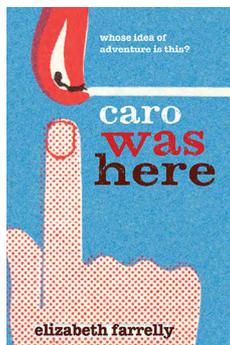




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Caro Was Here

Elizabeth Farrelly
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Brave is good, right? And birthdays too – except when they're not.

It's end-of-term and Caro Kelly is turning twelve. She has yearned to be twelve and yet, for some reason, this is the day everything starts to go wrong. Really wrong. Before recess, Caro finds herself humiliated, beaten and betrayed, even by her two best friends. Quite suddenly school is intolerable. Rules are especially intolerable. Something has to be done. Fast.

So when adventure beckons there seems no reason to resist. Bus? Sure. Ferry? Absolutely! Island? Why not? By mid-afternoon the worst birthday ever becomes the best birthday, ever.

Only when the friends find themselves alone on the island at night does Caro understand what she has done, and the forces she is up against. By then it is too late to go back. Caro sees she must use everything she has – and then some – just to get them out alive.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Elizabeth Farrelly grew up in New Zealand, where life tangles naturally with bush, sea and weather. In Auckland, London and Sydney she has worked as an architect, academic, editor, critic, politician, manager and weekly opinion columnist. She holds a PhD in architecture and several awards for design and for writing, including shortlisting for the prestigious Walkleys (non-fiction). But there are two things she has always loved above all: stories and adventure, real and imagined. So writing adventure stories, especially those with a vivid sense of place, seems an obvious, natural and fun passtime. Elizabeth lives in central Sydney with two children, two cats, one poodle, three fish and a pygmy bearded dragon.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 5-6
- Secondary year 7
- Ages 10+

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Geography

Example of:

- Novel

Themes/Ideas:

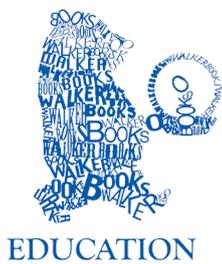
- Friendship
- Adventure
- Belonging
- Responsibility

National Curriculum Focus:*

English content descriptions include:

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
ACELA1501	ACELA1517	ACELA1529
ACELA1502	ACELT1613	ACELA1782
ACELA1504	ACELT1614	ACELT1619
ACELT1608	ACELT1616	ACELT1620
ACELT1609	ACELT1617	ACELT1621
ACELT1795	ACELT1618	ACELT1803
ACELT1610	ACELT1800	ACELT1622
ACELT1612	ACELY1709	ACELT1625
ACELT1798		ACELY1720

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.



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Elizabeth Farrelly on *Caro Was Here*



My daughter was 12 when she read the first few chapters of *Caro* in early draft. “Why are you writing about me?” she asked. “It’s not about you,” I responded. “It’s about me.”

In fact, *Caro* is not entirely me, and her adventure is not entirely mine. But we do share some traits – the yearning for freedom, the impatience with rules, the sense that exploring new stuff is one of the best things ever. And the adventure in the story does draw on some

of my childhood experiences.

I skipped school only once, as a child – but I was the ringleader. I did also have a couple of adventures being marooned on an island, one from a sailing boat caught in a storm and one where, like *Caro* and friends, we took a ferry and more-or-less deliberately marooned ourselves overnight. There was also a completely separate adventure involving a supposedly ‘haunted’ shack that turned out – or so we thought – to have been used by an escaped prisoner.

My adventures were in New Zealand, but Sydney strikes me as such a beautiful and under-exploited setting for stories. I love the way Sydney turns up the visual contrast – how it juxtaposes intense light and shadow, grungy city and sparkling harbour, contemporary wealth with a vivid criminal history. I love the mix of the fecund and the fetid in Sydney’s lush nature. I love the way its picturesque, undulating topography seems ripe for secrecy and crime. I’ve lived here 25 years and still, Sydney thrills me.

