

Fries by Ken Catran

Format: Novel
Extent: 160 pp

Overview

Fries by Ken Catran is a fast-paced action-packed mystery that will particularly appeal to students at the lower end of the middle years of schooling. The story is told in an unusual and creative way using a range of writing styles that makes for a challenging story and will keep readers engrossed until the very end when a further climax is reached.

Paul Knox tells the story with the input from friends to present the ‘facts’ until the whole story is told. The setting of a small country town whose main source of income is the Fries factory and the problems associated with its impending closure are the background for the unravelling of events.

All sorts of stories are told and secrets revealed in the course of the novel. Students will relish putting the pieces of information together like a jigsaw to solve the mysteries presented.

Author profile

Ken Catran is a high-profile screenwriter and young adult author in New Zealand, where he lives, and in Australia. He has written almost thirty highly successful television dramas and series and won two ‘Best Drama Script’ awards. His 1986 TV series, Hanlon, was a finalist in the US Emmy Awards. He has published 18 Young Adult novels, has been a finalist four times in the NZ ‘Best Teenage Fiction’ awards, and his books have been published in the US and the UK. He is a popular speaker and writer in residence in schools, tertiary colleges and literary festivals in New Zealand and Australia. His previous books include Golden Prince, (shortlisted for the 2000 NZ Post Awards and a CBCA Notable Book in 1999) and Talking to Blue (shortlisted for the 2001 New Zealand Post awards). His historical novel, Voyage with Jason, is the 2001 winner of the New Zealand Post and Best Teenage Fiction awards. His previous book Road Kill is featured in Reading Enriches Learning, Collection 1: Identity www.curriculum.edu.au/rel/sec_road.htm.

Find out more about Ken Catran on the web: www.vuw.ac.nz/nzbookcouncil/writers/catranken.htm

Assessment checklist

After reading Fries by Ken Catran and completing the activities, students will gain the skills to:

- identify stance
- interpret text
- discuss issues
- identify techniques in texts
- recognise specific language for different purposes
- recognise complex and simple sentences
- comprehend how shifting point of view affects interpretation
- understand how chronological sequence affects interpretation of event
Activities

Small-group activities

1. Who tells the story?
2. Consider all the components that make up the story and make a list of these. Also look at how different parts are presented.
3. How does the reader find out things?
4. Look at the way in which the story is told and the language used. Find instances of: direct speech, simple sentences, descriptive parts and narrative pieces. Look at the practice of writing in different tenses and find some examples.
5. What techniques are used to present portions of the story in different ways?
6. What do the black and white illustrations at the start of each chapter contribute to the novel?
7. What type of story is Fries by Ken Catran?
8. Did you find the story amusing? Give reasons for your answer.

Whole-class activities

1. Make a story map of events, laying them out as they occur in the novel then placing them in order of the time that they happened to determine the sequence of events. What is the purpose of telling the story with some parts told retrospectively?
2. With the whole class, discuss:
   - the plight of small rural towns
   - strong female characters
   - characters who take initiative and responsibility
   - change
   - the imagination
   - meditation
   - secrets
   - deals
   - Vietnam
   - being different
Individual activities

Characters
1. List all of the characters that appear in Fries and write a paragraph on each. State what part each plays in the overall story. Examine the point of view that different characters have.

Setting
2. Describe where the story is set and tell what you know about the history of the place up until the present. Cover how the Fries factory was established and the importance of the factory to the town.

Vocabulary and language
3. Define the following words as they are used in the story: downsize (15), PR (32), politically correct (90), resource rationalisation (41), rural down-turn (46), Executive Team Leader (57), affirmative (66), sporting icon (89), quantifies (96), symbols of oppression (120).
4. The words in the previous activity can be called ‘buzz words’. Determine what is meant by ‘buzz word’. Find other examples in everyday use.
5. Use the following words in sentences that show you understand their meaning: deposition (39), bane (42), fanatical (72), vegans (73), sybarite (73), trebuchet (112).
6. Language the author uses to describe the rugby game, such as carnage (98) and massacre (99), is deliberately exaggerated. What do these words really mean?

Writing
7. Make a list of the things you learned while reading Fries by Ken Catran.
8. Look at the place of emails in the story. Write an email to Sarah answering her questions and telling her briefly what has happened since she left.
9. From the story, take one of the following and write about it in your own words: The Fries Phantom, The Exterminator, The Great Potato Fight.
10. Write about your own Land of Syb.
11. Describe the visit from Eric the Ear-biter and his advice:
   a. from Nicole’s point of view
   b. from Mr Walker’s perspective
12. In your own words tell:
   - Mr Walker’s story
   - Hendrick Visser’s story
   - Roller’s story
13. Examine the ending and give your opinion about the conclusion of the story.
14. What did you consider to be the climax of the story, that is, the high point?