

Teachers' Notes written by Kevin Steinberger

DEEP WATER: An Eden-Glassie Mystery

By Elaine Forrestal

Deep Water introduces modern young readers to a popular genre of past Australian children's literature – the rural adventure story. Over a quintessentially Australian farmscape, the child protagonists follow their suspicions and hunches, against adult indifference, to sleuth out a mystery which resonates across the paddocks and through the bush of the small isolated community.

Synopsis

Narrator Tori is reluctant to return to his city home after holidaying with his cousins on their mixed property, Eden-Glassie. A flash flood, the result of days of rain upriver, had quickly spread out over the river banks isolating the three errant farm dogs. The two younger dogs eventually managed to cross back to the homestead. But old Axle, everyone's favourite, never returned although his body was never found. Six months later Tori is back at Eden-Glassie. He hears a dog howling at night, others have also occasionally heard mysterious dog howls over the past months. Against common reason, Tori believes it is Axle and is determined to find him. He enlists the aid of cousins Bronte and Morgan on surreptitious nocturnal forays out into the bush and across the river searching for the source of the dog howls. The discovery of a man's body in a remote hut deepens the mystery but so does a dog's bowl spotted in the same hut. The identity and history of the old man become crucial in Tori's quest which progressively widens in scope, drawing in a diversity of community folk.

Characterisation

The depiction of the main characters effectively illustrates the contrast between city and country lifestyles and mindsets. There are two main families involved: Ian and Helen Holding, the landholders of Eden-Glassie, and their two children Bronte and Morgan. The other family is that of the protagonist-narrator, Tori. His parents are city-based business people, his mother is sister of Ian. The Holdings, like Tori's parents are young, ambitious and hardworking. However, Tori's parents lead a very busy life which involves a lot of extended business trips, a plot device that enables the author to get Tori and his little sister Maddie out on to Eden-Glassie to pursue another series mystery. By contrast, life on Eden-Glassie operates at a more relaxed, less regimented pace, the seasonal demands of farm work notwithstanding. On the property, chores aside, the children enjoy the freedom to structure their own day.

Discussion Points

- The title of the novel, 'Deep Water', is ambiguous. While it refers to the flood, it also has an idiomatic meaning. What other meaning might it convey that suits the children's activity?
- The action largely occurs in the present. Why has the author used a flashback to begin the novel? How effective is this device in developing the plot?
- Why did the children not confide in the adults straight away? Why did they feel they had to keep their suspicions secret even though they needed to gather useful information from them, eg; the history of the Gurney land? (p.40)
- The author chooses her phrases carefully to evoke the outback setting, eg; *'the rusty tin roof'*, *'bouncing along the two-wheel track'*. Similarly, from phrasing in the text, what kind of picture is built up of the property, Eden-Glassie?
- What item did Morgan find that established proof of Axle's existence with the old man?
- Larna talks about the way Axle *'wears his baseball cap'*. (p.116) She is using figurative speech. What does she really mean?
- 'Deep Water' is written in the style of rural adventure stories which were very popular in years gone by. What are some of the ways the author has brought the Eden-Glassie mysteries 'up-to-date'?
- An obvious question is why did Axle not return home once the flood subsided. How did Uncle Ian explain this fact which is effectively the solution to the mystery?