

Grave of the Roti Men Geoff Havel

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Synopsis

Aaron doesn't usually get to see much of his dad, but now he's going to spend a whole month with him in the Indonesian islands. Paradise! But what starts as a fun holiday soon turns into something quite different, and Aaron is caught up in a whirlwind adventure he'll be lucky to survive.

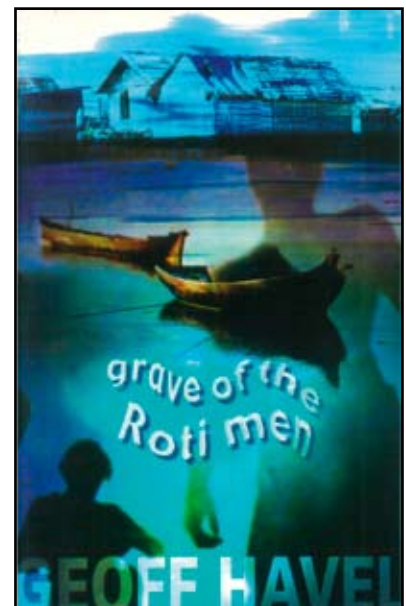
Author Background

Geoff Havel was born in the mountains of New Guinea. As a baby, he liked to sit in a sandpit on the edge of the jungle, stuffing whole bananas down his throat. His manners have improved since then, that is, unless he spots a good idea for a story as it goes past. Right in the middle of whatever he's doing he gets a faraway look in his eyes, rips out his trusty notebook and slams the idea between the pages.

Character

The story is told in third person, past tense, mainly from the point of view of a young Australian boy.

- What do we find out about Aaron from his conversation with the surfer in chapter one?
- What else do we discover about Aaron in the first few chapters?
- In chapter one Aaron's mother is introduced. Describe the kind of person she is. How does she get along with Aaron? How do you know?
- Does the way Aaron feels about his mother change during the story? What causes this change?
- How are letters used to develop our understanding of the main characters?
- How does the author introduce us to the other main characters — Dad, Husni, and Suzie?
- How does Aaron feel about Dad, Husni and Suzie when we are first introduced to them?
- How do Aaron's feelings towards these characters change as the story progresses?
- What are Aaron's first impressions of Indonesia?
- What do you think is his attitude to the people of Pepela at the end of the book?
- What are the main events that change Aaron's understanding of Husni's life?



Character Development

With 2 sheets of A4 paper folded in half, make a small booklet. Inside there will be 3 double page spreads – for the beginning, the middle and the end of the book. On the left hand side of each spread students draw Aaron as they imagine him at that stage. On the facing page they describe his character after class discussions analysing Aaron's feelings and attitudes about himself, his parents, Indonesia and Australia. Use a scaffold with sentence starters like:

- I like ...
- I hate ...
- I am afraid ...
- If I could I would ...
- I really wish ...
- My mother ...
- My father ...
- Compared to Indonesia, Australia ...
- Compared to Australia, Indonesia ...

Other points for discussion:

- Aaron's feelings about his parent's divorce.
- How fair is Aaron's attitude to Suzie?
- The marriage of the pretty girl to Husni's uncle.
- The difference in lifestyle between Aaron and Husni.

Language and Literacy

1. The author uses the surfer in chapter 1 to tell us something about Aaron.
 - Is the surfer a stereotype or have you met such a person?
 - Why would the author use a stereotypical character like the surfer in this scene?
(*Because it keeps the focus on Aaron.*)
2. The tension builds as the storm approaches even when Aaron is unaware that it is coming.
 - How does the author build the tension?
 - What descriptive language does he use when describing the storm?
3. The author uses Indonesian words throughout the novel.
 - Why?
 - How do you know what they mean?
4. There is an epilogue in this novel.
 - What symbolism is used in the epilogue?
 - What is the purpose of this epilogue?

Writing activities

- Letters to mother about other incidents that happen in the story
- Newspaper articles
- Storm stories

- Recounts of holidays in other places
- Diaries – perhaps an alternative to the story map activity outlined earlier

Setting

1. Where are the main parts of the story set? In a paragraph or two, describe each place. How did the author show you what each place is like? How was Aaron influenced by his time in each place?

2. As each chapter of the book is read, track the events of the plot using a story map. A blank map of the Indonesia/Northern Australia region would be useful for tracking the larger distances Aaron travels, while the part of the story set in Pepela would be better mapped intuitively on a large piece of paper.

Society and the Environment

There is a wide range of resources on the topics below – including internet sites, newspaper articles, reference materials in libraries. A display in the Fremantle Maritime Museum includes the first boat confiscated off Ashmore Reef.

Topics might include:

- Comparison of the Indonesian and Australian cultures
- The necessity to protect the reefs near our northern coast from over-fishing
- Australia's response to illegal fishing off its north coast
- The effect of the agreement between the Indonesian Government and the Australian Government regarding the Timor Sea on fishermen from villages like Pepela.

Science research topics

- Tropical reefs, trochus shells and trepang
- Navigating by the stars
- Cyclones and monsoons

Maths activities

- Conversions of nautical miles to kilometres
- Currency conversions
- Living cost calculations
- Speed of travel graphs for each stage of the journey, from jet to walking
- Map scales, pathways etc