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SMOOCH & ROSE

Samantha Wheeler



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

When Rose and Gran rescue a baby koala called Smooch from a pack of dogs, little do they know that bank foreclosures and bulldozers are only months away from swallowing up their home, their farm and Smooch's gum tree!

Rose can't just sit by and watch this unfold. She decides to put aside her fear of public speaking and try to make a difference.

THEMES

Relationships:

- Rose is an orphan. She lives with her grandmother. They share a close relationship.
- Rose meets Carol, a wildlife carer, who gives her encouragement and the confidence to fight for what she believes in.
- Kellee and Tahlia bully Rose, however she overcomes this.
- Rose and Smooch share a special bond. Rose understands what it's like to have lost parents.

Endangered Species:

- The subject of endangered species features in the text.

Koalas:

- The plight of koalas battling with the loss of habitat and threats to their survival is integral to *Smooch & Rose*.
- The diet, behaviour, habitat and appearance of koalas are included.

Courage:

- One person, no matter how small, can make a difference.
- It is important to stand up for one's beliefs.

Environment:

- Development and growth is affecting Australia's native flora and fauna.
- It is possible for developers to work with the environment rather than against it.

WRITING STYLE

Smooch & Rose is written in first person, past tense. The narrative voice is tangible and realistic. Younger readers will easily identify with Rose and her plight to save Smooch's home.

SAMANTHA WHEELER'S WRITING PROCESS

When writing the story about Smooch, the koala, I needed lots of information on the laws regarding tree clearing, and an understanding of the problems facing koalas in South East Queensland. I found some great information on the

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internet, like www.thekoala.com ; www.savethekoala.com ; www.koalacentral.com ; www.environment.nsw.gov.au , and the environmental defenders office.

The laws seemed to be a bit hazy so I rang the local council's environmental officer for clarification. He was extremely helpful, but told me that the rules were confusing and constantly changing. At the time of speaking to him, it was not against the law to clear trees in an area where a koala lived, unless a specific tree had a 'VPO' listing. Other than that, if there happened to be a koala in a tree at the time of clearing, a koala spotter had to be employed to watch out for the koala. As soon as the koala moved away, the tree could be removed. This was scary stuff!

I also spoke with an extension officer at Indigiscapes, a nearby environmental centre which focuses on raising awareness of native animals and plants. They agreed that the laws were tricky. According to them, getting young people to speak up will probably be the only way we can make a big enough difference to stop koalas from becoming extinct.

However, it was the president of the Koala Action Group who told me the story of children arriving at school to find their local koala's trees and hence their koala, completely removed. She also told me she had managed to successfully negotiate with a developer to make the driveway to a new development winding, not straight, so as to keep a large gum tree that was regularly inhabited by a koala. So she made a difference!

Finally, I needed an understanding of what it was like to raise an orphaned koala, as I have never done this myself (although I have raised orphaned farm puppies, cats, goats and sheep!). I looked at lots of clips on YouTube, and read *My Bush Babies* by Iris Anderson, with a foreword by Gerald Durrell, who was my idol when I was a child. Over twenty-eight years, Iris had raised hundreds of orphaned animals. Her stories were both sad and funny but they also helped me write *Smooch & Rose*.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

My inspiration for writing *Smooch & Rose* came from a shocking discovery I made in 2011. My daughter's school sat opposite a paddock of tall leafy gum trees; home to a lovely healthy koala. I'd search the trees every morning when I dropped her off, hoping to catch a glimpse of him. In fact, tourists on their way to the Stradbroke Island ferry would often stop to take photos of the koala snuggled high up in his tallowwood tree.

Then one day, I arrived to find not one of the trees were left! None! An empty paddock of broken branches and upturned trunks stared back at me. I couldn't

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believe it. I googled koala trees as soon as I got home, and found there were all sorts of loopholes that allowed this sort of thing to occur. Several phone calls later, I discovered that this wasn't the first time. One group of school children in another part of the bay had had to be sent home when they arrived at school to find their koala's habitat completely destroyed.

The strawberry part came from a nearby farm where I stop to buy fresh strawberries in winter. Suburban houses have sprouted up all around this farm, but the brave farmers have kept on farming. It was the perfect setting for my story.

And then came Rose. I read a story in the paper about an eight-year-old Queensland girl who had raised \$20,000 to save native animals, especially koalas. How could I not find that inspiring? *Smooch & Rose* sprouted to life.

