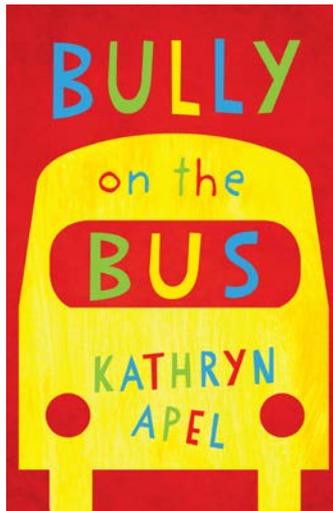


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BULLY ON THE BUS

Kathryn Apel



Teachers' Notes

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

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Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Bullying	2
Courage	2
Relationships	2
Poetry	2
Writing Style	2
Study Notes	3
Author Motivation	5
About the Author	6

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SYNOPSIS

When seven-year-old Leroy is bullied on the bus each day, he doesn't know what to do. He is silenced with the threat that if he tells anyone, he will pay. When the truth finally comes out, he is given a secret weapon – *The Big Bad Book of Fairytales*. While searching for the answer to his problem, he becomes Little Red Robin Hood. But how will the bully react?

Bully on the Bus is a verse novel for 6 – 8 year olds that explores the themes of bullying, courage and relationships. It is an easily accessible text for young, independent readers but is also appropriate for older readers.

THEMES**Bullying:**

- Leroy is bullied by DJ. He doesn't know what to do.
- Eventually, Leroy is given strategies to help deal with this issue.

Courage:

- It takes courage for Leroy to confide in others about his problem.
- Leroy stands up to the bully.

Relationships:

- Leroy has a positive relationship with his friends and teachers at school.
- Leroy's sister Ruby supports him.
- Leroy's mother and father help him with his problem.

Poetry:

- Figurative language and poetic devices are used throughout the text.

WRITING STYLE

Bully on the Bus is a verse novel told in first person, present tense. The poems are narrated by seven-year-old Leroy. The narrative is tangible, real and easily accessible to a young audience of 6 – 8 year olds. It is equally as effective for older readers and speaks to the bully as well as the bullied.

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STUDY NOTES

- The first poem introduces readers to the bully and Leroy's feelings of helplessness. Have you ever felt helpless like Leroy? Discuss.
- The bully doesn't seem to like school. How might this contribute to her treatment of Leroy?
- Leroy likes school and has friends. How could he use these positive parts of his life to help gain confidence against the bully?
- How does Ruby try to help Leroy? Why aren't her attempts more successful?
- Why hasn't Leroy asked for help or told anyone about DJ?
- What role does the bus driver play in *Bully on the Bus*?
- The dedication of the text says 'To Mum, who knew how to "read" bullies'. How can bullies be 'read'? How can 'reading' bullies help to overcome their behaviour?
- Explore the various poetic devices used throughout the text, discussing how they contribute to the narrative. Examples include:
 - Alliteration
 - bubbling, boiling, burning to explode (p17)
 - Shape poetry
 - grasp, tug, pull (p18)
 - falling (p49)
 - Simile
 - I want to roar like a lion ... stomp like a dinosaur ... my heart is howling like a hyena (p61)
 - the clock ticks like a bomb (p67)
 - chattering like magpies (p100)
 - Imagery
 - knife poised, air sliced (p67)
 - Metaphor
 - my cold jellyfish hand (p70)
- Annotate the poem entitled 'A Pinch' starting on p43, identifying the variety of poetic devices used, such as imagery, alliteration, repetition, simile, onomatopoeia and shape. Write a reflection about this poem and the way you are feeling about the events in the text at this point.

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- Leroy starts to feel physically ill as a result of the bullying. Discuss the importance of reading your own physical signs of stress so that you can start using some strategies when feeling like this.
- Discuss Mrs Wilson's comment that, 'Bullies only THINK they're tough'. (p96)
- Leroy is given some good advice about 'How to Bust a Bully' (p98). As a class, write your own poem about 'How to Bust a Bully'.
- How does reading *The Big Bad Book of Fairytales* help Leroy? If you could combine some characters from different fairytales to help 'bust a bully', which new super character would you create? What would their strengths be?
- Compare *Bully on the Bus* with picture books about bullying such as *Rebel* by Allan Baillie or *Ugly Fish* by Kara LaReau.
- Use a range of age-appropriate non-fiction texts about dealing with bullying from your school library to further explore strategies to deal with this issue.
- Discuss the reasons behind bullying. Why do people bully others? What strategies can be used when being bullied? Define bullying. What is the difference between being bullied and having an argument or disagreement with someone?
- Invite a counsellor to speak with students about how to handle bullies.
- With older students, write a journal entry from DJ's perspective. Why are you behaving in this way? How do you feel about your behaviour and the way in which you have treated Leroy? Include events from the text to help demonstrate your understanding of her character.
- Write a reflection on courage and resilience, using examples from your own experiences as well as from *Bully on the Bus*.
- Visit the following websites where there are excellent resources to address the issue of bullying:
 - Bullying. No Way! <http://bullyingnoway.gov.au/>
 - Say No to Bullying Day! <http://www.973fm.com.au/bullying/>

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- Participate in Say No to Bullying Day! Create posters to promote Say No to Bullying Day! to place around the school. Likewise, write short articles for the school newsletter about this project.
- Use the You Can Do It! program to teach students skills about relationships, courage, resilience and dealing with difficult situations.
- Consider reading other fiction texts about bullying to the class, such as James Moloney's *Swashbuckler* and *Buzzard Breath and Brains*.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

School buses are synonymous with bullying – the same group of children are confined in a small space almost unsupervised for extended periods of time. *Bully on the Bus* was inspired by the experiences of my young sons on their rural school bus run, but it's grounded in the memories of my own experiences as a child on the school bus.

Part of my motivation in writing *Bully on the Bus* was to give small children a voice – a springboard for discussion in a shared reading experience with parent or teacher. So often these children are silenced by fear or just don't have the words to convey how scary the situation is for them.

As I wrote the book, I realised it had potential for older children to see the effects of their actions on small children – even if they're 'just having a bit of fun'. Educators have said they see *Bully on the Bus* as a powerful tool because it empowers the victim, but also speaks to the bullies.

Writing the story in verse made it a much more powerful and emotive read – but also an easier read. The layout of words on the page cut the clutter and distraction, revealing the shape and heart of the story.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn's first rhyming picture book *This is the Mud!* was published by Lothian Hachette in 2009. It has since been featured on *ABC Play School*, while her chapter book *Fencing with Fear* was published in the 'Aussie Read!' Series. She has also had poetry and short stories published in children's magazines and on CD in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Kathryn's writing for children has been shortlisted in numerous competitions, including the Ipswich Festival of Children's Literature, and CYA Competitions. Kathryn teaches part-time, in the role of Literacy Coordinator, and conducts author talks at schools and festivals. She lives with her husband and two sons on a rural Queensland grazing property.

You can find Kathryn online at www.katswhiskers.wordpress.com.