

AUDREY GOES TO TOWN

Teachers Notes

Written by **Christine Harris**

Illustrations by **Ann James**

Published by **Little Hare Books**

SYNOPSIS

Audrey Barlow, her mum and her little brother Douglas come to stay in the town of Beltana while Dad and big brother Price go dogging. They stay with Mrs Paterson, who takes them in to be 'charitable'. Audrey isn't used to being in a town, but before she has time to adjust, Mum is taken ill and has to go to hospital. Now Audrey and Douglas are in strict Mrs Paterson's care. Even though Mrs Paterson doesn't approve of lots of people and things, she has lots of bewildering rules and doesn't believe Stumpy is real, Audrey decides to find her good side. Meanwhile, Audrey makes friends with Boy Jenkins, who helps her get into the hospital to visit Mum, and prepares to go to her first dance.

On the night of the dance, a flash flood sweeps along the creek. Audrey knows Mrs Paterson is out there, walking to the hall by herself. Raising the alarm, she spots the old lady clinging to a tree and everyone comes to the rescue.

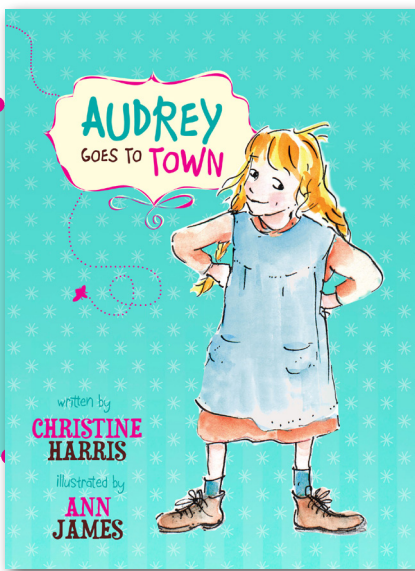
Slowly but surely Audrey and Mrs Paterson have come to know and care for each other. Audrey has learned that underneath Mrs Paterson's dour exterior is an old lady who still might like to wear a blue ribbon that matches her eyes.

THEMES

At the heart of *Audrey Goes to Town* lies a powerful message about resilience and being open to the best, even in difficult situations. The growing relationship between Audrey and Mrs Paterson highlight how these qualities can stand us in good stead.

While Audrey is thrilled to be coming to Beltana, when she meets Mrs Paterson and when Mum becomes ill, her excitement soon turns to dismay. She is a little scared of Mrs Paterson, but Audrey is at her core a positive person who looks for the best in all things. Remembering Dad's wise words, she knows instinctively that there must be something good buried inside Mrs Paterson.

Mrs Paterson's attitude to life is a sharp contrast to Audrey's. She accepts the Barlows into her home from a sense of duty. She has a firm idea of how things should and shouldn't be done. To her, Audrey is a child who needs to be set right, but it is clear that she is the one who needs help.



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Audrey is in a difficult situation but she remains resilient. She finds a way to get to see her mother, she doesn't give in to Mrs Paterson's notion that Stumpy isn't real and she sticks up for herself saying, 'I'm not poor. I've got my family!'

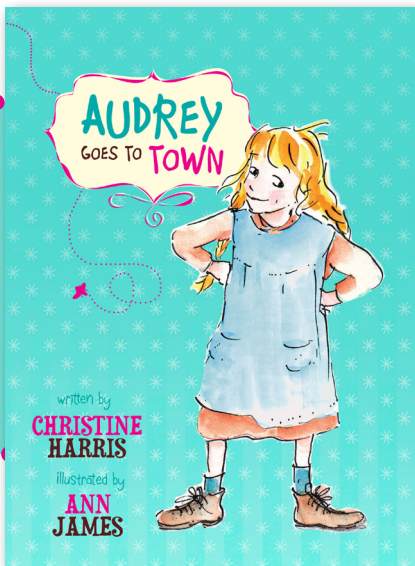
This particular statement has a big impact on Mrs Paterson. She has lost her husband and son and this has turned her into a sad, dour person who believes no one cares about her. With the irrepressible Audrey in her life, Mrs Paterson comes to realise this isn't the case and she sees the world in a new light.

