

## These notes are for:

- Middle Years
- Years 5-7

## Key Learning Areas:

- English

## Example of:

- Fiction/novel
- First person narrative

## National Curriculum Focus\*:

**General capabilities:** personal and social capability; ethical behaviour

### English Content Descriptions

Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
ACELA1502	ACELA1517	ACELT1619
ACELA1505	ACELT1613	ACELT1620
ACELA1797	ACELT1616	ACELT1621
ACELT1609	ACELT1618	ACELT1622
ACELT1795	ACELT1800	ACELT1625
ACELT1610	ACELY1709	ACELY1721
ACELT1612	ACELY1711	ACELY1723
ACELY1699	ACELY1801	ACELY1725
ACELY1701	ACELY1712	ACELY1726
ACELY1704	ACELY1714	

\*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:

- Friendship
- Family
- Bullying
- Acceptance
- Identity
- Integrity
- Courage
- Difference
- Change
- Itinerancy
- Broken families
- Mental illness

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

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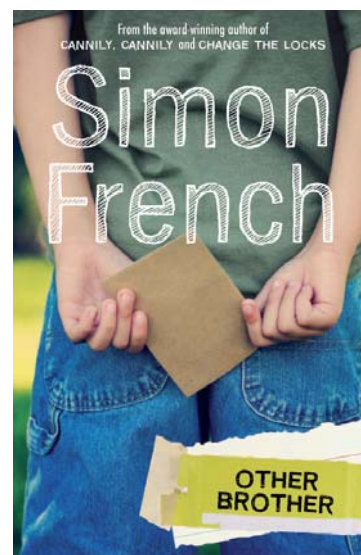
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## Other Brother

### Other Brother

Author: Simon French  
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## Synopsis

Kieran wants to be part of the in-group at school. He wants to be on the football team. He wants to fit in. But then his cousin Bon turns up. Bon doesn't know anything about fitting in – he looks different, he wears the wrong clothes, and he says weird things. Kieran just wants to ignore Bon, but soon he is forced to make a choice. Which is more important – being popular, or doing the right thing?

## 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*. *Change the Locks* was an Honour Book in 1992. *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 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 *Other Brother*. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.



## In the Classroom

### Setting

- Draw a map of Kieran's hometown based on the information provided in the novel. Include such places as Kieran's house, his school, the oval, shops, hotel, caravan park, etc. (Chapter 2, when Kieran goes for a jog with his father, might be a useful starting point.)

### Structure and Style

- Do a "visual summary" of the book.
  - Rule five pages of your workbook into four even squares.
  - Label each square "Chapter 1", "Chapter 2" and so on.
  - In each square, draw a picture representing the key development in this chapter. You could depict an event that occurred in the chapter or even draw a symbolic representation of a theme or a character's feelings – try to be as creative as possible!
  - Below each picture, write a quote from the chapter which links to your image. Remember to use quotation marks!
- Why do you think Simon French has chosen to write in the first person? Choose a passage from the novel and try rewriting it in the third person. How does this change your experience of the novel? Do you feel as connected to the characters?

### Character

- Discuss the following statement as a class: "The main character of a book is not necessarily the hero". Is this true of *Other Brother*? What about other books you've read? What does it mean to be a hero?
- How do you view Kieran at the start of the novel? Why do you think he is initially so hostile towards Bon? Do you identify with him and his attitude towards his cousin, or do you find him an unsympathetic and unlikeable character? Have your feelings towards Kieran changed by the end of the novel? In what way?
- Draw a line graph showing the development of Bon and Kieran's relationship in the novel. Include all key events which have an impact on their relationship, indicating on the graph whether this impact is positive or negative.
- Discuss the differences in Kieran and Bon's home lives. What impact do you think their respective upbringings have had on their personalities? Consider such things as independence, confidence and relationships with others. Imagine that you had been raised in a similar environment to Bon. How do you think you might have been different from how you are today?
- Both Kieran and Bon have lost contact with somebody they cared for. How does this help them eventually reach an understanding in their relationship? Write an additional chapter to the book where Bon makes contact with Sam or Kieran with Connor.

- While Bon and Julia initially seem to be very different types of people, as the novel proceeds the similarities in their personalities and circumstances become increasingly apparent. Draw a Venn diagram showing the similarities and differences in their characters.
- In small groups, create a character map for a person from the book. Each group should look at a different character – make sure you include Kieran, Bon, Julia, Nan, Aunty Renee, Mason or Lucas and Kieran's mother and father. Draw a picture of the character in the centre of the page and then around them include:
  - adjectives that describe their personality
  - information about their family, hobbies, skills, fears, ambitions, etc.
  - what role they play in the novel
  - how/if they change throughout the novel
  - three quotes from the book which give insight into their character (make sure you use quotation marks).

Re-form into new groups made up of one member from each of the original groups. Each group member should present their character while the other members of the group take notes. At the end, students should have notes on all of the characters in the book.

- In the novel, the roles of children and adults are frequently reversed, with children often forced into positions of responsibility and adults sometimes acting in childish or irresponsible ways. For instance, Julia insisting that she be allowed to attend school or the man who plays soccer with Kieran's father referring to Bon as "girly-boy". What other examples can you find of this type of role reversal in the book? Based on your own experiences and observations, do you feel the book offers a realistic depiction of human nature in this regard?
- Compose the postcard which Bon and Kieran receive at the end of the novel. Some ideas to consider include how Julia's life is different now that she is with her father, her feelings towards her mother, advice or messages that she might give to the two boys and memories of their time together.
- Write a diary entry as Bon a year after the end of the book. In what way has his life changed? Is he different in any way? How is he being treated at school? What is his relationship with his mother like?

