



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Henrie's Hero Hunt (House of Heroes Book 2)

Petra James
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Henrie Melchior, the first girl born into the House of Heroes in 200 years, is on a Hero Hunt. When Marely Hart phones on the Hero Hotline, Henrie, Marley and Alex Fischer are in a race against time to find Henrie's missing parents, a missing gold statue and the answers to questions piling up around her archaeologist great aunt . . . but Violetta Villarne from Villains Incorporated is watching very closely. The answers Henrie needs are buried somewhere in the past, but the present is a whirlwind of secrets and subterfuge. Will Henrie solve the Hunt? Will she find her parents? Or will the House of Melchior shadow her forever?

Author/Illustrator Information:

Petra James was born in a small town in the South Island of New Zealand, and came to Australia via London. She has written several fiction and nonfiction titles for children and, most recently, is the author of the seven books in the Arkie Sparkle series. Like Arkie, she wanted to be an archaeologist when she grew up (she had planned to work her way through the career alphabet but didn't get past "A"), but instead sold chocolate chip cookies and eventually found her way into publishing. When she is not sending fictional characters (often named after streets) on adventures, she works in children's publishing in Sydney. The House of Heroes series are her first books with Walker.

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 3-5
- Ages 8+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Novel

Themes/Ideas:

- Family
- Bravery
- Secrets
- Prejudice



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Henrie is on her first official hero hunt, but the villainous Violetta Villarne is chasing after the same secrets as Henrie. Without looking it up in a dictionary, how would you define the word “villain”? How are villains different from heroes? Do you think different characters in the story would give different answers to this question?

Henrie’s Hero Hunt features a variety of different designs and illustrations throughout the text. Find a page that you think is designed interestingly and discuss why it appeals to you (try pages 13, 26, 57, 104 or 160 as a starting point.) How would the story be different if it were all just text?

Petra James incorporates a lot of puzzles and codes into the story, including morse code and book ciphers. Turn to page 173, where Henrie explains how to create a book cipher using *Henrie’s Hero Hunt*, and create a secret message that can only be decoded using the book. Then, give the message to a buddy or friend and see if they can decode it.

The different codes used to send messages in the book are useful in different situations. When sending secret messages using book ciphers, the book acts like a password so that only people who have the right book can decipher what you’re saying. Morse code can be translated by anyone who knows it or has a code book, but it has other advantages. What is morse code used for in the story? What kinds of secret hero situations do you think it would be most useful for?

Petra James uses a number of literary devices throughout the story. What is the definition of each device? How do these devices make the story more interesting for the reader? Can you find other examples of them in *Henrie’s Hero Hunt* and other books? Write a short story using as many of these devices as you can.

- Alliteration – “Or as zen as a zuchinni; as poised as a pumpkin, as languid as a leek.” (page 105), “Turbo Tea-Towel Tickler” (page 156).
- Metaphor – “Boy, this kid was a tough nut. Maybe the toughest nut I’d ever encountered. She was definitely a macadamia.” (page 29)
- The narrator talking directly to the reader – “And you know how I like alliteration.” (page 17)
- Oxymoron – “It’s funny how noisy silence can be” (page 20)
- Simile – “Ellie chomped on danger. She was like a beaver.” (page 24)
- Repetition – “ALERT ALERT ALERT ...” (page 104)

Henrie talks a lot about “non-verbal communication” and tries to communicate with Marley and Alex using gestures and facial expressions. This sometimes works well and sometimes doesn’t. Can you think of times in your life when you or someone else has used non-verbal communication to get their message across or express their feelings? What sorts of things are easiest to communicate without words?

Henrie and Violetta both make special vocabulary lists for types of words that they particularly like. Henrie shows us a list of a few of her favourite ologies on page 14:

- *Brontology: the study of thunder*
- *Garbology: the study of garbage*
- *Limacology: The study of slugs*

And on page 176 we see Violetta Villarne’s list of “Things I Must Do Today”, where she says she must “Add more evil words to my list of ‘Words for Villains’”. What sort of words are you most interested in collecting? Try starting a special vocabulary list of your own, where you collect interesting words for special purposes. You could make a list of ologies like Henrie does, or you could make lists of special words for heroes or villains, or you could make a different kind of list altogether.

“Don’t limit yourself by taking sides, kid,” said Violetta’, (page 179)

What do you think Violetta says this? From a villain’s point of view, why would taking sides limit a person? Do you think it’s always a good thing to take sides, or are there some situations where not taking sides might be a heroic thing to do?

What do you think of the revelation that Caspian is now teaching at the Villain School run by Villains Incorporated? When Ellie says “The company of villains should suit him well.” (page 186), what do you think she means? If Caspian used to teach heroes at HoMe, and is now a villain along with Carter and Finn, how would that change your understanding of what makes a hero or a villain?

“I see you are discovering that information is valuable.” (Albert Abernathy, page 103)

What does Albert Abernathy mean when he says that information is valuable? Can you think of some examples in the book of different sorts of information being valuable to different people? What information is most valuable to Henrie and her friends? What kind of information do you value the most?

Why do you think Violetta asks Henrie to be her prison penpal? Why do you think she might like Henrie so much, even though they seem to be enemies?

Marley Hart’s grandmother Agnes turns out to have been a double-agent during WWII. What is a double-agent? Can you think of anyone else in the book who acts as a double agent?



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Q&A with author Petra James:

The *House of Heroes* series features spies, secrets, clandestine organisations, secret codes and fantastic character names. What influenced you when writing the book?

I loved playing spies and detectives when I was a kid. We had a set of well-thumbed Agatha Christie novels in our bach (New Zealand for 'holiday house') and I consumed them all. So I've always loved a mystery and skulduggery. I also love the idea that language and secrets hide in codes and have to be teased out into the open. Finding the right character names is one of the best problems to have when writing a book. The names are like hooks on which to (figuratively) hang your characters, and you want these names to embody the essence of your characters.

The *House of Heroes* series is told in first person, and there are plenty of moments in the book where Henrie speaks directly to the reader. How did Henrie's voice come to you, and how did you know she needed to talk to the reader too?

Maybe it's unusual to have notes to the reader when the book is already in the first-person but Henrie wouldn't stop talking. She kept saying things that were outside the story so, obligingly, I wrote them down for her.

Kids think laterally so when Henrie began to comment on things that were above, below and beyond the story – despite of and possibly because of being stuck in a linear narrative – it made sense to me.

These asides are also a way of giving the reader an even deeper sense of Henrie's thoughts and the way she sees the world. Hopefully, they help to strengthen her voice.

Tell us more about working with illustrator A.Yi to bring Henrie's world to life.

Anne is a brilliant illustrator, and I already knew and loved her work. She conveys mood, energy and quirk so beautifully. One of the earliest roughs I saw was the portrait of past Melchior – and I was so delighted with the expressions, and noses, on all of them. She had totally captured 200 years of Melchior tradition and the different characters who had formed this House of Heroes.

With wordsearches, ciphers, notes to the reader and more, the design of *The House of Heroes* series is pretty unique! At which point in writing the books did you know that you wanted the layout and design of the book to be special? Can you talk us through your process?

I had always envisaged the book with breakout notes, diagrams, speech bubbles, road signs, arrows and other such visual snippets and included them, where possible, in the original manuscript (I think I might be a thwarted designer). And then the real designer Sarah Davis, Associate Art Director at Walker Books, pulled them all together so wonderfully and made the pages zing.

What is your top tip for aspiring young heroes?

Heroes of the everyday are all shapes and sizes, like you. Bravery is open to everyone.

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