I love stories where the environment – built or natural – tangles in a genuine way with people’s lives, helping to weave the plot. I suppose this links my background as an architect and urbanist with my fiction writing. Nature and culture interweave to make cities, and together they shift and shape our lives in a lovely and intricate dance.

And I chose Goat Island in particular because it has a prison history, although the actual collection of buildings I had to invent. It also has Charles Anderson’s rock.

Charles Anderson was a real convict, angry and badly behaved because of brain damage sustained during a beating in the navy when he was still a child himself. He was sent to Australia at the age of 18 and chained to the rock. The pain and pathos of his story resonates with *Caro*’s sense of captivity (in school, first, and later for real)

and with Jamie Savage’s present predicament.

As a child I read myths, legends and from all over the globe. The common elements were page-turning adventure, intensely vivid setting and the high-contrast battle of good against evil. As an adult I read widely but my greatest pleasure is still from reading well-crafted crime; Elmore Leonard, Don Winslow, James Lee Burke. So in a sense, *Caro Was Here* is crime for children.

I steal an hour each morning to write fiction, and that’s if I’m lucky. So for me, it’s slow. I thought I’d bash *Caro* out in two or three months. In fact it took more like six or seven. But it was such a pleasure to write!

I wanted to write a story about courage, about the relationship between naughtiness and freedom – about how you can be too brave, and wind up having to braver still, just to escape alive.

But *Caro* is also a story about friendship, and how people are not always what they seem. It’s about secrets, and secret pain. About how the history of place keeps popping up in the present, rewriting our stories even as we live them. And about what happens when the usual rules, imposed by teachers, parents and society, are suddenly removed.

A couple of other things were important to me.

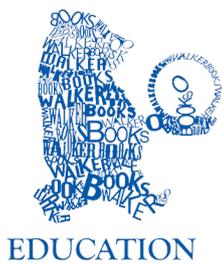
As a woman and a mother of girls, I wanted to write a story with a strong female lead. I wanted to create a girl who thinks and dares and leads. I wanted her to generate a bad or difficult situation, and have to use her intelligence to get out of it.

I like the campfire scene for this reason, because the power passes to the fire, which becomes the something bigger that makes the group cohere. Fire has a magic for all humans, but for children its power is intense and irresistible.

I think this is one reason for setting the story in a real place. Children in particular are alive to magic. To see through a child’s eyes is to see all the magical implications and possibilities of nature, adventure and life.

But I wanted to write adventure because children have so few adventures these days. We keep our children closeted, focusing so intensely on their ‘safety’ that much of that enchantment I remember – roaming at dusk in the local back lanes and hedges, imagining ourselves as pirates, swashbucklers and deerhunters – has gone.

I wanted to try to recapture the magic of this real world, since this is the world we must learn to treasure.



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And there's the crime thing. What I love about crime is the combination of a strong page-turning plot – which for me requires complex characters struggling with intensified moral issues – and a vivid physical setting. I love how this gives a sense of an intensified moral landscape. This may be why I am very drawn to the great storytellers of the past (Kenneth Grahame, Charles Kingsley, JM Barrie, Hans Christian Andersen) who were by no stretch writing 'crime', but who nevertheless gave children's tales intense moral import by incorporating real evil.

I believe the presence of evil is an essential ingredient in developing a recognition of the good. Too many children's stories deny the existence of evil, once again in the name of safety. I think this is misguided, as well as boring. Children need to grapple with evil in a controlled environment, such as a story, in preparation for the real life.

Will there be a sequel? And whose story should it be? Nigel's? Ned's? Tattie's?

Answers: I certainly hope so! And I'm open to suggestion!

Discussion Questions and Activities

Before reading *Caro Was Here*, view the cover of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The tagline
- The publisher
- The blurb

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book, how close were your predictions to the actual novel? Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

What is a genre? What genre is this novel? As a class, make a list of all the genres you can think of. In small groups, make a mind map of some of the characteristics of the adventure genre. Consider settings, characters, events and themes. In what ways does *Caro Was Here* resemble a typical fantasy novel? How is it different?

