

## **Mama's Song**

**By Ben Beaton**

### **About the book**

*Mama's Song* is a confronting yet ultimately uplifting story about:

- The choices we make.
- How eighteen-year-old Georgina negotiates the challenges arising from her unplanned pregnancy while at boarding school.
- The changes she undergoes after the subsequent birth of her daughter while estranged from her family.

### **Genre**

Young adult fiction

### **Reading level**

Young adults/ age 13 plus

### **Interest level**

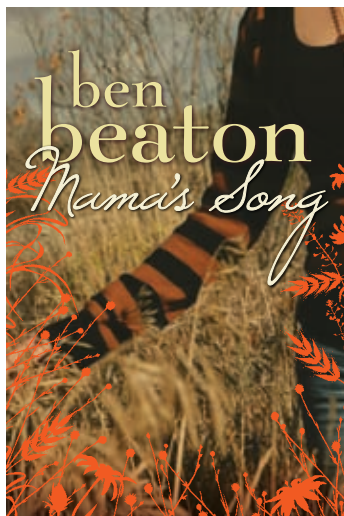
Young adults/ age 13 plus

The story can be read as a cautionary tale, but the book's main focus is the personal growth that comes with taking responsibility for one's actions. In this respect, *Mama's Song* is also a coming-of-age story.

Given the subject matter, *Mama's Song* will resonate most strongly with teenage girls. Mothers and daughters are the dominant theme of the book.

The book lays the ground for learning opportunities on a number of different topics, such as teenage pregnancy and adoption versus keeping the child, and will provoke lively debate.

Other important issues arise from the story, such as the rights of a child and what constitutes a family.



### **Link to VELS (Victorian Essential Learning Standards)**

The VELS are based on a set of shared community expectations and values. These values are:

- tolerance and understanding
- respect
- responsibility
- social justice
- excellence
- care
- inclusion and trust
- honesty
- freedom
- being ethical.

Select 3 VELS values and describe how they are present in the novel. How does an understanding of these values inform your reading of the novel?

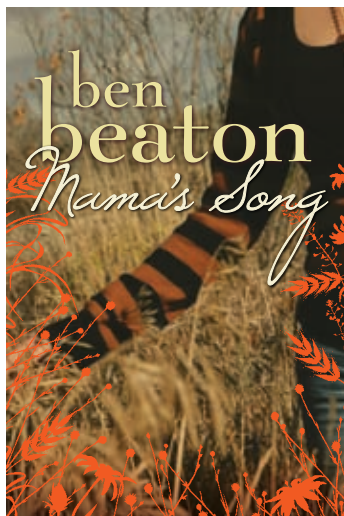
### **Link to HSC Syllabus documents**

Students will develop knowledge and understanding of:

- the contexts, purposes and audiences of texts
- the forms and features of language, and the structures of texts.

Students will develop skills in:

- responding to and composing a range of texts
- effective communication
- individual and collaborative learning
- investigation, imaginative and critical thinking, and synthesis of ideas



- reflection as a way to review, reconsider and refine meaning and learning.

Students will come to value and appreciate:

- the role of language in developing positive interaction and cooperation
- their developing skills as users of English
- the pleasure and diversity of language and literature
- the role of language and literature in their lives
- the study and use of English as a key to learning
- reflection on their own processes of learning
- English as a language of communication and culture
- appropriateness, subtlety and aesthetics in language use.

### **Study of the Novel**

Purpose:

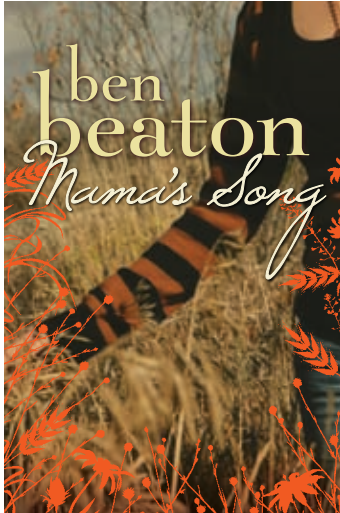
What is the message, or moral behind *Mama's Song*? What are readers asked to consider or do as a result of reading the text?

