

Teachers' Notes
by Fran Knight

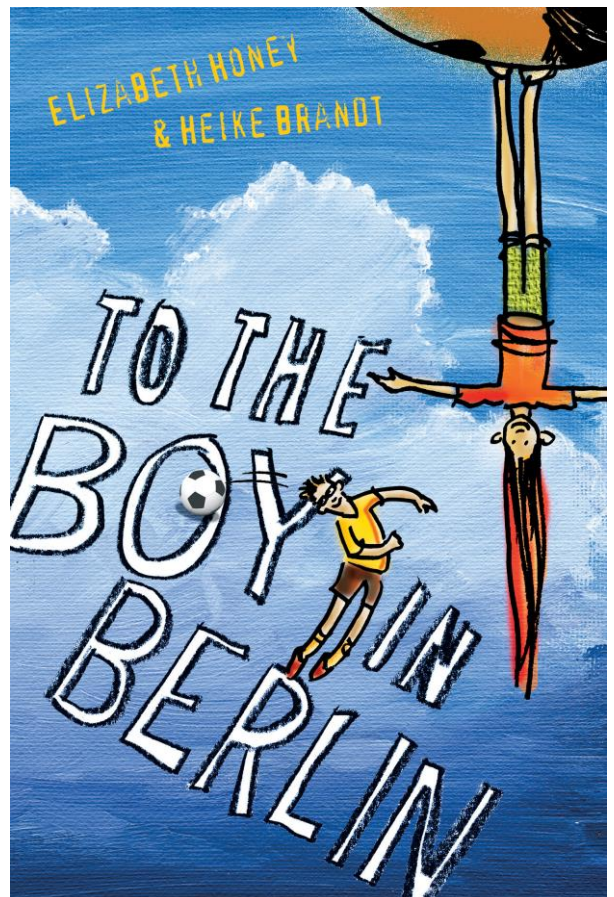
To the Boy in Berlin
Elizabeth Honey & Heike Brandt

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Recommended for ages 10 – 14 yrs

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83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest, Sydney
NSW 2065
Australia

PO Box 8500
St Leonards
NSW 1590
Australia

ph: (61 2) 8425 0100
fax: (61 2) 9906 2218

info@allenandunwin.com
www.allenandunwin.com

Allen & Unwin PTY LTD
ABN 79 003 994 278

INTRODUCTION

PLOT SUMMARY

Packing a letter into a box of books stored under a house for decades, Henni has no idea it will be answered and her quest for information about the people who once lived there, will be satisfied. But she does receive an answer, not from the family, but a boy with a similar name, Leo Schmidt. So begins a trail of emails between Melbourne and Berlin, uncovering a story that spans time and creating a friendship that crosses the world.

This book is at first a group of emails sent between the two, but as they unfold, we find that Henni is absorbed in her quest to find out more about the Schmidt family, and Leo is just as absorbed in helping her. Through their emails, we learn of the desperation Leo feels in trying to protect his friend, Felix, whose mother is placed in detention in Germany. Henni, so far away, is able to bring comfort to Leo in his quandary, and between the two of them they find a solution. When Henni returns to Cauldron Bay to stay for a few days with the Biddle family, she too comes up against opposition from Mr Biddle and his son, Craig. They want the information about the Schmidt family to stay in the past, and try to deflect Henni from her enquiries.

But pursue it she does, sometimes putting herself in peril, needing Leo's comfort and sage advice. The exciting conclusion brings all their research together.

DISCUSSION

What a world is presented to the readers! One where people who have lived their lives in one country are deported through no fault of their own, where children hide their friends so they will not be sent to detention, where a child born in one country must be returned to the country of his ancestors, not even knowing where it is. Amazingly the world of Leo in Berlin parallels the world of Leopold in Australia during World War 1 and by implication, what is happening in Australia today. The issues concerning asylum for refugees in Germany have changed since the novel was written.

Henni's efforts make her think about things she has never thought about before. She knows that the Schmidts were German, a family escaping to a place of peace and safety from a country going down the path to war. But as Henni finds out, their lives here were shattered by the same prejudices and suspicions they left at home, and through the emails to Leo, she finds that something similar is still happening in Berlin where refugees are being treated as outsiders.

A wonderfully funny page turner, a detective story, a story about friendship, bringing in issues which our students see every day in the press and on television, this book will have wide appeal. In the classroom, students can read together, practice the computer lessons given, write emails to each other, find out how difficult it is to write collaboratively, do a literature circle, collaborate on a research topic, join with a class somewhere else in Australia, read and learn some German words ... the list is endless, there is a multitude of things your students can do when reading this novel.

