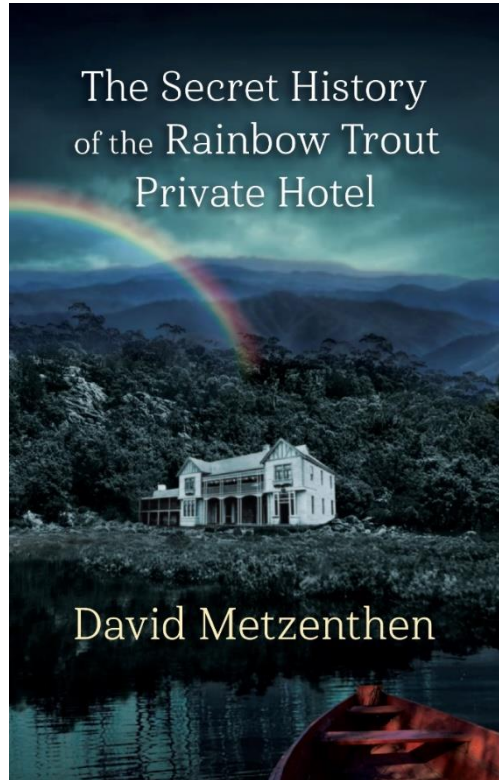


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TEACHING NOTES

The Secret History of the Rainbow Trout Private Hotel



Andy Lightfoot's gap year takes him deep into the past – at the old and weirdly wonderful Rainbow Trout Private Hotel. Here, high in the mountains, Andy discovers working for nothing gives him everything . . . and that the middle of nowhere is the centre of an amazing universe, filled with individuals of sheer brilliance.

The mysterious old hotel is as vibrant a character as any human in this narrative, with many rooms – and secrets – to discover. This is a skillfully wrought narrative that explores diversity, human nature, contemporary issues and the invisible threads that bind disparate people together.

BEFORE READING

- Discuss the title and conjecture as to genre, setting and what might a secret history involve. What clues does the cover art offer the reader? Consider the landscape, the building, the rainbow and the lake.
- Conduct a five-minute research grab on where rainbow trout are found in Australia [possible locations for the hotel]
- The author writes: *The whole book was triggered by the first line, page 1. I was hitch-hiking in New Zealand and came upon a lake called Lake Waikaremoana ... the light was golden ... the year was 1977!* This indicates that this novel was almost fifty years in the 'making'. What insight into a writer's creative process does this give us e.g., that a single idea can gradually develop into a full narrative, that one incident can trigger a sequence of events that become a plot. Brainstorm possibilities.

DURING READING

Structure

- The author establishes the general location of the hotel early. Use Google maps or similar to locate the Alpine Region and using contextual clues narrow down the location. Use the images aspect to examine the terrain. Establish activities, commercial or otherwise, population, tourism, products and so on of this area using a concept map or similar strategy. How does the setting for a story impact on the plot?
- Begin a *dramatis personae* as characters are introduced and make brief notes of relevant details e.g., appearance, personality traits, occupations, habits
- Select the character of most interest to you and develop a creative one-pager analysis on him/her/they. There are many student-created examples on the internet as well as templates.

Literary Devices

- The author uses figurative language extensively, and to great effect. As you read, draw attention to these. Identify these examples [BLM 1]
- Another literary device used by the author is imagery, which is descriptive language used to create a mental image for the reader. It might be literal, describing something a character sees or feels, but is often more subtle. Choose one of these sensory imagery examples and write a short paragraph outlining the emotional response you feel is intended by the author:
 - ✓ *He surveyed the landscape; lake, mountains and low hills. 'Shipwrecked on an inland island, we are. Lost the lifeboats and lit a fire.'* P. 16
 - ✓ *The room smelled old but clean, not of candles but of laundry soap. Sunlight fell on floorboards pitted with age.* P. 19

