

Teachers' Notes

Kerenza

A New Australian

Rosanne Hawke

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle



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A New Australian series

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Introduction

It is 1911 and Kerenza is happy in the small Cornish village where she has lived her whole life. She has her friends and family around her, she enjoys school, and she loves the misty countryside. But times are changing, even in her sleepy village, and her parents fear the uncertainty and hardship of her father's work down the mine, as well as the lack of security that comes with renting their home. All of which means that Kerenza's life is just about to change completely forever.

Kerenza's uncle emigrated to Australia when he was not much more than a boy, but he kept in touch with his family, and he and Kerenza's father have plans to claim land from the government in South Australia and start up a farm together. So despite the distance, the difference, and the danger, Kerenza and her family travel halfway across the world in the hope of a better life and a new start. Kerenza's parents are hopeful that this change will provide their children with opportunities that could only be dreamed of in densely populated Cornwall. Kerenza, however, is more than a bit doubtful, and her younger brother Kitto and little sister Elowen are also uncertain and nervous. Her elder sister Wenna is completely against the proposition. Wenna has been stepping out with a local lad, has steady employment as a maid in the Lord's manor, and flatly refuses to leave.

Whatever she may think of the plan, Kerenza is too young to decide for herself, and so she and her trunk board the steamship that will take six weeks to reach their destination. The journey is difficult for her, but their arrival is even harder. Australia does not *look* the same as her home. The colours are wrong, the shape of the trees is wrong, the very air smells wrong and the sounds that surround her are alien and strange. Matters are not helped by her newly met cousin Jacob who makes it clear to Kerenza that he thinks she doesn't belong in Australia either.

The mallee scrub where her father and uncle's land lies is remote, densely covered in unforgiving and tough vegetation, and home to animals the like of which Kerenza has never seen. Her new life at first seems to her to be as harsh and unwelcoming as the scrub. But gradually, as Kerenza learns to know her new home, she realises that beauty and wonder are to be found in Australia as well, new friendships to form, and a new chance at a life that may be different from before but might also be better in a lot of ways as well.

Kerenza's journey is as much in her heart and mind as it is one of physical relocation. She overcomes the challenges she faces with strength and courage, and her love for her family, her determination to do what she can to help, and her generosity of spirit shine through and allow her to finally learn to appreciate her new life as an Australian.

About the Author

Rosanne Hawke is the author of many award-winning children's books and is a fourth generation Cornish-Australian whose ancestors arrived from Cornwall in 1856 to work at the Burra mine. She lives near Kapunda in an old Cornish farmhouse with underground rooms. She grew up in the bush; loved reading and writing as a child and has written over twenty books for young people including *Kelsey and the Quest of the Porcelain Doll*, *Soraya the Storyteller*, *The Keeper*, *Sailmaker*, *Wolfchild*, which was commended in the 2004 open Cornish Holyer an Gof Awards, and *Across the Creek*, which won this Cornish award for children's literature in 2005. Her historical novel, *Taj and the Great Camel Trek*, won the 2012 Adelaide Festival Awards for children's literature. Her latest books for younger readers are *Killer Ute* and *Shahana: Through my Eyes*. Rosanne lectures in creative writing at Tabor Adelaide and visits schools, supporting literacy programs. She's a Bard of Cornwall and has a Cornish Corner on her website where you can discover more about Cornwall and Cornish people's lives and influence in Australia.

www.rosannehawke.com

Rosanne Hawke has a Facebook Author Page.

Activities

English

Language, slang, and dialect differences all mark people as belonging to one group of people or another. In 1911, Australians spoke a different variety of English than did their ancestors in England, or the newer immigrants still arriving from Britain. Kerenza and her family have a different accent than her cousins do, and use different words.

- As a class discuss the language used by Kerenza, and the difference from the language used by her cousins. Think about what is likely to be different, why the language is different, and what things might have influenced Australian English to shift and change from the British English that the original colonists spoke.
- Reread the first two chapters after Kerenza has arrived in Australia. In pairs or small groups see how many distinctly Australian words and phrases you can find being used.
- Some words are obviously Australian such as *mallee*, *kangaroo*, and *dingo*. As a class discuss how we can tell that these words are Australian, and where they came from. What other English words can you think of, that have come from Indigenous Australian languages? (Hint: think of some of the names of animals, plants and places.) Choose one of your words and see if you can research and find out 1) which Indigenous Australian language it has been taken from, 2) if it has been changed when it was adopted as an English word, and if so how it changed, and 3) what its original meaning was.

Kerenza: A New Australian has been written in the first person from the perspective of Kerenza. We see Australia through her eyes, and understand events from her point of view. An author's choice of viewpoint influences the readers' understanding of events, and how sympathetic they are to the other characters in a novel.

- As a class discuss the way seeing things from Kerenza's point of view affects how we interpret the action of the story.
- Discuss the other viewpoints that the author could have chosen to share with us, and what you think that the various other characters in the book might have had to say about events.
- Individually, choose one of the characters from the list below, and write a brief description of the first time they meet Kerenza. Write the description from the perspective of your chosen character, remembering to share their thoughts, feelings and reactions, and something about *why* they feel this way about what is happening.
 - Jacob
 - Harry
 - Valmai
 - Clarrie
 - Winnie

History and Geography

Kerenza's father was a miner, who had no experience of farming. While her uncle had some knowledge of local conditions and crops, he too was relatively inexperienced. The land they planned to farm was covered in dense mallee scrub, and needed to be cleared before it could even be ploughed or a crop sown. This was not an unusual thing to happen in Australia at the time. While today there are many thousands of hectares covered in farmland, with sheep, cattle and crops being successfully farmed, less than three hundred years ago Australia had no tilled soil or farms recognisable as such by Europeans at all.

