Teachers’ Notes

Raven Lucas Book 3: Chinese Whispers

Christine Harris

Teachers’ notes written by Madeline Holmes

Contents

Introduction................................................................. 2
About the author........................................................... 2
Reading the text............................................................ 2
After reading the text...................................................... 6

Teachers’ Notes may be reproduced for use in school activities. They may not be redistributed for commercial sale or posted to other networks.
Introduction

The disappearance of Raven's father leads her to Malaysia and the shady world of counterfeit artefacts. Raven’s journey is fraught with danger but she is determined to find her father and uncover the truth, for only he can provide the answers and put her family back together again.

About the author

Christine Harris is one of Australia’s busiest and most popular children’s authors. She has written more than fifty books as well as plays, articles, poetry and short stories. Her work has been published in the UK, USA, France and New Zealand.

Chinese Whispers is the third novel in her Raven Lucas series, following Book 1, Missing and Book 2, Dead Wrong.

Reading the text

Part One

Class discussion: first impressions

1) Have a class discussion about what a reader expects from a novel and make a class list of typical features. Once you’ve done this, discuss how your expectations might change when you read a mystery novel. For example, on your list of what you find in a novel you will have included characters. What types of characters do you expect to come across in a mystery?

2) Reread the description of the girls’ arrival to Malaysia and have a discussion about security measures countries employ to protect their borders. Why is it so important that people have passports? Why should people be identifiable? What are governments concerned about when they implement security measures?
Research task: creating a guide book

Raven and her friends rely on Jessica, Dasha and Musa when they travel to Malaysia but imagine if they didn’t have someone to guide them. Where might they source information?

Your task is to create a guidebook of where you live that would be useful for a foreigner arriving for the first time. Draw on your own experiences of travelling and think about what information would have been useful. Visit your library and look at travel guidebooks and browse the internet to study travel websites. Use the novel as a source too and take note of the information Jessica shares with her friends. You should include a brief history of the area, local customs, tips on accommodation, food, local activities, places to visit, what to avoid or be careful of, a map as well as anything you might uncover in your research.

Literary component: response blog

Continue with your blog that you began when reading Missing and Dead Wrong to record your impressions of the novel. Writing down your personal responses to the story will help when it comes to class discussions and written activities. As you did when reading the first two novels, take on the persona of a detective and keep a character record which details relationships, motivations, characteristics and visual descriptions. In order to make sense of the clues, you should include chapter summaries and map the journey of the characters.

Part Two

Class discussion: responding to the novel

1) The title of this book, Chinese Whispers, references a game that demonstrates how information changes as it is retold. Have a discussion about this process where information can become misinformation. Come up with a list of information sources which you use every day. Are these reliable? How do we determine if a source of information is reliable? How often do we go directly to the original source and how often do we receive information second hand?
2) Jessica considers herself a good sidekick. How would you define a sidekick?

Are sidekick characters found only in mystery novels? What qualities should a sidekick possess?

Research component: arguing your case

As a class, talk about the role of secrets in the Raven Lucas series. Think about the motivations behind secrets and whether these secrets have good or bad outcomes. Then talk about the opposite ideas of secrecy and openness in society. You might like to think about it in the realm of home or at school, in relationships, in organisations or government. Come up with a con/pro list for keeping information secret.

You have been invited to take part in a debate about the impact of secrecy: secrets are harmful. In teams of three, argue for or against this statement. Provide evidence to demonstrate the truth of your argument.

Literacy component: characterisation

In order to tell a story writers create characters. You learn about a character through many elements: description, thoughts, actions, speech, dress, personal history, etc. Think about your favourite stories. It’s likely that the supporting characters will be just as memorable as the protagonist.

Put Raven aside for the moment and consider what you know about everyone else in Chinese Whispers. You should have enough information to describe each character to your neighbour. Using the characters in Chinese Whispers as a guide to what a reader should know about a character, create six character profiles for people who could potentially interact in a story. You don’t have to think about the story yet, just create a cast of characters.