What is the purpose of this novel (i.e. to entertain, to inform or to persuade)? How can you tell? Write a paragraph about the novel using only informative language that is unbiased. Write another paragraph using persuasive language to convince the reader to share your opinion of the novel. What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Create profiles for Caro, Ellen, Ned, Tattie, Nigel, Jamie, Danny, Jellybaby and The Streak. Write a paragraph of information about each character, their traits and how they grow during the book. Include a picture based on your interpretation of the author's description of their appearance. Write each character's name on a large sheet of paper and draw lines between each, describing their

relationship, how their relationship changes/grows during the novel and what causes the change.

Identify the orientation, complication and resolution of the story. Ask students to identify this structure in other books or movies. As a class, discuss how these narrative features give meaning to stories.

Keep a "Vocab Journal" while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that are unfamiliar and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.

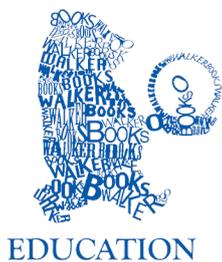
A novel will describe the setting and action in words, allowing the reader to visualise using their imagination. A comic strip or graphic novel uses illustrations to show the reader the setting, action and character's emotions. Create a comic strip of a key scene from the novel.

What are Caro's motivations for organising the group to skip school and catch the ferry to Goat Island? Was she considering the opinions or safety of the other characters?

In small groups, explain how Caro demonstrates the following character traits in the novel:

- Stubbornness
- Selfishness
- Recklessness
- Compassion
- Resourcefulness
- Courage

Write a book report on *Caro Was Here* stating what you liked/disliked about the book, who you think would enjoy the book and mention any books that it is similar to. Use some quotes from the book to illustrate your statements. Create a class blog or wiki to post your reviews and share



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them with other students. You can use this blog to post book reviews of any other book you read as a class or on your own. You can use Blogspot (www.blogger.com) or Wordpress (<http://wordpress.com/>) to create your class blog. Walker Books loves reading book reviews, so send yours to educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au.

The Goat Island in *Caro Was Here* borrows elements from Cockatoo Island. Why do you think Farrelly chose to combine elements of both islands? In your opinion, is it more important for an author to accurately describe real locations, or to put their own spin on locations in order to tell gripping stories that will captivate readers? What is meant by the term “artistic license”? To what extent do you think authors have the right to use artistic license when writing about actual people and locations?

Draw a map of Goat Island featuring the locations described in the book. Mark the locations of key scenes in the novel.

Imagine that a movie was being made of *Caro Was Here*. In small groups, create a soundtrack to accompany some of the key scenes, thinking particularly about the mood you want to convey. You could either make a compilation of existing songs or compose your own musical pieces. Present your soundtrack to the class, explaining why you have chosen the pieces you have.

Imagine you are a journalist and write a newspaper report about what happened over the course of the night Caro and her companions spent on the island. Interview some of the characters to include their side of the story.

How does the desire to fit in/belong and be popular motivate Caro? How do her actions work against her

fulfilling these desires? What lessons does Caro learn about friendship by the end of the book?

How has the loss of Caro’s older brother affected her?

The novel is told from Caro’s point of view, meaning we only learn about other characters through Caro. Rewrite a key scene from another character’s point of view, or write several journal entries from the point of view of another character.

Hold a debate with one side arguing that Caro was irresponsible and put her companions in unnecessary danger, and the other side arguing that Caro gave her friends an unforgettable adventure and captured criminals.

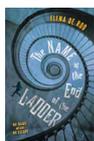
Write an extra chapter to add to the end of the book that explores one of the following:

- What does Jamie Savage do next?
- Caro has an idea for another adventure.
- One year later, Caro discovers that Danny has escaped from prison and is looking for revenge.
- Create your own interesting idea!

“Can isn’t the s-s-same as d-d-do.” (Page 213)

How does the way Jamie’s dialogue is written affect the way you read it? How would it be different if the author had written the dialogue normally and then stated that Jamie was stuttering?

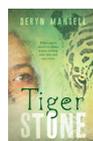
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