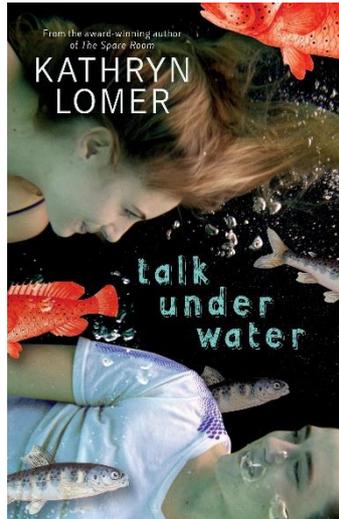


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

TALK UNDER WATER

Kathryn Lomer



Teachers' Notes

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

ISBN: 978 0 7022 5369 0 / AUS \$19.95

Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Relationships	2
Courage	2
Deafness	2
Grief	2
Adventure	2
Forgiveness	2
Sailing	3
Environment	3
Poetry	3
Writing Style	3
Study Notes	3
Author Motivation	5
About the Author	6

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools
but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

SYNOPSIS

After meeting online, Will and Summer soon discover they have much more in common than their interest in sailing. Summer now lives in Will's hometown of Kettering in coastal Tasmania. When they finally meet face-to-face, not all goes according to plan.

Summer is deaf and Will now finds himself trying to communicate in a completely new language. But why does he feel closer to this girl than to people he can actually speak to?

Talk Under Water is a powerful story of courage, persistence and friendship. Both Summer and Will are challenged to step beyond what they know and embrace the unknown.

THEMES

Relationships:

- Will and his dad are struggling with the breakdown of their family.
- Will and Summer form a close bond that develops into one of mutual trust and love.
- Will's friendship with Cully is tested when Will and Summer become close.

Courage:

- Summer must find courage to go sailing with Will and form a relationship with him.
- Both Will and Summer show courage by venturing into unfamiliar territory.

Deafness:

- Summer's deafness prompts Will to learn sign language.
- Will feels he communicates better with Summer than with his friends or family.
- Will begins to wonder if Summer's deafness is preventing him from taking their friendship further.
- Deafness is sometimes called the invisible disability.

Grief:

- Summer is grieving the loss of her father who died several years earlier. She writes letters to him to share her hopes and fears.
- Will is grieving the breakdown of his parents' marriage.

Adventure:

- Will and Summer embark on an adventure that forces them to take risks, problem-solve and trust one another.

Forgiveness:

- Will learns the importance of forgiveness – firstly in forgiving Summer and eventually in forgiving his mother.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Summer learns about forgiveness when she discovers that Will did not set out to hurt her.

Sailing:

- The text is built around the motif of 'charting unfamiliar waters' and is set against the backdrop of sailing.

Environment:

- Aspects of the environment including the dangers of longline fishing to seabirds are raised in the text.

Poetry:

- Will uses poetry to express his feelings.

WRITING STYLE

Talk Under Water is told through a collection of emails, Facebook posts, letters and sections of prose. It is a dual narratives that shares the perspectives of both Will and Summer. It offers insight into the challenges, doubts and emotions of the two protagonists, allowing the reader to feel a true sense of empathy and connection. The language used is tangible, realistic and engaging. The inclusion of sign language makes this a unique and very powerful text. Poetry also features.

STUDY NOTES:

- Take note of the quote by Jessica Watson at the beginning of *Talk Under Water*. Who is Jessica Watson? What did she do? What does this quote tell us about this story we're about to read?
- Both Will and Summer admire Jessica Watson. Track the influence that Jessica has on them and how she becomes a mentor for Summer throughout the text.
- Once Will sees Summer for the first time, he learns that she is deaf. In small groups, discuss the author's ability to surprise both Will and the audience in this way. What clues retrospectively connect the text with her deafness?
- What role does Cully play in *Talk Under Water*? Why is a character like Cully necessary in a story like this?
- Discuss Summer's family. Why is Violet so distant? What relationship does Summer have with her mum and sisters?
- What does Will mean when he emails, 'my mum left us. as simple and complicated as that' (p21).
- Why doesn't Will use capital letters in his emails? How is this significant later in the text?
- Will and Summer discuss the stupidest things they've ever done. What's the stupidest thing you've ever done? Write a reflection or share with a friend.