CLASS ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

1. The book can be divided easily into five months from August to December. As your class reads the book, have them draw up a table on a page in their workbooks, in which to jot down events, characters and places they come across. In this way, they will have a record of what they have read, to refer to. Expanded, it may look a little like this:

Month	What happens (list the events as they happen)	Characters (list new characters that appear, and who they are)	Places (list new places that are discussed)	Henni's research (make notes about what Henni finds out in her quest for information)
Introduction and August				
September				
October				
November				
December				

2. Pin up a large map of the world in the classroom. Ask students to put pins in the places mentioned in the story. Berlin and Melbourne are the two main places, but many others are mentioned (Turkey, Shetlands, Alice Springs, Bremerhaven, Southampton, Port Said etc) Attach a tag to each place showing what part it plays in the story. An old map of Germany showing East and West may be useful for those students who do not know what happened at the end of World War 2.

3. Collect pictures of Berlin and Melbourne, placing them alongside each other on a display board. What sort of houses do Leo and Henni live in? What are their schools like? Can you find pictures of shops in Berlin and Melbourne? What are their holiday houses like? Try to set up a pictorial image of the two cities and the lives of the two main characters. Collect travel brochures about each city and display them in the classroom. Wikipedia will help you with information (<http://en.wikipedia.org>)

4. Collect information and articles from newspapers, library books and the Internet concerning German migration to Australia. Ask your staff and parent body if anyone has German ancestry. Perhaps ask someone in to talk to your class about migrating to Australia. Look in your local history books about German migration to your area. See if there are any remnants of their presence (street signs, memorials, names of businesses, suburb names, graves in the local cemetery and so on). Some websites that your students can use are:

<http://www.agtv.vic.edu.au/> - select 'Focus on Culture' page;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Australians and

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_settlement_in_Australia

<http://www.germanaustralia.com/index.htm>

THEMES

FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

1. A range of different families is presented in the story.

List the families. List their names and relationship to each other. Perhaps pin up a large piece of butcher paper, which your students can add to after a brainstorming session listing all the families and their relationships with each other.

How is each family connected to Henni?

2. Henni and Leo have a wide range of friends:

- Who are Leo's friends?
- How do you know they are friends?
- Who are Henni's friends?
- What kind of relationships does she have with her friends?

3. Many of the friendships and family relationships change as the novel progresses. Look closely at one family and show how a relationship within it changes. (For example, Henni's sister and her father have an argument over tennis. Explain what happens and how it is resolved.)

MIGRATION

1. Many of the characters have migrated from their homes for various reasons. List the families and their members who have migrated and find their reasons for doing so. Fill in the following table; it may help you sort them all out. (The Schmidt family is put in to give you a start.)

Family	Where are they from?	New home	Why did they move?	Result
Schmidt family	Germany	Australia	Conscription? Coming war? (see Nov 10)	Family is destroyed, Leopold burnt

2. Select one family and follow their story.

- Why did they leave their country?
- Where did they go?
- what life did they develop?
- What happened to them?
- Write up the family's story as a newspaper account.

3. Henni and Leo find out that many Germans came to Australia before World War One.

- Re-read emails on Nov 10, Nov 23, Nov 28, Nov 30, Dec 2, Dec 3: what do Leo and Henni find out?

- Check out the Bureau of Statistics and find out how many people of German origin came to Australia as migrants.
- Can you find out where they settled?
- What in Australia today shows our German heritage?

Searching on the Bureau of Census and Statistics website (www.abs.gov.au) can give you information about the number of German migrants who have come to Australia, and how many Australians have German ancestry. Try also <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/programs-and-publications/community-information-summaries/the-germany-born-community>

The four websites listed on page three of these notes could be helpful here.

Check if your library has the book, **German Australians** by Al Grassby (Macmillan 2000) or perhaps your local community library has it.

To find out about modern migration to Germany, check <https://handbookgermany.de/en.html> - the official pages of the German government for migrants, also in English and other languages.

REFUGEES

Leo's problem of hiding his friend, Felix, is one of the many exciting episodes in the book (re-read emails from Oct 18 to Nov 4).

- Draw up a story board of what happens.
- List the range of emotions felt by Felix, Leo, Felix's mother, Leo's parents.
- What could have happened?
- Retell some of the smaller stories Leo finds out about other refugees.
- What does Henni find out about refugees in Australia?
- Check the newspapers for other stories of refugees today.

