

The Secret History of the Rainbow Trout Private Hotel

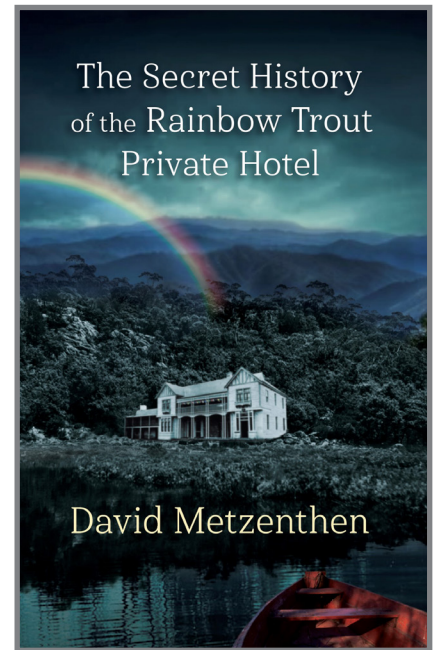
AUTHOR

DAVID METZENTHEN

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary
(Language, Sexual References, Alcohol References)



SYNOPSIS

Andy Lightfoot's gap year takes him deep into the past—at the old and weirdly wonderful Rainbow Trout Private Hotel. Here, high in the mountains, Andy discovers working for nothing gives him everything . . . and that the middle of nowhere is the centre of an amazing universe, filled with individuals of sheer brilliance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Metzenthén is the highly-regarded author of many books for children and young adults. He has been awarded Premiers' prizes, a Prime Minister's award and a CBCA Book of the Year award. He lives in Melbourne with his family. Before becoming a fiction writer he was an advertising copywriter – and also a builder's labourer. He likes surfing, fly-fishing and is a dedicated conservationist.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Discuss the title and conjecture as to genre, setting and what might a secret history involve. What clues does the cover art offer the reader? Consider the landscape, the building, the rainbow and the lake.
- Conduct a five-minute research grab on where rainbow trout are found in Australia (this could offer possible clues for locations for the hotel).
- The author writes: 'The whole book was triggered by the first line, page 1. I was hitch-hiking in New Zealand and came upon a lake called Lake Waikaremoana . . . the light was golden . . . the year was 1977! This indicates that this novel was almost fifty years in the "making"! What insight into a writer's creative process does this give us? eg. That a single idea can gradually develop into a full narrative, that one incident can trigger a sequence of events that become a plot. Brainstorm possibilities.

DURING READING

Structure

- The author establishes the general location of the hotel early. Use Google maps or similar to locate the Alpine Region and, using contextual clues, narrow down the location. Use the images aspect to examine the terrain. Establish activities (commercial or otherwise) population, tourism, products and so on of this area using a concept map or similar strategy. How does the setting for a story impact the plot?
- Begin a *dramatis personae* as characters are introduced and make brief notes of relevant details eg. appearance, personality traits, occupations, habits.

- Select the character of most interest to you and develop a creative one-page analysis on him/her/them. There are many student-created examples on the internet as well as templates.

