

Ruby and the Pen

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

Ruby and the Pen is the story of a 12-year-old, cartoon-drawing girl who buys a pen from a mysterious market stall. The pen has a magical power: whatever she draws, happens! Initially the pen protects Ruby from the meanest girls at her new school, but over time the pen's power becomes dangerous. Soon Ruby faces a difficult choice—the pen or her best friend.

As Ruby struggles to wean herself off the pen, she's faced with problems galore. Can she foil her headmaster's evil plan, and save an endangered species of bird in the process, relying on her own talents and working as a team with her friends? Or will she succumb to the pen's power?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Lawrence penned his first book in 2007. Since then, he has written 12 fun-filled children's books aimed at engaging reluctant readers.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Cherie Dignam has always loved drawing and works in a variety of mediums. However, she is at her happiest with a good old-fashioned dip pen and ink.

THEMES

- Fantasy—magic
- Bullying
- Teamwork
- Environment
- Humour
- Family Relationships

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Look at the cover of *Ruby and the Pen*. What do you notice? What do you think the character is feeling? What do you think this story is about?

- Read the blurb and then discuss. Did anyone's idea about what the book is about change?
- If you could make a drawing become reality with a magic pen, what would you draw? Why?
- The author was inspired by the quote, 'The pen is mightier than the sword'. Discuss this quote as a class.

CHAPTER 1

- How does the opening line hook you in? What question/s does it leave you wondering about this character? Does it implore you to find out more?
- What impression does the closing paragraph leave the reader? In what ways does it encourage the reader to keep reading?
- Discuss and write down the meanings of the following words that can be found in the book.
 - accentuated
 - indignant
 - rickety.

Use them in your own sentences.

- Consider and discuss the language used to create a visual image in the reader's mind throughout the story. How does it make you feel? Circle the adjectives in each of the following examples:
 - 'He had a weathered, leathery face and mischievous eyes, and he wore a purple robe covered in gold coloured images of moons and stars, with a matching brimless cap.' (p 6)
- Discuss the literary technique of alliteration on p 4 and describe how the author has used this as a form of humour and for a memorable impact. Refer to the illustrations to identify the reference to the names. Do the alliterated words always need to begin with the same sound?
 - Brainstorm some other possible funny alliterated names for these characters, and draw pictures to match.

Comprehension

- Why are Ruby's mother and her boyfriend sending Ruby to boarding school?
- What does this opening chapter tell us about Ruby's family dynamics and how she feels about her mother's boyfriend?
 - What language is used to show Ruby's feelings, both about the new boyfriend and about her father?
- What happened to Ruby's father?
- How did Ruby earn the money to buy the pen?
- Why do you think the antique 'Second Hand Treasures' stall appeared for Ruby?
- What happened when Ruby picked up the pen? What does the inscription, 'Manibus futuri' mean, and why might this be meant especially for her?

CHAPTER 2

- Write down the definitions of the following words.
 - haggard
 - vacantly.

How do these words describe the character's traits?

- What is a simile? What is the literal meaning and metaphorical meaning? Write your own similes to describe someone coughing.
- Discuss how the author uses different kinds of humour to show the characters' personalities, and to keep the reader engaged.

Comprehension

- 'Double, double toil and trouble, Fire burn, and caldron bubble.' (p 8) Have you heard of this quote? What famous play, and by which writer, is it referring to? This literary technique is called 'allusion'. How does it relate to the bubbling of the ink?
- How does Ruby's mother feel about sending Ruby to boarding school? How does Ruby feel about leaving her mother behind?
- What was the plane trip like for Ruby? How did she handle the challenge? Could she have done anything differently?

CHAPTER 3

- The author has used the metaphor of an ‘uncooperative’ dog and its ‘dissatisfied’ owner to refer to Ruby and Sasha. What does this tell you about their relationship?
 - Is there another metaphor you can think of to describe the way the characters feel about each other?
- ‘His cheesy grin contrasted sharply with his angry eyes.’ (p 12) What does this line tell you about the Headmaster of Hetherington Hall?
- What kind of personality traits does Sasha possess?
- What is your impression of the standards and facilities of Hetherington Hall? What specific language is used to give this impression?
- What are the typical behaviours of a bully? How do Sasha and Miranda show some of these? Do you think Ruby’s reaction to their taunting was a good approach? Why or why not?
- How do you think Ruby will respond to the bullies in the next chapters?

CHAPTER 4

- What is an idiom? What does the ‘needle in a haystack’ idiom mean? (p 16). How does Ruby innovate on this idiom? Brainstorm other ways to describe this idiom.
- Why do you think Ruby has a special connection to this bird?
 - Research the Gouldian Finch or another rare species and complete an infographic including life cycle, habitat, statistical facts, images and calls to action, with references.

