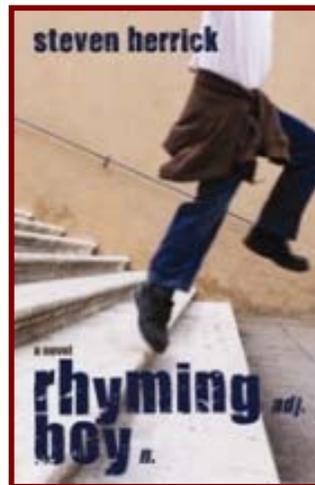


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RHYMING BOY

Steven Herrick



Teachers' Notes

Written by Steven Herrick

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SYNOPSIS

Jayden Hayden lives with his mother, a football-crazed *Blues* fan. Jayden doesn't have a dad, but when his school announces a father and son breakfast, he decides that it's time to meet his father. It takes some time, but eventually a meeting between Jayden and his dad is arranged. Jayden however, is sorely disappointed when Robert doesn't quite fit his preconceptions.

Jayden is a self-professed *word* man. He teaches himself a new word from the dictionary each day. As such, his vocabulary is extraordinary. Why then does he find it so difficult to describe the emptiness he feels after meeting his father for the first time?

Rhyming Boy is Jayden's journey of self discovery and understanding; of learning about the adults in his life and making sense of the various fragments that help define his character.

The extensive use of humour together with literary devices such as similes, alliteration and malapropisms make *Rhyming Boy* an engaging and funny story of a boy who finally accepts and appreciates his own identity.

THEMES**Relationships:**

- Jayden does not know who his father is. As he approaches adolescence, the questions about his father have no doubt arisen before the 'father and son breakfast' is announced. This breakfast gives Jayden the incentive to delve further.
- Initially, Jayden is disappointed with his father. Robert does not fit Jayden's preconceptions of what a father should be. Ironically, Jayden is also concerned that his father will be disappointed with him - Jayden is not sporty, but rather likes to read books, learn vocabulary and write poetry. Will his father approve of this?
- Jayden learns that being a father is new to Robert. He doesn't know exactly what he should do, how to be a father etc.
- Jayden has an open relationship with his mother. He finds her bizarre similes amusing, but annoying.
- Mr Hardy, Jayden's neighbour, fills the void in Jayden's life as a male mentor, perhaps in a grandfatherly role. Later in the book, Jayden refers to Mr Hardy as his best friend.
- Jayden develops a friendship with a new girl in his class, Saskia. She helps Jayden find his father and helps him to realise that adults make mistakes too.

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Acceptance:

- Jayden learns to accept that a relationship with his father will take time to develop.
- Jayden accepts his eccentric mother and loves her individuality.
- After meeting his father, Jayden begins to understand that his mother is his family and that his father may not play the role that he imagined he would.

Identity:

- Jayden has inherited physical features from his father. When he meets his father, he can make these connections.
- Jayden is embarrassed by his name – Jayden Hayden. He is called by a number of nicknames throughout the book; Television Boy, Dictionary Boy and Rhyming Boy. At the novel's end, he discards all of these, taking ownership of his name – Jayden Hayden. This indicates that he has come to terms with his family's makeup. Having finally met his father, and having distinguished those who play a major role in his life, he begins to accept his own identity.
- We all need to know who we are and where we come from.

Family:

- Families come in different shapes and sizes. The nuclear family is one such structure. Single parent families are portrayed positively in *Rhyming Boy*.
- Familial relationships can occur with those outside of the actual household e.g. neighbours and friends

Language/Poetic Devices:

- The novel is filled with malapropisms, alliteration, similes and metaphors
- Dictionaries – Jayden teaches himself a new word each day

WRITING STYLE

Rhyming Boy is a narrative told in the first person, present tense. The use of literary devices including similes, metaphors, malapropisms, combined with dictionary and poetic references further enhance the story. The characters are well defined and genuine. Jayden's mum, Sandra, is reminiscent of the iconic *Kath and Kim* characters. The narration is realistic and contemporary, yet light and humorous.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

In the past twelve years, I've written ten verse-novels. I thought it was about time I wrote a fair-dinkum prose novel. And the story of Jayden, a boy interested in the fine details of words, and family life, seemed the perfect fit. I wanted to explore deeply the thoughts and aspirations and nuances of a twelve year old

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boy – this time, verse just wouldn't work. I had great fun writing the book; Jayden, his mum and Mr Hardy were great friends to have around every day.

