



STORYMAKERS

PART THREE

COLIN THIELE

TEACHERS' NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

STORYMAKERS is a series about internationally known Australian writers and illustrators of children's books. **STORYMAKERS** is designed to develop children's awareness of how books are conceived and created and to encourage a love for books and reading.

Each film in the series will highlight a different aspect of the process of creating a book. Characters in the books will come to life through live-action drama or animation. Enactments of key scenes from the books will be interwoven with commentary from the author/illustrator who will give background to passages in the book.

In each DVD, authors/illustrators will talk about how they start a particular scene, characters or story idea. They will also discuss how personal experiences have influenced their works.

The series will also look at the process involved from manuscript to print—the endless revisions, re-writes, editing and in the case of picture books, the actual design process. Above all, the authors/illustrators in the series will come across as 'real people' who get their ideas from anywhere and everywhere...their past, memories of their own childhood, life around them. Their works will come to life in the series, in ways which speak directly to children's imagination.

STORYMAKERS: COLIN THIELE explores words and their impact—the power of words and how they are used to develop setting, character and the spirit of place. Colin speaks of the importance of word choice and word order for suspense and dramatic effect. He talks about imagery, mood and creating humour with dialogue and description. He also discusses other aspects of his writing including: where his ideas come from, his reasons for writing and how long it takes to write a book.

In the DVD, Colin answers letters from school students and we see him at home, and on the farm where he grew up, talking with Jonathon a school student. Jonathon asks questions raised by his class. Colin reads extracts from his books, and the novels **STORM BOY, SUN ON THE STUBBLE, THE VALLEY BETWEEN, SHATTERBELT** and **JODIE'S JOURNEY** are dramatised.

Colin Thiele's personal warmth and his love of writing will inspire young readers and encourage young writers to explore their own creative imaginations.

The series is designed for upper primary school and for those students in secondary schools and tertiary institutions studying Children's Literature courses.

ABOUT COLIN THIELE

COLIN THIELE is a wonderful storyteller. He is also a great teacher with a special commitment to the education of children. His stories recreate the life, landscape and spirit of the rural German community which was his childhood world. They reflect his love of the natural environment and tell of people battered by wind, water and fire. As he says:

I believe, as I have said often enough, that one of the functions of literature is to reveal humanity to humanity, to interpret and comment on the variousness of the human condition. This is so whether the author is writing for children or for adults.

As a man who wrote mainly verse for the first 20 years of his writing life, the poetry remains in his work, even when reflecting upon the process itself:

For in what exactly does the 'spirit' of the place and its people reside – the texture of sand and stone or pavement underfoot, the touch of the air under heaven, the tone of the voice, the tremor of an eyelid? How does one arrange words on paper to recreate the most tremulous moments of human experience, or to reveal truths about our existence, without the platitude or sentimentality—and to do all this in the context of a readable and entertaining story?

Colin Thiele was born in Eudunda, South Australia, in 1920. He went to school in the country and to University and Teachers College in Adelaide. After serving in the RAAF during the Second World War, he taught in high schools and wrote many programs for radio including plays, poetry, documentaries, talks and children's features. In 1957 he started lecturing in English at Wattle Park Teachers College in Adelaide and was its Principal from 1965-1972. He worked briefly as Director of Murray Park College of Advanced Education before serving as Principal of Wattle Park Teachers Centre from 1973-1980. Since then he has been a full-time writer and most of his children's books have been set in South Australia.

Colin Thiele's non-fiction includes writing about history, the environment and education. He is a book reviewer and an editor and has been widely published in journals and anthologies. He has also written short stories, verse, school texts, biography and adult fiction. Indeed, most of his publications have been for adult audiences. Colin Thiele in his role as educator has lectured overseas and is well known as a broadcaster and public speaker.

Many of Colin Thiele's books have been translated into other languages and published internationally. **STORM BOY, BLUE FIN** and **THE FIRE IN THE STONE** have been made into films. The author was awarded many prizes, citations and commendations for his writing both in Australia and overseas and in 1977 he was made a Companion of the Order of Australia for services to literature and education.

Colin Thiele died in 2006 aged 85, with his wife and daughters by his bedside.

THE POWER OF WORDS

FROM THE DVD

I've always loved words and I've said that words ought to do what the writer wants them to do. Words should run when they're meant to run. They should walk when they're meant to walk, they should sing when they're meant to sing and even now, I never cease to be amazed at the way a row of black marks on a piece of paper can do so many wonderful things. They can make us laugh, they can entertain us, they can make us cry and I've seen it happen and I suppose everybody has, people with tears streaming down their cheeks and all they're doing is looking at a piece of paper with some marks on it. So the power of words is enormous.