### Themes

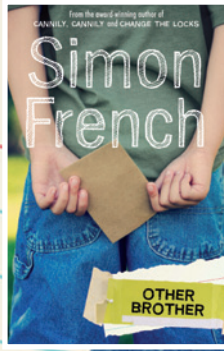
- The first line of the book is, "We're brothers, we are". What does it mean to be a brother? In what ways is it different from being a friend?
- In Chapter 3, Kieran reflects on what it is like to be a new kid at school. Have you ever been a new kid? (This doesn't necessarily have to be at a school – it could be a new sporting team, club, friendship group, country, suburb ...) How did you feel? How did others treat you?



- Imagine that you were given the job of helping a new student settle into your school, town or suburb. Write an orientation manual with information that might help them adjust. Include maps, diagrams, dos and don'ts – anything they might find useful.
- Imagine that Bon arrived at your school one morning, as he does in the book. How do you think he would be treated? How would you behave towards him? Individually, reflect on the way Kieran's class is similar to and different from your own. Which particular student, or group of students, do you think you most resemble? Who would you most like to resemble?
- In the novel Kieran deals with the issue of whether it is more important to be popular or to do the right thing. Have you ever experienced a similar conflict, where your desire to be accepted or liked has made you feel pressured to do or go along with something that you felt was wrong? Write a journal entry about this. (This is a personal reflection that you do not have to share this with anyone.)
- Have a "Four Corners debate" in response to the following statement: "It is more important to be liked by others than to be true to yourself." As a class, designate corners of the room to represent each of the following responses: "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree". Stand in the corner that best represents your point of view. Explain why you have chosen your particular corner and listen while your classmates do the same. As the debate proceeds and new ideas are raised, change corners if your opinion alters in any way.
- In Chapter 14 Julia tells Kieran, "It's easy being part of a group ... and it's hard to walk away and do the things you know are right. But if it's the right thing, other kids will see that. They'll come to you and be your friend. They'll like you for who you are." Discuss her comments in small groups. Do you agree with her or is she being overly optimistic? From your experience, are people who do the right thing necessarily respected and admired for it? What if they're rejected or ridiculed instead? Is it still important to do the right thing?
- Bon writes a story in his maps and inventions book where he is transformed into a knight called "Bon the Crusader", Kieran becomes "Kieran the Brave" and Julia becomes "Julia the Fair". Do you think the names he has chosen are appropriate? Why or why not? How do Lucas and Mason twist these names in their bullying and taunting? What does this reveal about them? Think particularly about how it highlights their ignoble or unheroic qualities.
- Look up the word "chivalry" in the dictionary and then write a definition for it in your own words. Share your definition with the rest of the class.
- If you were transformed into a character in Bon's story, what name might you be given? Think especially about your positive qualities. Draw a picture of yourself as a knight, lady, king, queen or other "chivalric" character and then write this name below your drawing.
- Read some famous chivalric stories (Arthurian legends are a good option) and then write and illustrate your own story featuring knights, maidens, castles, quests and other features of the "chivalric" tradition. You may like to experiment with the courtly style of language used in these stories. Make sure you plan and edit your work.
- Bullying is an important theme in the novel. Research this issue on the "Bullying. No Way!" website ([www.bullyingnoway.com.au/](http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/)) then brainstorm the following questions in small groups composed by the teacher:
  - What are some of the reasons bullying occurs?
  - What sort of actions can be regarded as bullying? Consider physical bullying, verbal bullying, cyberbullying and psychological/emotional bullying.
  - How can people help stop bullying?
  - Do you feel that bullying is a problem at your school?
  - What strategies are in place for preventing bullying at your school?
  - What actions occur if bullying takes place?
  - What role do the following groups/people play in preventing bullying: principal, teachers, school counsellor, parents, students, others?
 Individually, write a letter to the principal with suggestions for how bullying might be reduced at your school.
- Design a poster to raise awareness of bullying. You may like to use an online poster design site such as Glogster ([www.glogster.com/](http://www.glogster.com/)), Artskills (<http://www.artskills.com/>) or Notaland (<http://notaland.com/>). Try to use a range of persuasive language techniques such as imperatives (commands), direct address, inclusive language, emotive language and rhetorical questions. Display your posters around the school.
- Discuss the title of the book. Do you think this is a good title? Why or why not? Think particularly about the use of the word "other". What feelings or associations does this word conjure up for you? If you were asked to choose an alternative title for the book, what would it be? Remember, a good title should capture the audience's attention and give them some idea of what the book is about.
- Analyse the visual techniques the designer has used on the cover of the book. For example, colour, font, images, symbolism, composition (where things have been placed). Design an alternative cover for the book featuring your new title. Present it to the class, explaining how you have used visual techniques to emphasise the themes, subject or mood of the book.

# Simon French

## OTHER BROTHER



At the end of *Other Brother*, Bon and Kieran receive a postcard from Julia, who is now living with her father on the south coast. On the first postcard, draw a picture of the place where she is living and make up a name for it. On the second, write the message Julia may have written to the boys.

Greetings from

Dear Bon and Kieran,

PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE



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