There may well be someone in your school community who could talk to the class about being a refugee. There are Refugee Associations in each state who could help your class with information and speakers and an excursion could be arranged to a Multicultural Museum / Museum of Immigration which has a display about refugees.

For information about refugees and refugee activism in Germany today, check out:

<https://www.proasyl.de/en/> - German activist group for refugees.

PREJUDICE

Henni strikes a great deal of prejudice towards her enquiries when she is in Cauldron Bay.

- Read the emails reporting the prejudice shown to Henni and draw a timeline of the prejudice she comes up against. (Dec 3, Mick; Dec 5, Maude; Dec 8, finding out what happened to Leopold; Dec 9, Mick; Dec 10, bicycle is thrown into the bushes; Dec 12, resolution.)

- How does she maintain her sanity against such opposition?
- Read the emails reporting the prejudice shown towards the Schmidt family and draw a timeline of the opposition to the family and what they endured. (Dec 7, Dec 8, Dec 12, Dec 13.)
- What other instances of prejudice are recounted in the story?
- Can you find instances reported in the daily newspaper?
- In the email dated Sept 25, Henni talks about being an *innocent bystander*. What does this mean? Why has she used that concept? Look back at Leo's email of Sept 21. What has happened to upset Leo?

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GERMAN

Words from the German language are often inserted in the text. As Leo is writing in English, a language he learnt as a child, he often uses German words as he writes, which means that Henni must ask him what they mean.

- Compile a list of these words and their meanings.
- Henni also finds out some German words and asks Leo for their translation. What are these?
- Leo translates several letters and pages from books for Henni.
- How did it make Leo and Henni feel when Leo translated the letter?
- What information does Leo give about his language?
- The class could research the number of German words used in our language.

COMPUTER LANGUAGE

Leo is able to teach Henni some things about her computer. (For example, he tells her to write her emails and save them on a disc to send to him, so saving time.)

- What other hints does he teach Henni?
- He gets Henni to scan pages and send to him for translation.
- What new things can you learn about your computer use?
- Perhaps the class can brainstorm a list of things they can do when they email (I've found that students in year 8 have little confidence at using email).
- Ask your students to email a letter to you about their response to the book.

Internet safety

Here is a good opportunity to remind your class about Internet safety.

- Henni hints at the safety issue in her first email of August 31, where she says to Leo, 'If that's who you are'. Who could he have been?

- There are many instances in the newspaper about children caught because they have been going into chat rooms. Discuss this with your class. Perhaps ask the IT teacher or technician or local police officer to talk to your class about how to protect themselves on the Internet.

USE OF LANGUAGE

Imagery

Elizabeth Honey creates some beautiful images with words. One that is just wonderful is the image of the neighbourhood using the tennis balls that Danielle has hit out from their yard (see October 17).

- See if you can find another stunning image created by one of the authors. Write it out in your book, with its date. Rewrite it in your own words.

Jokes and Riddles

There are riddles in many of the letters. Several need explaining because words are not known or are used in a different way.

- An example of this is Henni's joke about the wombat (Nov 17). Why did the boys not understand this joke? (Nov 18.) Can you retell it in your own words using an animal they do know?
- Learn a joke to tell your friends. Do you know any others which you can tell to your classmates?
- Telling a joke or riddle successfully is sometimes difficult to do. Have a riddle session in your class.

(Joke books can be found in your library in 808 Dewey. If students are interested in how to make jokes, they can read *It's True! You can make your own jokes* by Sharon Holt, Allen & Unwin, 2006)

FEATURES OF A BOOK

(Apart from the blurb-writing exercise, these could also be part of a pre-reading discussion.)

- Have a good look at the book in your hand. What does the cover tell you?
- What does it tell you about the two main characters?
- Look at the blurb. What information does it give you? Could you write a blurb? Try it and see if it is as good as the one already there.
- On the publication page, information is given to you about the authors, Elizabeth Honey and Heike Brandt. What do you learn about these two people?
- Often when you look at the cataloguing details about a book, it gives you subject headings. What are the subject headings for this book? What does this tell you about the book?
- There is a piece of a poem by Thomas Carlyle. Read it. What does it mean? Why do you think it was placed at the front of the book?

