

My Story: Sabotage! The diary of Rowan Webb, Auckland, 1985

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Synopsis

Rowan Webb is a third-former at Auckland Girls' Grammar School. She lives with her mother and is still trying to come to terms with her father's death a year earlier. Rowan has many friends and gets on well with her neighbour, Alex. Alex and his parents are really into Greenpeace. Through her friendship with Alex, Rowan begins to get really interested in environmental issues and starts to become involved with recycling and joining marches. She enjoys school, especially French – and dancing on Friday afternoons!

It is because of Rowan's interest in her French class that she decides to write to Lisette, a French girl advertising for a pen pal. Rowan tells Lisette all sorts of things about herself and her friends. When Lisette tells Rowan that her brother René is coming to New Zealand to visit, Rowan is thrilled and invites him to visit her family.

At first, René is charming and friendly. But one day Alex and Rowan see him with a mysterious French woman called Frédérique, who hands him a parcel. When Rowan calls out to René, he completely ignores her and hurries off. He also refuses to be photographed. This behaviour seems very strange to Alex and Rowan and when the Greenpeace boat *Rainbow Warrior* is bombed and the blame falls on the French Secret Service, they begin to wonder if René is all that he said he was.

Could René be involved in the bombing? And, if so, is Rowan somehow responsible? After all, she did give Lisette lots of information about Alex and his family's yacht, as well as their involvement in Greenpeace. One thing remains clear though; Rowan must contact the police and tell them what she knows.

Text Type

My Story: Sabotage! The Diary of Rowan Webb, Auckland, 1985 is a fascinating story about a young girl growing up in New Zealand during a time where our anti-nuclear stand was making headlines at home and overseas. While the story is fictional it gives readers an insight in Auckland during this time and real events and people are discussed. The reader gets a real sense of what New Zealand was like in the 1980s – including the music and fashions of the era.

Sabotage! will appeal to girls aged 10+, as well as anyone who is interested in New Zealand history.

The story is told in diary form and, through her entries, we learn about Rowan's thoughts and feelings. Rowan deals with many issues typical to teenage girls, including peer pressure, friendship, boys and developing values. Rowan is also trying to come to terms with her father's death and her own developing sexuality.

As well as the usual teenage dramas, Rowan unwittingly, through her association with René, becomes caught up in the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: pp. 5-19, pp. 20-88 and pp. 89-144.

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Students should make inferences and predictions about what will happen next as they read.

It would be a good idea to do some research on New Zealand in the 1980s and New Zealand's anti-nuclear stance so that students understand the context of the story.

Encourage students to study the character of Rowan and examine her qualities and characteristics as well as her motivations. Wherever possible, have students compare their own lives to Rowan's experiences. Have students discuss their own views about the environment and nuclear energy and encourage them to form opinions and values of their own.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the back cover blurb.

- To whom does the diary belong? How old is she?
- What do you expect from a story told in diary form?
- Where and when is the story set?
- What is the name of the boat that is bombed? Who is implicated in the bombing? Why do you think these people wanted to sink the ship?
- How does Rowan become involved in the investigation into the bombing?

Students read the Historical Note on pp. 145-157 and study the photographs.

- Who owned the *Rainbow Warrior*?
- Who died in the explosion?
- Why do you think the French Government denied any connection to the bombing?
- Where was the *Rainbow Warrior* going to be heading after Auckland?

- How did the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* backfire on the perpetrators?
- Who is Christine Cabon?
- Who did Alain Mafart and Dominique Prieur pretend to be?
- How many French spies did New Zealand police believe to be involved in the incident?
- How did New Zealand citizens help police catch the spies?
- Describe the deal struck between the New Zealand and French governments. Was this deal fair? Why/why not?

