



Sticking with Pigs

by Mary-anne Scott

About the author:

Mary-anne Scott is a writer and musician from Havelock North. She is one of nine siblings and growing up, their family had a culture of books and music. The highs and lows of raising four sons has left her with a store of gritty, contemporary issues to write about. Her sons are now young men and she has, so far, three grandsons.

Her previous novels are: *Snakes and Ladders*, 2012, and *Coming Home to Roost*, 2016. Both books were short listed for the NZ Children's Book Awards. Mary-anne also writes as a commentator and as a weekly advice columnist, *Dear Mary-anne*, for Stuff.co

Mary-anne is an avid reader of fiction and has a particular interest in Young Adult books and short stories. She is also a singer, guitarist and cellist and regularly plays at weddings and in wine bars. She is also a guitar teacher, and a steady stream of young musicians come through her front door after school each day for lessons, providing even more fodder for her writing.

Synopsis of Novel:

The novel centres on the life of fourteen year old Wolf Miller and the challenges he faces while on a long anticipated and hard won pig hunting trip with his tough and mysterious, Uncle Jem. Wolf's family is very risk averse due to his twelve-year-old brother suffering from Addison's Disease, a rare condition whereby the body is very prone to infection and does not produce adrenalin, and also due to family circumstances that are not revealed until later in the novel. The boys' parents only agree to Wolf going on the trip because Davey is so keen for him to go – he will be there in spirit, if not body. The first obstacle the trip faces is Davey crashing his bicycle into a car whilst accompanying Wolf on a fitness training run, but from his hospital bed he again successfully argues for Wolf to be allowed to go.

As expected Wolf is pushed to his physical limits on the hunting trip, but with the help of the loyal hunting dogs, they do eventually locate and 'deal to' a wild boar – and this is where the real challenges begin. While carrying one of the injured dogs back to where they left their gear, Jem suffers a relapse of a serious knee injury and Wolf is instructed to walk back through the dense bush, find where they parked Jem's old truck, and drive for help – a very big ask for any fourteen-year-old. To further add to the ordeal, Wolf insists on carrying the 75kg pig out on his back, because this is what Davey would want.

After many trials Wolf does find his way back to the truck, and even has a decent go of driving it out, before losing control and crashing off the road. Help arrives in the form of Jem's partner Rowena, step-daughter Trina and Jem's hard as nails mate Smithie. Perhaps to prove to Smithie (and to Trina!) that he is no 'townie softy' Wolf volunteers to return with them to assist the stricken Jem, and so his trials continue. Jem is eventually helicoptered out of the bush and everyone returns to civilisation. The novel ends happily with all



the family gathered around Jem's hospital bed and the boys making an impassioned plea to be allowed to adopt the injured dog, Ralph. We definitely feel the family has 'grown' enough for the parents to agree to this plan.

Themes / Issues

Facing adversity and challenges, the personal growth that occurs through pushing yourself to unknown limits, not allowing serious illness to define who you are, the ethics of blood sports such as pig hunting, family loyalty.

Writing style

The novel is third person (limited) past tense narration in a straight linear progression of events. The descriptive sensory detail given to the bush and the 'cinematic' drama of the pig-hunt are strengths of the book, as is the real sounding teen dialogue and the genuine feel of lead character Wolf's interior monologues.

Year level suitability and application

The novel will work very well with year 9 and 10 groups, although the outdoors and personal challenge / discovery themes will also be relevant to older students. The questions from the 2017 NCEA level 1 Written Text external exam work very well with this novel, particularly questions 5, 6 and 7. As also stated below the novel has direct links to the junior and senior PE/ Outdoor Ed / Health syllabus. Avoid presenting the novel as suitable for boys more than girls. Trina is a strong character in the novel and represents the many girls in this country with a love of tough physical challenges.

Curriculum links

Very direct links to the P.E. / Outdoor Education / Health syllabus

Physical / mental health and wellbeing, personal identity / self-worth, safety and risk management, sensitivity and respect, relationships with other people, social attitudes and beliefs, interpersonal skills / personal growth through planning, executing and reflecting on a serious challenge.

Learning opportunities

Before reading: Setting the scene

Reading the cover for visual/verbal clues:

- Students work in pairs to study the verbal and visual clues given by front and back cover of the

book. They make a set of predictions on plot, character and setting based on those clues alone.

- While doing this, students can also make a list of statement that identify how they are being 'positioned' by use of of colour, contrast, images, layout, font style.