Literary Devices

- The author uses figurative language extensively, and to great effect. As you read, draw attention to these. Identify the following examples:
 - Blunt mountains stood behind it like old protective friends (p 3)
 - opening his case to expose squashed paint tubes and brushes stored like smugglers' contraband (p 41)
 - because the future's a mere moment away (p 68)
 - Tiny rainbows glistened here and there as if jewels had fallen from the sky. (p 255)
 - oil paintings of shepherds brooded (p 256)
 - looked like the stars of some elegant but odd European movie (p 260)
- Another literary device used by the author is imagery, which is descriptive language used to create a mental image for the reader. It might be literal, describing something a character sees or feels, but is often more subtle. Choose one of these sensory imagery examples and write a short paragraph outlining the emotional response you feel is intended by the author:
 - He surveyed the landscape; lake, mountains and low hills. 'Shipwrecked on an inland island, we are. Lost the lifeboats and lit a fire.' p 16
 - The room smelled old but clean, not of candles but of laundry soap. Sunlight fell on floorboards pitted with age. p 19
 - The grand scale of the view made him feel small and lonely. At home, riding his bike beside the Murray River under ancient redgums, there was a feeling of alone-ness but not loneliness. p 44
 - Looking down, he watched slender tendrils of mist drifting through the treetops. p 147
- Show Don't Tell is a literary technique with which most students will be familiar. It is used to create a more immersive narrative experience, and the author uses it here to great effect. Discuss these examples and what the reader gleans from them.
 - As for any indication of a vacancy, there was only a six-digit telephone number that Andy guessed would not have received an answer anytime this century. p 8
 - Andy seeing a calendar, for the year 1976, swinging on a hook . . . p 13
 - Andy and Nash stood at the kitchen window looking out at a shining yellow and white American car that had pulled up in the car park. Like something driven straight out of the 1950s, it was big and heavy with a chrome grill, twin head lights, whitewall tyres and . . . p 164
 - Andy took another look at Clint McGinn's car. It was a Chev, he reckoned, at least sixty years old, in old bold Hollywood colours and rock and roll style. It sat like a grinning shark. p 165
- Symbolism is another device frequently used by authors. The setting being a hotel, the reader expects mention of rooms and doors. What do you think the author intends for the reader to think? You could use a strategy such as Hot Potato to brainstorm ideas as a class. Alternatively, individuals can come up with their own suggestions. Consider these examples:
 - Doors opening and closing everywhere, he thought, which surely meant something, although he didn't know what. p 123
 - Living in the hotel, Andy felt like an actor in a play. Every time he entered a room, climbed stairs, opened a door or rounded a corner, he expected something unusual to happen. p 152
- Identify examples of foreshadowing throughout the novel. This is especially apparent with Dash:
 - Constant flicking of his lighter, he appears to be the only smoker
 - His receipt of the insurance letter and his reaction (about pp 150–160)
 - An ongoing thread of references to fire the kitchen stove
 - The fireplace in the cosy lounge
 - The smoke alarm winking reassuringly (p 180)
 - 'You gotta love a fire, Dahlia.' Nash stood the old black billy in raw orange heat. 'Runs in the family.' p 210
- Fire and its capability are both positive and negative throughout. Discuss how this relates in general to themes, and

characters in the novel.

- Henri is a significant, albeit secondary, character in this narrative. ‘Hmmm. I would say I like to paint the things behind the things you can see. To paint the meaning, Andy. Or give them meaning.’ He laughed. ‘That’s if these things offer something unseen. Good painters share secrets or truth.’ How does his early comment begin to shape our understanding of the plot? Outline your thoughts on this and support with references to the text.

Themes

- Choose one of the following themes (or identify one you think should be included) to expand on in a piece of analytical writing:
 - Conservation v Destruction (Hippie v Hillbilly)
 - Illusion (Secrets/Hidden history)
 - Coming of Age
 - Dreams v Reality
 - Human Nature
 - What is success?
 - Diversity: Religion/beliefs, language, race
 - Light v Dark (Good v Bad)
 - Relationships
 - Civilisation v Wilderness
 - Redemption
 - Siblings/Family Dynamics.

AFTER READING

- Stage some mini-debates, points to consider could include:
 - The end justifies the means
 - People are neither wholly good or wholly evil
 - Change is frightening
 - Good people can do bad things
 - Having dreams is more important than current reality.
- Using your choice of medium, create a visual image of some aspect of the setting eg. the stable, the lounge or kitchen of the hotel, the lake.
- Choose a character and write a creative piece on ‘what happens next’ eg. Julia going to boarding school, Dash heading to Broadway, Andy going to Melbourne. Incorporate some of the author’s, David Metzenthen’s, suggestions for writers and keep to the style of the novel with its figurative language/literary devices.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
SUE WARREN