Teacher reads pp. 5-19 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension pp. 5-19

- What does Rowan discover in the suitcase containing her dad's things?
- How long ago did Rowan's father die? Why does Rowan's mum feel guilty about his death?
- What does Rowan decide to use the ship's log for?
- Who are the two famous people that Rowan sees at the races?
- Why does Alex believe that David Lange is the best prime minister that New Zealand has ever had?
- What does Rowan get for her birthday?
- Where are Alex's parents planning on sailing their boat? Why are they going there?
- What do Alex and Rowan both want to do when they grow up? What do they start doing to show they care about the environment?
- Who is Rowan's new pen pal? What is she interested in? Why doesn't Rowan tell Alex about her pen pal?
- Why is Alex schooled at home? Why does Rowan's mum believe that Alex's parents are "alternative"?
- Why does Rowan find the holidays so boring?
- Why does Rowan miss her dad so much when she visits Kelly Tarlton's underwater world? What does she find so inspiring about Kelly Tarlton?
- Why is the nuclear issue causing problems between New Zealand and Australia?
- What is Rowan's new school called? How does she feel about going there?

Discussion

- In what ways has her father's death affected Rowan's life? What does her mother mean when she says "everyone grieves differently"? How does Rowan cope with her father's death? How does her mother cope?
- What do you know about Greenpeace and the work that they do? Do you feel strongly about any environmental issues? Explain.

- What aspects of life in the 1980s does Rowan talk about in these diary entries? Think particularly about music, fashion, important figures, events and leisure activities.
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read pp. 20-88 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 20-88

- Why does Rowan's mother make her go to school on the anniversary of her father's death? Is this fair? Why/why not?
- Who made Rowan's dad his special tape? Why do you think listening to it makes Rowan feel close to her father? What does Pravinda give Rowan at school?
- What do Rowan and her mother do on Waitangi Day?
- What present does Alex's family give Rowan?
- Who is Lisette's brother? When is he coming to New Zealand?
- How does Rowan feel about her mother's new boyfriend? What does she do for her mother in the morning to try and make up for her outburst?
- What information does Rowan include in her letter to Lisette?
- Who is Luana? What does she have in common with Rowan? What differences are there between their home lives?
- Who does Rowan meet in French class? Why does Rowan find it embarrassing when her mother visits the girl's house?
- What does Rowan do at the sleepover at Francine's house? Why is Pravinda not very happy with her afterwards? How does Rowan reassure her?
- Why do you think Francine tells lies about Rowan after she saw him with Alex? How does this make Rowan feel?
- What does Rowan talk to Alex's mother about when her mother goes to the concert?
- What advice does Rowan's mother give her about Francine? Is this good advice? Why/why not?
- What do Alex and his parents watch on TV with Rowan and her mother?
- Why does Rowan's mum think that Francine is trying to buy her friendship?
- What are Rowan and her mother training for?
- Why doesn't Rowan go and help Alex's mother at the Greenpeace stand?
- What cause does Rowan support when she participates in the walk?
- What does Lisette tell Rowan her brother would like to do when he visits New Zealand?
- Why is Rowan so upset when she hears that Kelly Tarlton has died?
- Why is Luana acting so strangely? What do you think Rowan's mother means when she says that "religion can be a crutch"?

- What does Rowan do when she skips school with Francine? This kind of behaviour is out of character for Rowan. Why do you think she does it?
- Why does Rowan think that she needs a bra for ballroom dancing? Why do you think her mother decides to let her get one?
- Why do Luana and Pravinda come and spend the weekend at Rowan's house? How do the girls celebrate the end of the weekend?
- How does Rowan's mother embarrass her in front of Alex?
- Why does Rowan find rainbows uplifting?
- What does Alex do after the Easter show that shocks Rowan? What do you think was "obvious" to her mother? Why does Rowan find Alex and her mother so annoying after the incident?
- Where does Rowan get a job?
- Why does Rowan try and avoid going to church with Luana?
- What does Rowan's mother give her money for?
- Why doesn't Rowan's mother let her go and help at the Greenpeace stand in town?
- Why is Francine brought to school in a police car? How do her parents punish her?
- Describe René's visit. What impression does Rowan and her mother get of him?
- Why is Rowan's mother rude to Francine when she turns up on Sunday?
- What makes Rowan a star in French class?
- Why do you think René doesn't want to be photographed? What does he take photos of down at the wharf? What does he ask Rowan and Alex questions about?
- What do Rowan and Alex see René doing in town? How does René react when Rowan calls out to him? What explanations do Alex and Rowan come up with for his behaviour?
- Who does Rowan try smoking with? What else does she do while she is in Thames?
- Who does Rowan's mother talk to in Thames that Rowan recognises?
- What bombshell does Rowan's mother drop on May 27th?
- What does Rowan learn about the *Rainbow Warrior* from Greenpeace?