Comprehension

- Why did the bullies lie about throwing Ruby’s pen out the window?
- Why do you think Miss Luxton believes/wants to believe Sasha and Miranda?
- Why would the other girls in the dorm pretend not to notice the bullies?
- What strategies did Ruby use to calm down?
- What was Ruby’s cartoon idea?
- How does Ruby know that she can trust Fav to be her friend?
- Do you think Ruby will be worried about Sasha’s threat?

CHAPTER 5**Comprehension**

- What is meant by ‘unwritten rules’? Who’s rules are they? Do you think these rules apply to everyone equally?
- ‘Ruby’s jaw tightened and she forcefully started typing a reply.’ (p 20) What does this tell you about Ruby’s feelings after she read her mum’s email? How does the language ‘show’ and not ‘tell’?
- Why didn’t Ruby send her ‘honest’ reply?
- How does the author use humorous banter between Ruby, Fav and Mr Lemon, and between Ruby, Fav and the bullies?
- What are the main things that Ruby is upset about?
- What does ‘The bullies seemed to have the teachers wrapped around their little fingers’ mean, and how is this affecting Ruby’s school experience?
- How did Ruby’s pen reappear in her pencil case? How did the pen control Ruby to draw a picture of Sasha? Or did the ‘magic’ come from Ruby herself? Discuss the possibilities of the ‘power’ of the pen.

CHAPTER 6

- Pronounce the following words out loud:
 - hazchem
 - ricocheted
 - nougat.

Identify the spelling patterns and particular phonemes in the words, then break down the words into sounds or

syllables.

- Can you list other words with similar phoneme patterns.

Comprehension

- Compare the similarities and differences between Sasha's reaction to her pimple and Ruby's reaction to her inexperience with soccer. Which shows more resilience? What, if anything, could they have done differently?
- Think about a time you had to overcome an unfamiliar or challenging task/situation. What positive thinking strategies would be helpful? What did you learn from Bertie's advice?
- What is the purpose of Dougal's drone? What other ways could the drone be useful to him and Ruby?
- Why does Ruby think she is 'so going to get it!' (p 29) after talking to Andre?

CHAPTER 7

- Find and discuss the definition of 'wincing'. Find other examples in the chapter where a character might have 'wincing'. How does this word express feeling?

Comprehension

- What kind of 'tone' do you feel Ruby's mum is expressing in her email? (eg. happy, disappointed, hopeful, resentful, longing, excited).
- Why do you think Ruby chose to hide in the cupboard when Sasha returned with her voice back?
- Why might Ruby want to prove to Sasha that she can score a goal?

CHAPTER 8

- How many words can you find in this chapter that relate to the game of soccer?
- 'Right at that moment Sasha had the ball in defence, and decided to kick it as hard as she could up the field. The ball flew off her boot like a low flying missile. It hit an unsuspecting Ruby on the top of her head, ricocheted forty metres, and completely bamboozled the Monsetto goalkeeper.' (p 37) Imagine this scene in your mind. Highlight the specific parts of the language that show the reader the intent (or unintended consequence) of each character.
 - Write another scene using visual literacy techniques for a partner to illustrate.

Comprehension

- How did Sasha manipulate the coach, Miss Luxton, to keep Ruby from playing soccer?
- What do you think will be the consequences of the 'magic pen' in future chapters?

CHAPTER 9

- 'The school bully's shoulders were slumped, her face was flushed and she was staring miserably at the ground.' (p 38) How does the language used in the above quote show the reader how the character is feeling? How is this more effective than writing, 'The school bully felt miserable.'? Write another sentence showing a miserable character.

Comprehension

- Why is Fav reluctant to continue using the pen? Does Ruby feel the same way? Why or why not?
- Do you think Sasha deserved her punishment?
- Do you have your own conclusions to Ruby's questions about the real estate land; 'Who bought the land? What are they going to do with it? And why is Mr Lemon so happy?' (p 39)
- How does Ruby feel about being asked to draw for the school magazine? Do you believe she will be successful at this role, based on what you know about her abilities?

CHAPTER 10

boring, as in '... Sasha's eyes boring into the back of her head.' (p 43)

composed, as in 'composed enough to speak.' (p 44)

- These terms are both homonyms (words that share the same spelling and pronunciation but have different meanings). Write both definitions for each word. Can you find more homonyms in the text, or add your own to a list?
 - Create a graphic showing the differences between homonyms, homophones and homographs, and ask students

to provide examples of each.

- Through the dialogue between Ruby and Andre, identify the parts of their speech that show the reader how each character feels, thinks, their interests, dislikes, sense of humour, way of speaking, impact on the other, and so on. Does the dialogue sound natural / casual or formal? Is the tone light and friendly, or heavy and serious?
 - Write a short script with dialogue between two characters from the book, experimenting with tone, expression and feeling, then share with the class.

