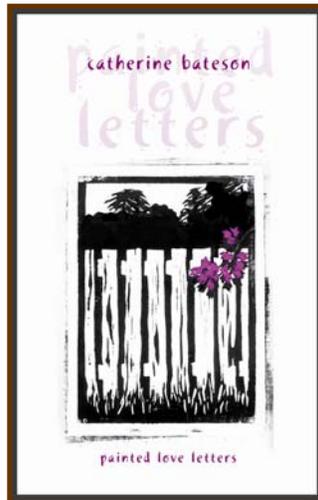


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

PAINTED LOVE LETTERS

Catherine Bateson



Teachers' Notes

Written by Catherine Bateson

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SYNOPSIS

Chrissie Grainger has to grow up fast when her father is diagnosed with lung cancer. Her Dad, an artist, has an idiosyncratic way of coping with his death sentence. Her mother takes on a job as a waitress to support them all and to keep herself occupied. The move from the country to the city and yet another change of school sees Chrissie juggling a double life. There is the Chrissie at school who pretends everything is normal and the Chrissie at home who watches her father dying.

Painted Love Letters deals with grief, but it is grief tempered by a robust appetite for life. Dave Grainger will not be defeated by his illness. He uses it to inform the last of his artworks and he manages to attend his own retrospective exhibition. Chrissie's Mum learns things about her own mother's suffering and life. And Nan steps into the story as a guide and mentor for Chrissie.

STYLE

Painted Love Letters is narrated by Chrissie Grainger, an acute observer. Her voice is confiding and honest as she reveals details of a life lived in the shadow of death. The book is easily read but will reveal poetic layers to a serious reader. There is a gentle humour, too, as Chrissie confronts death for the first time and navigates her way through both her school world and her unusual home world.

THEMES

Painted Love Letters explores the experience of grief, specifically through chronicling Chrissie's emotional journey as she watches her father dying, but also through her observations of her mother as she faces a future without her husband, and that of her grandmother, who reaches into her own past for strength to make a new life.

A secondary theme which runs strongly through the story is that of living - and dying - an artist's life. Dave's reaction to the news of his diagnosis is to keep working and to work in new directions. Chrissie responds to his dedication, learns from it and embraces it in her own way by the end of the book, which celebrates Dave's life and work.

Although Painted Love Letters is a book about death, and the story is a sad one, it is also about achieving reconciliation with death beyond conventional platitudes. Dave Grainger's death changes Chrissie's life irrevocably but his way of dying gives her a gift she will own for the rest of her life.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Bateson's books have received much acclaim. Commendations for her books include:

Rain May and Captain Daniel

Winner CBCA Book of the Year Awards Younger Readers 2003

Winner Queensland Premier's Literary Awards Best Children's Book 2003

Shortlisted NSW Premier's Awards – Patricia Wrightson

Recommended Reading List for Australian Family Therapists Award for Children's Literature

Millie & the Night Herron

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Australian Book 2005

Painted Love Letters

Winner Australian Family Therapists Award for Children's Literature 2003

Honour Book CBCA Book of the Year Awards Older Readers 2003

Shortlisted NSW Premier's Literary Awards – Ethel Turner Prize 2003

The Year It All Happened

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Australian Book 2002

Catherine Bateson grew up in a second-hand bookshop in Brisbane frequented by leading Australian writers including Tom Shapcott and Bill Jones. This, she says, gave her 'the incredibly false view of the world that everybody reads and writes'. The daughter of a journalist mother and father who was for many years Editor of The Australian Journal, Catherine's passion for writing is a lifelong one.