CHARACTERISATION

1. There are many minor characters in *To the boy in Berlin*. As the class reads the book, have them draw and cut out the outline of a person (a large one, about 1.5 metres) and put it on the pinup board. (They will need a large number of these.) On each, write the character's name. There should be one each for Henni and Leo, but one too for all the others: each of Henni's family and friends, Leo's family and friends, the Biddle family etc. As information is given in the book, students can add pieces of information to the outline.

For example, one of my favourite characters is amongst the last to appear, Gerit Schmidt. Her outline would be that of a woman. On her outline would be written:

- Leopold's grand-daughter
- lives in Alice Springs
- sleeps in a swag
- liaises between Aboriginal people and art galleries
- loved her grandfather
- he told her lots about birds
- etc

In this way, much information could be attached to the outline of each of the characters, giving a base for the class to write about one person

2. How much do you know about Henni and Leo? Fill in the table.

	Henni	Leo
family		
friends		
house		
influential people		
acquaintances		
likes		
dislikes		
hobbies		
description		

3. Using the table and the information gathered on the cut-out characters, students are to produce a drawing of one of the characters. The class could use the same outline as used above. The outline could be given hair, clothes, face, expression, baggage, things in their hands, hats, and so on, to make them recognisable as a character from the book. These could be displayed in groups around the classroom or in the library as part of a display to promote the book.

EXTENSION WORK

INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP WORK

Some of your students may like to do some work which involves looking more closely at the novel and thinking beyond the classroom.

1. Draw up a **family tree** for the main characters.
2. Draw a **map** of Cauldron Bay (think about scale, a legend, colour, north and south, heading). [These can be checked against the one provided by Elizabeth Honey at the beginning of *The Ballad of Cauldron Bay*, Allen & Unwin, 2004.]
3. List the people who live in Cauldron Bay and show where they live on the **map**.
4. Draw a **plan** of the house where the family lived in Cauldron Bay.
5. What do you think Elizabeth Honey's **aim** was in writing this novel?
6. Write another week's worth of **emails** between Henni and Leo.
7. Write the conversation between the two when they **meet** in Melbourne.
8. Create a **For Sale** sign for the house at Cauldron Bay.
9. What might Henni do with the boxes of books and papers she has found (your class could go on an excursion to a **museum** where the officer shows them how things are restored and stored).
10. Think about the phrase used several times in the story, '**six degrees of separation**' (email Aug 31). What does this phrase mean? Draw the links between Leo and Henni; Bettina and Konrad Schmidt and Gerit; the Schmidt and Biddle families. What does this show?
11. Henni and Leo have an intense discussion about their **beliefs** (Sept 5 and 7) Re-read the two emails. What do you believe? Explain yourself in an email to a friend.
12. Henni and Leo discuss **Conscription** (Sept 18 and 25) Re-read the two emails. What is conscription? When has it been used? Why did it come up in conversation between Henni and Leo? A number of countries still practice conscription. Can you find out where they are? How would you react if Australia brought back conscription?
13. In his email of November 14, Leo describes his anguish at going to the **Detention Centre** to visit Felix's mother. Your class may like to discuss detention centres and what they are used for and what they mean. This could lead to discussions about detention centres in Australia and elsewhere. Your class may like to debate the usefulness of such places.

CLASS PROJECTS

1. There may be a cemetery or memorial near your school. Your students may like to select a headstone or name from the memorial to research. The headstone or memorial may give initial information and then your students could research from local library, council information, local

historian, local history books, state library, genealogy libraries, state archives etc. Even using Google may bring up some family history. The idea is to help your class find out about someone they do not know, see what avenues of information they can pursue and then collect as much as they can about that person.

2a. Set up a **Literature Circle** for groups of students to read books by Elizabeth Honey. Your teacher librarian may be able to help you find information about her, and get a selection of her novels for the class.

Elizabeth Honey's novels for readers aged 8-12 years. (Asterisked titles extend readership to 14 yrs)

Novels about Henni and her friends:

- *45 and 47 Stella Street and everything that happened*, reissued 2000
- *Fiddle-back*, reissued 2000
- **The Ballad of Cauldron Bay*, 2004
- **To the Boy in Berlin*, 2007. Published in Germany as *Henni & Leo*, 2009
- *Stories from Stella Street*, 2016 – compendium edition

Other novels:

- *Don't Pat the Wombat!*, reissued 2000
- *What do you think, Feezal?*, reissued 2000
- *Remote Man*, reissued 2000

Elizabeth Honey has also written and illustrated volumes of poetry and picture books for younger readers.

