novel? Why or why not?

#### Chapters 1–10

**Key quote:** p. 90 'There's a razzle-dazzle of light and sound and I pick us, this moment, our friendship, our pact against the world. I jump ship from my world to hers because I believe her world is the one that really exists.' In the opening chapters the reader is introduced to Lara's world. What does this quote indicate about Lara's regard for friendship and herself?

#### Focus questions:

1. What do you find out about the main character, Lara, in the first chapter? What do you learn about her personality, conflicts, interests? What else would you like to find out about her?
2. A lot of characters are introduced in the first three chapters. Make a table of the characters to show their names, a few words to describe their personality and their relationship to Lara. What role do you think these characters will play in the story? How do you think their relationship with Lara will develop?
3. Lara's relationship with her mother is strained. They disagree on a number of issues. What are these issues? Describe the differences in their personalities. Do you find it believable? Why or why not?
4. Compare and contrast Oggy and Chelsea. Predict the role each may play as the novel develops. How do they fit into the social hierarchy of the school and town?
5. What aspects of small country towns are featured in the novel? How does this impact on how the characters behave?
6. In Chapter 9 Oggy shares a secret with Lara. What do you think Lara will do about it? Make a detailed prediction based on what you have already read.

#### Chapters 11–20

**Key Quote:** p. 109 '[My mother]'s afraid I will become something she cannot control. But

that's not my fault and I can't help her.' In the middle section of the novel, Lara takes risks with some momentous outcomes. Why do you think she does so?

### **Focus questions:**

1. List in chronological order the events that have occurred so far.
2. Some major events shift Lara's perception of herself and those around her. What are the events and what impact do they have? Provide evidence for your answer with quotes from the novel.
3. Oggy and Lara are best friends but there are difficulties and tensions between them, which finally erupt at the beach party. Identify the differences between the two girls. Trace the events and tensions that lead to the argument.
4. Create a character map of Lara's mother. Annotate the drawing with a written analysis of her attitudes, values, appearance and role in Lara's life.
5. Read pp. 107–109. Consider the revelation Lara's mother makes. What does this tell us about her? How does this influence her behaviour towards Lara? Find evidence from the text to support this.
6. Identify how figurative language is used throughout Chapter 12 to describe minor characters. Quote from the text to justify your answer.
7. Read Chapter 16 closely and annotate moments of tension. How is pace created? How is the reader positioned to respond?
8. Is it easy to empathise with Chelsea's character?

### **Chapters 21–32**

**Key quote:** p. 165: 'I've discovered recently that sometimes people aren't who you think they are.' In the context of the novel, what does this quote indicate about Lara's journey in relation to herself?

### **Focus questions:**

1. If Tom was able to talk about what was going on, what might he say to Lara and Nathan when they visit him at home? Read Chapter 22.
2. Lara finds it difficult to tell her father the truth. What choice does she make and why? What would you do?
3. Lara has to confront her mistakes. What does she finally realise about herself in relation to Chelsea and Nathan?
4. Rewrite a scene from Drama Camp – from Nathan's point of view.
5. The crisis in Lara's relationship with Nathan peaks during Drama Camp. Read p. 246 and describe the understanding that Lara comes to at this moment. Explain how it symbolises other issues and conflicts in her life.
6. The identity of the robber is not revealed until the final pages. Before reading the last chapter, predict who the robber could be. What clues lead you to your conclusion?
7. Identify devices used to mislead the reader about the identity of the robber. What was the author's intention?

### **CHARACTERS**

The writer uses figurative language, often with symbolic overtones, to describe how

characters look, act and speak. Dialogue is used to great effect in this book and is rarely broken by descriptive passage. It appears like a playscript which invites direct entry into the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Consider the following examples:

## Appearance:

- Oggy: p. 10 'Oggy is very small, very white, with huge feet. Today she's wearing a knitted cardigan and her steel tipped-boots.'
- Mother: p. 101 'the glassy skin over the ridge of her brow is almost bald. Her sunken eyes have been left unprotected.'
- Dan: p. 54 'His fists are as big as bowling balls'

## Action:

- Man at the auction: p. 211 'Though his breath whistles between foxy teeth, the old bloke has the presence of mind to overcharge us.'
- Mr Hatherly: p. 13 'He's always leaning against something as if he can't support the weight of his feelings.'

