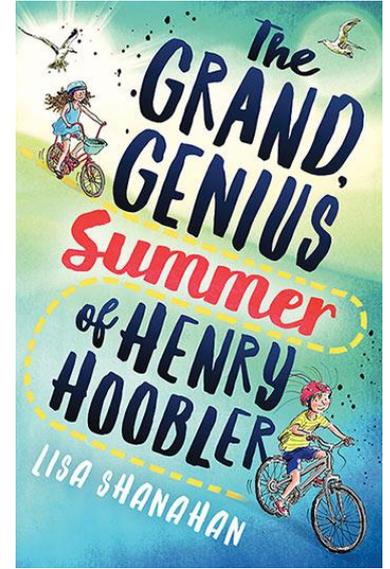


# The Grand, Genius Summer of Henry Hoobler

By Lisa Shanahan



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Recommended for 7 – 11 year old readers

## Summary

It is summer holidays and Henry Hoobler is worried about many things: going away to Yelonga, camping in a tent, bugs, spiders, snakes, stingers, blue-ringed octopi, tsunamis and sharks. But the thing worrying him most is learning how to ride his new silver bike, without training wheels, in front of his family and friends. Then Henry meets Cassie, who has the clever, funny knack of making everything seem possible, and suddenly he discovers the way a new friend and unexpected adventure can turn a person 'inside out like a pocket, into something new'.

A vivid, rounded and heartfelt portrayal of a nine-year-old boy's life, his struggle with anxiety and his gradual, joyful discovery of courage and a strong sense of self.



Lisa Shanahan describes her style of writing in this novel as 'spare...with lots of snappy dialogue and [a] careful use of description and imagery, [while maintaining] a certain richness of language, which I think makes reading books so pleasurable'.

This choice of style perfectly frames the novel's exploration of family and community in shaping who we are, as well as the importance of learning courage, perseverance, forgiveness and kindness, and treasuring small ordinary moments and rejoicing in the natural world.

*The Grand Genius Summer of Henry Hoobler* won the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards (Griffith University Children's Book Award) 2017 and was shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year (Younger Readers) Award 2018.

## Use in the curriculum

*The Grand Genius Summer of Henry Hoobler* can be used in the primary English classroom or as part of an integrated unit, covering English, HASS and Health and Physical Education. (It is particularly pertinent to the H&PE Content Descriptions of Personal, Social and Community Health Yrs 3 & 4—Being healthy, safe and active; Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing.)

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## Themes

- friendship
- family
- community
- holidays
- anxiety
- courage
- emotional honesty
- mindfulness

## Discussion questions

1. **Orientation:** Before starting the novel ask students to write a recount of a favourite family holiday experience. Encourage them to describe the location, where and with whom they stayed, as well as the sort of things they loved doing.

OR

Encourage them to write a sensory poem using the following prompts:

Holidays smell like...

Holidays taste like...

Holidays sound like...

Holidays feel like...

Holidays look like...

I love holidays because... OR I don't like holidays because...

2. **Themes:** Ask students to describe how they feel when they are worried. Now discuss the sort of things that make Henry worried and how he reacts in the novel. Read pp. 9–10 and discuss the strategy that Henry's mother uses when she feels nervous about going on holiday. Explain that this technique is called Mindfulness. For more information, lesson plans and programs relating to Mindfulness try the Smiling Mind app at <https://app.smilingmind.com.au/>.
3. *But now he was thinking about it, perhaps the bravest people were the ones who were a little bit worried or scared the whole time and did brave things anyway...* (p. 114). Make a list of examples in the novel where Henry (and Lulu) overcome their fears, show great courage and discover a new pleasure in life.
4. **Characterisation:** How is Henry changed by his visit to Yelonga? Ask students to give examples of events in the book that illustrate this change.
5. **Language:** Find the many different ways the author uses to describe the sounds of snoring in the extract '...As they tiptoed past a darkened tent...' (pp. 116–119). Ask students to choose their favourite description/image and explain why they liked it.
6. **Art/Geography:** Explain to your class that writers often use maps at the beginning of their books to help readers gain a better sense of place. Then ask them to draw a map of the fictional town of Yelonga, with all the significant place names and special spots in the story, including the camp and caravan site. Now draw a map of an imaginary holiday spot. Create special places of adventure and quiet nooks for rest. Encourage them to think about what they would call this area and who they think will holiday there.
7. **Empathy:** Ask students to put themselves in Henry's shoes and imagine how he feels a few days after returning home. Now ask them to write a letter to Cassie, imagining everything they think Henry would want to say to her. An extension exercise would be to ask the class to do the same thing but this time imagine they are Cassie and write a reply to Henry.

## Author's inspiration

'I think one of the things I really wanted to explore in Henry was the importance and worth of children's emotional lives, the way their triumphs, joys, griefs and worries lived out through ordinary moments are intensely valuable and valid, deserving of the same kind of serious regard we afford ourselves as adults. I wanted to explore the way change sometimes comes slowly and sometimes in a blast, through the little intersections and everyday interruptions of life: meeting a new friend; being amazed to discover you are exceptionally good at something like board games and noticing small details; realising that even those you think are invulnerable, like your own siblings, still carry the same common worries and fears.

'I wanted to write a funny book that captured the fast interactions of family life—the awkwardness and tenderness of loving your embarrassing parents and your annoying, frustrating siblings. I wanted to write a book where a middle child came to a certain peace about the ways in which his older and younger siblings encroach on his space. I wanted to explore the ways an unexpected friendship like the one between Cassie and Henry can help him to see in a new way.'

Lisa Shanahan

## The author

Lisa Shanahan is an award-winning writer of picture books and fiction for young people. She loves moon-gazing, making up words, mango sorbet, mock orange blossom, black cockatoos, shouts of unexpected laughter, the weight of a scruffy dog resting on her knee and hot cups of tea from a teapot. Her first novel for teenagers, *My Big Birkett*, was published to critical acclaim both in Australia, where it was short-listed for the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers, and in the United States. Her picture book *Bear and Chook by the Sea*, illustrated by Emma Quay, was the CBCA Book of the Year for Early Childhood in 2010. Her most recent picture book *Big Pet Day*, illustrated by Gus Gordon, was the Speech Pathology Book of the Year for Ages 5–8 in 2015. She lives in Sydney, close to the river of her childhood, with her husband and their three sons and one woolly dog.

