



Teachers' notes

Our Australian Girl – series 2

General Introduction

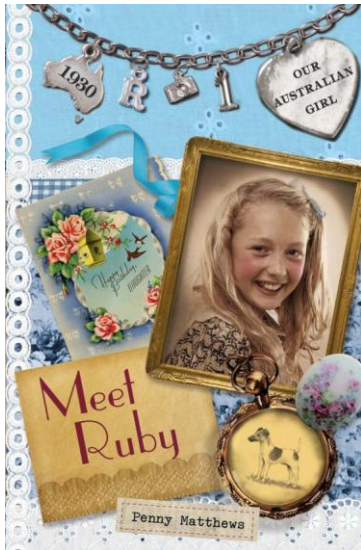
Apart from our original inhabitants, Australia is a country of immigrants. By focusing on the experiences of children, particularly girls, this series continues to explore Australian history in all its diversity.

Exploration of this series of books provides excellent source material for supporting the focuses of the Australian Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2010): *'...helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature to expand the scope of their experience'* (p1). Students at this level can read to expand their repertoire, find out about other times, places and aspects of Australia's history.

These carefully researched books demonstrate how language is dynamic *'and that changes to English are related to historical developments and the geographical differences of users over the centuries...'* (ACARA, 2010, p3)

This series will also support the English curriculum and its relation to history *'Literature, with its emphasis on studying texts from a range of historical and cultural contexts helps students understand the perspectives and contributions from people around the world and both the past and present'* (ACARA, 2010, p14).

The units of work around this series will involve reading, viewing, speaking, writing, creating and reflecting on various aspects of each text.



Meet Ruby

By Penny Matthews

It's 1930 . . . and Ruby Quinlan lives in a big house in Adelaide with her parents and her fox terrier, Baxter. As she gets ready for her twelfth birthday party, Ruby has never been happier. But the world she knows is collapsing, and people everywhere are losing their jobs and their homes. Soon Ruby's comfortable life falls apart in ways she could never have imagined . . .

Meet Ruby and join her adventure in the first of four stories about a happy-go-lucky girl in a time of great change.

Information for Teachers:

- Ruby's story covers how the Great Depression affected Australia - a devastating time in our history. One of the biggest shake ups of our class system, it resulted in the break-up of families and whole communities and provided the basis for the politics, economic policy and welfare that we know today.
- The series has been conceptualised with the National Curriculum in mind, and the books are designed to be both appealing stories and quality teaching resources for the history and literature strands.
- Each book has a primary historical resource at the back, taken from the time the book is set (e.g. a poster, illustration, advertisement, photograph, etc.), as well as a general description of what life was like at the time.
- The books provide a perfect springboard for discussing important events and issues in Australia's history, and present historical facts and information in an engaging and accessible way. As one young reader put it, 'it's the only time when learning about the olden days is fun!'
- At the back of each book, the author has written about their journey to becoming an Australian girl, and what it means to them to be part of the rich and varied tapestry of backgrounds that makes up our society.

Before Reading:

- On page 110, there is a short synopsis of what life was like in Ruby's time. Read this section together as a class and consider the following questions. Write your answers in your writers' notebook.
- What type of low paid jobs do you imagine children left school to do?
- Imagine you have been asked to leave school to help support your family. Research the jobs that might have been available for you to take. Choose one of these jobs and write a whole week worth of diary entries about your day and your activities. Consider how you might feel about working in the job you have chosen.
- Families had to rely on food vouchers for things like tea, sugar and oatmeal. Research recipes from the 1930s in Australia and consider what your meals might have consisted of. How many meals a day do you think you would be eating? How often would you have been allowed to eat meat? What type of meat would have been most commonly available to you?
- Choose one of the 'did you know facts' on page 113 to inspire a short story. It can be fiction or non-fiction. But remember, if you choose non-fiction, you must do your research and be sure to get your facts correct.

Prediction:

- Looking at the front cover, predict what type of life Ruby might have. Based on your prior knowledge of 1930's Australia, use the images on the cover of Meet Ruby to predict whether Ruby was rich, poor or middle class.
- What else can you learn about Ruby from the other clues on the cover?
- Write your predictions down in your writer's notebook to revisit later.

Questions about the text:**Chapter One:**

- What have we learned about Ruby so far? Using a character map, write down what you know about Ruby. For example: *Ruby is an only child and she is not good at maths.*
- Who is Brenda and how does Ruby feel about her?
- Why would Brenda think it important that Ruby be wearing a hat and gloves?
- Who do you think Baxter is?
- Why do we think it needed to be stated that Ruby's house has an indoor lavatory?
- What do we think a girl like Ruby would choose to dress up as for her birthday party?

Chapter two:

- What is an icebox?
- How does Ruby feel about her cousin? Can you speculate as to why?

Chapter three:

- What is a gramophone?
- Why do you think Ruby has never had a 'proper best friend'?
- Why do we think May is reluctant to join in the games with the girls?
- A camera is a very expensive present to give a 12-year-old girl in 1930, how much does a camera cost now? Why do we think cameras are so much cheaper in 2013?
- Why do we think that Ruby felt out of place in her dress in front of Tommy?

Chapter Four:

- What do you think Ruby's parents are arguing about?
- Why do you think there is a campsite for homeless men? Why do you think Ruby's mother is so disapproving of the campsite?
- The zoo is nearly empty. Why do you think people have stopped visiting the zoo?

Chapter Five:

- Ruby is starting to become aware of the hardships for others, despite her own comfortable life. How might this make her feel?
- Think about the gifts Ruby received on Christmas day. How different are these gifts from the ones you might receive on Christmas day at your house?
- Why is there a silver coin in the Christmas pudding?