As a class discuss the fact that immigrant farmers in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries commonly (and with governmental blessing) moved on to an area of land and started cutting down the vegetation and planting crops. Some things to include in your discussion are:

- What were some of the difficulties these hopeful farmers faced?
- Whose land were they taking possession of?
- Many of the settlers thought that the land was vacant. Why did they think this? (Look at the conversations between Clarrie the swaggie and Kerenza).
- How did the British/European idea of land use, ownership, and possession contrast to the way Indigenous Australian cultures traditionally cared for and used the land?
- How might Australia's differences from Europe in terms of soil types, climate, suitability for crops and livestock, and native vegetation and ecosystem have contributed to the different approaches to land use?

- What are some of the long term negative side-effects that European-style farming has had on Australian land? (Hint: Think of the conversation where Clarrie suggests leaving some of the Mallee uncleared, and think about why the well water was salty. Also look at the Murray-Darling river system and what has happened to it in the past 200 years.)
- How were the Indigenous Australians treated by the government at the time? What justifications did the government think they had for taking the land and making people leave their Country?
- Clarrie told Kerenza that Winnie and her grandmother were the only Ngawait left in their Country in 1911, and that there were no other speakers of the language left. How many Australian languages have been lost since European settlement? What language/s do the people from your local area speak?
- What are some of the traditional ways in which Indigenous Australians look after the land, the waterways, and the animals?

Creative Activities

- Kerenza shows Elowen how to make dollies from an old hanky, and scraps of wool and cloth. Try and make a rag doll of your own, using similar materials to those that the girls had available. Use Kerenza's description on pp 90–92 of how to make one as a guide.
- Kerenza makes butter from cream using an eggbeater to whisk it in a bowl (p. 103). In small groups experiment with different ways of churning cream into butter. You can try:
 - Using an old fashioned eggbeater like Kerenza used.
 - Putting the cream in a large jar and shaking it.
 - Using a modern whisk to beat it in a bowl.
 - Using a modern electric mixer.
 Write a report comparing the different methods you used. Remember to include how long each method took, and how difficult it was. Make a snack using your fresh-churned butter – for a challenge you might want to use the buttermilk as well, and make pikelets!
- Try dowsing for water on your school grounds. See if you can find a map showing the pipes/sewer lines and compare the results of your dowsing to the water lines you know about. (It probably won't work, but it is always fun to try.)
- Find a recording of Dame Nellie Melba singing and listen to it. (You can hear her singing 'Home, Sweet Home' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMi16nYUFq0>) Learn a song she used to sing and perform it at assembly or for another class.
- Individually or in pairs research a Cornish fairy tale or myth. Rewrite the myth and illustrate it, and use your work to make a class book for sharing. There are fairy tales and resources on Cornish themes on Rosanne Hawke's website (www.rosannehawke.com).
- Kerenza was able to bring one trunk of her favourite possessions with her. Most trunks held approximately the same amount as a modern cardboard box used by removalists

when people move house. If you had to move to another country and could only take one box of things with you, what would you choose? Kerenza brought books and pictures and art supplies. Make a list of what you would pack if you were in Kerenza's situation.

- Kerenza painted a picture of the land that was her new home using only two colours of paint, blue and red.
 - Choose the two colours that you think best represent the land where you live, and paint a landscape using only different shades of your chosen two colours.
 - Go for a walk in an area of bushland near your school. What colours do you see around you? Take coloured pencils and a sketchbook with you, and use them to record the variety of different colours you see. Use these visual notes to help you paint or draw a multihued landscape.
- Make a postcard and write a message on the back to a friend or family member.

Science and Technology

Kerenza and her family take six weeks to travel to Australia by steamship. Steamships revolutionised waterborne transport and were a major technological breakthrough. As a class discuss the ways in which the advent of the steamship changed global shipping. Some questions to research and consider are:

- What were the advantages of steam-powered ships over sail? Were there any disadvantages?
- What things does a steamship need that a sailing ship doesn't? What things does a sailing ship need that a steamship doesn't?
- How long did the journey from Britain to Australia take on a sailing ship?
- How long did the journey from Britain to Australia take on a steamship?
- When were steamships invented?
- How fast could the first steamships go?
- When were steamships at their most popular?
- Why are steamships no longer widely used?

Write a brief piece discussing your findings about steamships, and their impact on the global shipping and transport industry. Other things that you might like to research and include in your report are:

- Names and pictures of some famous steamships.
- Diagrams showing their engines and explaining how they worked.
- The floorplan/layout of a typical ocean-going steamship in the early 1900s.
- Scale pictures showing their size relative to 1) sailing ships, and 2) modern cargo and passenger ships.
- Maps showing some of the more well-travelled shipping routes, with duration of voyage marked on them for different types of ships.