## Speech:

### Dialogue

- The family interactions at the restaurant (Chapter 13, pp. 110–111)
- The conversations between Lara and her mother (Chapter 3, pp. 17–20 and Chapter 13, pp. 107–109)
- Oggy revealing her secret to Lara (pp. 86–89)
- Oggy and Lara arguing (Chapter 24)

### Monologue

- Mrs Kaye's speech (p. 92)
- Lara's speech at the police station (p. 76)
- Mother's speech to Nathan waiting for Lara to return (p. 61)

## Activities

1. Using the examples above, identify the literary devices used to create believable characters.
2. Choose one of the examples of dialogue and analyse how it is used to further the action, raise the tension and reveal the characters' thoughts and feelings.
3. Consider the subtext of the speeches. What is being suggested but not said?
4. Read one of the monologues. What impression do you have of the character and what is suggested about their situation or environment?
5. What do you think Lara means when she says that she sees Tom 'disappear without leaving the room. Tom worries me' (p. 33)? What impression does this give you? What kind of person do you think Tom might be and what has made him like this? How does this picture of him play out through the novel?
6. In Chapter 6 we see Lara move from loneliness to joy then despair. Lara's emotions are intense and she tends to make impulsive decisions. Later she tells Nathan that 'I have to follow myself around and find things out as they happen' (p. 266). How does this quality impact on her life and the events that happen? Do you think that Oggy operates in the same way? Find evidence from the text to support your answer.
7. A number of characters reveal themselves to be different to what they seem. They grow

and change. Pick one of the following minor characters and chart their development.

Use Photoshop to create a character map.

Mother – Chapters: 3, 12, 13, 17, 28 / Blake – Chapters: 6, 7, 14, 29 /

Mrs Kaye – Chapters: 11, 21 / Chelsea – Chapters: 2, 6, 16, 18, 21, 27

## SETTING

### Activities

1. Create a map of the town and its environment.
2. Look at the following examples and discuss how the author has used literary devices to create a picture and a sense of place.
  - The town: p. 24 'Oggy says our town is ordinary but I love Point Jerome. It's like a badly pegged tent stretched over lumpy ground that sits across two hills and a bay.'
  - Duke Street: p. 72 'At the bottom of Duke Street, gulls chip into the ragged face of the bay.'
  - Dan's house: p. 54 'The cottage floats in swamp lilies and I don't think I want to go inside if it's like the shed, but I'm shocked: the interior is immaculate.'
3. Using one of the following examples analyse the literary devices used to create a sense of place.
  - Oggy's House: Chapter 7, p. 51
  - Lara's House: Chapter 9, p. 81
  - Tom's House: Chapter 22, pp. 169–171
  - Duke Street: Chapter 19, p. 149
  - The Cliffs: Chapter 27, pp. 214–215

## TENSE AND POINT OF VIEW

Present tense was chosen to create a sense of momentum and urgency. The novel is written in the first person and reads almost like a dramatic monologue. It invites the reader into Lara's most intimate thoughts. Lara does not hold back in her emotive, often scathing and rather witty descriptions of her family and friends.

## THEMES

The following themes are explored throughout the novel as the characters confront their vulnerability and make choices in response to the difficulties they encounter.

- Identity and selfhood
- Friendship and loyalty
- Family relationships
- Development of personal values
- Revelation of true nature and character
- Rebellion and peer pressure
- Self protection and preservation

## CREATIVE WRITING

### Activities

1. Choose one of the themes from the novel as the basis for a short story.
2. Write four diary entries from either Chelsea's or Blake's perspective. Include entries about their feelings and about the other people in the play. Elaborate on their hopes, dreams and fears.
3. Write a character reference to be read in court for either Oggy, Tom or Petra OR Write

the defence presented by Oggy's lawyer at court.

