Overview

Road Kill in the new Crime Waves series is a fast-paced, action-packed mystery thriller by Ken Catran, an author who has proved that he can capture young people’s attention and interest. The story is told by Jack, whose parents work hard running a second-rate motel but struggle to make ends meet. Jack loves his Harley motor bike and he very much wants to win the Scrape, a motor bike race. He finds a second-hand condenser to make his machine go. Jack and his girlfriend, Susan, who knows as much about bikes as he does, prepare the bike for the race.

Road Kill is set in a small country town where animals are constantly being killed on the road by passing traffic. The killing of creatures extends to humans - and Jack becomes a target. What follows is an intriguing thriller that will capture the interest of bright young readers as well as the most reluctant and thrill all who read it. The plot is fast-moving and clever, with plenty of action to engage readers.

Opening

Look at the way the story opens. Comment on how the story starts. Make some observations about what the author does to grab the reader's attention. What is established in the first few pages?

Setting

Where is the story set? Does the setting have a lot of bearing on the story? Give reasons for your answer.
In what time is the story set?
Title

Where does the name for the novel come from? In your opinion, is the book appropriately named? Make some comment.

Characters

Look at the importance of characters in the story.
Do a profile of the narrator, Jack, touching on his family background, where he lives, what he does, and saying what his attributes are and what he is like as a person.
Do a pen portrait of Susan.
Write a character study of Mr Ricketts.
Who is Wally? What do we know about him from the story? What part does he play in the overall plot?
Jack's parents are seen through his eyes and by their actions. Write a paragraph about what each is like.
Do an outline of the two policemen: Sergeant Adler and Inspector Tindall, saying what each looks like, how they come to be involved in the story and the role they play.
Describe Cynthia Breen. Who is she?
There are usually main characters and minor characters in a book. Examine the role of each and what makes each major or minor. Jot down a list of minor characters, what they are like and what they contribute to the story.

Plot

Tell the story to a friend.

Style

Examine the way in which the story is written. Who tells it? How do we learn about events and details? What is the tone of the story? Look at the place of time and perception in the unfolding of the narrative.

Gender

Look at both the female and male characters in Road Kill, examining their strengths, weaknesses and abilities. Comment on the way the author has created them.
**Language and Literacy**

Why do people come to Jack's town?
What is the 'One-Fifty'?
The last night of the One-Fifty was all we thought it would be. (See page 10.) What is really being said here?
Explain what the 'Scrape' is and how it works.
How did Jack come to find the body in the library?
What happened when Mr Ricketts went for help after the discovery of the body? Examine how the novel is written. Sometimes there are short, succinct sentences - the way a teenage boy would speak or write. Look closely at the language used in Road Kill and how it gives credibility to the voice and therefore the text. On page 17 the sentences are almost staccato - and many are not whole sentences. Why has the author used this mode of writing here?
Find some examples of language that you found you could relate to and jot down these expressions.
What is a colloquialism? Are there examples in the text?
Look at the conversations between different people - Jack and his Dad, Mum and Jack, Mr Ricketts and Jack - and say what they do for the story. Look at the use of direct speech and what it adds to the story. What was the significance of the lack of a good photograph at Mr Ricketts's funeral?
What did Wally mean by: 's not right?
What skills and attributes are needed to take part in a bike race?
Tell in your own words what happened when Jack and Susan took the secret route in the race. What saved them? Was this cheating, do you think?
What was Jack's reaction when his parents brought in the cake after he had come seventh in the race?
The author uses graphic imagery and vivid language to hold the reader's attention and involve the reader, for instance, when Jack's father curses the hawk on the road he calls it a 'bloody bird' and Jack tells us it is literally 'bloody', which is a play on words. Find some more examples of vivid language and say what they contribute to the overall effect of the story.
Look at a descriptive passage, such as the fireworks display on page 12. What makes this passage come alive? Use these ingredients in your own writing.
What was the reason for the attempts on Jack and Susan's lives? (See page 88.)
Find a dramatic passage and say why you chose it.
What message was Jack so anxious about that Susan had got on the final Scrape run?

**Climax**

The story works by building up through various little clues to a climax until the expectation that something major is about to happen is established. The reader looks forward and anticipates what is to come, knowing there will be something dramatic and scary. At what point is the climax reached?
Humour

Look at the place of humour in the story and find places that you found amusing. Look at the place of understatement and sarcasm in the story.

Ending

Look at the ending. What did you think was going to happen? How was the story resolved? What was your reaction at the end of Road Kill?

Epilogue

What is an epilogue? What purpose does it serve in Road Kill?