- What is a 'wireless'?

Chapter Six:

- Why does Ruby's mother not know how to cook?
- What is a lunatic asylum? What do we call them now?
- What do you think the parade was for?
- What is a communist?
- How might Ruby be feeling to be trapped in the crowd at the protest?
- What might have gone wrong had Ruby's mother not gotten to her on time? Write a short story in your writer's notebook about what could possibly have happened to Ruby?
- What do you think Ruby's mother means when she says, "sometimes none of us are as grown up as we think we are"?

Chapter Seven:

- Why do you think Mrs Triall hasn't come back from her holidays?
- Ruby has learned the financial crisis is affecting her family. How might she be feeling about this news? What things is Ruby afraid of?

Chapter Eight:

- Where do we think Polly and Hilary are? Why are they not at school?
- Imagine you have lived a very comfortable and privileged life, all your life. Now your family has no money. Write a diary entry of what might have changed for you and your family and how this makes you feel.
- Why do you think Ruby and her friends are so horrified that Hilary will be going to State school? What is a State school?
- Why do you think State schools had such a bad reputation?
- Miss Fraser is getting married. Why is 35 considered old to be getting married and having a baby?
- Why will Miss Fraser stop work after she is married?
- Why do you think Ruby's parents are at her school?

Chapter Nine:

- What do you think Brenda knows about Ruby's father?
- Ruby is facing an enormous change in her life, how is she feeling about this? How might you feel if it were happening to you?
- What is bankrupt? Do you know what this means?

Character profile of Ruby

The novel focuses on one character, so the following are suggestions about how students might build up a picture of Ruby. It can be made simpler for younger students and more in-depth for older ones. It could be done graphically, such as

Ruby

- What her name means
- Appearance/Home
- Likes/Dislikes
- What she says/thinks
- What she does
- What others say about her
- Authors choose the names of their characters carefully. Find out what Ruby means and discuss why the author might have chosen that name.
- The author doesn't tell us what Ruby looks like, but she tells us what she likes and doesn't like. For instance she likes ballet. Find out what else she likes and doesn't like.
- You can create a character by showing what they eat, wear, do, say, without having to describe them directly. This can be helpful to students when they create characters in their own writing. Find descriptions of Ruby and what she likes to eat.
- Writers also use what characters think, do and say to show us what they are like. Have students find examples of what Ruby thinks and says that give a picture of what she is like.
- What are Ruby's strengths and weaknesses?
- Ask students if they would like her as a friend. Why or why not?
- Does Ruby change during the story? Is she different at the end than at the beginning? How?

Create a Wordle for Ruby at <http://www.wordle.net/>

- Have students paste in the words they have used to describe her, and what others have said about her from the above profile.
- Choose a font that best suits her.
- What words appear the largest for Ruby?
- Share Wordles in the class.
- Discuss similarities and differences.
- Have students draw how they imagine Ruby to look, giving her a clear facial expression. Are the images of Ruby anything like the one on the cover image? Compare class images. Why do readers imagine such different portraits?

Narrative structure

Year 4: *'Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example, character development and plot tension'* (ACARA, 2010, p27).

- **Produce a story map of what happens to Ruby** throughout the story. This could be added to for further instalments of the series. Again this can be made simpler or more complex as appropriate.
- Ruby's Actions
- What happens?
- Predictions
- Actual Outcomes
- Where they happen
- Problems

The following are informed by the Australian Curriculum: English for Year 5:

'Students understand experiences, ideas and information beyond their immediate experience. They select relevant textual evidence to support opinions about texts, and recognise that narratives and experiences in texts are shaped by different viewpoints. Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts' (ACARA, 2010, p29).

Imagine that Ruby can time travel and she comes to visit your class. Think of at least two questions you would like to ask her.

In a small group take turns to *be* Ruby. Write some questions to interview her.

Create

- You have explored a lot of historical detail through this story and there is more information given at the end of the book. Ruby's story is written in the first person so we see events only from her point of view.
- Write your own story about what you imagine your life would be like in 1930, using historical detail found in the back pages of the book.

Language

'[Students] learn that changes in English are related to historical developments and the geographical influences of its users over the centuries, and that there are many differences in dialect and accent' (ACARA, 2010, p2).

Find examples of uses of language in the period. Invite students keep their own records of unusual words they find, and to suggest contemporary equivalents. This could be compiled on a chart or a wiki with new words added during the reading.

Find some unusual or old-fashioned words in the book. Write your own definition with a partner, suggest a word that would be used today, and then look up dictionary definitions.

Research

- This is a most interesting period in history – indications are given at the end of the book. A possibility is to offer readers further research, especially children who are interested in ‘facts’– add to the list of events.
- One of the events in the book was inspired by an actual event – The Adelaide Beef Riots. Ask your student’s to research this event and report on the facts. They may do this in a variety of ways: Podcasting, News Article, Book Trailer, Information Report, etc.

Teachers

Further resources, image, maps and articles can be found here

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

Take time to explore the Our Australian Girl Website

<http://www.ouraustraliangirl.com.au/>

Adelaide Beef Riots

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/58638894>

The Adelaide Beef Riot occurred on Friday, 9 January 1931. It began as a march, from Port Adelaide into the city, to protest against the Labor Government’s decision to replace beef with mutton on ration tickets for the unemployed. Led by leaders of the Unemployed Workers’ Movement (UWM), one thousand men, women and children marched carrying placards, banners and red flags. At the edge of the city they were joined by a thousand unemployed Adelaide men. The crowd sang revolutionary songs and chanted ‘We want beef’ as they marched past Parliament House and stopped outside the Treasury Building in Victoria Square.