

## Beach Sports Car

Darlene Oxenham

illustrations by Sally Morgan and Tracey Gibbs

Waarda series editor: Sally Morgan

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### Synopsis

When Annie's dad promises her a beach sports car she imagines a bright red hotrod with racing car stripes. All her school friends will be so jealous! But it will take a lot of work to turn Dad's battered old bomb into the car of Annie's dreams. Then again, hard work can sometimes make the rewards seem so much sweeter.

### Themes

*Beach Sports Car* is about using your imagination to make everything old, new again. It also portrays strong family relationships.

### Writing Style

*Beach Sports Car* is told in the first person, from the point of view of Annie, a young girl. Broken into short chapters, the writing pulls the reader through the book with dynamic descriptions and lively dialogue, and a good dose of suspense.

### About the Author

Darlene Oxenham is a Malgana woman from Shark Bay on the coast of Western Australia.

### Authors' Motivation

'My story was inspired by my time living in Useless Loop. I loved growing up in Useless Loop, and also in Carnavon.

'When I was young I liked to collect shells from the beach, swim, collect oysters from the rocks, fish, play with my dog Patches and play badminton. I also loved to read *The Secret Seven* and *The Famous Five* books. I felt happiest when at the beach with my family, and riding in my pop's watertruck in Useless Loop.'



## STUDY NOTES

### Pre-reading

Look at the book and think about the impression it gives you before reading.

- Based on the cover, what do you expect the book to be about?
- Write, draw or tell your own story, 'Beach Sports Car', using just the title and cover illustration as your start point.
- Read the back cover blurb. Does this change your ideas about the book?
- Does the blurb make you want to read the book? Why/why not?

### After reading

#### *Structure and presentation*

After reading the story look again at the cover illustration.

- Which elements of the story are illustrated on the cover? Why do you think the illustrator chose to paint those elements?
- Write an alternative blurb for the story.
- How important are the internal illustrations to your understanding of the story? Draw your own pictures (not necessarily based on those in the book) of Annie, Patches, Dad, Red or the Beach Sports Car.
- This is a short chapter book. Why do you think the story is divided into chapters? How do the chapters generally begin and end?

#### *Expectation*

When Annie's Dad says they're getting a Beach Sports Car, Annie imagines what it will be like. When she first sees the car she is very disappointed.

- Have you ever imagined something that then turned out to be completely different from what you expected? How did you feel? What did you do?
- Have you ever worried about something that then turned out to be much better than you expected? How did you feel? What did you do?
- Make a list of things you are looking forward to — your birthday, a holiday, a special visitor or treat, etc. Write down the best case and the worst case, e.g. birthday: best case — party, cake and presents; worst case: no one remembers it's your birthday.
- Make a list of things you are not looking forward to. Write down the worst case and the best case for each event.
- How do your expectations affect the way you respond to things?

#### *Special Projects*

Annie and her Dad fix the Beach Sports Car together, turning it from a pile of junk into something wonderful.

- Have you ever fixed or made something big with your parents or another adult? Think of a project you would like to do with one of your parents or another adult. Write down all the steps involved from start to finish. What steps could you do yourself and what parts would need help?

## *Cars*

- Have you ever looked at the engine of a car? Ask someone who knows — a parent, teacher or mechanic — to show you the different parts of an engine and explain how it works.
- Cars are all around us now, but when was the car first invented? How did people travel long distances before cars? How have cars changed? What will cars be like in the future?
- Imagine you own a special car. What does it look like? What special features does it have? What do you call it? Where will you take it? Draw a picture of your car. Build a model of your car. Write a story about the making of your car. Write a story about an adventure in your car.

## *Place*

Annie's family lives in a caravan at Useless Loop.

- Is Useless Loop a real place? Can you find it on a map? What do you think it would be like to live there?
- Look at an atlas and see what other unusual place names you can find. Can you locate Dead Cow Lagoon, Monster Mount, Terrible Creek or Vampire Gorge?
- How do places get their names? Does the name of a place change the way you think/feel about it?
- What is the name of the suburb or town you live in or near? How did it get that name? If you could change the name, what would you choose? Why?
- Do you live in a house, an apartment, a caravan, a boat? Do you share a room or have your own? What might it be like to live in a different kind of place? If you could live anywhere, where would you live? How do you imagine your life would be different?

