

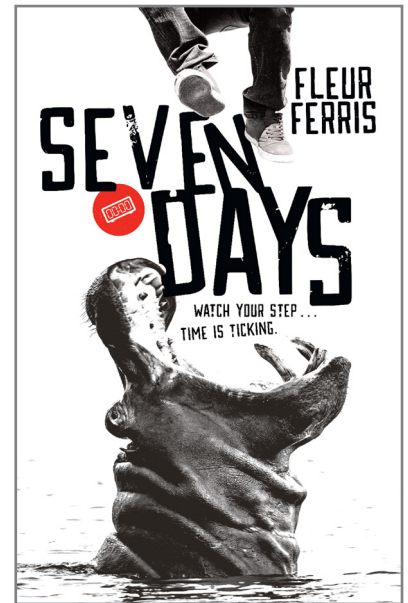
Seven Days

AUTHOR
FLEUR FERRIS

SCIS: 5399635

ISBN: 9781761043352

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

When Ben is dumped with his country relatives for the holidays, he starts counting down the days until it's over, hating every second.

But Ben's stay takes a sharp turn when he comes across his great-great grandfather's journal—the final entry being from one hundred years ago, right after he was shot.

With his cousin, Josh, Ben starts unravelling mysteries, lies and shocking crimes. Can the two boys beat the odds to resolve a century of bad blood between two families?

A dangerous treasure hunt could hold the answers – or it could be a journey from which there is no return . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fleur Ferris spent the first seventeen years of her life growing up on a farm in Patchewollock, northwest Victoria. She then moved twenty times in twenty years.

During this time, Fleur sometimes saw the darker side to life while working for a number of years as a police officer and a paramedic.

She now lives a more settled lifestyle in Moama, southern New South Wales, with her husband and three children.

Fleur's colourful and diverse background has given her a unique insight into today's society and an endless pool of experiences to draw from. When she isn't weaving this through her latest story, reading or spending time with her family, you will find her with friends, talking about art, books and travel.

Fleur's first YA novel, *Risk*, won the Australian Family Therapists' Award for Children's Literature, the Sisters in Crime Davitt Awards for Best Young Adult Novel and Best Debut Book 2016, as well as a YABBA in 2017. She has also written *Black*, *Wreck* and *Found* for young adults. *Nullaboo Hullabaloo* and *Seven Days* are Fleur's novels for younger readers.

Visit Fleur's website at fleurferris.com.

THEMES

Self-perception

Ben begins the book hating himself for who he is—his father's son, no good at sport, skinny and pale, scared of everything. As he delves into the history surrounding his great-grandfather's murder, Ben initially discovers things that

seem to support his self-loathing, but as he digs deeper and starts to open up to both himself and his cousin, Ben begins to accept who he is and even starts to see himself through Josh's eyes, as brave and resilient and determined and clever, and realises his fear is actually a sixth sense that keeps him alive. This gives him confidence and drive to be himself, to believe in himself and also to stand up for himself.

Doing the right thing

Ben does lots of things throughout the story that are ethically questionable, such as stealing a look at Queenie Rhinestone's private journal as well as breaking into the zoo, which is a criminal act. But, you could argue, he does them for the right reasons. Is there such a thing as right and wrong? Does a person's intent play a part in what is right and what is wrong? Or is 'truth' in the eye of the beholder? And does the outcome legitimise the means?

Justice

Who determines justice—an individual or the state? Is it possible to justify a criminal action for the greater good?

Inheritance

This theme is one that runs through *Seven Days* as a continuous motif, and one that trickles into every aspect of the story: inheritance of wealth, inheritance of badness and bad deeds, inheritance of reputation, inheritance of name, inheritance of perspective, genetic inheritance and nature versus nurture and self-fulfilling prophecy.

Family

The role of a person's family is another deep-rooted theme in the story—closely linked to the inheritance theme, but very much stand-alone, too. The different characters portray many different perspectives on family, and the different expectations and relationships between family members: Ben's divorced parents and their living separate lives from their son is in stark contrast to Josh's close family life; family and place are also inextricably linked in the story.

Zoophobia

Ben's fear of animals is initially portrayed as a vulnerability, but it soon becomes apparent that his biggest fear reveals his true bravery—something he very much utilises as the story develops, and something that drives the story and action.

City and rural living

The differences between Ben's life in Melbourne and Josh's life in Manibee are contrasted throughout *Seven Days*. While Ben's life in Melbourne is conveyed as a wealthy yet lonely one, and anonymous thanks to the number of people who live in the city, Josh's small-town community is one where people are held accountable due to everyone knowing everyone's business, and Josh's life is mainly portrayed as a healthy one, filled with sport and outdoor activities and a close-knit family that rates relationships and experiences above things. Are these true to life or outdated stereotypes?