STUDY NOTES

- Both Rose and Smooch are orphans. With this in mind, discuss why Rose feels so attached to Smooch?
- Why does Rose sometimes wish that she was invisible?
- Why do Kellee and Tahlia bully Rose? If you were Rose, how would you handle this bullying?
- What do you admire about Rose? How do you relate to her as a character? If you could give Rose one piece of advice, what would it be?
- Why does Rose decide to give Smooch her teddy, Brownie? What does this reveal about Rose's nature?
- Re-read the description of Smooch on page 19. Discuss the way in which the author has described his features. Why is this style of writing so effective? Choose another animal and write a description of it using some of the techniques you've discussed.
- Using the description of Rose's and Gran's house on page 24, draw a picture of what you have visualised.
- What does Rose mean when she says, 'a volcano was erupting in my Santa belly'? (p32)
- All stories need complications. When Gran gets the letter from the bank, this forms the basis of the novel's main crisis point. Explain how this letter gives the narrative a strong plot development.
- Discuss Samantha Wheeler's use of figurative language throughout *Smooch & Rose*. Some examples include:
 - 'Wet swimming pool hair and red icy pole lips made them look like saltwater crocodiles ready to strike.' (p36)
 - 'They laughed a nasty, squeaky laugh that made my skin feel like maggots were wriggling over it.' (pp36-37)

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- ‘My heart turned into a tub of ice-cream left too long in the freezer – full of icicles and bitterly cold.’ (p45)
- ‘His shiny bald head jutting out of his black suit reminded me of a turtle with its head poking out from its shell.’ (p48)
- ‘Icicles began to shatter inside my ice-cream heart.’ (p67)
- ‘She was staring into it, like the swirling soup had hypnotised her.’ (p71)
- ‘The enormous orange monster lurched towards the trees.’ (p97)
- ‘He flicked a broad hand at me as if I were a wasp buzzing around his head.’ (p99)
- ‘The bulldozer had left a thick ugly scar from the road p108
- Their tails turned into helicopter blades when they saw Uncle Malcolm.’ (p112)
- ‘The breeze in the treetops agreed.’ (p131)
- Rose is the only person not invited to Kellee’s birthday party. Write a reflection of a time that you felt excluded from something. How did it make you feel? Does this make you think about the way you could include others? Discuss.
- When Lizzie dies, Rose is heartbroken. She has lost her mum, dad, and now Lizzie. Write a reflection of a time when you have lost a pet or a loved one. Read picture books such as *Old Pig*, *The Sounds of the Sea* or *Harry and Hopper* to further discuss the subject of grief and loss.
- Make a list of the many things that are changing in Rose’s life. Why is change such a difficult thing for people to handle? How do you cope with change?
- What clues do we get that the farm is going to be bulldozed? Why does bulldozing trees impact on the koala population?
- What do you think the author’s main message is in *Smooch & Rose*?
- Why is Rose cross that Smooch is growing up?
- Rose is frustrated that Gran seems to be giving up. Do you think Gran is giving up? Discuss.
- On page 80, Rose says she, ‘felt a little sparkle of hope’. How important is hope? How has hope empowered Rose to fight for Smooch?
- Rose is terrified of public speaking. What tips would you give Rose about overcoming this fear?
- On page 103, Rose gets excited that Gran is using the words she’d heard Rose use – words such as ‘endangered’, ‘corridors’, and ‘short-sighted’. Create a vocabulary list that would help persuade the council to stop the developers from bulldozing the trees. Discuss the importance of using accurate vocabulary.
- How is Rose like her dad? Give examples from the text to support your ideas.

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- What does Gran mean when she says, ‘a watched mailbox was like a watched kettle’? (p126)
- With relation to *Smooch & Rose* and your own experiences, discuss the following statement: You don’t have to be big to be special.
- What does the final sentence of the book reveal about the future for Smooch and the koalas of Redland Bay?
- On a map of Queensland, locate Redland Bay. Shade in the areas that are koala habitats. Use google earth to view this area. Survey the amount of development that has encroached on the bushland.
- Research the life cycle, habitat, behaviours and diet of koalas. Present your information in a report format of your choice. Ideas include a brochure, poster, website or prezi.
- Visit the websites listed on pages 134-136 of *Smooch & Rose* to research threats faced by koalas.
- Discuss the features of a range of persuasive texts, including letters, advertisements, brochures and speeches. In small groups, use a range of these text types to persuade an audience about the need to protect koalas and their habitats.
- Write a newspaper article about Rose and her successful campaign to save Smooch and his habitat.
- Create a website that highlights the dangers and threats being faced by koalas in the wild.
- Carol looks after a wide range of native animals. Choose one of these species to research. Use your library’s OPAC to locate non-fiction books on this species. As you read, take notes.
- Rose is asked to present a persuasive talk about an endangered animal. Choose your own endangered animal on which to present a persuasive PowerPoint presentation.
- Hold a fundraising event to raise funds for www.savethekoala.com or another endangered species in your local area.

For teacher/librarians:

- The plight of koalas was recently reported on ABC’s *Four Corners*:
<http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/08/16/3569231.htm>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samantha Wheeler lives in Brisbane with her family and many animals. Her first story took shape during a writing course at the Queensland Writers Centre in 2009 and was accepted into the inaugural Allen and Unwin Children's Manuscript Development Program in 2010. She went on to have a short story published in the *One Book Many Brisbanes* anthology and to write *Smooch & Rose*, her first children's novel, inspired by a local strawberry farm and her concern for Queensland's koalas.