



STORYMAKERS

PART ONE

ROBIN KLEIN

TEACHERS' NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

STORYMAKERS is a series about internationally known Australian writers and illustrators of children's books. *Storymakers* is designed to develop children's awareness of how books are conceived and created, and to encourage a love for books and reading.

Each film in the series will highlight a different aspect of the process of creating a book. Characters in the books will come to life through live-action drama or animation. Enactments of key scenes from the books will be interwoven with commentary from the author/illustrator who will give background to the passages in the book.

In each DVD, authors/illustrators will talk about how they start on a particular scene, character or story idea. They will also discuss how personal experiences have influenced their works.

The series will also look at the processes involved from manuscript to print—the endless revisions, re-writes, editing and in the case of picture books, the actual design process. Above all, the authors/illustrators in the series will come across as “real people” who get their ideas from anywhere and everywhere...their past, memories of their own childhood, life around them. Their works will come to life in the series, in ways which speak directly to children's imaginations.

STORYMAKERS: ROBIN KLEIN deals with the process of writing a book. In the DVD, Robin, one of Australia's most prolific and popular authors, discusses the ways she collects her ideas. Scenes from Robin's very successful book, **PENNY POLLARD'S DIARY** are interspersed with Robin talking about her craft as a writer. The DVD follows the development of her highly amusing character, Penny Pollard, as well as the development of the story in written form.

STORYMAKERS: ROBIN KLEIN is a valuable resource for teachers to help encourage children to develop an early love and appreciation of books. The DVD can be used to focus on Robin Klein the author, or more broadly on the writing process itself. The series is designed for upper primary school children and for secondary school and tertiary students studying Children's Literature courses.

ABOUT ROBIN KLEIN

ROBIN KLEIN was born in 1936 in the small town of Kempsey in New South Wales. Robin was one of nine children and she describes herself as ‘a little wimp’ who never got ‘...a look-in, was scared, picked on and pushed around...’ Money was short and the family regularly moved from one old country house to another. Robin owned a few books which she read and re-read until she was bored. If she ever complained about having nothing to do, her mother would say: “Of course you have something to do...here’s a pencil and piece of paper, go away and write a book”. So began Robin’s love for books and writing.

When Robin left school at the age of 15 she worked as a tea lady. She then worked in various jobs as a telephonist, a bookshop assistant, librarian, nurse, painter, potter and copper enameller, a photography teacher and now a full-time writer. In between, she married and raised four children.

Robin’s first short story was published in 1952 when she was 16. In her early days she wrote a great deal of poetry and prose, but writing didn’t really become a significant force in her life until much later.

In 1974 she wrote a novel which she felt was brilliant, however the publishers didn’t agree. Not until her marriage ended did Robin seriously begin writing. She wrote for school and women’s magazines. Her first children’s book, **THE GIRAFFE IN PEPPERELL STREET** was published in 1978. By 1981 she decided that she had a real flair for writing.

In 1982 she won the Children’s Book Council of Australia Junior Book of the Year award for **THING** and a Highly Commended in the same awards for **PENNY POLLARD’S DIARY** in 1983.

Robin says: “Creative writing is like a hunger. It’s an urge to write within you—writing or painting whatever your particular field is.”

AFTERWORD Sometime after 2000, Robin suffered a brain aneurysm while in the middle of writing a trilogy and although she survived, unfortunately she is no longer able to write.

ROBIN KLEIN ON WRITING

“**WHAT** I do is keep an exercise book and I’ve trained myself at the end of every day, no matter how tired I am, to write down at least five things that I’ve seen or heard during the day that could be used in a story. Not necessarily a plot, but just something interesting...an interesting person I’ve seen on the train...something I’ve heard in conversation...”

I also have this other book. If I’ve got a few spare minutes, I’ll sit down and write the adjective “blue” and then I’ll try to think of all the different things that are blue. Or “hair” and I’ll try to think of different ways to describe hair. Because actually, original writing is only using combinations of words in a way that no one else has ever done before. Hopefully, when you’re stuck in the middle of a paragraph and you want to describe a sunset, you can look up “sunset”.

I can do up to about 15 drafts. I start off making a master sheet of everything I want to say and a basic outline of the plot. Then I work straight onto the machine, not worrying particularly about typing mistakes or errors. I just want to get the ideas down before I’ve lost them. And after that, it’s just a process of going through and re-writing.”

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

IN THIS DVD we meet Robin Klein, talk to her about her writing and see her work. Scenes from **PENNY POLLARD'S DIARY** are interspersed with Robin Klein talking about the development of her characters and stories.

Teachers should preview the DVD to use it most effectively in follow-up work on Robin Klein herself, or the writing process in general. The following suggested activities can be selected or tailored to meet the needs of individual children or class groups.

DVD VIEWING

1. In the DVD, an attempt was made to enact some of the scenes from **PENNY POLLARD'S DIARY**. Were they successful? Why? Why not?
2. Did Penny seem real to you before you saw the DVD? Why or why not? Was the Penny in the DVD the same Penny you'd imagined? Do books need films to make them real? Discuss.
3. Do you ever think about authors of books...how they write? Does knowing something about Robin Klein help you enjoy, or understand her books more?