I like a style which is a very clean, spare style. In other words, I like using the short word instead of the long word and that's probably a good policy for most writers. I nevertheless like it to be very rich in images and associations so I use a lot of comparisons, a lot of metaphors and relations between words...I always try to choose words that can build the mood of the story and at the same time create visual images for the reader to see...but when we come to people speaking to one another—their dialogue, their conversation—, then I think we have got to be very, very accurate. The exact words that I use will bring out the humour of the situation wonderfully well, if you can do it well...

I think this country has been very easy for me to write about because it was in my blood and all the images that I tried to catch were images which existed. You see, the planks of sunlight in the early morning in this country are golden, they glow off this country, off the stubble...and almost every picture in one's mind can be recreated and I think that's why so many people have sort of responded to the imagery of this kind of country because they can see it in their own eyes. When I had to leave, it was a tremendous wrench.

FROM BOOK TO FILM

COLIN THIELE gives examples to illustrate his general comments about writing. In **STORYMAKERS**, settings, characters and incidents are dramatised as he reads selections from five of his books, listed below.

STORM BOY We see Storm Boy's home, that wild and windswept strip of sandhill and scrub between the calm water of the Coorong and *'the endless stream of the Southern Ocean'*. Images of Storm Boy's happy life are followed by the death of his pet pelican, Mr Percival, killed by a duck shooter.

SUN ON THE STUBBLE The DVD presents a few scenes from this novel. First we see Bruno as he watches his talkative, gobbling, turkey-like Aunt Emily with her waggling chin, her high-pitched laugh and her ironmongery—her clashing and jangling chains, earrings, clips and brooches. Later, as Colin Thiele speaks of his own sadness when he left his boyhood farm, we see an old car on a country road. At the end of the DVD, Bruno is driven by his father to the railway station. He is going to school in Adelaide, reluctantly. *'Deep within him he knew that things would never be the same again. Something in his life was ending, something he loved as much as life itself...'*

JODIE'S JOURNEY The idea for this book came from a letter written by an 11 year old girl with arthritis. She had heard that Colin Thiele also had this disease and asked him to write about it. The book is about a girl the same age as the person who wrote the letter, and how she copes with the crippling pain of severe rheumatoid arthritis. In the DVD we take up the story when Jodie and her mother first go to hospital. She must stand and wait to be admitted despite her pain. Jodie's journey is a journey *'in and through arthritis'*.

THE VALLEY BETWEEN Benno and Vito, on holiday from the country, stroll along the beach in their sagging, hand-knitted swimming costumes, unaware that the girls are giggling at them. They are approached by the Beach Inspector who points out that they are exposing themselves—indecently.

'Was something showing?'

'Everything.' Benno was appalled.

'Everything? Crikey!'

SHATTERBELT Sally and her brother Andy head for a steep and dangerous gorge. Tracey warns them to stop. *'Whether is was premonition or not she didn't know but the details of what was about to happen were suddenly so clear that she could have written them down; Andy slipping and rolling, his body lying crumpled and motionless. Sally's distraught cries. She was sick with fear.'* Sally and Andy make fun of Tracey and ignore her pleas but Andy falls over the cliff, as Tracey had predicted.

MEMORIES

COLIN THIELE SAYS:

I think when you live in a place and grow up in a place you sort of soak it up through your boot soles. It becomes part of you and this country and the hills beyond—the farming country—is in my blood and to try to catch that, to catch it in words is very difficult, so you tend to rely on images, pictures, so that your readers can identify with what you're trying to say.

The following activity is concerned with the role memory plays in writing. It may be completed before watching the DVD, or it may be adapted and finished after viewing. Teachers should change the script according to their own students' interests and backgrounds. If the activities are completed before viewing the DVD, the class could exchange their memories in a group or with the whole class.

After considering what Colin Thiele says about the craft of writing, students may then edit and proofread their own work in pairs or individually. Final drafts may then be published on a class blog or in a school magazine.

SCRIPT

In **STORYMAKERS**, Colin Thiele says that much of his writing is based on his own memories and experiences. In this exercise, you will remember things from your own life and share some of these with your class. You will also write down in detail one of your memories.

Relax, make yourself comfortable, I will make suggestions and then pause so you will have time to remember.

First, think about an enjoyable time you have had recently. What happened? How did you feel?

