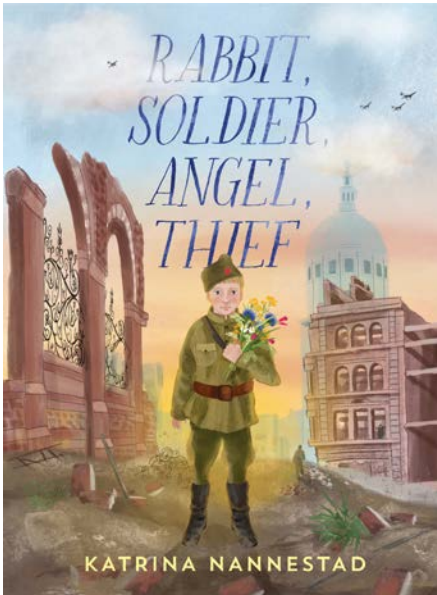


Classroom Resources



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Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief

Katrina Nannestad

BOOK SUMMARY

Award-winning writer Katrina Nannestad transports us to Russia and the Great Patriotic War and into the life of Sasha, a soldier at only six years old ...

Wood splinters and Mama screams and the nearest soldier seizes her roughly by the arms. My sister pokes her bruised face out from beneath the table and shouts, 'Run, Sasha! Run!'

So I run. I run like a rabbit.

It's spring, 1942. The sky is blue, the air is warm and sweet with the scent of flowers.

And then everything is gone.

The flowers, the proud geese, the pretty wooden houses, the friendly neighbours. Only Sasha remains.

But one small boy, alone in war-torn Russia, cannot survive.

One small boy without a family cannot survive.

One small boy without his home cannot survive.

What that small boy needs is an army.

From the award-winning author of *We Are Wolves* comes the story of a young boy who becomes a soldier at six, fighting in the only way he can – with love. But is love ever enough when the world is at war?

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ACELA1483
- ACELT1764
- ACELT1798

THEMES

- Belonging
- Identity
- Resilience

Recommended Reading Ages: 10+

Resources Created For: Upper Primary

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Classroom Resources

Before Reading

Engaging the Reader

The protagonists in films and books – who audiences love the most – tend to be sad, kind, brave and funny and living in a difficult time and place. In the text, they have moments of sorrow and joy, which make readers feel both sad and happy for them. The best characters have contradictions – they are not consistent – just like real people. They get angry, can be terrified and then be brave, and then be scared.

1. In pairs or small groups, ask students to discuss their favourite characters in movies or books.
 - a) What do they have in common?
 - b) What is different?
2. As a class, discuss Harry Potter (or another character from a book you've studied).
 - a) Why do readers like Harry?
 - b) What do readers dislike about Harry?
 - c) Why is this mix of characteristics important?
 - d) How does the setting and time impact Harry?

As a class, complete the table:

What's sad about Harry?	What gives Harry joy?	How is Harry noble and kind?	Who does Harry look up to? Why?	How is Harry like us?	How is Harry different from us?

Judge a book by its cover

1. Examine the front cover of the book and the title, *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief*. How do the author and illustrator draw in the reader with this cover and title?
 - a. Ask students to identify as many visual techniques as they can, particularly:
 - i. Symbols
 - ii. Colours
 - iii. Placement and framing
 - b. What elements of the cover and title seem to clash?
 - i. An angel and a thief?
 - ii. A soldier's uniform and flowers and a young boy?
 - iii. War and flowers?
 - c. Do these clashing elements make the seem book interesting/make you want to read it?
 - d. How are time and place demonstrated on the cover?

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Understanding context

This story is told from the perspective of a young Russian boy and is set against the backdrop of World War Two in Germany, Ukraine and Russia. This setting and context allow the author to consider the universality of the human experience, human qualities, the impact of war on individuals and notions of enemies and allies.