BRANCHING INTO BOOKS

1. Compare the Penny of **PENNY POLLARD'S DIARY** with the Penny of **PENNY POLLARD'S LETTERS** or even **PENNY POLLARD IN PRINT**. Does each book give a different impression of the type of girl Penny is? Do the same aspects of Penny's character come through in each book, or is she different?
2. Think about books you've enjoyed reading (or those you have not enjoyed reading). Were the characters real? How is it that some book characters seem real, even in science fiction or fantasy, when other characters don't seem to be real at all?
3. We find out a lot about Penny Pollard from her diary, letters and other writings. We can also find out a lot about people by looking at their rooms, or in their school bags or handbags.
 - a) Design Penny Pollard's room as you think it would be. There are some specific clues in her books, but many decisions will have to be made based on what you know about her.
 - b) Design Simone's bedroom. How does it differ from Penny's? Are you given any specific clues in the books about Simone's room, or only about her character?
 - c) Now look in your room. What does it say about you?
 - d) What do you think Penny Pollard would have in her school bag? List everything or try to fill a bag with what you imagine she would carry.
 - e) Could you do this with Simone's school bag?
 - f) Perhaps you could investigate some of your friend's school bags (with their permission of course) to see what each bag can tell you about its owner.
4. Robin Klein says that she doesn't write to be funny, that it just happens that way. What do you think is funny about Penny Pollard books? About other Robin Klein books? What makes a story funny? Read funny books by other authors. Are they funny in the same way that Robin Klein is funny?

WRITING AWAY

1. Review and discuss Robin Klein's approach to writing.
2. Get a small notebook. Use it to record four interesting things you notice each day. Include newspaper articles, interesting people, conversations, clothes, activities, ideas for plots. Use the notebook for ideas for writing.
3. At least once a week, take 10 minutes to jot down ideas related to one topic. It may be lists of words, phrases, connected ideas—just keep writing on the topic for 10 minutes. Keep these in another notebook. They could be useful later on.
4. Write a diary of your own thoughts, fears and experiences for at least one term. Don't try to copy Penny's style—find your own.
5. Robin Klein encourages young writers to keep a folder for their writing so that they can look back on it later on. Begin to keep a folder of some of your writing.
6. Write a rough draft of a story, and put it away for a few weeks or a couple of months, then take it out again. Have your ideas changed at all? Can you make improvements?
7. Write another day in **PENNY POLLARD'S DIARY**. Try to make it consistent with everything you already know about her.
8. Imagine your own character, and write a diary from that character's perspective. It doesn't have to be an amusing character like Penny, and it doesn't have to be a child, but see how realistic you can make your character.
9. Individually, or in groups, write a Penny Pollard scene as a radio play, a stage play, a newspaper article, and a narrative, not told by Penny herself. Share these with each other. Compare them, looking at the changes in style and language that are necessary for presenting the same, or similar scenes in different forms.

SOME OF ROBIN KLEIN'S BOOKS

The Giraffe in Pepperell Street (1978)
(picture book)

Honoured Guest (1979)

Thing (1982) *Australian Junior Book of the Year Award, Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA)*

Sprung! (1982)

Junk Castle (1983)

Penny Pollard's Diary (1983)

People Might Hear You (1983) *Kids Own Australian Literature Award (KOALA); COOL Award*

Oodoolay (1983)(picture book)

Annabel's ghost ; &, Don't tell Lucy: two ghost stories (1983)

Brock and the Dragon (1984) (junior fiction)

Hating Alison Ashley (1984) *Young Australian Best Book Award (YABBA); Kids Own Australian Literature Award (KOALA)*

Thingnapped (1984) (junior fiction)

Penny Pollard's Letters (1984)

Ratbags and Rascals (1984) (poetry and verse)

Thalia the Failure (1984)

Seeing Things (1984)

Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left (1985)

The Enemies (1985) (junior fiction)
Separate Places (1985) (junior fiction)

The Princess who Hated It (1986)
(picture book)

Penny Pollard in Print (1986)

Games (1986) (young adult fiction)

The Lonely Hearts Club (1987)

Snakes and Ladders (1985) (poetry and verse)

Boss of the Pool (1986)

Against the Odds (1989)

Came Back to Show You I Could Fly (1989) *Human Rights Award for Literature; Australian Children's Book of the Year Award for Older Readers; New South Wales Premier's Literary Award; COOL Award.*

All in the Blue Unclouded Weather (1991) *New South Wales State Literary Award*

Dresses of Red and Gold (1992)

Seeing Things (1993)

Turn Right for Zyrgon (1994)

The Sky in Silver Lace (1995)

The Listmaker (1997) *South Australian Festival Award for Literature; Books I Love Best Yearly honour (Queensland)*

Penny Pollard's Scrapbook (1999)

NFSA TEACHERS' NOTES



STORYMAKERS: ROBIN KLEIN

Producer: Janet Bell

Director: David Haythornthwaite

Executive Producer: Janet Bell

Year: 1987 | Duration: 27 minutes

Study Guide writer: Fiona McKay

Consultant to the series: Ursula Kolbe

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