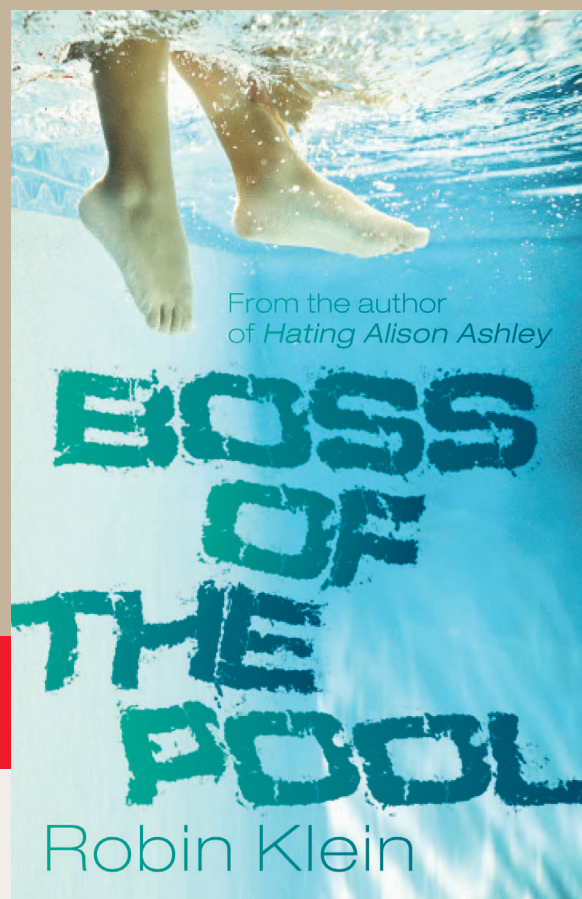


# Boss of the Pool

Written by Robin Klein

- Unlikely friendships • Disabilities
- Selflessness • Self-discovery



## Synopsis

Anne is a single parent who has found a part-time summer-holiday job. This affects her daughter Shelley's plans for her own holidays, because she's not allowed to stay home alone in the evenings unsupervised. She must spend her nights with Mrs Murray, the old lady next door, or accompany her mother to the hostel for disabled children and swim in the unused pool.

After an unsuccessful evening with Mrs Murray, Shelley decides to go to the hostel after all. Unfortunately, she is not alone at the pool and has to cope with the unwanted attentions of Ben, who really likes her and is terrified that she will drown.

Shelley hurls abuse at Ben, hoping to make him go away, and then decides to get into the water to frighten him. She soon discovers, much to her surprise, that with certain persuasive tactics she is able to get him into the water up to his ankles.

The following day is Anne's day off, as on Sundays the parents of the residents come and take their children out for the day. Encouraged by the thought that the place will be deserted, Shelley decides she needs a swim. When she arrives at the pool, she finds Ben waiting at the door. Before she can get away he notices her arrival and is so excited that she decides to have her swim anyway.

Shelley bribes Ben with a silver and then a gold star to go further into the water. Finally, she gives him her gold medal with the words 'Boss of the Pool' engraved on the back. Such was Shelley's success with Ben, that when Anne is awarded a fulltime position at the hostel, Shelley resolves to teach all the kids how to swim. With the help of the new Boss of the Pool!

## About the Author

Robin Klein is one of Australia's best-known and most successful writers for children. Her books include the very popular Penny Pollard series; *Thing* (which won the Children's Book of Australia's Junior Book of the Year Award in 1983); *Hating Alison Ashley*; and *Came Back to Show You I Could Fly*, which was the CBCA's Book of the Year (Older Readers) in 1990. She has published four books with Omnibus Books: *The Princess Who Hated It*; *Birk the Berserker*; *Boss of the Pool* and *The Ghost in Abigail Terrace*. Robin is not currently writing.

She lives in the Dandenong Ranges, east of Melbourne.



# Discussion Points

## Before Reading

- In an effort to create interest in the novel, draw students' attention to the title, without revealing the illustration on the front cover. Pose the question: 'What do you think the outline of the story will be?' Students should then break up into small groups and choose a speaker to represent them. Each student gives the speaker their opinion of the story's content. When all students have relayed their opinion to the speaker, all the speakers report back to the rest of the class. A vote could even be taken as to which version may in fact be the closest to the author's own. Read it and see!

- Read aloud to students a passage of the story to motivate them to read the story for themselves. The paragraph beginning on page 57: 'No I won't!' ...Ben took one more haunted step.\*

- Any student who has read the book, or noticed it on the shelf in the library, might like to share their thoughts on the novel.

## During/After Reading

- Some people say that it takes a special person to work with disabled people. Do you think this is the case?

- Was Shelley special all along and just didn't realise it, or is there more to it than that?

- What sort of relationship did Shelley have with Ben?

- What has this experience done for Shelley? Will it affect her life, and how?

- Do you think her mother knew of Shelley's efforts all along, or do you think it might come as a surprise to know what Shelley had been doing with her time in the pool room?

- What do you think Anne's response would have been at the end of the story?

- Discuss the main characters: Shelley, Ben and to a lesser extent Anne, Shelley's mother. As a single parent, Anne needs to work and it is as a result of this situation that the story arises. Can anyone relate to this?

# Activities and Copymasters

## ACTIVITY 1:

### MRS MURRAY'S HOUSE

Read the sentence below to the group, without revealing the front-cover illustration.

'Shelley stormed next door with a face as fierce as a hawk and rang Mrs Murray's doorbell, determined to find pleasure in the next three hours enforced stay.' (p.3)\*

Then, as a speed-writing exercise, give students 10 minutes to write what they think might happen at old Mrs Murray's house.

## A. Download CM Mrs Murray's House

## ACTIVITY 2:

### BOSS OF THE POOL

Before revealing the front cover of the story, students could be asked to draw a caricature of what they think the 'Boss of the Pool' would look like. Download CM Boss of the Pool. After completion of the activity, discussions could be held about such issues as:

- Why most students drew a male in the role.
- What kind of clothing they drew their character in and what would have been more appropriate.

## B. Download CM Boss of the Pool

## ACTIVITY 3:

### WRITTEN CONVERSATION

Organise your class into partners, taking on the role of Shelley or Shelley's mother, Anne. Read the last chapter of the novel and imagine that the final sentence reads, 'Just then Anne walked into the pool room.'

What would the conversation be?

Each taking a turn with the pen, write a response to each other as though you were the characters. Remind the class about the correct use of speech marks and you can download Adverb Bank EXTRA SUPPORT.

## C. Download CM Written Conversation

## D. Download CM Adverb Bank EXTRA SUPPORT

## 4. THE SECRET DIARY OF...

After discussion or research about what a biography entails, ask students to write the diary of the person who resides in room 24 down the corridor, on the left, at the nursing hostel.

## E. Download CM The Secret Diary of...

\*Boss of the Pool, by Robin Klein, published by Omnibus Books, 1986

