

## Steven Herrick – Author visit - Teacher’s Notes:



### The author:

Steven Herrick is a poet and author for children and young adults. He has written eighteen books and has pioneered the verse-novel genre for young adults in Australia. He has performed his work in many countries over the past twenty years, including New Zealand, USA, UK, Canada, Vietnam, Croatia, Spain and Singapore. His verse-novels have been released internationally in the USA and UK and The Netherlands.

His books have been shortlisted for, and won, numerous literary awards, including:

- 2005 NSW Premier’s Literary Award for young adult literature for **by the river**.
- 2005 Honour Book – Australian Children’s Book Council Book of the Year (Older Readers) for **by the river**
- 2006 Book of the Year – Australian Speech Pathologists Award for **Naked Bunyip Dancing** (Upper primary Children)
- 2004 Honour Book – Australian Children’s Book Council Book of the Year (Younger Readers) for **Do-wrong Ron**
- 2003 Children’s Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Shortlist (Younger Readers) for **Tom Jones saves the world**
- 2000 NSW Premier’s Literary Award for children’s literature for **the spangled drongo**

His two latest books are **Cold Skin** – a verse-novel for young adults: and **Rhyming boy** – a prose fiction novel for children.

**Steven’s website:** <http://www.stevenherrick.com.au>

### Before the author/poet visit:

#### Class discussion:

A few weeks prior to the visit, start discussing with class, general attitudes to poetry, touching on issues such as:

- Subject matter - is a poem more likely to be about a person or an object (river, tree, flower) What do you think poems should be about? List ideas on whiteboard? Vote on most popular topic. You never know – the poet may take requests?
- Does it rhyme?
- Is poetry always/sometimes/never funny?
- Do you know any poets? Ever met a poet? If you have – what does he/she look like? If you haven’t met a poet – what do you think they’ll look like? List description on the whiteboard. All drawings welcomed by the poet!!
- Can poetry tell a story? Or is poetry always just a single poem about one thing?
- Are the lyrics to songs, poetry? Discuss?
- List on the whiteboard any poems or poets that the students know of? Let students bring poems into class before visit and read the best ones? Vote on favourites.

## **A week or two before the visit:**

with students read the first twenty pages (or the whole book!) of one of Steven's verse-novels. Which novel?

To help you in your choice, for further Teachers Notes, go to:-

### **by the river**

[http://www.allenandunwin.com/\\_uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741143577.pdf](http://www.allenandunwin.com/_uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741143577.pdf)

**Cold Skin** [http://www.allenandunwin.com/\\_uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741751291.pdf](http://www.allenandunwin.com/_uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741751291.pdf)

### **lonesome howl**

[http://www.allenandunwin.com/\\_uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741146561.pdf](http://www.allenandunwin.com/_uploads/BookPdf/TeachersNotes/9781741146561.pdf)

The above Notes will also help if you choose **love, ghosts and nose hair** or **a place like this**. For **the simple gift** – a Q&A is available at <http://www.stevenherrick.com.au/notes.htm>

## **VERSE NOVELS** – general discussion points.

- What's happening here? Is this a novel or just a set of poems?
- Who is telling the story? Is it first or third person? Or something more – multiple narrators? How do we know who is telling the story?
- Is the character speaking to us aloud, or just talking to themselves! Discuss *interior monologues* versus *monologues* how are they different? What were Shakespeare's soliloquies?
- How do we come to understand each character? Through what they do? Through dialogue? How they think? All of the above? If so, are *interior monologues* helpful in developing characters in a story? More so than prose, or less?
- Read the first four poems in **love, ghosts and nose hair**. They are, in effect, a template for introducing the main character. Have each students write a poem, or poems, using this same format.
- In **Cold Skin**, there are nine main characters. Each character "tells" the story. Nine narrators! How does the author maintain cohesion and tension, using so many storytellers? Compare this to **by the river** where there is only one narrator. Which book is easier to read? Which tells a better story?
- Read **the simple gift**. Who is the main character? Are you sure? Discuss the theme of "redemption" in relation to Old Bill. Some readers have commented that the book seems to end without resolving every issue. Do you agree? Do you think the author meant to do this? What do you think happens to Old Bill? What do Billy and Caitlin do after the story is over? Try writing your own finishing poem? Or a poem about "Old Bill returning".

## **After the author/poet visit:**

A few simple discussion points.