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Summer writes letters to her dad. Why does she do this? Why does she eventually stop writing to him? Write your own series of letters to someone with whom you're very close.
- Why does Summer say that it's too hard to be brave without her dad being there?
- What role does trust play in *Talk Under Water*? Use examples from the text to support your response.
- Jessica Watson writes that she learnt a lot from hitting a container ship. What do Will and Summer learn from their mistakes?
- How are Summer's writing conventions different from a hearing person's? Why are they different? Find examples from the book to discuss, such as on p47/48.
- Will discovers that body language is 55% of communication. Investigate the role that body language plays in communication, learning the non-verbal forms of communication.
- Why does Will describe sign language as 'transparent' (p89)?
- Will notices that Summer doesn't put herself down and is happy with who she is (p96), nor is she held back by peer pressure. Why is Summer like this? Why does Will often feel unable to be as confident? Discuss.
- When Summer goes sailing with Will for the first time, she says 'it feels like stepping up to life' (p111). What does she mean by this?
- When Summer ponders the vastness of sea life underneath the water, she says it is like 'a whole unseen world' (p119). How is the growing relationship between Will and Summer like 'a whole unseen world'?
- Discuss Will's comment: 'How is it that someone I can't even talk to properly makes me laugh more than anyone else I know?' (p122).
- Discuss the motif of the black swan theory that runs throughout the text. What episodes in the text are linked to this theory?
- What do Will and Summer learn from one another?
- When Cully emails Summer, Will is furious. He then realises that perhaps Cully wrote exactly what Will is feeling deep down. How is this episode a turning point in the narrative?
- Summer wants to become a photographer. Create a photo journal of her journey around Bruny Island, showing your understanding of the personal steps she is achieving through this challenge.
- After *The Fall*, Will says that he needs a mum-hug. Why does it take this event to make him feel this way about his mother?
- Will harbors anger about his mother leaving. Once this anger is brought to the surface, he starts to heal. Discuss the importance of dealing with anger rather than allowing it to bottle up.
- How is the albatross following the yacht similar to Summer?
- Why does Will feel a sense of pain when Beth puts Hannah to bed? How does this prompt him to eventually start reading emails from his mother?

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

- Why do you think the author decided to end the novel with Will meeting Delia and Rosemary?
- What is the significance of the title of the book? How does it relate to the themes of the narrative?
- Read Nette Hilton's picture book *My Silent World* in which a young deaf girl receives a cochlear implant. Discuss whether deaf people might prefer to remain deaf than receive such an implant.
- Why do you think the author chose not to use quotation marks when writing dialogue? How does this reflect the themes in the book?
- Read some of e e cummings' poetry. Why does Will love poetry so much? Discuss the way in which poetry connects Will with his mother.
- Locate Kettering and Bruny Island on a map. Create a Story Map that shows Summer's personal journey as she circumnavigates Bruny Island.
- Visit the Auslan Signbank website. Learn some of the signs Will learns in his Auslan lessons and choose five new words to learn how to sign with a friend. www.auslan.org.au
- The fingerspelling alphabet has been included on pp323-326. Learn how to spell your own name and practise with a friend.
- Visit Jessica Watson's website to learn about her adventures and challenges. Select extracts from *True Spirit* to read as a class. www.jessicawatson.com.au
- Read some of Jessica Watson's Blog. www.jessicawatson.com.au/_blog/Official_Jessica_Watson_Blog
- Consider keeping a class blog of your own as you read *Talk Under Water* using a blogging tool such as Blogster. www.blogster.com

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The title of this book probably stems from a story told to me years ago during what was called 'The Claremont Project' in which deaf kids went to a regular high school in Claremont, Hobart, and everybody in the school learned Auslan as a second language. The story went that a group of kids went on a snorkelling trip and the kids who could sign well could continue their conversations underwater! Suddenly, Auslan was all the rage!

So, the seeds of this book were planted a long time ago. But I can trace the push towards a book to the time when I followed Jessica Watson's progress in her solo circumnavigation of the world, and taking a class in Auslan with my young son. I have an abiding interest in communication in general (not just our species' sort of communication!) and languages in particular. As an ESL teacher, I was interested in psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics and I had, years before, read the wonderful *Seeing Voices* by Oliver Sachs which was all about deaf culture and Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct*, which included chapters on sign language. I had long been fascinated by the visual/spatial language of the Deaf. When I finally learned some Auslan myself, it rekindled my interest in a powerful way. I wondered whether I could write a book with a deaf character and overcome the challenges that might present. I

UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

had also been fortunate enough to do some sailing myself in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel off the east coast of Tasmania, culminating in a circumnavigation of the beautiful Bruny Island. These elements all came together in *Talk Under Water*. An immense amount of research went into the book, particularly around having a deaf character using sign language throughout. I had already read a lot about sign language and Deaf culture and had attended an Auslan class. But I sought out whatever books, online sources and other information I could find to expand my knowledge of sign language and Deaf culture.

I must have worked on the book for approximately four years. When I had a good draft I sought expert advice from TasDeaf which brought me up to date with Deaf culture in terms of rights, attitudes, and so on.

The book changed dramatically as it went along but that can be a normal process for a writer. I had never written a novel before in which the story is told from two characters' points of view, so this was also a big challenge but one I enjoyed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn Lomer grew up on a farm in northwest Tasmania. She left school at 15 and began the first of many and varied jobs in Tasmania and then overseas. She eventually went to university as a mature-age student and became a teacher of English as a Second Language, which she taught for many years in Australia and Japan. She also holds a Graduate Diploma in Journalism, Media and Communications.

Talk Under Water is Kathryn's third young adult novel. Her first, *The Spare Room*, was a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book for Older Readers and her second, *What Now, Tilda B?*, won the Margaret Scott Prize. Both books were shortlisted for the Children's Peace Literature Award.

Kathryn has also published across the genres of adult fiction, short stories and poetry.