

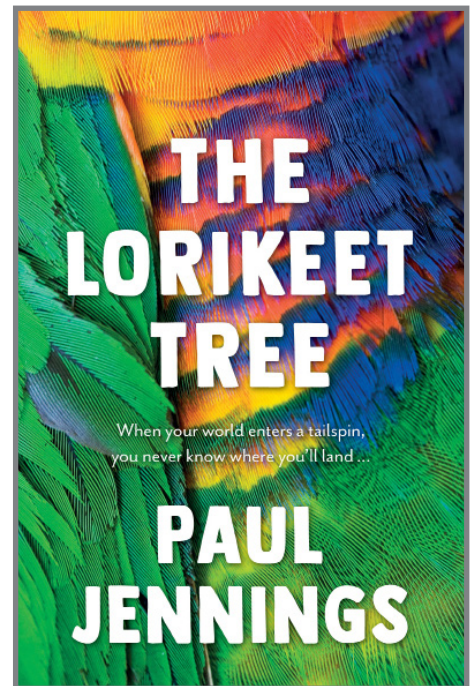
The Lorikeet Tree

AUTHOR
PAUL JENNINGS

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Secondary



SYNOPSIS

Emily loves the bush and the native animals on her family's reforested property, particularly the beautiful rainbow lorikeets that nest in one of the tallest trees. But then her father is diagnosed with a terminal illness, and Emily's world enters a tailspin.

Her twin brother, Alex, refuses to accept the truth. His coping mechanism is to build elaborate additions to his treehouse in the superstitious belief that it will avert disaster—leaving Emily to deal with the harsh reality on her own.

When Alex secretly adopts a feral kitten, going against everything that's important to Emily, the siblings' emotions reach boiling point—with potentially dangerous consequences for them all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Jennings has written more than one hundred stories and sold over ten million books. Since the publication of *Unreal!* in 1985, readers all around the world have loved his stories. The first two seasons of the top-rating TV series *Round the Twist* were based on Paul's popular short story collections and he received two Awgie awards for screenwriting episodes. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to children's literature in 1995, was awarded the prestigious Dromkeen Medal in 2001 and was made a Fellow of Monash University in 2010. In 2019 he was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Children's Book Council of Australia. He lives in Warrnambool with his partner, comedian, actor and author Mary-Anne Fahey.

STUDY NOTES

- Why is Alex so fixated on building his treehouse? How might his strange behaviour relate to being read *The Little Match Girl* fairytale when he was young? How much of his behaviour is really about him trying to control his world?
- Emily, receiving the news about her father's illness, says, 'I felt as if he had just tossed me an invisible medicine ball that was too heavy for me to hold.' (p 9) Do you think this simile works as a way to describe the physical and emotional aspects of receiving bad news? How do you feel when you hear bad news?
- What role does Matthew play in the story? How do you feel about him at the end of the novel?
- Why does Emily find the kitten so confronting? What do you believe about cats being outdoors? Should people be allowed to have cats in Australia?
- Why do you think Paul Jennings decided to frame his story as a school assignment? How would you feel about having such a personal story being read for the purpose of being assessed?

- Read each entry of feedback from Emily’s teachers. Do you think Mrs Henderson was fair to give Emily a B+ on the first feedback sheet? What about the comments from the other teachers? Are they fair in your opinion?
- Did you notice the story starts with a title page called What’s Going On or As It Happens? Why does Mrs Henderson think it is clever that there is no question mark on the title (p 53)?
- What do you believe in as passionately as Emily believes in the protection of the lorikeets?
- “‘It’s not a gift,” I complained. It’s something I do. It’s hard work. It’s putting up with the pain. I hate being strong. It hurts but I just keep going because I have to. And it’s lonely.’ (p 46) What do you think it means to ‘be strong’? Does being strong mean that you don’t need help? What does Emily learn about ‘being strong’ as the story progresses?
- What is the significance of the last sentence in the book, ‘She has become one part of the whole.’? Do you think this sentence might relate to the earlier conversation between Alex, Emily and Matthew about death on pp 103–105? How are they related?
- How did you feel when the novel ended? What do you predict would happen next to the characters? Would you read a sequel? Why or why not?
- Which characters were your favourites? Why?
- Write a list of the fabulous language Paul Jennings uses in this novel—what are your favourite new words? Have a go at using some of these words in your own writing.
- Extension Question: Paul Jennings said that he created the story of the cat and bird as a metaphor for the struggle between Emily and Alex. Explain what you understand him to mean by this.