

These notes are for:

- Middle Years
- Years 5-7

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Fiction/novel
- Third person narrative

National Curriculum Focus*:

General capabilities: personal and social capability; ethical behaviour

English Content Descriptions

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
ACELA1502	ACELA1517	ACELA1763
ACELT1608	ACELT1613	ACELT1619
ACELT1609	ACELT1614	ACELT1620
ACELT1612	ACELT1615	ACELT1621
ACELT1798	ACELT1616	ACELT1803
ACELY1699	ACELT1800	ACELT1622
ACELY1701	ACELY1711	ACELT1625
ACELY1704	ACELY1801	ACELY1721
ACELY1705	ACELY1714	ACELY1724
	ACELY1715	ACELY1725

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.

Themes:

- Belonging
- Secrets
- Homelessness
- Acceptance
- Responsibility
- Resilience
- Memory
- Single parent families

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

Walker Books Australia
Locked Bag 22
Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

Ph +61 2 9517 9577
Fax +61 2 9517 9997

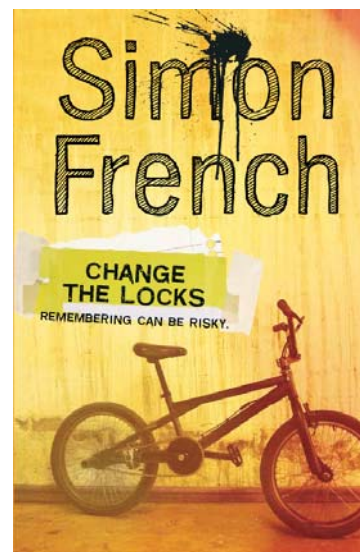
These notes were created by Leonie Jordan.
For enquiries please contact:
educationwba@walkerbooks.com.au

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Change the Locks

Change the Locks

Author: Simon French
ISBN: 9781921720758
ARRP: \$16.95
NZRRP: \$18.99
April 2012



Synopsis

I don't know where we came from. Several times when it had seemed important to know, I had tried asking, but Mum never really answered.

Steven is curious about his past. When he hears a stranger's name, odd memories come back to him. A large house. Being left on the side of the road. But does he really want to remember everything?

In 1992 *Change the Locks* was an Honour Book in the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards and winner of the Australian Family Therapy Association Family Award.

Author/Information

Simon French grew up in Sydney's west and had his first novel published while he was still at high school. He has written several novels and picture books, published in Australia and overseas. His work is praised by critics and has won several awards, including the 1987 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award for *All We Know*. *Where in the World* won the 2003 NSW Premier's Literary Award for Children's Literature, was short-listed for the 2003 CBCA Book of the Year Award for Younger Readers, long-listed for the 2003 Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and nominated for the IBBY Honour List in 2004. Simon's most recent novel is *Other Brother* (2012). Simon is a primary school teacher in the Hawkesbury region of New South Wales.

How To Use These Notes

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with *Change the Locks*. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.