WRITING AUDREY GOES TO TOWN

Audrey Goes to Town is Christine Harris's third book featuring Audrey Barlow, a girl growing up in Outback South Australia in the 1920s and '30s. Audrey first appeared as the main character's younger cousin in *Outback: The Diary of Jimmy Porter*, written for Scholastic Australia's My Story series. She first featured in her own story in *Audrey of the Outback*. Readers learned about her life in a house in the bush with her family. In this second book in the Audrey series, she goes out into the world beyond her family's home, taking her curiosity and bright personality with her.

Christine Harris felt that the character's voice took over when she was writing about Audrey. Put in the new situation of living in a town gives Audrey lots of opportunities to learn about herself and the world. Christine thinks that, 'It is natural that experiences and people we meet change us in some way, and Audrey learns quickly!' While Audrey remains the same imaginative child who loves meeting people, it is clear that she is growing up. She helps look after Dougie, rescuing him from the goats and taking him to the Jenkins house to play. More importantly she, thinks about other people's feelings. For instance, when she finds out that her mother will be in hospital for weeks, she doesn't let herself cry in case it scares Dougie. And now Audrey thinks about things more deeply. When confronted with the very unfriendly Mrs Paterson, she doesn't despair but decides to find the stiff old lady's good side. After all, Stumpy is invisible to most people but he still exists, so even though Mrs Paterson doesn't appear to have a good side, she might.

Once again Christine Harris uses lively, humorous dialogue to show much of Audrey's character. Although Audrey still uses words like 'distractonate' for 'distract' and 'punch you all' for 'punctual', she now knows when some words are wrong, like the difference between 'escort' and 'hescort'. She even knows not to correct others in case she hurts their feelings. The mistakes Audrey does make, like her understanding of



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what a 'dead' language is, reveal much of how she thinks and works things through. Her plainly spoken comments and questions are impossible for Mrs Paterson to ignore. And Audrey's enthusiastic, very Australian exclamations – 'the cockies' corsets', 'strike a light', 'Fair dinkum' – bring her personality to life. In contrast, Mrs Paterson speaks very properly, often correcting Audrey's language.

Audrey Goes to Town gives us a glimpse of what life was like in small Outback towns in the 1920s and 30s. Although life is more comfortable in Beltana than out in the Barlow's house, it still isn't easy. The townspeople might have lino, glass windows and a store with lollies, but it is dry and families like the Jenkins struggle to make ends meet. Also, events away from the town have had a big impact: at the core of Mrs Paterson's unhappiness is the fact that she lost her son in the Great War. What appeals to Christine about writing about this period is 'People's ability to make the best of things without whinging.'

Although Christine conducted a lot of research for *Audrey of the Outback*, she realised she needed to find out more for *Audrey Goes to Town*. She also re-visited Beltana and talked to 'old bushies' to get the feel for life in the town in the '20s and '30s. Many events in the book take place in buildings that still stand in Beltana (see Christine's pictures on 'Audrey's Blog' at her website, www.christineharris.com).

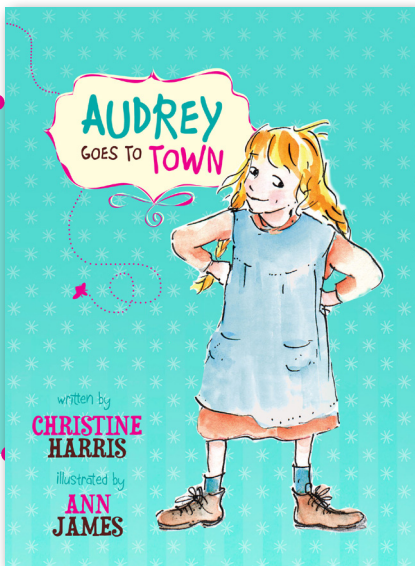
Audrey meets many fresh, funny and interesting characters in Beltana. Christine feels that these characters develop in her stories naturally and that they are possibly composites of many people that she's met but that she can no longer put her finger on as individuals in her mind.

Christine is delighted with Ann James's illustrations, saying, 'I have had many illustrators over the years and there are times when I've thought, yes, those are good illustrations, or laughed, because they were funny. But when I saw Ann's drawings of Audrey, I thought, that IS Audrey. Ann didn't just do good drawings, she captured Audrey's spirit. Ann 'recognises' Audrey.'