Comprehension

- How do we know there has been a power shift from Sasha to Ruby? Can you infer how Ruby might feel about this?
- What did you learn about Andre's parents? What did you learn about Ruby's father?
- Why do you think Ruby trusts Andre to share her feelings about her dad's death and how it has impacted on her family?
- What did you learn about Mr Lemon and Dodgy Dave? How do you think this will impact on the school and the land?

CHAPTER 11

- Observe the arrangement, wording and spelling Ruby uses in her emails to her mum. How is language used differently in emails and text messages to handwritten letter writing?

Comprehension

- What might be meant by, 'Ruby smiled. For the first time in years, she felt like she had a purpose.' (p 49)?
- 'It concluded with the rallying statement: "The world needs more trees, not more theme parks!"' (p 54). Discuss the meaning of 'rallying statement', and how this line is trying to be persuasive.
- How do you think the team are feeling about publishing their articles in the school magazine? What are the aspects that could be seen as 'controversial'?

CHAPTER 12

- The author has used puns to highlight the name (Lemon) and the nature of his greedy actions in a humorous headline. Brainstorm more words relative to 'lemons' and write an alternative headline.

Comprehension

- 'But Bertie had simply given her a wink and said, "Hey, no use crying over spilt milk!"' (p 58). What does this saying usually mean, and how might it help Ruby in her situation with the Headmaster?
- Do you think the Headmaster's decision to expel Ruby was fair? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 13

- 'He wore the expression of a boy in a dentist's waiting room who hadn't cleaned his teeth since the last visit.' (p 62)
- How does this metaphorical line symbolise how Mr Lemon is feeling in that moment? What kind of expression might be on his face? Think about a time you may have felt this way. Turn to a partner and replicate the expression, or draw it!
- What kind of comedy is 'satire'? How were Ruby's cartoons 'satirical'?

Comprehension

- What makes the scenario of the teachers celebrating Ruby's expulsion humorous? Is this realistic?
- How is the author portraying the 'adults' in the book?
- How does the author portray the distinctions between Mrs Amaro and Mr Lemon? (p 60)
- Why did Mr Lemon go back on his decision to expel Ruby? How did he behave?
- Did Mrs Amaro help Ruby achieve her goal?
- Do you think the theme park could be good for the community? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
- Do you think Ruby is, in fact, in control of the pen? Or is it the other way round? How is this changing the relationships amongst the girls?

CHAPTER 14

- Discuss the definitions of the following words. How do they all express an emotive quality? Draw and label an

emotive picture for each word.

- sceptical
- hapless
- elusive
- jubilantly.

Comprehension

- What or who is a 'Cheshire cat'? Which literature text does this come from?
- How have Ruby's emails to her mother changed? How has her attitude towards the other students changed? How would you describe Ruby's manner now?
- Why do you think the ink bottle doesn't do what Sasha wants it to do?

CHAPTER 15

Comprehension

- How is the pen making Ruby feel 'emptiness'? In her mind, what is she really struggling with? How does she begin to turn this around?
- Retell the events of the stinging bees. Do you think Sasha has learned her lesson about the pen yet?

CHAPTER 16

Comprehension

- How are the friends all working together to achieve a common goal?
- In small groups, brainstorm some ideas for how Ruby and her friends can stop the bulldozer from 'terminating' the trees.

CHAPTER 17

- 'Ruby darted through the hole in the picket fence and plunged into the sea of green trees and bushes.' (p 84). Hyperbole is an exaggerated statement, not meant to be literal, and used in emotive/emphasised situations or dialogue. Highlight the parts of the above quote that are not meant to be taken literally.
 - How does this language create a greater impact on the reader?
 - Re-write this quote using more literal terms and compare the 'emotive effectiveness'.
- Onomatopoeia are words that represent, and imitate a sound. What is the 'pitter patter' (p 85) representing in the story? What other things could be represented by a 'pitter patter' sound?
 - List other onomatopoeia sounds that could have been heard in the forest.

CHAPTER 18

Comprehension

- Why has the 'surge of warm energy' disappeared from Ruby's pen? Where did it come from in the first place?
- What did Mr and Mrs Amano gift the school for Ruby? What does a 'full scholarship' mean? How do you feel about Ruby being able to stay at Hetherington Hall? What change can you see in Sasha?

CHAPTER 19

- 'The sun shone brightly as powerful, foam-crested waves crashed over the sleek dark rocks on the beach below.' (p 92). How does this quote evoke the senses?
 - How does the language in the above quote allow the reader to visualise the setting? Draw a picture as you visualise these words.

Comprehension

- What is the significance of Adelaide and Ruby throwing the keys and pen into the water where Bertie died?
- How does the closing line, 'Goodbye Dad, I love you', make you feel? How do you think Ruby is feeling?