2b. Or your students may want to read a selection of books that have to do with prejudice or Australia during World War or Germans in Australia or refugees.

Some suggestions are:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Anthony Eaton <i>Fireshadow</i> | • Colin Bowles <i>Nights in the sun</i> |
| • Anthony Eaton <i>A new kind of dreaming</i> | • Colin Bowles <i>Surfing Mr Petrovic</i> |
| • Morris Gleitzman <i>Once</i> | • Brendan Murray <i>Tev</i> |
| • Morris Gleitzman <i>Boy overboard</i> | • Colin Thiele <i>Emma Kepler</i> |
| • Morris Gleitzman <i>Girl underground</i> | • Colin Thiele <i>Sun on the stubble</i> |
| • Diana Kidd <i>Two hands together</i> | • Colin Thiele <i>The rim of the morning</i> |
| • Diana Kidd <i>Onion tears</i> | • Bernard Ashley <i>Boat girl</i> |
| | • Marguerite Hann Syme <i>Chickpea</i> |

There are many recent books with this theme; ask your teacher librarian to set up a display or talk to the class about the range of books held in the library.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

ELIZABETH HONEY

Elizabeth Honey is the hugely popular, award-winning author of poetry, picture books and junior novels. Her playful humour, originality and irrepressible energy strike a chord with kids everywhere and her stories about the Stella Street mob have been translated into many languages.

Elizabeth says:

I was born in Wonthaggi and grew up on a dairy farm. Dairying takes place in wet places because the cows need lush grass, so I spent a large part of my childhood in gumboots, and on rainy days when we couldn't go outside I did a lot of 'making things'.

Us Honey kids were always making things. In the country, this is easy because there are raw materials everywhere – bailing twine, gumnuts, sticks, snake's skin, feathers, ferns, Christmas beetles, bark, wood, the Weekly Times ... and every farm has a shed, and in it, every tool you might need to make things with. Mum made clag for us out of Silver Star starch and I drew, coloured, cut and stuck my way through childhood.

Then I went to Swinburne Art School in Melbourne where I learnt to draw and colour and cut out and stick professionally. I did the Film and TV course which led to cutting up moving pictures and sound, which was even more fun.

Writing didn't happen until much later. I became an illustrator and that involves a close reading of the text, so I knew how stories worked. Besides, being a keen reader I had absorbed a mighty lot of books.

Now I live in Richmond, an inner suburb of Melbourne, with Andrew, a graphic designer; our two young adults when they're home; and a whole lot of junk that might come in handy.

HEIKE BRANDT

Heike was born 1947, two years after the Second World War, in Jever, a small town in Northern Germany, which was then under British control. She grew up in Berlin, the only girl between two boys in her family. When she was seventeen she spent one year as an exchange student in the USA and graduated from high school there. After finishing school in Berlin Heike went to university and studied teaching and education and got a degree. She worked for four years with homeless people and their kids in a government housing project. Then, together with other people, she opened a bookstore for children's literature. At the bookstore, they worked as a collective, read every book before they decided to sell it, published lists of recommended literature for young people and produced calendars for children. That's when Heike began to write. She has published three books in German. But before she published her first book she worked as a translator and since 1986 she has been a freelance translator. Heike has translated over 70 books from English to German – some by Australian authors (Elizabeth Honey, John Marsden) and others by British, US, Canadian and Nigerian authors.

FRAN KNIGHT

Fran is a semi-retired teacher librarian who loves to read adolescent fiction. She has read and reviewed children's books since the 1970's, for magazines such as *Magpies* and *Fiction Focus*, as well as newsletters for English teachers, history teachers and teacher librarians around Australia. Her

love of reading has led her to talk at conferences about her reading and enthusing kids to read. She has written teacher notes for many books published in Australia, and her articles about using books in the classroom are often found in *The Literature Base*, and sometimes in *Magpies*, *ACCESS* and *Viewpoint*.

In 2005, her book, *Ngadjuri: Aboriginal peoples of South Australia's Mid North Region* was published, following 20 years of research into this group. Pledger Consulting has published five books which reflect Fran's reading. Each of the five contains lists of books she has read, placed under subject headings which can be used in schools to help students find novels that reflect their interests.

Fran lives in the City of Adelaide, where a short walk takes her to a range of libraries and bookshops. Her contribution to teacher librarianship has been recognised with the South Australian Teacher Librarian of the Year awarded in 2005, and Honorary Life Membership of SLASA (School Library Association of South Australia) in 2007.