Prior knowledge discussion / activities:

- Class discussion on whether there is a 'Townie / Rural divide in New Zealand. Class to share their own experiences – and they will all have stories to tell.
- Google 'Crumpy and Smithy test drive a Hilux'. This old TV advert gives a tongue in cheek indication of rural 'roads' and attitudes.
- Get students to share any experiences of facing challenge in the outdoors, particularly to do with hunting challenges.
- Class debate on the ethics of blood sports like pig-hunting. This will need to be handled with sensitivity as some students may well have deeply held views on these issues.

During reading:

Understanding the content – Answers to these may be written and/or oral

Chapter one:

1. Write a short information sentence on each member of Wolf's immediate family.
2. Why does Wolf's mother tolerate Uncle Jeremy (Jem) coming to the house?

Chapter two:

1. Explain the awkwardness at the dinner table.
2. What emotional 'blackmail' trick does Wolf pull to get his mother to agree to the trip?
3. What compromise does Jem suggest?

Chapter three:

1. What type of physical fitness does Jem say you need for pig-hunting?
2. Briefly describe Addison's Disease.

Chapter four:

1. What promise does Wolf make to Davey?
2. Explain the pun 'sticking with pigs'.
3. Explain the boys' nicknames for each other.

Chapter five:

1. Describe the road trip into the bush.
2. Explain how the tataramoa plant got its English nickname.
3. Why doesn't Wolf notice the wasp's nest?

Chapter six:

1. Explain the different roles of the two pig dogs.

Chapter seven:

1. Describe how the pig is eventually killed.

Chapter eight:

1. What are two reasons for gutting the pig?
2. List the jobs Wolf has to do.

Chapter nine:

1. Describe what Wolf finds most unpleasant about carrying the pig.
2. Why do you think Jem speaks so angrily when Wolf stops on the hill climb?

Chapter ten:

1. Explain how Wolf needs to use the sun to help him find his way back to the road.
2. How does a compass tell you where north is?

Chapter eleven:

1. How confident would you feel with Jem's 'driving lesson'?

Chapter twelve:

1. What does Jem say that makes Wolf a hero?
2. What mistake does he make almost immediately on the way out?

Chapter thirteen:

1. Describe Wolf's feelings on finding the road and the truck nearby.

Chapter fourteen:

1. What vital part of driving the truck had Jem not told him?
2. What causes the truck to crash?

Chapter fifteen:

1. Give three reasons for Wolf needing to carry the pig when he leaves the truck.
2. What sort of man is Smithie?

Chapter sixteen:

1. What information earns Wolf a 'Well done' from Smithie?
2. Why do you think Wolf volunteers to go back into the bush?

Chapter seventeen:

1. What pact does Wolf make while walking?
2. What would Wolf have found disappointing about the conversation the men were having about him?

Chapter eighteen:

1. Why does Jem think people with disadvantages often achieve more?
2. What is the explanation for both his and his step brother's bad knees?

Chapter nineteen:

1. What is the story behind the blue handled knife?
2. Did you enjoy the ending of the story? Why / why not?

Post reading: Taking it further

Theme analysis:

Activity one: Group work activity

Select two of the themes / issues listed earlier in these notes and get students to elaborate on what the author may be commenting on and how she may be positioning them think about these issues. When considering the 'how' aspect students will need to closely consider character presentation.

A group spokesperson reports findings to the class.

Activity two: Individual work – NCEA level 1 Written text essay questions.

Attempt one of these questions from the 2017 level 1 Written Text external exam. Note that the first question works very well for this novel.

- Describe at least one challenge faced by a character in the written text. Explain how this challenge helped you understand the character.
- Describe at least one idea that changed your perspective or point of view in the written text. Explain how this idea changed your perspective.
- Describe a key moment in the written text that surprised or shocked you. Explain how this moment was important to the text as a whole.

- Describe a character that you disliked or admired in the written text. Explain how your feeling towards this character helped you understand the text as a whole.

Role play activities:

(these need to be handled with sensitivity and closely monitored by the teacher)

- In groups select a short scene or episode from the novel. Present it to the class using a combination of existing dialogue and your own added dialogue.
- Monologue – adopt the role of one of the characters and speaking in character explain your relationship with another character.
- Write and act out a TV or radio interview where Wolf is asked about his ordeal in the bush.
- Monologue - Speaking as Wolf or Jem one year in the future, reflect on the events of a year ago

Beyond the text activities:

- Write a proposal, to be taken to the Board of Trustees of your school, for an overnight class trip into an area of bush within reasonable driving distance of the school. Plan a series of activities and list all the health and safety precautions you will need to adhere to. Write a list of all the gear students will need to bring. Also write a caregiver permission form.
- Design a poster or make a short film highlighting the benefits of bush experiences and the safety precautions necessary.
- Write a case for or against pig or deer hunting in the New Zealand bush.

by Denis Wright