Remember also:

- *your first day at school*
- *an achievement you feel good about*
- *a conflict*
- *an exciting time*
- *your earliest memory*

On the DVD we will watch some scenes from Colin Thiele's books. We will see children who have different feelings about their experiences. Now concentrate on your own feelings. Remember when you have felt:

- *sad*
- *happy*
- *embarrassed*
- *frightened*

Finally, have you ever had a premonition or a vision of what is going to happen in the future?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

IN STORYMAKERS, Colin Thiele discusses his own writing with Jonathon, a school student and leader of a Thiele fan club. In particular he talks about the use of words and a selection of scenes from his books which are used in a dramatic way to illustrate his descriptive powers. Before watching the DVD it may be useful for students to think of questions they may wish to ask the author if they too had the chance to meet him. After watching the DVD all the way through once, it is suggested that the film should be replayed. The class may be divided into groups, assigned different tasks from the following activities and then report back to the class as a whole. Activities should be selected and modified to suit the abilities and interests of individual students and groups.

DVD VIEWING

1. What questions did the students want Jonathon to ask Colin Thiele? What were some of his answers? In particular what did he say about the use of words?
2. In the DVD, scenes from five books are dramatised. Each one is used to illustrate aspects of Colin Thiele's writing. In groups, choose one of these scenes.
 - a) Who was in the scene? Where were they? What happened to them?
 - b) What did you feel as you watched it?
 - c) What did you learn about Colin Thiele's writing?
 - d) Does understanding something of the writer's life help you to enjoy his writing?
3. Individually, write about what you liked in the DVD and what you thought was important. What was especially good advice for you? You could decide to use this advice next time you write. Tell the other students what you learned and how it is useful for your own writing.
4. Bruno and Benno are characters in different books, but in the DVD they are played by the same actor. What does this suggest about the source of many of Colin Thiele's ideas?
5. The end of the STORYMAKERS DVD shows a boy exploring an old farm and walking through fields of stubble. Who is the boy? Why do you think he was chosen for these final scenes?

6. Colin Thiele says,

I get thousands of letters from children and many of them say... "these words interest me, they fascinate me, how do you get the words to do these things? How do you arrange them...?"

Here are some other general comments from the letters in the DVD:

I like you because you put sad parts in the beginning, the middle and the end

I like your colourful descriptions

Your stories make me laugh and make me sad

And here is another example.

I love your words like 'scum', 'shimmering', 'flirting' and 'half-heartedly'.

In groups, make up a list—**What makes a good writer?** In your discussion include:

What is written and who it is for, how and why the writing is done and the language that could be used in different situations. Think of the people who have written well—including yourself and your friends—and give examples of each of the above points. Design a poster and publish your ideas on the classroom wall or blog. This will be a good reference for your own writing exercises.

BRANCHING INTO BOOKS

1. Ask your teacher to read aloud a short story from one of Colin Thiele's books, perhaps from a novel where individual chapters stand alone as self-contained stories. Four books that draw strongly from the author's own boyhood experiences which are full of adventures and wonderful anecdotes are: **SUN ON THE STUBBLE, UNCLE GUSTAV'S GHOST, THE SHADOW ON THE HILLS** and **THE VALLEY BETWEEN**. Chapters read in sequence will show how theme and character are developed. In this collection the themes develop from childhood innocence to the responsibilities of young adulthood. Or you could listen to a chapter or two from the shorter novels such as **STORM BOY** or **SHATTERBELT**.
2. In groups, prepare a dramatic reading aloud of an episode from one of Colin Thiele's books. You could include movement, mime, role play and sound effect.
3. Individually, choose one of your favourite incidents from Thiele's writings. Learn the details and become a storyteller. Tell the story to the class and try to encourage others to read the book from which the incident comes.
4. Choose a book and get together with other students who have read it. Sit in a small circle and review the book. The rest of the class can listen and ask questions as they sit around you in a larger circle. Inspire the others to read the story. Remember to keep the ending a secret.
5. Colin Thiele must understand the characters in his books to be able to write about them. He has to imagine how they would think, speak and behave at different times and with other characters. Imagine you are a character who appears in the DVD or a Colin Thiele book and think of a situation this character could be in. Describe where you are and who else is there. What do you look like and how are you dressed? How do you speak? Who are your close friends? What do you like doing? Take on the role of the character you have chosen, tell the class who you are and answer their questions. You could work with others to prepare a 'This is your Life' episode for the character you have chosen.
6. Record an interview with a character from one of the books. Take an incident from a book and re-write it as a radio play. This may also be recorded.
7. In groups, act out one of the stories. Others in the class could try to guess which book it comes from.
8. Individually design a book poster which illustrates and informs the class about a book written by Colin Thiele.

