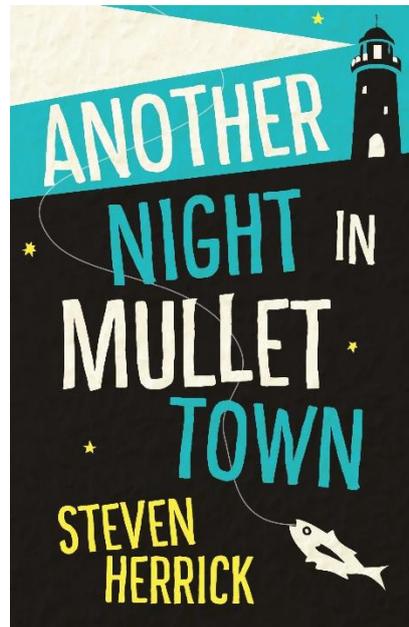


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ANOTHER NIGHT IN MULLET TOWN

Steven Herrick



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

The sleepy, coastal town of Turon is home to Jonah, his best friend Manx and a lake full of mullet. Not a lot happens in this part of the world; however, when a real estate magnate plans to develop the area for cashed-up weekenders, the locals begin to realise just what's at stake.

Between navigating his way through his parents' marriage breakdown and summoning the courage to talk to Ella, Jonah discovers the true meaning of honour, friendship and happiness.

THEMES

Relationships:

- Jonah's parents are struggling with their marriage; Jonah has to adjust.
- The friendship between Jonah and Manx helps both boys navigate their way through adolescence.
- The bond between fathers and sons is explored.
- Jonah and Manx are too nervous to talk to Ella and Rachel, but discover the virtue of relaxing and just being themselves.

Coming of Age:

- Jonah and Manx learn much about themselves and others throughout the text.

Identity:

- Identity is shaped through an understanding of one's core values as well as a sense of belonging and community.

WRITING STYLE

Another Night in Mullet Town is a verse novel told in first person, present tense. The narrative is a compelling and realistic account of life in a small coastal town as seen through the eyes of fifteen-year-old Jonah. Figurative language and free verse gives the text a rich and perfectly nuanced quality. Fast paced and relatable, the text is suitable for a lower-mid secondary audience. It contains alcohol, drug and sexual references.

STUDY NOTES

- The first poem 'Mullet' introduces readers to the two main characters of the text – Jonah and Manx. What is revealed about both boys and their lives from this poem?
- How does Manx use the metaphor of the mullet to express his own frustration with life in Turon? Have you ever felt like Manx? Share with a friend.
- What does Jonah mean when he says the storm 'dammed the lake, and damned the town' (p5)?

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- Re-read the description of Manx's shack and yard in 'Manx' (p7). Sketch this scene. Discuss Steven Herrick's use of language features to create such a vivid image.
- How are Manx and Jonah similar to and different from one another? How does their friendship help them to mature and develop?
- What role does Mr Crewe play in *Another Night in Mullet Town*? How do the episodes between Mr Crewe and Jonah help to punctuate the fights between Jonah's parents?
- In 'Droopy, Loopy and the Neighbourhood Dogs' (pp11/12), Jonah suggests that the local paper should print a story about the garden gnomes cemented to Mr Crewe's fence. Write this newspaper story, using facts from the poem to help.
- How is the character and life of Jonah's dad depicted throughout *Another Night in Mullet Town*? What clues do we get of his life as a truckie? How does Jonah feel towards his dad? How do you feel about him?
- Devise your own slogans to describe the city people moving to Balarang Bay (pp23/24).
- Why does Jonah think that the 'companion of attraction is fear' (p27)? What advice would you give Jonah when it comes to talking to Ella?
- Why does Jonah describe the house at Balarang Bay as 'a two-storey glass-and-concrete nightmare rendered in ochre dwarf[ing] every house on the point' (p35)?
- What does Manx's dad mean when he says 'the dirty feet of Turon would never scuff the carpet in the Lloyd-Davis palace' (p36)?
- Why does Jonah feel the urge to kick the grass clippings and 'remember how I felt as a child' (p44)? Why does he think 'it's never too late to be ten years old again' (p45)? Write a reflection about what you would do to make yourself feel ten years old again.
- Why does Jonah say that 'Auntie Trish looks at me like I'm Dad's son' (p48)? In what ways is Jonah like his dad? In what ways is he different? What characteristics do you share with your parents?
- Perform a dramatisation of the poem 'In the Soft Light' (pp47–49) to your class.
- What comment is the author making about teenagers wanting to be like their friends in 'The Line-up' (pp50/51)? Why is that the one time that Jonah wishes he wasn't like his friends? Do you want to be like your friends? At what point do you think this might change?
- Discuss the scene in which Jonah clears away the weeds from his Grandpa's grave (pp55/56). How has Steven Herrick evoked empathy in this scene? Write a journal entry in the role of Jonah using this scene as stimulus.
- Discuss the poem 'Grandpa's Wake' (p59). What does this poem reveal about the relationship between fathers and sons?