Context:

The novel has an interesting context, as it's written by a man who takes on the persona of a teenage mother. What other novels have been written in this way? Does the author succeed in making the story of Georgina and her experiences realistic?

Audience:

Who is the intended audience for this novel? What evidence is there that the book has a wide appeal beyond teenage girls?



### **Style & Language use**

Symbols:

There are a number of symbols used in the novel to advance the story:

- the rose bush outside the maternity ward
- character's names
- music.

Construct a list of symbols employed and describe how they contribute to the narrative.

Point of View / Tense:

The novel is written in 1st person POV and present tense. What impact does this have on the telling of the story and on the narrative.

Setting:

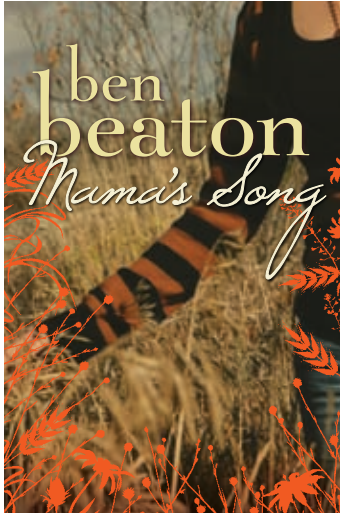
After entering the hospital the characters never leave. What effect does the physical environment of the hospital have on the events of the story and on Georgina's growth and development?

### **Activities**

English Tasks – Reading and Writing

Creative Writing tasks:

A number of the chapters are written as fragments – try writing in this style about your day, a holiday experience or a time you were angry / sad.



Write an essay on one of the following topics:

- For a story to be truly memorable, it must strike an emotional chord with the reader.
- How has your reading of *Mama's Song* been informed by your wider reading / viewing? Make inter-textual references in your answer.
- Books often are pitched at a particular audience. Comment on how the novel caters for its audience.
- How has character construction informed your understanding of the themes conveyed in the novel?

Write a letter from George to Chris explaining her situation, and the arrival of their baby.

Select a scene from the novel and rewrite it as a script.

### English Tasks – Speaking and Listening

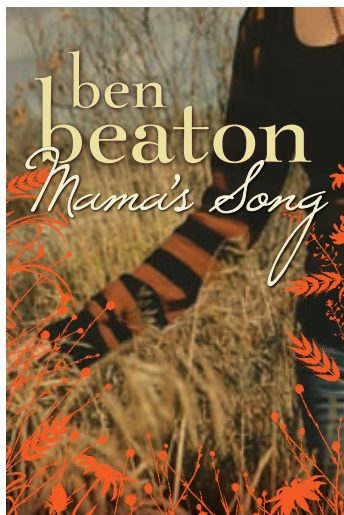
Debate:

- the hospital should have contacted Georgina's mother
- George should have told Chris he is a father
- George's life would be better if she'd had the abortion
- single mothers should not get welfare handouts from the government.

Oral Presentation

Choose one of the following topics explored in the novel:

- Race
- Gender
- Culture
- Choices



- Maturity
- Family
- Love

Create a presentation that describes how the novel explores the topic. Use images, film, facts and opinions in describing the topic. How does your chosen topic impact on the narrative?

### **Personal Development/ Health**

Rights of the Child – George, Hannah, Nasreen

A number of issues relating to decisions impacting children are indirectly raised in the novel.

Review the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and consider which core rights are infringed in Georgina's decision.

Baby Hannah's Rights: George chose not to tell Chris his daughter had arrived (p.46). Hannah's father didn't want to be involved anyway (also p.46 and paragraph 1 p.139 ). But is choice theirs to make?