Similarly, Christine has been thrilled with the response she has had to the first book in the Audrey series. 'With some of my books, readers comment on the exciting plot or strange environment, but with the Audrey books, they tell me they 'love' her. And it's not just the younger readers, either. I find that many older readers, as in elderly people, say that Audrey reminds them of their own childhoods.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CHRISTINE HARRIS has lived in many parts of South Australia, including some isolated rural locations. As a child her best friend, Jennifer Hobbar, was imaginary. Christine has always loved reading books and she had her first go at writing one perched in a tree when she was nine years old. She hasn't stopped writing



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since.

To date Christine has written more than fifty books including short stories, historical fiction, thrillers, horror, speculative fiction, humour, plays and picture books. She has received many awards for her writing, including being shortlisted for the Children's Book Council Book of the Year Award (*Jamil's Shadow*, 2002) and an Aurealis Award for speculative fiction (*Foreign Devil*, 2000). In 2006 she was honoured to receive the Carclew Fellowship.

Today Christine lives in the Adelaide Hills with her family. She travels widely, taking up writer-in-residence positions, speaking at conferences, holding writing workshops and visiting schools to talk about her books. This doesn't stop her writing because she usually has a laptop handy, though when she doesn't, she has been known to resort to a pen and a serviette.

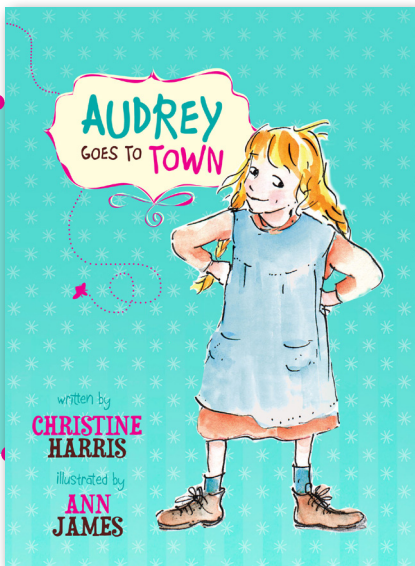
Find out more about Christine and her books at: www.christineharris.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

ANN JAMES has been an art teacher and a designer of educational texts, while she currently works as an illustrator and runs an art gallery and bookshop. She illustrated her first trade book for children, *A Pet for Mrs Arbuckle*, in 1980 and since then has illustrated many picture books and novels for young readers. Ann uses a wide range of illustration techniques, including photography, collage, watercolour, ink drawing and pastels. She experiments with art mediums continually and loves to include her pets in her pictures.

Ann is dedicated to children's literature. In 1988 she and her partner, Ann Haddon, opened Books Illustrated in Melbourne. Books Illustrated combines a gallery of book illustration and a children's bookshop. In 2000 they received the Pixie O'Harris Award for Distinguished Service to Australian Children's Literature. In 2002 Ann James received the Dromkeen Medal for her work as an illustrator, her support of others and her contribution to further in the cause of children's literature in Australia. Her books have appeared on many awards' short and honour books lists.

Find out more about Ann and her work at: www.booksillustrated.com.au



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STUDY NOTES

1. Why is Audrey so excited to come to town? If the students have read *Audrey of the Outback*, they might like to compare Beltana to her home.
2. What happens that makes Audrey wish she could go home? How does she keep from getting too unhappy about living with Mrs Paterson and missing her mum and dad? Is she a strong person?
3. What is Mrs Paterson like at the beginning of the story? What is she like at the end? How has she changed? Has Audrey had anything to do with those changes?
4. To help students understand life in the 1920s and '30s, have them list the things that the children do in the book and compare them with the sorts of things they do.
5. List all the features of the town – the school, the creek, the shop, the hotel, Mrs Paterson's house, and so on. Have students make models of the town's features using the odds-and-ends box. In a sand tray or on a mat, put together a model of Beltana.
6. Find some of the funny things that Audrey says in the book. Discuss what they mean, and whether we still say things like that today. How does the author show different character's personalities by how they speak?
7. Imagine that it is Christmas time and Audrey has gone home to her house in the bush. Mrs Paterson and Audrey send each other letters and presents. Write a letter from each of them to the other, and draw a picture of what they give each other.