

Freewheelers: *Launched!* by J. A. Mawter

Teacher's Notes for Australian Standing Orders

Synopsis

Launched! is the second book in The Freewheelers action/mystery books after *Unleashed!* The twins, Clem and Darcy, and their friends Mio, Bryce and the new member, Tong, are The Freewheelers, five kids who tackle the challenges that come their way as they ride through their urban jungle. Although coming from different backgrounds and different families together they take on the world. When The Freewheelers decide to enter a bike trials competition they set up a training camp only to discover some unwelcome intruders.

Tong's bike is stolen and graffiti appears around the neighbourhood, including Bryce's old tag from his days when he lived on the streets. Under suspicion, Bryce protests his innocence but the evidence that links Bryce with the bike thief is mounting. To clear his name and find the missing bike Bryce must turn to the street kids he used to hang out with, kids who he's been forbidden to see ever again. Tensions rise as the bike trial approaches and Bryce must choose between The Freewheelers and his family, or his old friends.

Writing Style

The writing style throughout is fast and pacy, in keeping with the action in the plot. The story is structured in such a way that each chapter contains rising tension, and most chapters end with a cliff-hanger or hook of some kind to entice readers to continue reading. The language is very visual, reading like a film script that culminates in a very exciting flying fox scene. The character's personalities and backgrounds come through in their dialogue: banter between the twins; halting speech from Vietnamese Tong as he learns English; quite formal English from Japanese Mio, and colloquial speech from Bryce. There is also a song and the street language used to communicate in the form of graffiti. The beagle Bella, an elderly friend Mr Lark and some wonderful cooking moments provide oases of warmth during the action.

Author's Inspiration

The inspiration behind The Freewheelers series is to highlight alternative lifestyles for today's stifled, bubble-wrapped kids. The objective was to show normal kids venturing out of their homes, facing ethical and moral dilemmas, forging friendships, solving mysteries and having adventures along the way. With the plethora of fantasy novels I wanted to show it's not just magical kids who can *have a life*.

Research played a huge part in this novel with everything from bike trials to non-cook foods, to life in Vietnam, to Jewish diets and Japanese schooling, to martial arts and runaways (or throwaways as street kids are sometimes referred to).

Another objective is to highlight the plight of these street kids – kids found around the world from the poorest to the most affluent countries– and to show how poverty leads

to crime. Lastly, I wanted to look at families and how they are evolving in this modern world.

Editorial Comment

The Freewheelers series has been optioned by Rialto Films to be made into a television series. Jeni (J.A) Mawter has been contracted as series advisor.

Study Notes

Themes and issues in this book:

Families

There are many configurations of 'family' amongst the members of The Freewheelers as opposed to the traditional 'Mum+Dad+2 kids'. Ask students to provide a breakdown of their own immediate family. Is their family similar to any of the characters in Launched! Students can draw their family tree, going back to grandparents or even great-grandparents.

Sports

As well as riding BMX bikes what other sports do the Freewheelers play? Poll the students to learn about the sports that they participate in. Discuss whether the rising health problems of children today, such as obesity and diabetes, can be linked to a lack of sport?

Graffiti

The earliest forms of graffiti were cave art and body art. Today graffiti is seen as a deviant act but graffiti artists insist it is a form of communication that evolves from a desire to communicate with society. Often, people who feel marginalised feel they have no voice in their society. What they say, feel or think does not appear in the media in any way. What other ways can students think of for marginalised people to communicate in public?

Food

The making and sharing of food is an important part of communal sharing and bonding. What importance does food have to the relationship of The Freewheelers and their relationship to Mr Lark. Students can discuss their favourite recipes, especially non-cook recipes, and perhaps make them and share them with the class.

Friendships

Highlight that all friendships have their ups and downs. Bryce has been torn between two sets of friends, his new friends The Freewheelers, and his old friends the street kids. Friendships don't always mean having to make a choice. Which group does Bryce choose?

Moral Dilemmas

On many occasions in *Launched!* the characters have to make choices where there is a conflict between morals and ethics. Some examples are: they interfere with the course of justice when they save the girl at the railway bridge; Bryce defies his father and leaves the house when grounded; Bryce reverts to using graffiti even though the judge at the court ordered him not to; Clem and Bryce decide to eat the pork in Tong's Vietnamese rice cakes even though it is forbidden in their religion; Tong reluctantly confesses he's seen Bryce's tag on the flying fox tower etc. What other examples can students find where characters must make moral choices?

Homelessness

Many children around the world, for a variety of reasons, do not have a home. Young runaways turn to each other to provide the 'family' and friendships that were missing in their old lives. Some of the signs that a child might be thinking of running away include changes in behaviour; isolation from family and friends; rebellious behaviour such as truanting; accumulation of money and possessions; possible disclosure, hints or even outright threats. What should a student do if they suspect a friend or family member is planning to run away?