4. Write a news article about the robberies for the *Point Jerome Chronicle*.
5. Write a travel article about Point Jerome for a city newspaper OR Think about a place you have visited and write a feature article for the travel section of a newspaper describing the place and people in an engaging way.
6. There is going to be a big house and land auction in Point Jerome. The houses where Oggy, Lara, Tom and Blake live are all up for sale. Write a speech for a real estate agent who has to promote the sale.
7. Produce the poster for the school play about World Poverty.
8. Create a programme for the play about World Poverty. Remember to include programme notes on the purpose, design and scenes in the play.
9. Write a review of the play that the students in the novel produce.
10. Imagine what Dan might like to say about his life and write a piece of memoir. Write a letter from Dan to Blake for a special birthday in which he tells him about their childhood home and siblings, early life together and what it has been like to be his brother's guardian.

## Extension

1. *Dress Rehearsal* presents a view of the world in which the ordinary symbolises the extraordinary. Explain this statement with reference to the text.
2. Identify descriptive passages for three male characters and discuss how the audience is positioned to respond.
3. Define the main characters' motivations under the terms of reason, spirit and desire.
4. Explore how minor characters are used in the novel. What motivates their choices? Are they realistic?
5. Create a PowerPoint presentation analysing the photographs of Dorothea Lange depicting the Depression in America.
6. Research the events that shaped the Depression. Write an analytical essay about the context of the play that the students in the novel create.
7. Lara's parents make more mistakes than she does. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss.

## DEBATE

**Statement 1:** Forgiveness is the greatest of values. (Discuss in context of Lara's growth and development.)

**Statement 2:** Tom's background is a reasonable excuse for his actions.

**Statement 3:** Oggy should be severely punished for keeping the stolen money.

**Statement 4:** You should work out your own problems first without parental help.

**Statement 5:** Young people who are convicted of crimes should always be incarcerated.

**Statement 6:** You are always responsible for your own mistakes.

## II Drama

### Activities

1. Create a role-play to explore one central theme from the novel OR Using character and context from the novel as an initial reference, create a montage of scenes in which the conflict unfolds.

- Analyse the dialogue in pp. 110–111, p. 92, p. 61 and create a duologue in response.
- Choose one character from the novel and create a dramatic monologue which engenders sympathy but also reveals their flaws.
- Choose a passage from the novel and convert into a script. Re-enact the scenes and extend them, e.g.: Chapter 17: The Wilsons, Chapter 23: Dance practice.
- Write a dramatic monologue for Mr Hatherly's play. You will need to research the Depression in Australia. It might be based on a memoir of someone who lived through that time. As a basis for your writing read Margaret's monologue in Nicholas Enright's play about the Depression, *On The Wallaby*.
- Research the topic of World Poverty and write a contemporary dramatic monologue on the theme. It might be written from the perspective of:
  - A refugee
  - A person living on welfare or in poverty in contemporary Australia. Consider their circumstances, background, psychological state.
  - A political activist
- A lie is easier to tell than the truth. Analyse this statement with reference to the text. Create a role-play based on this theme.
- Lara's perceptions begin to change after a major crisis. She says: 'I realise that I've thought about Nathan a lot in the last twenty-four hours and that it probably means something. I guess it means that being reliable is important, not boring, like I thought it did' (p. 138). Create a drama showing a change in understanding following a crisis.
- Create the court scene in which Oggy and the robbers are brought to trial. Develop their defence.
- Lara presents a poem at rehearsal to reflect the theme of the show and to share her intense emotions. Find a poem which interests you. Create a series of scenes based on your poem using sound, movement and dialogue. Incorporate the poem into your performance.

## III Values in Education

### Activities

- Research statistics on the impact of poverty on families in Australia.
- In groups, identify the organisations that support families in crisis. Each group should give a speech to present their findings.
- In groups, create a poster identifying the qualities of positive friendship choices.
- Research the juvenile justice system in Australia and create a case study for either Oggy or Tom or Petra.
- Research the wider variety of issues concerning youth and road safety.
- Using information about road safety from your local agents, create a poster promoting safe practice around one issue concerning road safety, e.g. drink driving, speeding, wearing seatbelts, driver responsibility, passenger etiquette and conduct.
- In pairs, identify the choices, actions and peer pressure which lead to the girls accepting a lift with a drunk driver in the novel. Discuss the strategies the characters could have used to prevent this. Present your findings in a table.
- The boys in this novel vary in their attitudes, values and beliefs. Choose two male characters and compare and contrast these in each character. How do their beliefs and values inform their choices and actions? Quote from the text to justify your answer.