

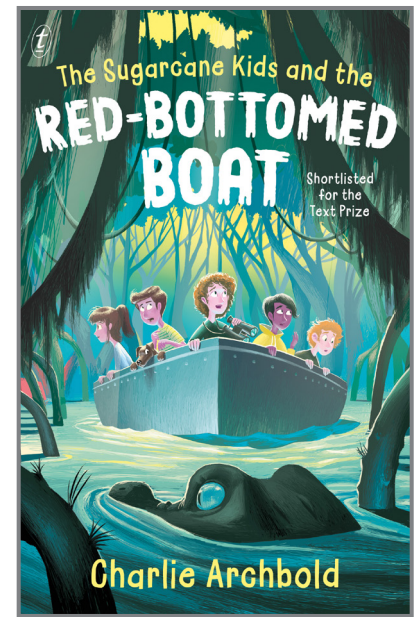
The Sugarcane Kids and the Red-bottomed Boat

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SCIS: 5405343

ISBN: 9781922458520

RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

Andy and his best friend Eli live in a small coastal town in far north Queensland. When Eli's cousin Jacob is arrested for a jewellery theft, Andy and Eli both know he is innocent. They need to find something that will prove Jacob's innocence, and they need to do it fast.

Eli and Andy team up with the twins, Bernie and Fletch, to help Jacob. They talk to Jacob's girlfriend Jacinta, who worked with him on the luxury boats owned by Royce Marine Company. But Jacinta is too spooked to talk to them, offering only one clue—*find Ruby*. Who or what is Ruby?

The clue leads Eli, Andy, Bernie and Fletch into the heart of the mangroves, deep into crocodile territory. They'll have to be loyal, smart, and very brave if they want to outsmart the Royce Marine crooks, and survive Sebastian, the legendary gigantic crocodile watching over the treasure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlie Archbold is an educator and writer. Her first novel, *Mallee Boys*, was a CBCA older readers honour book. The *Sugarcane Kids and the Red-bottomed Boat*, her first middle-grade novel, was shortlisted for the Text Prize.

BEFORE READING

- The story takes place in a very unique setting—a coastal town in far north Queensland. As a class, discuss some of the elements that make this part of Australia so special. What kind of animals might you expect to find? What is the landscape like? (You might need to do some research!)
- *The Sugarcane Kids and the Red-bottomed Boat* is a mystery novel. Make a list of some of the things you'd expect to find in a mystery.
- What does the phrase 'innocent until proven guilty' mean? As a class, discuss the concept of justice, and come up with some of the reasons that people might be unfairly or incorrectly imprisoned.

WHILE READING

- Who are the 'Sugarcane Kids'? Who gives them their name?
- Why is Eli so quiet?
- Do Andy and Terry get along? Make a list of some of the clashes between them. Does their relationship change by

the end of the book?

- Why does everyone think that Jacob is guilty? Do you blame them?
- ‘Raymond Royce is not popular in town because he wants to build a massive hotel’ (p 21). What does this tell you about the kind of person Raymond Royce is?
- Andy is glad that his dad tells him ‘tough stuff’ and doesn’t pretend that bad things don’t happen. Why do you think he’s glad about this? Why do you think some adults keep tough stuff from kids? How do you feel about this?
- What story does Andy’s dad tell him about Big Nigel?
- What is legendary about Sebastian? What role does he play in the story?
- Who is Washington named after?
- What is special about the ‘arrow’ formation?

AFTER READING

CHARACTER

- ‘Jacob Wilson is a seriously good person’ (p 9). Why does Andy say this? Make a list of qualities that you believe make someone a good person.
- ‘(Turtle) came here from Indonesia with Eli’s grandpa when they were young. There’s an old black-and-white photo of the two of them on the dresser. Eli’s grandpa is holding a surfboard with one hand, all shaggy long hair and beard, and he’s hugging Turtle with the other arm like he’ll never let her go.’ (p 53) Does anything about Turtle surprise you? Think about the fact at the beginning of the book—why do you think we never learn her real name? Where do you think the nickname ‘Turtle’ might come from?
- What is Jacinta afraid of? Why doesn’t she do more to help Jacob? Write about a time when you’ve felt afraid to step in and help someone.