In the Classroom

Language Style & Structure

- How does Simon French use language to create suspense and capture the reader's attention in the opening chapter of the novel? Some ideas to consider include:
 - first person narrative voice ("I") so that the reader experiences the scene from the protagonist's point of view.
 - minimal use of visual imagery and extensive use of aural and tactile imagery so that the reader shares the protagonist's experience of stumbling around in the darkness, e.g. "the quiet click of a car door and a soft, slow crunching of gravel".
 - similes, e.g. "Like clockwork, I kept waking".
 - metaphorical language, e.g. "I fell into the heaviness of sleep".
 - statements that generate suspense by making the reader conscious of the fact that the narrator knows more than they do, e.g. "I knew what it was".
 - variation of sentence length, with long, rhythmical sentences followed by short, terse sentences, often just consisting of one or several words, e.g. "Softer and softer it became until suddenly there was a cough of an engine. A car. Ours".
 - the use of italics to express the protagonist's thoughts or internal voice, e.g. "*Don't cry*".
 - Dialogue, e.g. "the car ... he's stolen our car".
- Chapters 1 and 10 of the book begin with the same opening sentence. Why do you think the author has done this? Think particularly about how in the latter case, it helps signal the climax of the novel. What did you expect to happen in Chapter 10 after reading the first sentence?
- At the start of the book, Steven's class members are matched up with penfriends at another school. Imagine that you had a penfriend. Write a list of questions that you might ask them.
- Find your own penfriend on the "Penfriends of the World" website (<http://www.studentsoftheworld.info/>) and write a letter or email to them. Make sure you write in paragraphs and set your letter out appropriately with a greeting, signature line, etc.
- Compose a series of letters that Steven and Elise might exchange in the future. Make sure you consider the way that Steven's life may have altered after the end of the novel.
- In Chapter 4, Steven tries to recall his earliest childhood memory. What is your earliest memory? What happened? What senses did it involve: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch? What feelings or emotions do you associate with it? Write a journal entry about this memory.
- The first hint that Steven gets about the secret in his past is hearing the name Elise, which unleashes a vague memory for him. Make a list of all the clues about his past that Steven gets in the novel. Make sure you include the chapter reference for each clue. How does this gradual revelation of information add suspense for the reader and keep them involved in the plot?
- "You don't know where you and your mum come from, it's like you just ... materialised. It's a mystery. You should try to solve it or something" (pp42-43). Imagine that you had a blank spot in your past. How would you react? Would you be frightened? Curious? Apprehensive? Write a short story about a character who uncovers a secret in their past. Make sure you don't reveal the secret until near the end of the story (i.e. at the climax), so as to maintain tension in the plot.

After you have written a draft of your story go back and edit your work. As well as checking the accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar, try to replace any weak words with stronger ones and vary your sentence structure to increase dramatic impact. You may also like to use some of the language techniques Simon French uses in the novel.

Setting

- Working in pairs, write down all the information you learn about the setting from one chapter of the book. (Make sure that each pair deals with a different chapter and that all chapters of the book are covered.) For instance, on page 15 we learn that a lot of people in the town are unemployed. Be sure to include page references. Present your work to the class.
- Make up a name for the town where the novel is set and design a brochure or pamphlet encouraging people to visit. Some things to include could be facilities, landscape/environment and local attractions. Make sure you use persuasive language techniques to try and appeal to the audience. For instance, positively biased words, rhetorical questions, descriptive language, exaggeration, imperatives (commands) and inclusive language. Use headings, subheadings and bullet points to make your ideas clearer. Also consider how you can use visual elements such as font, borders, images and layout to make your brochure look attractive.

Character

- Discuss the ways that Steven exhibits the following character traits/values in the text:
 - courage
 - responsibility
 - resilience
 - empathy
 - care and compassion.

Are there any other qualities you would add to this list?

- "Maybe that's why she won't talk about it. You know, because it was really scary" (p91). Write a journal entry as Steven's mother the night that she was taken away by the police for squatting. (You may like to re-read pages 122–124 first.) Focus particularly on exploring her thoughts, feelings and expectations about the future, rather than on simply recounting events.
- Overall, do you think Mrs Matovic is a bad mother? Do you consider her negligent and neglectful? Explain your response. What attitude do you think the author has towards her? Does he judge her or is he instead empathetic towards her?
- How does Steven's relationship with his mother change over the course of the book? Why do you think this change occurs? Construct a line graph showing the development of their relationship. Discuss the significance of the final scene of the book. What does this suggest about their future?
- In small groups, come up with a list of questions that you would like to ask a) Steven and b) Mrs Matovic. Avoid asking closed questions and instead focus on open questions such as how they felt at different parts of the novel or their motivations for particular actions. Brainstorm some possible answers to these questions as well.

