

# HARRY'S SECRET

ANITA HEISS



Harry is really good at skateboarding and he's also a deadly drawer. His good friend Gav approves of one, but art, well, he believes that's for wusses. So Harry only sketches in secret, telling none of his friends or family.

Then the *Cowra Guardian* portrait competition comes along and Harry really wants to give it his best shot – and keeping up clandestine efforts becomes increasingly challenging. Harry's Secret explores themes of individuality, conformity, friendship, family ties and creative drive.

ISBN: 9781760152024

RRP: \$9.99

## TEACHER NOTES

- Harry feels like he needs to hide his drawing talent because it isn't cool. Do you think this was the right thing to do? Have you ever felt the need to hide something about yourself because it wasn't cool? Did you ever tell people about your 'secret', and if so what happened? Do you think there are prescribed ways of being cool and fitting in with a group?
- Consider Gav's comment 'Art's for wusses'. Why does Gav talk about art, reading and tennis negatively? Do you think such behaviour is helpful for others and even Gav? How do you talk and think about things you are good at and things you aren't?
- Do you think art and ballet is girly? And skateboarding and footy is only for boys? Discuss gender stereotypes connected with certain sports and activities, also giving examples which subvert them. Consider having an activities day or week where the students can all participate in sports and activities that have traditionally been gendered.
- Discuss the artist William Dobell, and the Archibald and Dobell Prize to provide further context to the novel. Some useful links: <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/>

[http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/?artist\\_id=dobell-william](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/?artist_id=dobell-william)

<http://www.dobellartfoundation.org/>.

Organise a class excursion to the Archibald Prize or another suitable portraiture exhibition.

- Using the competition guidelines from the novel as a springboard, discuss how subjective and cultural elements can influence how art is created and received. Select a few famous artworks to assist with the discussion (for example, Michelangelo's Pietà, Pablo Picasso's Guernica, and Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans).
- Harry submits his competition entry under the pseudonym H.B. so he can stay anonymous because he fears embarrassing himself in front of Gav. What are some other reasons why one might use a pseudonym for their art? Discuss historical instances of pseudonym use such as female authors (eg George Eliot/Mary Ann Evans) using male pen names.
- The word 'deadly' is Koori slang for 'really great'. Discuss how words can have different meanings depending on cultural context. Watch the following video and talk about other Australian Aboriginal English words (such as humbugs, mob, fella, unna) and what they mean.

<http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/media/1453788/indigenous-use-of-english-language>.

- Consider the following lines in the novel:
  - 'Drawing, for Harry, is a way to deal with stress.'
  - "'Drawing is about seeing the magic in everyday people.'"

Identify the instances in the novel which demonstrate each of these ideas. Do you think that it's okay for an activity to provide enjoyment as well as a means to manage stress?

- Create a slideshow for your students that showcases different styles of Australian portraiture. (Some artists whose work you could include are Margaret Olley, Brett Whiteley, Joy Hester, Gordon Bennett, Ben Quilty, Tracey Moffatt, Adam Cullen.) Ask students what styles they like and why. Set them to task on their own portraiture project (sketch, painting or sculpture) of an important figure in their family or community, adopting one of their favourite styles or creating their own. Display the final artworks around the class.