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

- After you’ve finished the book, re-read the list of facts at the beginning of the story. Why do you think the author has chosen these particular facts? Using information from the story, come up with an additional fact to add to the list.
- What is a prologue? Why is it separate from the rest of the story? What do writers use prologues for? What is it used for in this story?
- Like all good mysteries, this story is full of suspense. The suspense is created because we don’t know what will happen to the characters when they end up in dangerous situations. One example of this is when Eli is trying to get the dry bag (p 182) and Sebastian is circling the boat. Where else does danger come from in the story? What do the characters do to escape these situations?

THEMES

Stereotypes

- What is a stereotype? What happens to people when others make assumptions based on stereotypes? How can stereotypes be harmful? Make a list of some stereotypes you’re aware of. Has anyone ever stereotyped you? How did it make you feel?
- What stereotypes do Eli and Andy have about Harvey at the beginning of the book? What causes them to see him differently? Do people deserve to be given the chance to change?
- If Jacob’s grandpa was still alive, ‘he’d say it was because of the way Jacob looked that they’d been so quick to arrest him.’ (p 54) What does he mean by this? Discuss this as a class, in relation to the way the photo of Jacob is used in the Shire Times.

Friendship

- How far would you go for a friend? Would you help them even if it might get you into trouble? When Eli says that he understands if the twins don’t want to help (p 46) do you think he means it? Why/why not?
- What are some of the differences between Eli and Andy? How do these differences strengthen their friendship?
- Why do you think Harvey is so mean to Andy and Eli? Rewrite one of the scenes in the story from Harvey’s

perspective. Why might he feel angry or excluded? Does this excuse his behaviour? What could he do instead?

Environment/setting

- What interests you about the setting of the story? Is it similar to or different from where you live? In what ways? How do the mangroves add to the suspense?
- The writer of the story uses all of her senses to create the setting—smell, sound, taste, touch and sight. Find an example where each of these senses is used to create the setting of the story. How could you use your senses to describe the place you're in right now?
- Andy's class goes on an excursion to collect rubbish from the park to save the sea turtles—why is this important? What other manmade things are dangerous to the animals or places mentioned in the book?
- In the book Mrs Cummins gets the class to do a report on sugarcane. Investigate the sugarcane industry of colonial Australia and the experiences and contributions of Pacific Islanders. What impact did the sugarcane industry have?

ACTIVITIES

- Charlie Archbold uses similes to create vivid images of the landscape of the book, eg. 'in the dry season the water shrinks into a thin brown stream, like a scab all dried up along the edges.' (p 10) What is a simile? Underline the simile in this sentence. Make a list of three more similes from the novel.
- Come up with your own similes for the following:
 - The river is like.....
 - It's hot like.....
 - The branches were tangled like.....
- 'It's their habitat. Respect them,' says Jacob about the crocs (p 11). Why is it so important to respect the natural habitats of animals? Make a poster that shows the natural habitats of crocodiles in Australia—include at least three facts about their habitat and share these in class.
- Make a list of some of the animals that are mentioned in the book. Create a short presentation on your chosen animal—is it threatened by anything? What makes it unique or special? Where does it live? Where is it mentioned in the story?
- If we look at the scene in the mangroves, where the Sugarcane Kids come face to face with Sebastian, we might say that the ingredients for creating suspense are danger + setting. What is the danger in this scene? How does the setting present an extra challenge, or add to the mood of the scene? Think of a danger and a setting that you would use to create a suspense scene.
- The Sugarcane Kids follow clues to solve the mystery and clear Jacob's name. Can you list some of the clues that they find?
- A red herring is a deliberately misleading clue. Can you think of any red herrings in *The Sugarcane Kids and the Red-bottomed Boat*? Why are they misleading?
- Think of a new mystery for the Sugarcane Kids to solve. Make sure to include the following:
 - Some clues that could help the Sugarcane Kids solve your mystery.
 - One red herring you could add to your mystery.
 - Give the mystery a catchy title: The Sugarcane Kids and the . . .
- Write the first chapter of your mystery. Once you are done, swap chapters with a classmate and see if you can identify the clue in your partner's work. Did they identify the clue in your work?
- In the book Andy's dad, Rob, builds and makes lots of things. He makes a platform for Andy's bike so Washington can ride on it with him. Draw what you think Washington's bike seat looks like. Design a system to transport an animal by/on a bike, scooter, skates or skateboard. Think about how it works, how it is constructed, what it is made of, how safe and how comfortable it is.