1. As a class, discuss what they already know about World War Two, including:
 - a. When did the war happen?
 - b. Which countries were involved in the conflict?
 - c. Who is Adolf Hitler?
2. In order for the class to properly understand the context of *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief* ask them to do some research on:
 - a. What happened between Germany and Russia during World War Two?
 - b. Who or what is the Red Army?
 - c. Who are partisans?
 - d. What happened to Stalingrad by the end of World War Two?
 - e. What happened in Berlin at the end of World War Two?
 - f. What was the relationship between Germany and Russia at the end of the World War Two?
 - g. Where is Siberia and Stalingrad?
 - h. What is kasha, a balalaika, and a ushanka?
3. After students have discussed their findings, ask them to think about:
 - a. Why are Berlin and Russia, during World War Two interesting places to set a story?
 - b. Why do we like to read stories set in World War Two?
 - c. Why are they relevant today?
 - d. Who is a friend or an ally? Who is an enemy?
 - e. How does a setting add to a story?

During Reading

Examining Sasha

1. As students have thought about Harry Potter, and what makes him an engaging and relatable character, ask them to think about Sasha and his attributes. Ask them to complete this table as they read through the novel:

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Chapter	What's sad about Sasha?	What gives Sasha joy?	How is Sasha noble and kind?	Who does Sasha look up to, and who does he despise? Why?	How is Sasha like us?	How is Sasha different from us?
1						
2						

- Why is this mix of characteristics important?
- How does time and place impact Sasha and the reader?
- Why do readers like Sasha?

After Reading

Making the reader curious

Great writers make readers curious. A curiosity gap – created with intrigue or surprise, pulls in an audience rather than pushes them away.

Katrina Nannestad draws a reader into her story by rousing the reader's curiosity and using skills such as sensory detail and personification to bring the scene to life.

- Read these passages from Chapter One:

I'm cold. I'm crawling through the dark, flat on my belly, elbows and legs working. But I'm cold. So cold. The ground is hard, icy, cruel. The chill presses through my clothes and skin, right to the core of me. And the fear does, too.

... I make straight for my target, pale and plump, almost shining in the night. I pull back my arm, clench my jaw, then stab. I plunge the knife as deep as it will go. A voice cries out, waking soldiers all around me, but I'm here now and determined to finish what I started. I pull downward and the blade of the knife rips the stab wound wide.

For each passage, answer these questions:

- What questions does Nannestad make the reader ask in the first pages of chapter one?
- How does she surprise the reader?
- What does the reader learn about the narrator?
- Why does the reader want to keep reading?
- How is the reader misled and then surprised?

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Show don't tell

Katrina Nannestad is also very good at showing and not telling, which is a key skill of good creative writing.

1. Study Chapters One and Two as a class and work out what Nannestad shows and doesn't tell. Identify quotes from these chapters, and the techniques they use.
 - a. How does Nannestad reveal the time and place of the story, without telling the reader directly?
 - b. When do you learn Sasha's name and how old he is?
 - c. Why is this more powerful than reading – Sasha was very young and he became a soldier for the Red Army in Berlin, during World War Two?

2. In Chapter Six when Sasha is with his family, Nannestad creates a lovely scene that shows him being clever and brave.

I blurt the words out as fast as I can. 'Yelena crept into Anna Pushinka's garden and picked all her beautiful fat red strawberries, then threw them at the boys when they came in from harvesting the barley and it was such a waste that I wanted to tell Mama and Anna Pushinka, but Yelena made me promise not to blab and I have been feeling very bad about keeping such a naughty secret for weeks and weeks and I am so very sorry!' The grin falls from the prince-monster's face. He stands and stamps his big black boot. Stomp! 'This stupid boy knows nothing!' he roars.