- Did Steven's visit meet with your expectations? Are you more likely/less likely to read poetry now?
- Did the author look/sound/appear like the person who had written the verse-novels you read beforehand?
- Can you write a poem in the style of your favourite Steven Herrick poem that he performed during his visit. Read aloud to class? Vote on best? Send to poet?
- Were his poems realistic? Do you think they came from real-life incidents?
- He talked a lot about his family and about events in his own life. Can you design a cover for his new book (make up your own Steven Herrick title) or can you design an author web-site?
- Write a letter to the author describing yourself, trying to convince him to write a poem about you!
- Authors are really busy...so why not write the poem yourself – send the best to the author.

## The Poetry Workshop - Steven Herrick

Here is a list of simple “how-to” ideas for writing poems. I don’t claim that these will make anyone the world’s greatest poet, but, hopefully, they present a set of elementary starter-templates for poetry in the classroom.

What is necessary to accompany these ideas is for the teacher/school to have copies of my books so you can show numerous examples of my work. Yes, I’m trying to sell my own books. No, I won’t email you copies of the poems. Anyone who is aware of the average salary of authors in Australia will understand why. Also, I happen to think my books will be useful teaching aids in the classroom.

Please remember, poetry is like every craft/artform – the first draft is just that – the secret to making it read well is in the editing. I’ve found the best form of editing is to read the draft aloud, over and over – if you stumble over the words, change them to the way you speak. Keep it simple and concise. Don’t be afraid of doing lots of drafts. Equally, don’t expect perfection – be content with a bright/original idea expressed clearly.

Enjoy the workshop...

### **A) The Refrain Poem**

the anti-rhyme poem! Instead of rhyming at the end of each line, this poem starts each line with the same word – that way there’s no argument of “Ms, I don’t know how to start!”. Build this poem slowly. eg: Choose a subject – I have one called WALLS – start with the easy stuff

*Walls are painted yellow*

*Walls hold up our house*

*Walls are where teachers hang our drawings*

Then encourage them to “build” on each line – why are the walls painted yellow?

*Walls are painted yellow because dad says it’s soothing.*

What is another way of saying walls hold up a house?

*Walls are floors standing up for themselves!*

Yes, teachers hang things on walls, but what about when they’re frustrated?

*Walls are what teachers bash their head against...*

The secret to this poem is building on the simple lines and trying to see the subject in a slightly different, off-beat way. *Walls jump in front of drunken drivers!* Don’t be content with just saying the obvious – build on each line. Ask simple questions to encourage each student to explore why they chose to write something like “*Walls are painted lime green*” – there’s always an answer to that – “*Walls are painted lime-green because Dad couldn’t afford a good colour*”

And if you wish, once it’s written you can remove the word (“walls”) from every line and just get it to start every third line, with a little tinkering. Whatever sounds/reads best.

“Walls” from **Water Bombs (University of Qld Press)**

### **B) The monologue poem**

This poem is really easy if you present a few suitable examples before the students start writing. (hint: “Water Bombs” (the Joe poems) or “Poetry, to the rescue” (the three-year-old cousin poem). The trick here is to give the person an age – the age becomes the determining factor. For example: Joe at 14 would sound very different to Joe at 94. The poem starts simply...

#### **Joe at 9**

*My name is Joe,*

*or Joseph.*

*My mum calls me Joseph.*

*My brother calls me Josephine,*

*but not when my dad’s around...*

The way to build on this poem is to encourage the students to write about their own life, in their own words. Encourage them to highlight positive or unusual things that happen in their family, or at school, or at the soccer/netball club.

“Joe at 9” from **Water Bombs (UQP)**

### **Class sets of Steven’s books:**

Steven’s books are available as class sets from his publishers at a substantial discount. You can also order books on a sale or return basis, prior to the author visit for students and teachers to purchase and get signed during the visit.

For High schools, Steven recommends:

**by the river** – Allen & Unwin

**Cold Skin** – Allen & Unwin

**lonesome howl** – Allen & Unwin

available (at a discount) from Kate Justelius-Wright at [KateJ@allenandunwin.com](mailto:KateJ@allenandunwin.com)

**love, ghosts and nose hair** – University of Qld Press

**A place like this** – University of Qld Press

**the simple gift** – University of Qld Press

available (at a discount) from Rosie Chay at [rosiec@uqp.uq.edu.au](mailto:rosiec@uqp.uq.edu.au)