- Take turns assuming the role of either of these characters and answer questions from the class. Try to use your voice, posture, movements and facial expressions to make your performance convincing.
- Friends play an important role in the novel. Examine the impact that Patrick, Neal and Katrina have on Steven and/or his mother.
- Write an additional chapter to the novel that takes place a year after the events at the end of the book. Focus particularly on the way that the characters' lives and relationships may have altered as a result of their experiences.
- Patrick says to Steven, "... you were strange when you first started at the school in town. Didn't play with anybody. Pushed and kicked and cried" (p42). Steven's experiences of homelessness and abandonment make him initially antisocial and withdrawn. What are some other traumatic events children of Steven's age may experience? For instance, parental separation, abuse, migration and war and conflict. What effect might such experiences have? How can we offer support?
- Research homelessness on the internet. Work in small groups, with each group allocated one of the following questions to gather information on and then report their findings to the rest of the class. After all groups have shared their information, as a class, brainstorm ways that your school might raise awareness of homelessness in your community. The following sites may be a useful starting point.
 - Youth Homelessness Matters website: <http://www.youthhomelessnessmatters.net/>
 - City of Sydney website: <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/homelessnessservices/InformationKitForVolunteers/Module1/WhatIsHomelessness.asp>
 - The National Homeless Youth Report: <http://www.theoasismovie.com.au/report/report.php>
 - Rebecca's Community: <http://www.homeless.org.au/homelessness/>

Themes

- Discuss the significance of the title. What ideas are implied by changing locks? A threat to be kept out? Being excluded or denied access to something? Imprisonment? Something else?
- Imagine that the publishers were unhappy with the title of the book and had asked you to come up with an alternative. What would you choose? Use a design program such as Publisher or InDesign to create a new cover for the book featuring this title. Consider how you can use visual techniques such as font, colour, composition, framing and symbolism to communicate the key themes of the book. Present your work to the class, explaining your ideas.
- Have you ever been robbed or had something stolen from you? What was it? How did you feel at the time? Did your attitude or behaviour change in any way as a result of your experiences? Share your responses with the rest of the class.
- How do Steven and his mother's lives change after their car is stolen? What are some of the emotions they experience when this happens? In Chapter 2, Steven writes a list of things Darryl also steals from them when he takes the car. What are some of the non-physical things he might add to this list? For example, independence, freedom and security.
- Write your own definition for the term "squatting". In small groups, brainstorm a list of problems or challenges that squatters might face. Make sure you consider children as well as adults.
- Read the "About the Author" section in the back of the book. Are there any aspects of Simon French's life that you think may have influenced the themes and characters in *Change the Locks*?

Questions:

- How many homeless people are there in Australia? How many of these are children? How does the rate of homelessness in Australia compare to other parts of the world?
- What are some of the reasons people become homeless?
- What groups or people are particularly at risk of homelessness?
- What are some of the challenges homeless people might face?
- What are some reasons homelessness is increasing in Australia?
- What services or help are available for the homeless?

If you enjoy Simon French novels, you'll love these other great reads ...



Surface Tension

Author: Meg McKinlay
ISBN: 9781921720284
AU\$15.95/NZ\$17.99

When Cassie and Liam start swimming at the lake neither of them realises the dark secrets that lie beneath. As summer heats up and the lake waters become lower and lower, the shocking truth is slowly uncovered. And soon, both their lives will change - forever.



On Orchard Road

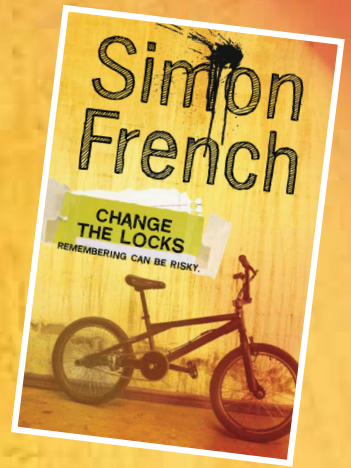
Author: Elsbeth Edgar
ISBN: 9781921720291
AU\$16.95/NZ\$18.99

Jane's world has been turned upside down. She has a brand-new sister, and her family has moved to a small town, leaving behind everything she knows. She is sure that she will be miserable – but a mysterious old lady, a curious boy and an amazing garden prove her wrong.

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CHANGE THE LOCKS

by Simon French



WORD SEARCH

Find the following words in the grid below. Words may be hidden horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

There are also 4 additional themes from the book hidden in the grid. Can you find them and add them to the word list?

WORD LIST

Simon French
Change the Locks
Steven
resilience
memories

the past
squatting
characterisation
setting
themes

protagonist
narrative voice
structure
language
techniques