- ✓ *The grand scale of the view made him feel small and lonely. At home, riding his bike beside the Murray River under ancient redgums, there was a feeling of alone-ness but not loneliness. P.44*
- ✓ *Looking down, he watched slender tendrils of mist drifting through the treetops p 147*
- 'Show Don't Tell' is a literary technique with which most students will be familiar. It is used to create a more immersive narrative experience, and the author uses it here to great effect. Discuss these examples and what the reader gleans from them.
 1.
 - ✓ *As for any indication of a vacancy, there was only a six-digit telephone number that Andy guessed would not have received an answer anytime this century p.8*
 - ✓ *Andy seeing a calendar, for the year 1976, swinging on a hook ...p.13*
 2.
 - ✓ *Andy and Nash stood at the kitchen window looking out at a shining yellow and white American car that had pulled up in the car park. Like something driven straight out of the 1950s, it was big and heavy with a chrome grill, twin head lights, whitewall tyres and... p 164*
 - ✓ *Andy took another look at Clint McGinn's car. It was a Chev, he reckoned, at least sixty years old, in old bold Hollywood colours and rock and roll style. It sat like a grinning shark p165*
- Symbolism is another device frequently used by authors. The setting being a hotel, the reader expects mention of rooms and doors. What do you think the author intends for the reader to think? You could use a strategy such as Hot Potato to brainstorm ideas as a class. Alternatively, individuals can come up with their own suggestions. Consider these examples:
 - ✓ *Doors opening and closing everywhere, he thought, which surely meant something, although he didn't know what. P. 123*
 - ✓ *Living in the hotel, Andy felt like an actor in a play. Every time he entered a room, climbed stairs, opened a door or rounded a corner, he expected something unusual to happen 152*
- Identify examples of foreshadowing throughout the novel. This is especially apparent with Dash:
 - ✓ *Constant flicking of his lighter, he appears to be the only smoker*
 - ✓ *his receipt of the insurance letter and his reaction (about p 150-160)*
 But also, with an ongoing thread of references to fire the kitchen stove
 - ✓ *the fireplace in the cosy lounge*
 - ✓ *smoke alarm winking reassuringly p. 180*
 - ✓ *'You gotta love a fire, Dahlia.' Nash stood the old black billy in raw orange heat. 'Runs in the family.' P 210*
 Fire and its capability are both positive and negative throughout. Discuss how this relates in general to themes, and characters in the novel.

- Henri is a significant, albeit secondary, character in this narrative. How does his early comment begin to shape our understanding of the plot? Outline your thoughts on this and support with references to the text.

'Hmmm. I would say I like to paint the things behind the things you can see. To paint the meaning, Andy. Or give them meaning.' He laughed. *'That's if these things offer something unseen. Good painters share secrets or truth.'*

Themes

Choose one of the following themes (or identify one you think should be included) to expand on in a piece of analytical writing.

Conservation v Destruction {Hippie v Hillbilly}	Dreams v Reality	Diversity: Religion/beliefs, language, race	Civilisation v Wilderness
Illusion [Secrets/Hidden history]	Human Nature	Light v Dark (Good v Bad)	Redemption
Coming of Age	What is success?	Relationships	Siblings/Family Dynamics

AFTER READING

- Stage some mini-debates, points to consider could include:
 - ✓ The end justifies the means
 - ✓ People are neither wholly good or wholly evil
 - ✓ Change is frightening
 - ✓ Good people can do bad things
 - ✓ Having dreams is more important than current reality
- Using your choice of medium, create a visual image of some aspect of the setting e.g., the stable, the lounge or kitchen of the hotel, the lake.
- Choose a character and write a creative piece on 'what happens next' e.g., Julia going to boarding school, Dash heading to Broadway, Andy going to Melbourne. Incorporate some of David Metzenthen's suggestions for writers and keep to the style of the novel with its figurative language/literary devices.

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Secret History of the Rainbow Trout Private Hotel

June 2023

ISBN 9781922696274

Contemporary Fiction

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Metzenthen is the highly-regarded author of many books for children and young adults. He has been awarded Premiers' prizes, a Prime Minister's award and a CBCA Book of the Year award. He lives in Melbourne with his family. Before becoming a fiction writer he was an advertising copywriter – and also a builder's labourer. He likes surfing, fly-fishing and is a dedicated conservationist.

A Message from the Author

Dear Teacher, here are my thoughts on The Secret History of the Rainbow Trout Private Hotel ... hard to know where to start so I'll start at the very beginning ...

The whole book was triggered by the first line, page 1.

I was hitch-hiking in New Zealand and came upon a lake called Lake Waikarimoana ... the light was golden ... the year was 1977!

*One thought can trigger a thousand others this is important, as a confidence booster for young writers ... that opening line or similar could be used as a starting point for ventures into the imagination. *As Picasso said, 'I start with one idea and when I WORK, it changes ...'*

Writing involves infinite choices ... some paths you take are dead-ends, some are super highways or gently winding leafy lanes ... writing is incredibly hard for ALL people ... or writing at your best is, because it involves you look INSIDE and try to find a way forward to tell your story and GIVE meaning and value to a reader ...

The book also deals with diverse characters, languages, ideas, religions, opinions, settings ... a kind of a gentle exploration which suggests topics for study or consideration ... The book is about conservation, places, and people it has a Jewish element, an Irish element, a few Muslim words, a Christian element, a Pagan element, a Buddhist element ...and a redneck element. It is not a work of theology but suggests that the worlds of belief are varied and many, and have much in common. This is an area of relevance throughout the world and all students are exposed to it whether they know it or not! So, understanding a little of what others might believe is a truly important plank of education.

It might be useful for teachers to consider how to begin a piece

Sue Warren losangzopa.com

Every person writes differently: there is no right or wrong way ... it is all about what triggers something within the person that needs to be shared/expressed/got out ... with the idea that the reader is as important as the writer and must always be considered. Nike says Just Do It ...I say, Just Start It ...you will be surprised that the process of writing one sentence can move the story on to a whole new world. Some opening lines have taken me a week or fifty years in the case of The Rainbow Trout ...