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- In 'That Was Enough' (pp60/61), some of Grandpa's life lessons are shared. Discuss these lessons. How can these ideals be applied to your own life?
- How does Manx use the metaphor of the shark to describe the impact of Mr Lloyd-Davis's actions on the community of Turon?
- How are the fathers in *Another Night in Mullet Town* different and/or similar to one another?
- Find examples from the text that reveal Mr Lloyd-Davis's personality traits.
- Why is it so important that Jonah hears the story of how his parents met, even though he's heard it many times before? How did your parents meet? In what ways is this an important part of your own story?
- How is Patrick like a shark?
- Re-read 'Rooftop Serenade' (pp118/119). What does the first stanza reveal about life in Turon? What devices has the author used to create such a heartfelt description?
- Discuss the scene in which Mr Lloyd-Davis says the oil washing straight into the lake is 'someone else's problem' (p123). What does this reveal about his character?
- When Mr Huth is robbed, the town helps him. What does this say about the calibre of people on the 'poor' side of the lake?
- Why does Jonah say to Mr Lloyd-Davis 'you're a lot like your son' (p184)?
- Why does Jonah 'almost feel sorry for Patrick' (p208)?
- Discuss the symbolism of Jonah turning back to look at Turon, 'the sunlight bright on Manx's shack' (p208). How is this an enlightening moment in the text?
- Re-read 'A Pact' (pp209/210). In what ways does this poem represent the major themes in *Another Night in Mullet Town*?
- Compare the friendship of Jonah and Manx with that of Angelo and Patrick.
- Discuss Steven Herrick's use of figurative language throughout the text, particularly how it contributes to its literary quality. Examples include:
 - 'His dad runs the petrol station in the shadow of highway gums' (p7)
 - 'The sigh of the sea breeze' (p15)
 - 'He walks like a draught-horse pulling a load' (p29)
 - 'I sleep in and wake to find the house echoing with emptiness' (p42)
 - 'A vein throbs in my temple, like my head is about to explode' (p49)
 - 'Fine flecks of dust flickered in its beam' (p58)
 - 'Like the scratching of mice in the ceiling' (p108)

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- 'Like I'm a stray dog looking for a handout' (p122)
- 'He's ignored like a fart at a funeral' (p137)
- 'The boys crowd around Patrick like seagulls arguing over an oily chip' (p193)
- Discuss the pace of the text. How does the author hook readers by his use of pace and by gradually revealing aspects of character and plot?
- How important is setting to *Another Night in Mullet Town*? What role does setting play in narratives?
- Write some of the episodes from *Another Night in Mullet Town* in prose form. Likewise, transform some of your own prose writing into verse form.
- Discuss the author's choice of line breaks and punctuation in his verses. Why has he chosen to start new lines where he has?
- Write a reflection on relationships, using examples from your own experiences as well as *Another Night in Mullet Town*.
- Which character/s do you most relate to in *Another Night in Mullet Town*? Why?
- Choose a character from *Another Night in Mullet Town* on which to create a character iceberg. Above the surface of the water, note what readers are literally told in the text about this character; below the surface, write ideas that must be inferred.
- Create a billboard advertisement for Turon, demonstrating your understanding of its virtues.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

I've been thinking about the increasing divide occurring in Australia – between the solidarity of community or the capital gain of real estate; between the integrity of work or the exploitation of labour; between hope and opportunity for our youth or an inheritance of poverty; between honesty and tolerance or suspicion and mistrust. It's all too much for a feeble-minded author to understand, so I tried to make sense of it through a narrative.

Another Night in Mullet Town is about community and how the insignificant actions of friends and neighbours shape our lives and define our character.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Herrick was born in Brisbane, the youngest of seven children. At school his favourite subject was soccer, and he dreamed of football glory while he worked at various jobs. For the past thirty years he's been a full-time writer and regularly performs his work in schools throughout the world. He has published twenty-two books. Steven lives in the Blue Mountains with his partner Cathie, a belly dance teacher. They have two adult sons, Jack and Joe.
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