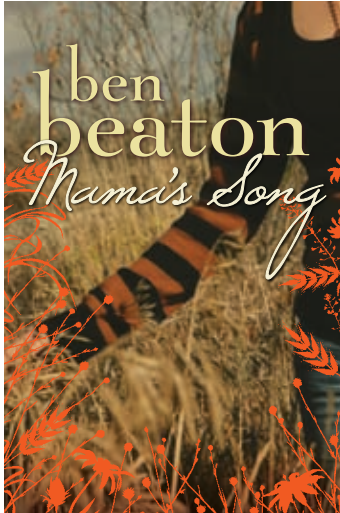
- Does a child have a right to know its father?
- Does a child have a right to be financially and emotionally supported by both parents?

Nasreen describes the process for becoming a wife in her culture(p142).

Research different cultural approaches to marriage and child birth.

There are some technical terms in the book relating to pregnancy, birth and breast-feeding. Reread the page reference then find out and describe what the following terms mean:





- Pre-eclampsia (p.19)
- (George's) water broke (p.11, third last paragraph)
- Epidural (p.21)
- Dilation (p.19 – 5 centimetres; p.27 – fully dilated)
- Crowning (p.30)
- Colostrum (p.45)
- Mastitis (p.100)
- Meconium (p.122, referred to as black sludge)

### **Static image study**

Consider images of:

- The Madonna
- Woman in burka
- Newborn child
- Premature baby
- Single mother



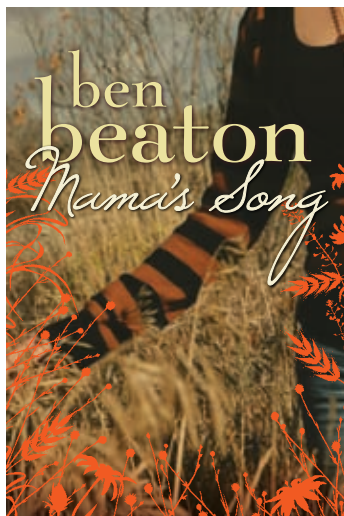


**black dog books**

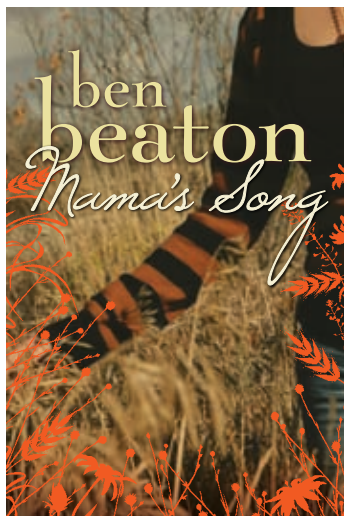
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# Teacher Notes

[www.bdb.com.au/teachers](http://www.bdb.com.au/teachers)







Consider how the image is constructed. What techniques are employed to position an emotional response from the reader? How does your chosen image inform your reading of the novel? What inter-textual connections can be made between the content of the novel and your chosen image?

### **Genre study**

The film *The Year My Voice Broke* has similarities to *Mama's Song*. After watching the film, consider other narratives that have stylistic links with *Mama's Song*. In what ways have viewing the film and wider reading informed your understanding of the novel?

### **Useful Resources:**

Black Dog Books Website

[http://www.bdb.com.au/books/mamas\\_song](http://www.bdb.com.au/books/mamas_song)

Reviews of *Mama's Song*

<http://www.readingupsideown.com/?p=1226>

[http://worldliteratures.suite101.com/article.cfm/book\\_review\\_mamas\\_song\\_by\\_ben\\_beaton](http://worldliteratures.suite101.com/article.cfm/book_review_mamas_song_by_ben_beaton)

<http://heyteenager.blogspot.com/2009/08/mamas-song-by-ben-beaton.html>

<http://content.boomerangbooks.com.au/content/book-reviews/childrens-book-reviews/mamas-song-by-ben-beaton.shtml>

Ben Beaton introduces *Mama's Song*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppnU9bGikAQ>



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**About the author:**

Ben Beaton

Born in Perth in 1972, Ben Beaton attended High School and University in Perth. He has taught English for the past 14 years and currently holds the position of Head of Information Learning Technology at Perth's Scotch College. He lives near the beach in Perth with his wife and children.