Part Three

Class discussion: responding to the novel

1) Consider the role of adults in books with young adult protagonists. Raven and her friends need to have a considerable amount of freedom to achieve their
goals. How does the author achieve this in a believable setting? What types of adult characters do you encounter in the novel? How is Raven able to achieve what she does?

2) We learn that Raven’s father’s disappearance is linked to the black market and counterfeit artefacts. Why do we value historical artefacts? Why would people want to own pieces that they can’t acknowledge? Should individuals own important historical artefacts? How is this sort of activity dangerous to the individuals involved? Why are people motivated to commit crimes?

Research task: historical artefacts
The Kris is a valuable artefact with an intriguing story. Over the course of human history certain artefacts have been coveted for their almost mythical status. Choose a famous artefact to research. Find out what you can about its origins and why it became famous. Speculate on why people sought it out.

Imagine that you work for the history channel and compose a script for an episode on your chosen artefact. Frame your research so that it is entertaining to an audience. You could re-enact the story of your artefact or interview potential experts. If you have access to filming equipment, you may like to record your classmates performing your script.

Literary component: proverbs
Jessica is fond of using proverbs, even if she doesn’t always express them correctly. A proverb is a short statement that seems to convey a universal truth or rule. This doesn’t mean that you should always heed them though. They might seem sensible but if you look more closely you often find there are other viewpoints to consider. Here are some contradictory proverbs you might have come across:

- You’re never too old to learn.
  You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.
• It’s better to be safe than sorry.
  Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

What messages do you think these proverbs teach us? Which ones do you agree with? Can you think of any other proverbs you know? Where do you think proverbs came from? Why do you think they are so easy to recall?

Think about your own set of values, that is, what is important to you – come up with at least ten ideas and then create a proverb for each.

After reading the text

Final Discussion

Explore the resolution and have a discussion with the following questions as starting points:

• How did Chinese Whispers compare to the first two books?
• Is the ending satisfying/expected?
• Were you surprised by the outcome? Why or why not?
• Did Raven’s mother surprise you?
• What do you know about Malaysia that you didn’t before?
• What does the novel suggest about friendship?
• Has everything in the story been resolved?
• What do you think the story says about determination?
• Do you understand the motivations of the criminals?
• What did you think about the shift in setting?
• Do you think Raven will adjust to a normal lifestyle after the excitement she’s had?
• Are there still people in Raven’s life she can’t trust?
• Do you have a clear sense of what happened?
• Think about the novel’s themes. What do you think the novel was about?
  What ideas were explored in the action, in the attitudes and the behaviour of the characters?
Written Response

Write a response to one of the following questions. Make sure to use examples from the novel to strengthen your answer.

1) What makes a suspicious character?
2) ‘There are many ways to see,’ said Jessica. ‘And when you are in an unfamiliar place you sometimes perceive things differently. Or you see what you previously missed’ (page 10). Discuss with close references to the story.
3) Imagine you are Christabel Grae, the journalist Jake called a piranha, and write a series of articles documenting what has happened since Raven’s father disappeared.
4) How do Jessica and Sarah take on the characteristics of sidekicks?
5) What role does Dasha play in the story?
6) Musa makes the comment that women are delicate (page 128). Discuss this idea with reference to the female characters in the story.
7) What sort of characters do you expect to encounter in a mystery?
8) Are good characters more appealing than bad ones?
9) How is suspense created in mystery novels?

Extension Activities

1) Write the opening lines of a suspenseful story.
2) Write a creative piece using the character profiles you created in an earlier exercise.
3) Choose a scene and retell it from the point of view of Jessica.
4) Create a new cover for Chinese Whispers.
5) Revisit the book and read the episodes featuring Raven’s dad. Using the book and your own research, write a pamphlet on malaria.
6) Write a review of Chinese Whispers for your school newsletter.