The Craft of Writing

Ken Catran has written a thriller that holds the reader's interest until the very end. How has he achieved this? Look at the way the story is broken up and the way things are alluded to or hinted at and then left, so the reader is left pondering and contemplating. Look, for instance, at the reference to Big Jake at the beginning, where the narrator mentions it and we are left wondering what is being referred to. Look also at the way the author brings in things that are going to happen and the reader is left dangling. How does this work as a device? For example, on page 25: Something I did not expect. That nearly killed me - and worse - nearly killed Susan. And stood our whole world on end.

When you write you need to put yourself in the place of your characters and speak with that voice. Examine closely how Ken Catran has done this. There are many details of his writing that you can use in your own work, for example, the way he makes links between dreams and the language: the saying 'in your dreams' is used, and thus connections and parallels are made in the reader's mind. The term 'road kill' is used to mean different things and then extended to make analogies to humans.

Examine the author's use of symbols, such as hawks, to establish a particular connotation for the reader.

Look at what the breaks do for the story, where they are made and what the reader is left with at the point they are made.

Ken Catran makes effective use of sounds and details in this story. Look for some examples and ascertain their effect.

Examine the place of visuals, the elements of mystery and suspense, and how the writer establishes atmosphere in Road Kill.

In places, we see things almost in slow motion, with great attention to detail, as on page 18. Find some further examples.

Have a look at the author's use of similarities, sarcasm, contrasts, coincidences and links. Find instances of each in the story.
Research

Find out about similes, metaphors and irony. Find examples of these from the text. Use them in your own writing.

What is the Witness Protection Programme?

Genre

Crime is a subject that has fascinated readers throughout history. What are the ingredients that make this type of story appeal to a wide range of people? What does the reader get out of this genre?

You may look at the interactive role the reader has to play in an effort to solve the mystery. The reader needs to think and try to work things out as the plot unfolds. There may be places where you, as the reader, find that things are not entirely logical and you think you have found a mistake where the author or editor has 'slipped up' - only to realise later that this was deliberate when things are finally resolved. Were there parts in Road Kill where this happened?

Examine some of the devices and ploys used by authors of crime novels: clues, the reader left dangling, intrigue, elements of surprise, twists and turns, and the use of red herrings.

Usually the author plunges right into the action to grab the reader's interest. List other strategies used by writers of crime novels.

Health and Human Development

What is Jack's relationship with each of his parents?

What is the relationship between Jack and Susan? What is it based on? Why do Jack and Susan like each other?

What has Jack inherited from his father?

Look at the impact a traumatic event has on people. Jack: I can remember everything that happened after that (page 13).

What affect did this event have on Jack in the way he reacts and feels? Look at the affect on you of a serious happening you have experienced. When Jack took part in the Scrape again, how had his attitude changed?

Discussion

Conduct a class discussion on the following topics and concepts:

- The stuff dreams are made of - people's lost dreams
- Being a 'loser'
- Love between parents and their children
- Children often know their parents better than parents realise
- Students know their teachers better than the teachers realise
- Being tolerant; equal relationships; seeing things from different perspectives; problems; attitudes; deception; parallels; contrasts; regrets; details; corruption; being hypocritical.
**Further Activities**

Imagine you have been asked to adapt this novel for the screen. Write a report saying if you think this novel would make a good film. Give reasons for your answer.

Take one scene and write a script for it.

Put yourself in Jack’s shoes. A friend has just returned from overseas and asks what has happened to Mr Ricketts. Tell her.

Retell or re-enact the episode of being lost in the bush and what Jack and Susan did.

Pretend you are a journalist. Write a report of the story for your newspaper. Compare *Road Kill* with other titles in the Crime Waves series, say *Killer Plot* by Ian Bone and *Cruel Nest* by Gary Crew. Are there any features that are common to them all, and hence comprise a genre? In what ways are they different?

**About the Author:**

Ken Catran is a high-profile screenwriter and young-adult author. He has written 30 highly successful television dramas and series and won three 'Best Drama Script' awards. His 1986 television series, *Hanlon*, was a finalist in the US Emmy Awards. He has published 18 young-adult novels, winning two NZ 'Best Teenage Fiction' awards.

He is a popular speaker and writer in residence in schools, tertiary colleges and literary festivals in New Zealand and Australia. His previous books for Lothian are *Golden Prince*, *Talking to Blue* and *Voyage with Jason*. *Golden Prince* was shortlisted for the 2000 New Zealand Post Children’s Book awards. *Voyage with Jason* and *Talking to Blue* have been shortlisted for the 2001 awards.

Other books in the Crime Waves series that have been published so far include: *Dead Red* by Ruth Starke, *Looking for Blondie* by Jenny Pausacker, *Killer Plot* by Ian Bone, and *Cruel Nest* by Gary Crew.