

Unit written by Dr Pam Macintyre and Dr Susan La Marca

***Camel Rider* by Prue Mason**

Year 7

Background

Camel Rider might be set in a fictitious Abudai but the plight of young Indian subcontinent boys, such as Walid, is reality, as are the cultural, racial and religious differences that separate Walid and Adam (an Australian expatriate). These differences act against the boys' ability to understand each other and their efforts to build a friendship/partnership to survive, in a harsh environment. They must also contend with some of human nature's nastiest manifestations after them.

This exciting survival story is cleverly told in alternate chapters focussing on each boy's point of view. Also, events within the chapters are presented from both sides, showing clearly that how we view the world is shaped by the society in which we live.

The idea for writing *Camel Rider* started as a dream. My dream was about a boy who was lost in the desert after he ran away to rescue his dog. I dreamed he met someone who saved him and also taught him a lot about Middle Eastern culture. The problem was I didn't remember whom he met. A few weeks later, I read a newspaper article about a camel jockey who was dumped in the desert. As I read it, I looked out the window and saw the kids playing in the pool and kicking around a football. It was hard to believe that less than five miles away there were these terrible camps with children being kept as slaves to ride camels in races. It was as if there were two different worlds living side by side. I began to wonder what would happen if these two worlds met each other. I realized I had the second character in my story and a way to write about the plight of camel riders.

Prue Mason www.pruemason.com/

Objectives

The objectives from the VELS interpersonal Development and English could be addressed using this text:

They participate in activities which enable them to identify the differing values and beliefs held by individuals in local, national and global contexts, and reflect on the impact these may have on relationships.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS Interpersonal development – Physical, Personal and Social Learning*, Level 5, page 14.

Students read and interpret texts that present some challenging issues. They compare texts that explore similar themes and ideas, and recognise that writers can express views and values other than their own. They develop a critical understanding about the ways that writers and producers of texts try to position readers to accept particular views of people, characters, events, ideas and information.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) *VELS English - Learning Focus*, Level 5, page 22.

Focus: Alternative Perceptions / Different Skills

Mason uses the different perspectives of the two boys in a variety of ways in the text. There are chapters told in alternating voices and within chapters, for example chapter 12.

Consider the interpretations of the different cultures that Mason shows us through the two boys. How does she use language and writing style to delineate character?

The alternative perceptions and different cultural experiences offered in *Camel Rider* are also explored in Eoin Colfer's book *Benny & Omar*. As an extension activity students could read this additional text and compare the different treatments. Both explore the interaction between a western boy from a compound in the Middle East and a local boy who is both poor and street wise. Consider how the different authors choose to tell their story and discuss the similarities and differences.

Focus: Risk-taking

Adam and Walid take various risks throughout the course of the novel. Such as Adam leaving the safety of the adult convey to get back to his dog Tara and the two boys driving the car in the desert. Identify other examples.

In her teachers' notes on *Camel Rider* Bronwyn Owen asks 'Can you balance risking your own life if the outcome of not taking the risk may be worse?'

- Take up this question with the students in discussion encouraging them to relate their own experiences to the text.

Assessment

Alternative voices

Instruct the students to write a scene from a story they create that demonstrates the distinct difference between two perceptions of the one event.

Students enact a scene from the book in pairs, each person taking one character, either Adam or Walid. In acting out the scene students demonstrate the different perceptions, values, ideas held by the two characters. They then reverse the roles. A discussion can then be held to consider how the defining elements of each role, and the different perspectives, affect the students' understanding of the book.

Further Reading

Al-Windawi, Thura	<i>Thura's Diary</i>
Colfer, Eoin	<i>Benny & Omar</i>
Evans, Alwyn	<i>Walk in my Shoes</i>
Gleitzman, Morris	<i>Boy Overboard</i>
Hawke, Rosanne	<i>Soraya, the Storyteller</i>
Mankell, Henning	<i>Secrets in the Fire</i>
Murray, Kirsty	<i>Tough Stuff: True Stories about Kids and Courage</i>

Supportive Material

Anti-Slavery International Association. <http://www.antislavery.org/>

"Lost Children Arrive home after Years as Camel Jockey Slaves" in *The Times*
at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article541925.ece>

PRUE MASON

CAMEL RIDER

A story of adventure, and two boys
from different worlds...