- a. How did you feel when you read this scene?
 - b. What does this show about Sasha?
 - c. How does time and place make Sasha's story more dramatic?
3. Then, towards the end of the book in Chapter Thirty-Nine:

Then, finally, I unbuckle the watch from my wrist. I hold it out to her, but she does not take it. Instead, she offers her thin white wrist and I buckle it on for her. Her skin is soft and smooth and smells like flowers. Just like Mama's skin.

'I'm very, very sorry,' I say and burst into tears.

And then, the most surprising thing happens. The mama drops to her knees and wraps her arms around me. She hugs me and cries and whispers, 'Danke. Danke. Danke.'

- a. Which techniques has Katrina Nannestad used in this passage?
 - b. What do we learn about Sasha?
 - c. Why is this a pivotal moment?
 - d. What does it tell us about human nature and how it is affected by time and place?
4. One of the most important symbols in the novel is that of flowers; they even appear on the cover.
 - a. Find four or five references to flowers in *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief*. Try and find these quotes from different parts of the story.
 - b. Looking at these quotes, what do you think the author intended the flowers to symbolise in the novel?
 - i. Does this change as the story progresses?
 - ii. Are they associated with any particular people/groups of people?
 - c. Using at least two of the quotes you have found, write a paragraph explaining the use of flowers as a symbol in *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief*.

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Friends are important

In many stories, the protagonist has a key relationship that helps them grow and learn, and helps the reader to understand them. Relationships with family members, adults, friends and members of a character's community play a key role in building and reflecting the identity of a character.

1. Ask students to list all of the important relationships Sasha has in *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief*. For each relationship ask them to identify what we learn about Sasha, and what Sasha himself may learn, because of this relationship. Remind students that relationships aren't always between people who like or respect each other, and negative relationships can also be informative (you may also like to point out that not all relationships are with humans).

2. Why is Papa Scruff important?

- a. Read this passage from Chapter Thirty-Nine:

Papa Scruff nods. He looks at the window where the woman and the two little boys are standing, staring out at us.

'Were they a gift?' he asks. 'Did the woman invite you in and offer you her watch and her clock because she thought you were a kind, sweet boy? Did her sons give you their yellow truck because they thought it was your birthday and you deserved a gift?'

I stare at Papa Scruff, my eyes now filling with tears to match his own. The watch on my wrist feels suddenly hot and heavy. 'I took them,' I whisper. 'I asked nicely for them. I said please. I even said thank you.'

Papa Scruff sighs. 'This is not who you are Sasha. I beg you, do not let hate and greed into your heart.'

'But they've taken everything from us!' I cry. 'Even Windy says so.' I look to Windy, but his eyes have dropped to his boots.

'Did that woman take your mama and your sister?' Papa Scruff asks.

- i. What does Papa Scruff teach Sasha in this scene?
- ii. Why is this scene significant in the story?
- iii. Who does Sasha come to belong to?
- iv. Who influences him and who does he influence? Why is this important?

3. Ask students to create a presentation on Sasha's significant relationships.

- a. For each relationship, create a mood board which includes images and sounds/music that reflects the influence this person has on Sasha.

Extension

There are many ways to make a family. Throughout *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief* Sasha both loses and gains a family. How is both the importance and diversity of family reflected in the novel?



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About the Author

Katrina Nannestad is an award-winning Australian author. Her books include the CBCA-shortlisted *We Are Wolves*, *The Girl Who Brought Mischief*, the Travelling Bookshop series, the *Girl, the Dog and the Writer* series, the *Olive of Groves* series, the *Red Dirt Diaries* series, the *Lottie Perkins* series, and the historical novel *Rabbit, Soldier, Angel, Thief*.

Katrina grew up in country New South Wales, in a neighbourhood stuffed full of happy children. Her adult years have been spent raising boys, teaching, daydreaming and pursuing her love of stories. Katrina celebrates family, friendship and belonging in her writing. She also loves creating stories that bring joy or hope to other people's lives. Katrina now lives on a hillside in central Victoria with her husband, a silly whippet called Olive and a mob of kangaroos.

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