WRITING AWAY

1. Imagine you are one of the characters dramatised in the DVD. You may be Storm Boy when Mr Percival dies, Bruno watching Aunt Emily, Jodie when she went to hospital, Benno or Victor on the beach, Tracey when Andy falls over the cliff edge.
 - a) Write in your diary or in a message to a friend what happened and how you feel about it.
 - b) Describe what happened from another person's perspective, for example, Storm Boy or Bruno's father, Jodie's mother, one of the girls on the beach or Andy's sister Sally.
2. Colin Thiele often writes about his own experiences. Ask parents, grandparents or other older people to tell you stories from their childhood. Tell one of these stories to a friend or to the whole class and write down the story. After editing and proofreading you could give it as a present to the person who first told it to you.

3. Choose one of the scenes that was dramatised in the DVD. If you have not read the book make up a story about the events that happen next. If you have read the book, write another chapter on eg school life in Adelaide for Storm Boy or Bruno, or a new adventure for Benno and Victor. You may want to write a newspaper article reporting something dramatic that happens in the book, eg Jodie or Tracey's experiences with natural disasters.
4. People write for many reasons and for different audiences. For example, you may write to entertain, teach, persuade or criticise. You may write for yourself, a friend or for someone you do not know at all.
 - a) In groups, discuss reasons for writing and give examples of each. List possible audiences.
 - b) Choose one of the scenes from the DVD or an incident in a book by Colin Thiele. What was the writer's intention? For whom was he writing?
 - c) Discuss who else could enjoy books written for children and young adults. Why might they like them?
 - d) Individually, think of one purpose an author might have for writing their book, eg to inform, raise an issue or ask for something, and then list two different audiences, eg a teacher or a parent. Write two pieces where the intention of the writing is the same, but the audience is different. Think carefully about the language you use, especially the words you choose. They should be appropriate for each audience.
5. You are a famous film director and you want to film one of Colin Thiele's books. Which one would you choose? What makes it especially good for filming? Write a report for your film producer giving reasons for the decision you have made.

MAKING FILMS

Some of Colin Thiele's books have been made into films. A few lines in a book may be dramatised in many minutes of film or the whole chapter may be recorded in a few moments. You can become a filmmaker too. Why not devise a short two or three minute film? If you are planning to shoot your film you will need to plot out not only the dialogue and action in the script, but also how it will be shot. The basic shots are close-up, medium and wide. You may use a zoom lens to get variations of these, such as medium/close-up. A shot may be high angle or low angle according to whether the shot is taken from above or below eye level. You may use panning or static shots. Remember, most shots are only a few seconds long and if you do not have editing equipment you will need to take each shot in sequence.

The camera you use may sit on a tripod or be hand-held. You can even use a smart phone. You will need to consider sound effects and lighting. Props and costumes will need to be organised before you start.

The most essential part of any equipment will be the script. This could be written in the form of a storyboard which is like a comic strip of each shot that provides a visual layout of events as they are to be seen through the camera lens.

First choose a scene to film, but be realistic, Here is how the first three sentences of Chapter eight of **JODIE'S JOURNEY** was made into a few seconds of the sequence you saw in the STORYMAKERS DVD,

FROM THE BOOK

Jodie was admitted to hospital at three o'clock on the following Thursday afternoon. The place terrified her. It was so huge, so crowded with people, that she felt as insignificant as an ant in the tunnels of Gibraltar.

FROM THE FILM SCRIPT

1. ACTION: Jodie and mother walk toward hospital, facing camera. Both look worried.
CAMERA: Medium wide shot, camera static.

2. ACTION: Jodie and mother walk toward hospital door.

CAMERA: Low-angle, wide shot of front of hospital, camera static.

3. ACTION: Jodie and mother enter automatic hospital doors and walk toward information desk to left of entrance.

CAMERA: Hand held camera, slight pan, follow Jodie and mother to information desk.

Zoom in to medium/close shot over shoulder of woman at information desk.

MOTHER *Excuse me please. My daughter is being admitted here this afternoon.*

Where would you like us to go?

4. CAMERA: Medium wide shot of nurse behind desk, camera static.

NURSE *We're busy at the moment. You'll just have to wait.*

5. ACTION: Jodie and mother exit to the left.

CAMERA: Medium wide shot, camera static.

NOTE: The above is simply an example of how a script may be written. Use the form most useful for your needs.

