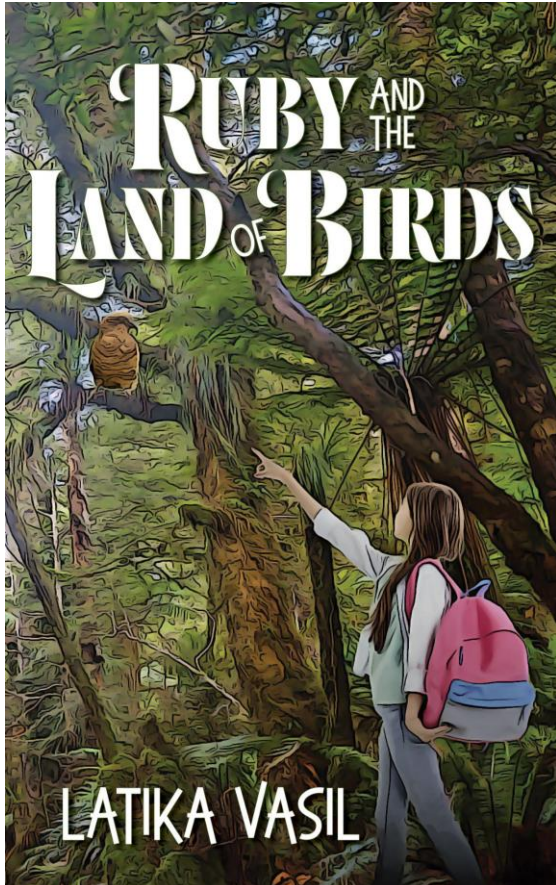


TEACHER NOTES

Ruby and the Land of Birds by Latika Vasil



Lonely and out of place at her new school, Ruby wishes life was different.

She gets her wish during a class trip to Ōtari-Wilton's Bush when her world is suddenly turned upside down. Ruby and her classmate Jasper accidentally tumble through time, finding themselves in a wild, ancient forest where there are no people – only birds.

To get home, Ruby and Jasper must journey to a magic pool that will show them the way, but only on the night of a clear full moon. Guided

by a wise and sometimes cheeky kākā, Ruby and Jasper race across a landscape filled with dangers and mysterious forces desperate to stop them.

If they don't get to the pool, they might be trapped in the past forever.

A thrilling and enchanting adventure story from Latika Vasil, author of *The World I Found*.

About the author

LATIKA VASIL is a Wellington-based author of Indian descent. She has an Advanced Diploma in Creative Writing from Whitireia Polytechnic and a Ph.D in Educational Psychology. She has worked as a university lecturer, a researcher, a creative writing tutor and a freelance writer. Her fiction has been broadcast on Radio New Zealand and published in anthologies and magazines. Latika is the author of a YA novel, *The World I Found* (2023, Black Giraffe Press) and a collection of short stories, *Rising to the Surface* (2013, Steele Roberts).

Relevant themes/issues

- Our impact on the environment
- Individuality and conformity
- Friendship
- Cooperation—working together
- Friendship
- Individual resilience
- Environmental issues / Respecting all life

Before reading

1. What does the cover illustration and the title indicate about the story?
2. In groups, discuss what you know about ancient trees. What are the oldest trees you have seen or know about?

3. Make a list of the top five survival skills you would need if you unexpectedly found yourself lost in the bush. What items would you want to have with you?
4. What parks and national parks have you visited? Have you ever been in the wild?

Characters

1. Think of three adjectives to describe Ruby, Jasper and Matua Kākā.
2. Describe at least one challenge faced by Ruby and Jasper. How do they tackle this challenge and what does this tell you about them?
3. How does Ruby develop and change during the course of the novel? What does she learn?
4. How does the friendship between Ruby and Jasper develop? How do they become friends?
5. Describe Jasper's personality. What are his interests, likes and dislikes?
6. Which character do you most identify with? Why?
7. Imagine you are going to adapt part of the novel for a school drama or video. Create a character sketch and costume for your character based on descriptions in the novel.
8. Choose either Ruby, Jasper or Matua Kākā in the novel and write a monologue from their point of view. What are their feelings about their situation and other characters?

Language

1. The story is narrated in third-person. Third-person narratives are told from an omniscient point of view. This allows the reader to know everything which happens and to consider what different characters might think and

- experience. What other books or stories do you know that are told from a third-person point of view?
2. Figurative language. Find two uses of metaphor and simile in the novel. What feelings or connotations do they convey?
3. Identify a tense moment in the novel. How is tension built up in the passage? Consider sentence length, word choice, and what is revealed.

Activities

1. Do an internet search on Ōtari-Wilton's Bush. Write down five interesting facts about the park.
2. The opening describes Ruby and Jasper's passage to an unfamiliar and mysterious world. What other stories do you know where people discover a portal to another time or place?
3. Think of the last class trip you went on. Where did you go, how did you get there and what did you do and learn?
4. In Chapter 1, Ruby wears skinny jeans, a striped top, a fake fur bomber jacket, her favourite lug-soled red boots, a knitted beanie with cat ears and a bindi. Do you have a favourite outfit, piece of clothing, or jewellery? What do you like about it? Describe the item or outfit, why you like it and how it makes you feel.
5. Think of a class trip or a family visit to a place you were keen to visit. Use this as a basis for a piece of flash fiction. Write three or four paragraphs focussing on the mood or atmosphere of the journey to the destination. You don't have to tell a story with a clear beginning or ending. Just focus on conveying the atmosphere.