STUDY NOTES

- Think of a person who you would love to meet. Draw two columns with the following headings and jot down four or five ideas in each column:
 - Five simple things they might find interesting
 - Questions to ask the person
- Jayden comments that he lives in the 'street of silly names'. Who lives in Jayden's Street and why does he find their names silly?
- Construct a sociogram to show the relationships between Jayden and the other characters in the book.
- Jayden imagines being in a toothpaste commercial with Saskia. Design a poster advertising *Nutrodent* toothpaste, using alliteration to devise an effective slogan for the product.
- Jayden's mum is a unique character. Draw a caricature of Sandra, using the description on p2 as a guide.
- Jayden's mum often makes up her own similes, but usually they make no sense. Choose one of her following similes and draw a short comic strip to illustrate the simile:
 - You're as funny as a turtle in a fruit shop (p14)
 - We had more customers than a platoon of soldiers (p28)
 - It's more confusing than a pig in a chook house (p31)
 - You're as vague as a moose with a cold (p86)
- Brainstorm some well known similes. What might Jayden's mum have said instead?
 - As quiet as a mouse (You're as quiet as a plank of timber, darl. P173)
- Think of some original similes of your own to suit certain images or situations.
- Mr Hardy is asked to bring his favourite book to the breakfast. What book would you take? Why?
- Jayden teaches himself a new word from the dictionary each day. Here is a list of some of Jayden's words:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-tasking • Precipitant • Chagrin • Mastigation • Bafflement • Linger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a dictionary to define these words. • Which of these words relate to the way Jayden may have felt during the story? Explain.
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- Throughout the novel, Jayden often observes his neighbours, the Thompsons, playing football in their backyard. Why do you think Mr Thompson offers Jayden to come and join them after the Father and Son breakfast? Why didn't he offer sooner?
- Jayden makes an interesting observation about silence – 'the longer it goes, the louder it gets.' (p45) What does he mean?
- Jayden makes a list of his *Top 5 Special Days* (p47+). Make your own list of *Top 5 Special Days*, giving brief descriptions of each event.
- What clues make Saskia and Jayden suspect that Jayden Finch is Jayden's father?
- Plan a party celebrating your favourite sporting team. Make a list of the food, drinks and decorations that would be at the party.
- Jayden's mum makes him soldier toast, which he thinks doesn't look at all like soldiers but more like thin strips of toast. Brainstorm other foods that have personified names.
- During Jayden's first meeting with his father, he observes quite intently the dog sitting outside 'expecting his owner.' (p128+) Re-read this passage. What is the correlation between the dog waiting for his owner and Jayden meeting his father for the first time?
- After their first meeting, Jayden says, 'I don't have a temperature, Mum. I have a dad. And there's no cure.' (p135) Explain what Jayden means. Why does he feel this way? Is Jayden justified in thinking this about his father? Explain.
- Jayden comes to the conclusion that he'll never understand adults. 'They're as strange and unpredictable and confusing and eccentric and fickle and erratic as...as I am.' (p167) Will Jayden understand adults better now or not? Explain.
- Saskia and Jayden help take digital photos of jungle like scenery and brainstorm their way through a 'metaphorical jungle.' (p161) Use *Google Images* or a digital camera to take photos of a different setting. Brainstorm vocabulary to match this same setting. Use these tools as a stimulus for creative writing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Herrick is one of Australia's most popular poets. He has published three books of poetry for adults. His books for young people include three books for young adults, *Water Bombs*, *Love, ghosts and nose hair* and *A Place like this*, two books for younger readers, *My Life, My Love, My Lasagne* and *Poetry to the Rescue*, and one picture book, *The Place Where the Planes Take Off*. *Love, ghosts and nose hair* was shortlisted for the 1997 CBCA Book of the Year Awards and the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards and *A place like this* has been shortlisted for both the 1999 CBCA Book of the Year Awards and

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the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards.

Over the past ten years he has performed his poems throughout Australia in schools, pubs, universities, festivals, rock venues and on radio and television. He has also toured Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and Singapore. He is one of Australia's most travelled and widely heard poets. Steven lives in the Blue Mountains with his partner and two sons.

Awards:**The Simple Gift**

Vision Australia Library Awards (2001)
 Sanderson Young Adult Audio Book of the Year
 The Childrens Book of the Year Awards (2001)
 Notable Australian Childrens Book - Older Readers
 Childrens Peace Literature Award (2001)
 Highly Commended (awarded by Psychologists for the Promotion of World Peace)
 New South Wales Premiers Literary Awards (2001)
 Ethel Turner Prize for Young Peoples Literature
 The Childrens Book of the Year Awards (2001)
 Older Readers

My Life, My Love, My Lasagne

Koala Award (Kids Own Australia Literary Award) (2002)
 NSW and VIC Childrens Choice Award

The Spangled Drongo

NSW Premier's Literary Award (2000)
 Patricia Wrightson Award for Children's Books

Tom Jones Saves the World

The Childrens Book Council of Australia Awards (2003)
 Shortlisted - Book of the Year - Younger Readers
 Childrens Peach Literature Award (2003)
 Psychologists for the Promotion of World Peace