Fiction writing is not essay writing. It is a totally different concept but your facts have to be straight or you lose credibility in a flash. Facts are foundations ... but characters in action, actions large or small, is where your imagination must be allowed to roam ...

A great rule, perhaps the most important rule, for all writers is to RE-WRITE ...RE-READ ...rinse/repeat .. research rest then read again ...*In an exam situation obviously not possible ... you can, I repeat, only do your best but it is amazing what your best can be ...

A writer, if they have tried to the best of their abilities to be true to themselves and honest in their efforts, must accept you never get it quite right ...give yourself credit for putting down words ... effort is all you can offer/accept our efforts will never be perfect.

Also, good advice is hard to find ... don't show your work to just anyone ...they can kill your enthusiasm or project as dead as a doornail with a sigh, a word, a look ... you have to have commentary on your work that is sensible ...

In a school situation you are generally trapped ...in that your teacher, for better or worse, will be offering their thoughts or corrections ...oh well! Deal with it and hope they are very thoughtful and very careful.

What I do know is that positive feedback works infinitely better than negative feedback even if you have to give that positive feedback to yourself! I cannot overemphasise that negative feedback can destroy any writer ...so the individual must guard against this/must stand up for their writing/themselves/their future ...

Good writing can be simple ...it tends to be clear and makes for effective communication

A large vocabulary is not a requirement ... a STOP sign is clear and simple ...selecting the right word is the way forward ...

My book has diverse characters from diverse backgrounds ... most are based on people I have met (or am!!) To write about others is always a difficult exercise but is a true test of imagination ... to walk in other people's shoes is an aspect of this book that I worked on. Boy, how easy is it for me to suggest writing exercises! I wish I could give magic solutions, but in writing there are none.

Reading is good for writing and vice versa. Hard work and effort are essential. Song writers might write a song in a day ... you ain't never gonna write a novel like that! Truth is you must look deep into yourself to write just about anything except maybe a shopping list ... *know it is not easy for anyone and doesn't get any easier ... that's the bad news. The good news is you are more capable than you know of writing well ... it's just that it's going to be exhausting.

Settings contribute so much to good writing ...that's pretty basic. A setting can trigger a landslide of assistance to a piece of fiction ...settings that work for you are where you should go ...you, the writer, are your best source of writing - and writing, being your work, is why you want to sound like you ...because your voice is different to everyone else's in the universe ...know that and have faith in it ...you can't be anyone else, not really ... but you can use your mind to think deeply on characters that are not you.

**You must be careful in this day of political correctness and cultural borrowing ...but, as a fiction writer, the characters are yours but always consider if you are being truthful, reasonable, sensitive, and within your rights to write what you intend ...it's a difficult part of writing that is constantly changing; everyone has to be aware of this ...because hyper-critics and hyper-criticism are just waiting to comment on work others have done ... If in doubt, leave it out!*

Finally, good writing is easy to access; find examples of, I mean, not create by yourself. There are infinite amounts of great writing and styles; any English teacher, any bookshop, any library, can offer many examples ...some you might really see as workable and so include elements of that style ...

Well, that's it: no song writer can tell you how you might write a magical song ... same for fiction writer ... that's why this business is extremely tough — but if you want to write, do so. End of story.

Regards, Dave Metzenth.

SPECIFIC CURRICULUM LINKS

English Years 7/8/9

- **ACELT1615**
- **ACELT1619**
- **ACELT1620**
- **ACELT1622**
- **ACELT1626**
- **ACELT1627**
- **ACELT1628**
- **ACELT1807**
- **ACELT1629**
- **ACELT1767**

NOTES BY SUE WARREN

Teacher Librarian

Just So Stories: losangzopa.wordpress.com

Instagram: [instagram.com/losangzopa](https://www.instagram.com/losangzopa)

BLM 1

Example	Page reference	Figure of Speech
<i>[her arms]...as lithe and smooth as a pair of copperhead snakes</i>	2	
<i>Blunt mountains stood behind it like old protective friends</i>	3	
<i>The kid had a snake-like awareness, a nose like a blade, and a cutting confidence</i>	10	
<i>A fish jumped, silver as a star</i>	16	
<i>on wire hangers that banged and twanged like some sort of ancient musical instrument</i>	20	
<i>opening his case to expose squashed paint tubes and brushes stored like smugglers' contraband</i>	41	
<i>because the future's a mere moment away</i>	68	
<i>The fish's sides were like polished metal...</i>	129	
<i>..its eyes liquid-black, its tail a silk fan dotted with India ink.</i>	129	
<i>Tiny rainbows glistened here and there as if jewels had fallen from the sky.</i>	255	
<i>oil paintings of shepherds brooded</i>	256	
<i>looked like the stars of some elegant but odd European movie</i>	260	
<i>big black wood-burning stove crackled cheerfully</i>	263	