



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## Hapless Hero Henrie (House of Heroes Book 1)

Petra James  
ISBN 9781760650834

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia  
Locked Bag 22  
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

Ph +61 2 9517 9577  
Fax +61 2 9517 9997

These notes were created by Steve Spargo.  
For enquiries please contact:  
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

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## Outline:

Twelve-year-old Henrie is the first girl heir of the Melchior family in 200 years. This was deemed a dereliction of duty by the formidable Octavia Melchior, head of the House of Melchior (HoMe). For HoMe is in the business of heroes for hire. Boy heroes, that is. Girls have no place. When Henrie receives a mysterious note, it sets off a chain of events including a kidnapping, a fancy skateboard manoeuvre and a private jet and she discovers something rotten at the heart of HoMe. As past, present and future collide, HoMe is poised to come tumbling down ... unless a new kind of hero can emerge from the rubble.

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This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

### These notes are for:

- Primary years 3-5
- Ages 8+

### Key Learning Areas:

- English

### Example of:

- Novel

### Themes/Ideas:

- Family
- Bravery
- Secrets
- Prejudice



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## Discussion Questions and Activities:

The story begins with definitions of “hero” and “hapless hero”. Without looking online or in a dictionary, write your own definitions of “hero” and “hapless” and write your own interpretation of “hapless hero”. After finishing the book, revisit your definitions and update them if your interpretations have changed.

*Hapless Hero Henrie* features a variety of different designs and illustrations throughout the text. Find a page that you think is designed interestingly and discuss why it appeals to you (try pages 8, 10, 28, 97 or 126 as a starting point.) How would the story be different if it were all just text?

Petra James writes interesting chapter openers and ends to entice the reader to keep reading, for example, chapter 1 opens “I know I have to tell you right away. I was the spark that caused the flame that caused the house to burn.” (page 7) and ends “But why was there a room bursting with shrieks? I’m about to get to that.” (page 14). How do these sentences make you feel as a reader? Identify other interesting chapter openers and ends in this book and discuss.

Petra James uses a number of literary devices throughout the story. What is the definition of each device? How do these devices make the story more interesting for the reader? Can you find other examples of them in *Hapless Hero Henry* and other books? Write a short story using as many of these devices as you can.

- Puns – “Claire Voyant” (page 15), “U R A Mazeball” (page 31)
- Alliteration – “...bouncy bubbly baby ‘b’s” (page 18), “Delightful, delicious, delectable, dainty, darling” (page 19)
- Metaphor – “We might look like one big picture of a person from the outside but inside we’re a kaleidoscope.” (page 30)
- The narrator talking directly to the reader – “I know what you’re thinking.” (page 20)
- Oxymoron – “an orphan with parents” (page 27)
- Simile – “Ellie wrapped me in a blanket like a falafel roll” (page 24)
- Repetition – “Dead. Dead. Dead ...” (page 125)

Keep a vocab journal while reading *Hapless Hero Henrie*. Using the list below as a starting point, collect words that you are unfamiliar with or that you find interesting, record the page number and find the definition for each:

- Dereliction (page 25)
- Veritable (page 41)
- Punctual (page 47)
- Saunter (page 56)
- Clandestine (page 74)
- Irrefutable (page 113)
- Scoundrel (page 113)

“Feast of fathers ... A shrewdness of apes, A murmuration of starlings, A parliament of owls.” (page 52). What is a collective noun? Find other collective nouns that are interesting to you

and compile a class list. For example, what are the collective nouns for crows, elephants, hippopotamuses, parrots, frogs and sharks?

“Albert Abernathy was twisting the life out of the truth.” (page 78)

From the time Henrie and Alex meet Albert at the train station to the time they are discovered on the jet, Henrie and Alex believe they are right and Albert is wrong. However, Albert then explains his interpretation of events which makes Henrie question her idea of truth. Do you think the truth is always a black and white issue? Or is it open to interpretation?

In chapter 8 Albert Abernathy explains why HoMe only recruited boys and the Melchior family only had boy children until Henrie. Based on this, discuss the perceived differences between boys and girls in Victorian times and compare that to the differences now. Are there things that boys can do that girls can’t, and vice versa?

As a class, make a list of things that are traditionally attributed to boys and girls using the table below as a template. Think about activities, jobs around the house, clothes, hobbies, etc. Revisit each item on the list and discuss why you think that item is attributed to boys or girls and if you agree or disagree with that.

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<b>Hair</b>	Long	Short
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What lie does Octavia Melchior tell Henrie’s parents? Why did he tell them this lie? What are the consequences of his lie? Is it ever ok to lie? How do you feel when someone lies to you? What other lies are told in the story?

Why do you think Finn and Carter do not like Henrie, even when they don’t know anything about her?

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- Metaphor – “We might look like one big picture of a person from the outside but inside we’re a kaleidoscope.” (page 30)
- The narrator talking directly to the reader – “I know what you’re thinking.” (page 20)
- Oxymoron – “an orphan with parents” (page 27)
- Simile – “Ellie wrapped me in a blanket like a falafel roll” (page 24)
- Repetition – “Dead. Dead. Dead ...” (page 125)

Keep a vocab journal while reading *Hapless Hero Henrie*. Using the list below as a starting point, collect words that you are unfamiliar with or that you find interesting, record the page number and find the definition for each:

- Dereliction (page 25)
- Veritable (page 41)
- Punctual (page 47)
- Saunter (page 56)
- Clandestine (page 74)
- Irrefutable (page 113)
- Scoundrel (page 113)

“Feast of fathers ... A shrewdness of apes, A murmuration of starlings, A parliament of owls.” (page 52). What is a collective noun? Find other collective nouns that are interesting to you

and compile a class list. For example, what are the collective nouns for crows, elephants, hippopotamuses, parrots, frogs and sharks?

“Albert Abernathy was twisting the life out of the truth.” (page 78)

From the time Henrie and Alex meet Albert at the train station to the time they are discovered on the jet, Henrie and Alex believe they are right and Albert is wrong. However, Albert then explains his interpretation of events which makes Henrie question her idea of truth. Do you think the truth is always a black and white issue? Or is it open to interpretation?

In chapter 8 Albert Abernathy explains why HoMe only recruited boys and the Melchior family only had boy children until Henrie. Based on this, discuss the perceived differences between boys and girls in Victorian times and compare that to the differences now. Are there things that boys can do that girls can’t, and vice versa?

As a class, make a list of things that are traditionally attributed to boys and girls using the table below as a template. Think about activities, jobs around the house, clothes, hobbies, etc. Revisit each item on the list and discuss why you think that item is attributed to boys or girls and if you agree or disagree with that.

	Girls	Boys
<b>Hair</b>	Long	Short
<b>Hobbies</b>	Gentle, “nice” hobbies such as dancing, crafts, reading	Active hobbies such as sports, roughhousing; technical hobbies such as video games
<b>Favourite colours</b>	Pink, purple	Blue, green
<b>Toys</b>	Dolls, cute animals, fashion/ beauty-related toys	Action figures, cars/trucks, monsters

What lie does Octavia Melchior tell Henrie’s parents? Why did he tell them this lie? What are the consequences of his lie? Is it ever ok to lie? How do you feel when someone lies to you? What other lies are told in the story?

Why do you think Finn and Carter do not like Henrie, even when they don’t know anything about her?

Henrie Melchior discovers much about her family tree during the book. What is a family tree? Draw your own family tree using information from your relatives.