SOME OF COLIN THIELE'S BOOKS

- Ab Diver*, 1988
Aftershock: The sequel to Shatterbelt, 1992
Albatross Two, 1974
The Australian Mother Goose, 1992
The Australian Mother Goose II, 1994
Ballander Boy, 1979
Blue Fin, 1969
Brahminy: The Story of a Boy and a Sea Eagle, 1995
The Cave & The Glory of a Galumph, 1989
Chadwick's Chimney, 1979
Charlie Vet's Pet, 1992
Coorong Captive, 1985
Dad Drains The Oil, 1988
Dangerous Secret, 1997
Danny's Egg, 1989
Emma Keppler: Two Months In Her Life, 1991
Farmer Pelz's Pumpkins, 1990
Farmer Schulz's Ducks, 1986
February Dragon, 1966
Fiery Salamander, 2007
The Fire In The Stone, 1973
Flash Flood, 1970
Flip-Flop and Tiger Snake, 1970
Gemma's Christmas Eve, 1994
Gloop: The Bunyip, 1962
The Hammerhead Light, 1976
High Valley Montville, 1996
Jodie's Journey, 1988
Klontarf, 1988
Landslide, 1997
Little Tom Little, 1981
Magpie Island, 1974
The March of Mother Duck, 1993
Martin's Mountain, 1993
The Monster Fish, 1999
Mrs Munch and Puffing Billy, 1967
The Mystery of the Black Pyramid, 1996
Pannikin and Pinta, 2000
Patch Comes Home, 1982
Pinquo, 1983
Pitch The Pony, 1984
Potch Goes Town The Drain, 1984
The Rim of the Morning: Six Stories, 1966
River Murray Mary, 1979
Rotten Egg, & Paterson To The Rescue, 1989
The Sea Caves, 2000.
Seashores and Shadows, 1985.
- The Shadow on the Hills*, 1977
Shadow Shark, 1985
Sharks in the Shadows, 1985
Shatterbelt, 1987
The Sknuk, 1977
Speedy, 1991
Stories Short and Tall, 1989
Storm Boy, 1963
Sun on the Stubble, 1961
Sun Warm Memories: The Colin Thiele Reciter, 2003
Swan Song, 2002
Tanya and Trixie, 1980
Thiele Tales: Three Long Stories for Children, 1980
Timmy, 1993
Uncle Gustav's Ghosts, 1974
The Undercover Secret, 1982
The Valley Between, 1981
Wedgetail, 2003
Wendy's Whale, 1999
Yellow Jacket Jock, 1969

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Storymakers: Colin Thiele

<http://nfsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=2580>

Sun on the Stubble

<http://nfsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=2860>

Department of Education WA

<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education>

University of South Australia

<http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/about/collections/thiele/biography.aspx>

Adelaide City Libraries

https://sapln.ent.sirsiidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/adelaide/search/results?qu=colin+thiele&te=

ABOUT NFSA TEACHERS' NOTES



STORYMAKERS: COLIN THIELE

Producer: Janet Bell

Director: Martin Daley

Executive Producer: Janet Bell

Year: 1987 | Duration: 27 minutes

Study Guide writer: Mark Piddington

Consultant to the series: Ursula Kolbe

For information about the NFSA's programs contact:

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ANNOTATIONS

These brief comments, together with the references to Colin Thiele's books in these teachers' notes, may help to guide teachers' recommendations as their students become Thiele enthusiasts and ask for direction to more of his books.

FEBRUARY DRAGON depicts children growing up in an almost idyllic country setting. We share their adventure and see them happily at work on the farm. Finally a bushfire destroys everything. Animals are burnt in the fire and the disaster is incomprehensible to the children.

'Come on, Mum, I'm tired. Let's go home.'

'Don't you understand? There is no home.'

BLUE FIN is set against the backdrop of the tuna fishing industry. It focuses on a sensitive young boy who has been labelled a failure by school teacher and father alike. The 'jinxed' fishing boat *Blue Fin* finally has a run of luck, but as plentiful Tuna are brought on board, the fishermen fail to notice an approaching storm which almost completely destroys the boat. The crew is drowned and the father is badly injured. The boy, Snook, gets the boat to safety, but finally it is wrecked on the rocks. It is a powerful story of hardship and struggle between the father, the son and the sea.

THE FIRE IN THE STONE is set in an opal mining town, Coober Pedy. It is a tough place to live and search for the opal—the fire in the stone. Fourteen year old Ernie Ryan finds an opal, which is stolen and he finally tracks down the thief. Ernie's mother left home when he was nine and there are tensions between Ernie and his father. Ernie's relationship with Sophie develops slowly and his Aboriginal friend Willie dies. The search is not only for opal but also for security and friendship.

SEASHORES AND SHADOWS is an exciting adventure story set in Cockle Bay, a small fishing village. Meg and Joe, two 14 year old cousins, explore the wonder and beauty of this peaceful world. They also need to watch out for Scarface, a huge white pointer shark, when they become stranded on a local island. The hunt for the shark almost ends in tragedy. The story is one of fear and endurance, bravery and humour.