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- Look at the cover. What do you think the story will be about? Based on the images, what themes do you think might be a part of the story?
- Analyse elements of the book cover design by Tony Palmer and comment on what makes them effective. Consider colour, font and images in your discussion. Why were these elements chosen? What would you have done differently if you were designing this book cover?
- Read the first chapter of the book. What do these descriptions tell you about Ben as a character and his family relationships? Who does Ben live with? Does he have a big or small family? Write down as many facts and assumptions as you can based on what you learn on these pages—then revisit them after finishing the book. Were you right in your assumptions? Has your view of Ben and his family relationships changed? In a separate column, write down any changes you'd make to your initial list about Ben's character and family relationships.

WRITING STYLE

- *Seven Days* is a novel written in first-person narrative, which means it is written from the point of view of the main

character, telling the story from Ben's perspective at all times, revealing only what he knows at that point in time as well as giving the reader front-row access to his inner thoughts and feelings. It is also written in the present tense, which makes the action that happens immediate and enables the reader to experience everything alongside Ben, in the moment, as it happens—making for a thrilling read.

- Fleur Ferris has carefully crafted the language of *Seven Days*, honing each word and sentence until it perfectly conveys emotion, action and movement so that every word has the greatest impact possible on the reader. Examples include:
 - Fractured sentences to show Ben's confusion
 - Stream of consciousness, long sentences to show Ben working things out and analysing
 - Short, sharp sentences to depict fast-paced action
 - Active vocabulary that gives each description as much power and meaning as possible, allowing the reader to see, hear, touch, taste and smell what Ben does.

WRITING STYLE QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- What are some of the benefits of first-person narration?
- What are its limitations compared, for instance, with an omniscient narrator?
- What other novels do you know that are written with a first-person narration?
- Can you list other types of narrative technique that are used to write fictional stories? First-person narration and omniscient narrator are just two.
- Re-read the end of the chapter called 'Digging for truth' from pp 175-177. Can you identify the writing techniques, outlined above, that the author uses to add emphasis and edge to the words? Circle examples of each in your text. Are there any other writing techniques that you can identify that the author uses in the story?
- Ben describes the poem in his great-grandfather's journal as 'old-person script'. Using the calligraphy letters in the Worksheet below, compose your own handwritten letter or poem and see if a friend can read it or de-code it.

KEY STUDY TOPICS

HISTORY AND PLACE

- What is the history of the town or suburb where you live? How has that history shaped the place you live today? For instance, are there any statues of significant people from your town's history? Are any roads named after important figures? And do you know of any families who have lived in the same area for 25, 50 or 100 years, like the Parkers and Rhinestones in *Seven Days*, or even much, much longer, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are the Traditional Custodians and the first storytellers of the lands on which you live?
- What are the main differences described in the story between living in a big city (such as Melbourne) and living in a rural area. Are there any similarities?

FAMILY AND IDENTITY

- Plot a family tree of the Parkers and Rhinestones based on your knowledge of the families from the book. Use the clues in the book to help you, eg p 15.
 - On a separate sheet of paper, fill in the details of your own family tree. How far back can you go? Are there any family members who can help you fill out more names?
- Re-read pp 79–88. In this scene, Ben takes Josh and Uncle Ian on a tour of his house. Consider the language that Ben uses to describe the house. He takes a lot of pride in showing his cousin and uncle his home, but it is more about the 'stuff' than the 'relationships'. With his mum and dad absent from his everyday life, Ben seeks comfort in his familiar surroundings. Compare and contrast Ben's descriptions of his 'house' in this chapter with those of Josh's 'home' on pp 33–36.

TIME AND CHANGING ETHICAL VALUES

- Can you think of any other books or stories that use time to structure or mark out the story in this way? Detention by

Tristan Bancks is one example.

- Can you think of any other books that feature journals or diaries, too? What are the similarities and differences between a first-person narration, such as that of *Seven Days*, and a diary narrative? For instance, a diary is usually written as a private text, not to be read by anyone else, and the writer is in control of what they write. How is this different from a first-person narrative?
- *Seven Days* also explores how the past can catch up with you, how history shapes our future, and how what we do today can affect the lives of people well into the future. Re-read pages 139–142 of *Seven Days* before answering the following questions.
 - In this chapter, Ben is trying to sort out his thoughts about doing the right thing. Ben speaks about feeling obliged to do the right thing once he finds out the truth, and that knowing the truth means he is obliged to make that truth known to others so that any wrongdoings can be fixed. In small groups, discuss the following points, which are a summary of Ben's thoughts around obligations, responsibility and doing the right thing. What would your answers be to Ben's questions, and why?
 - 'Is it my obligation to reveal the truth after a century has passed?'
 - 'The obligation comes with the knowing. If I say nothing, am I as bad as my great-grandfather?'
 - 'Am I responsible for anything he [my great-grandfather] did?'
- At the end of p 139, Josh and Ben allude to the different values of Australian society 100 years ago when Eunice Rhinestone was born: "She was raised to think certain things. Society was cruel back then." "It can be cruel right now, too," I say. But Josh is right. Eunice ... was raised in a community that had different beliefs to what we have now. She would have been shamed for many reasons, and none of them were her doing. Being Eunice Rhinestone wouldn't have been easy.
 - What are the beliefs and values of society 100 years ago that Josh and Ben are referring to here? And how are they different to the beliefs and values of Australian society today?