6. Write a paragraph or poem on kaitiakitanga. Who do you know or consider to be a kaitiaki?
7. Write a short opinion piece on conservation. What is conservation? What does conservation mean to you? What does the Department of Conservation do?
8. Write your own dramatic dialogue featuring characters from the story. You could imagine Jasper and Ruby meeting a few days after the class trip to discuss their adventure or a dialogue between Matua Kākā and other guardians where he argues that Jasper and Ruby should not be harmed.

Comprehension questions and writing activities

Chapter 1

1. Look at the description of Ruby at the start of the story? What does Ruby's choice of clothing tell you about her?
2. What other stories do you know in which people travel through a vortex or door from one time and place to another?

Chapter 2

1. What are Ruby and Jasper's first impressions of the forest? What strikes them as different?
2. How does Ruby and Jasper's relationship change during the chapter? What do they do that helps to form a connection between them?

Chapter 3

1. What other stories do you know that feature telepathy? Do you think telepathy is or isn't possible? Why?

2. What do we learn about Jasper in this chapter?

Chapter 4

1. Identify the verbs, adjectives and similes that are used in the opening paragraph to describe the forest.
2. What are the dangers of eating unfamiliar plants? What plants and fungi do you know to be dangerous to eat?

Chapter 5

1. What does the word 'Matua' mean? What other words do you know in te reo Māori which describe family relationships or respect?
2. What superpower would you choose if you could only have one?

Chapter 6

1. This chapter includes a long sentence which lists the content of Jasper's pack: "Then there was the more unusual stuff, the bits and pieces Jasper had emptied from the smaller pockets – the lighter and army knife, a tube of mentos, a squished-up bag of chips, an apple with brown spots on it, a phone charger, headphones, keys on a keychain that had a small torch attached to it, an old school newsletter, and a clear plastic container holding some cardboard toilet rolls wrapped in duct tape and with fuses sticking out the top." Use this sentence to write your own sentence listing the most interesting items in your school bag or backpack. Start your sentence with, "These were the bits and pieces I found in my back pack – ..." List the items after the dash and separate each item with a comma.

2. Make a plot outline of the key events of the first six chapters.

Chapter 7

1. The guardians are scared of 'Featherless Walkers', an epithet they use for people. Epithets are descriptive words or phrases that can be used in place of a person, place or thing's name. Imagine you are an alien observing the human race. What other epithets could be used to describe people?
2. The chapter ends with a simile: 'Glow worms, twinkling like faraway stars in a night sky.' The sentence creates an image by describing something (glowworms) doing something (twinkling) like something else. Use this sentence to create your own similes. For example, 'Books standing on a bookshelf like people queuing for a bus.'

Chapter 8

1. Choose one of the following writing activities: a) describe in a few sentences an animal that made you feel frightened. How did it appear to you; or b) write a few sentences describing a time when someone used humour to cheer people up during a difficult time.

Chapter 9

1. What dangers do Ruby and Jasper face in this chapter?

Chapter 10

1. Find a simile and a metaphor in the first two paragraphs.

2. Find an example of onomatopoeia (a word which resembles, or suggests the sound that it refers to e.g. splash, oink, hiss).

Chapter 11

1. 'The undersides of the wings blazed with red and orange feathers like a streak of fire against a deep blue sky.' Write a one sentence description of an animal—it could be a pet—using a simile.
2. Ruby falls asleep listening to the sounds of the river. Write a couple of sentences describing a time when you feel asleep listening to something or someone.

Chapter 12

1. Matua Kākā is helping Ruby and Jasper in their quest to return home. What other stories do you know which include characters which help main characters to achieve their quest? What opponents and obstacles do they face?

Chapter 13

1. This chapter is divided into three sections. Look at the breaks and note the transition: what is the difference between one section and another? Why do you think that the section breaks occur when they do? What do the section breaks indicate?

Chapter 14

1. Do you know any animals which have become extinct due to human activity? What endangered species do you know which are threatened by extinction?

2. Have you ever tried to make friends with an animal you've just met? Write a few sentences describing what you did and what happened.
3. Search the internet to find five fun facts about moas.

Chapter 15

1. This chapter features dialogue between Matua Kākā and Jasper. Look at the dialogue closely and use the sentence structure and punctuation to write your own additional lines of dialogue paying attention to how commas are placed within speech marks.

Chapter 16

1. Why do you think Matua Kākā finds humour difficult to understand at first?
2. Find two words set in italics in the chapter. What does italics add to the sentence? Write a sentence that includes a word in italics.

Chapter 17

1. Make a plot outline of the key events of the story so far. Why is this chapter especially important to the story?
2. Find one simile in the chapter. How does it add to the mood or atmosphere of the paragraph?

Chapter 18

1. Choose one of the following writing activities: a) write a short poem or paragraph describing the full moon and your feelings when you look at the moon. If you can see the moon reflected in water, then write about seeing the full moon and its reflection b) write a few sentences describing a

special, magical experience like the one Ruby experiences when she enters the pool.

Chapter 19

1. What difficulties do Ruby and Jasper face in this chapter?
2. If you could ride any animal (including extinct animals, mythological animals, and fictional animals) what would you choose and why? Write a short paragraph on your choice and the reasons for your choice.
3. Identify two uses of informal or colloquial speech in the chapter.

Chapter 20

1. What delays Matua Kākā?
2. What important act do Ruby and Jasper decide to do?

Chapter 21

1. Write down four or five key events that happen in this chapter.
2. How have Ruby and Jasper changed since the start of the novel? What have they learnt?
3. How does this chapter bring the story to a close?