## *Indigenous Story-telling*

- Are Indigenous stories different to other kinds of stories you've read? In what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?
- Invite a local Indigenous spokesperson to come and talk to the class about their people's storytelling and culture.
- Arrange for a language lesson in the Indigenous language of your local area.

## *Resources*

There are substantial resources for exploring Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum available at:

- <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/apac/lessons/index.html> [extensive resource for lesson plans on a variety of topics]
- <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/hsie/crosscurriculum/aboriginal/index.htm> [NSW resources to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into classroom]
- <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/indigenous/> [Queensland resources for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives]
- <http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/English/abtorres.htm> [Tasmanian resource for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into English teaching]
- <http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/pages/Educators/> [South Australian resources for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum]

## Interview with Darlene Oxenham

### **Tell us about Useless Loop — it's a fascinating name for a place!**

Useless Loop is a small mining town in the north of Western Australia, situated across from the town of Denham in the Shark Bay region. Useless Loop produces salt and gypsum and when I lived there this was exported around the world to places like Japan. Also when I lived in Useless Loop it was not a closed town so anyone could go in there. Now it is closed and if you want to visit you must first get permission from the mining company.

I am not sure how Useless Loop got its most uncomplimentary name but it is quite a beautiful place. It's right on the coast and has very white beaches and blue green seas. At least this is how I remember it from childhood. I haven't been back to Useless Loop since I was very young and from all accounts the actual town site has changed a great deal. However I believe the rugged beauty of the coastline would remain the same. For a child, Useless Loop was a totally fascinating place that offered many things to do and places to explore.

### **Where did the inspiration for your story come from?**

My inspiration for *Beach Sports Car* came from two sources — my childhood memories of Useless Loop and the inventiveness of my father.

My father was born in a time when things were not as easy to get as they are now. He was also born in a small town, Denham, which was remote from all major towns. At the time Denham was not an easy place to get to. The only road into town was a dirt road and driving there often took days. Because of this my father became very clever at fixing things and creating new things from old parts. My father always sees new ways of using old things, and this is exactly what he did when I was young. We had a beat-up faded pink Volkswagon that my father had cut the roof and front doors off, which we drove along the beach. We often used the car to go shelling — my father would drive the car and we would look out for the telltale sign of a small air hole in the sand. This air hole signalled that a baler shell lay beneath the sand, and it was then my job to jump out of the car and dig the shell up.

So *Beach Sports Car* arose out of these childhood memories and into the story I wove the character of Annie who is loosely based on myself. In many ways it did not matter to my father that I was a girl, he still gave me the same opportunities to drive the car or steer the boat or fix the car — if I showed an interest in something he let me be involved. I also included my beloved dog Patches in my story as he was an important part of my life at the time. He was a lovely dog and we used to go everywhere together. I have a strong memory of Patches and so included him in the story.

### **You use a lot of subtle humour in telling the story; how did you approach the writing process?**

This is the first piece of creative writing that I have ever written and so was unsure how to approach it initially. In the end I decided just to start, to write whatever I could in the initial writing session. So I just launched into writing the story. I knew what the overall

storyline would be and where I was heading — creating this beach sports car — so I just started writing. After this first session I went back and amended things. I added certain details by visualising life in Useless Loop at the time. I then included the mother character, and added more detail about Patches and gave him more prominence.

In the process of refining and adding detail I also thought carefully about what might engage children in the story and humour was one of these things. So I included Patches running away from the noise and peeing on the car. I thought things like this were real and children could relate to them — plus they showed what Patches thought and, in the right context, were humorous incidents. I guess as a person I like to laugh and tease and this has come through in the book.

### **What message can kids get from reading *Beach Sports Car*?**

One message that I hope kids get from reading *Beach Sports Car* is that you can reinvent things and make the old new again. That we don't always have to have that bright new shiny thing. That we can use old things to have fun. I hope kids see that things are more meaningful if they invest something of themselves in them, as Annie did with her Dad.

From this story I hope that kids can see that if you have a vision or dream that this can be realised. I hope that kids have dreams and strive to achieve them.

At the very least the message that I hope kids get from reading *Beach Sports Car* is that firstly stories are fun and therefore reading is fun and everyone should do it.