Discussion

- Describe Rowan. What challenges does she face? How does she deal with them? What are her values and beliefs?
- Pravinda gives Rowan a card to let her know that she is thinking about her on the anniversary of her father's death. This is a very thoughtful gesture. What qualities do you believe someone should have to be a good friend? In contrast, Francine spreads rumours about Rowan. Why do people sometimes make up stories about others? In what other ways is Francine not a good friend?
- What advice did Rowan's father give her about how to deal with bullies? Have you ever been bullied? What do you think is the best way to deal with a bully?

- Describe Rowan's relationship with her mother.
- Why do you think that David Lange was such a popular prime minister? What qualities do you think an effective leader should have?
- Why do you think René is in New Zealand? Do you believe that his visit is innocent or do you agree with one of Rowan and Alex's theories? Explain your answer.

Students read pp. 89-144 independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension pp. 89-144

- What happens to Rowan's last letter to Lisette?
- Why does Rowan enjoy dance class so much?
- How do Rowan and her mother commemorate her brother's death? Why do you think that Rowan's mother didn't tell her about her brother until recently?
- Who asks Rowan's mother out on a date? How does Rowan feel about this?
- How does Francine get Rowan into trouble?
- Why doesn't Luana like Francine? How are Rowan's two friends different from each other?
- Why does Rowan get sick of her job?
- How does Rowan react when Francine tells her about the double date she has organised? What does Rowan tell her mother that she is doing that day? Describe Rowan's date.
- Why does Rowan decide to tell her mother about her date? How does her mother react?
- Why is the crew of the *Rainbow Warrior* going to Mururoa?
- Why does Rowan feel so inspired by the quote on the bookmark?
- What does Rowan's French teacher tell her that the postmark on Lisette's letter means?
- Where does Rowan meet the teacher that her mother is dating? What does she think of him?
- Describe Auckland Harbour when the *Rainbow Warrior* arrives. What is the atmosphere like? How does Rowan feel when she looks at the ship?
- What terrible news does Alex give Rowan on Thursday 11 July?
- How do the people at Rowan's school react to the news?
- What does Rowan see when she gets down to the wharf at the end of the day?
- Who is killed in the blasts?
- Why does Alex believe that René may have been involved in the bombing?
- How does New Zealand rally around for Greenpeace after the bombing?
- Why does Rowan get put on detention?

- Why does Rowan have a negative attitude in French class? Is this fair? Why/why not?
- Why does Rowan's mother want her to stop working on her *Rainbow Warrior* scrapbook?
- What good news and what bad news is reported in the paper on Tuesday 23rd July?
- Why don't Alex and Rowan tell their parents about René?
- Why does Pravinda ask Rowan if she is doing drugs? What does Rowan tell her to get her off the scent of what is really wrong?
- How does Rowan feel after she talks to the school guidance counsellor? Why is it important to be able to talk about your problems with someone?
- Why are Alex and Rowan so shocked when they realise that the spy at Greenpeace is named Frédérique Bonlieu? Why does Rowan begin to worry that the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* is her fault?
- What do Rowan and Alex take with them to the police?
- What does Rowan's mother admit to her when she tells her that she has been seeing the school counsellor?
- What do Alex and Rowan discuss with the detective? Why are their parents proud of them?
- What is Frédérique's real name?
- What does Rowan's mother say to Rowan that makes her feel less guilty?
- Describe Rowan's second date with Luke. What does he do that impresses Rowan's mother?
- What evidence is there in the story to suggest that Rowan is beginning to get over her preoccupation with the *Rainbow Warrior*?
- What does the detective tell Rowan when he rings back?
- What does Rowan see outside that she thinks is a message from her father?

Discussion

- Rowan's mother has lost a child and her husband. How does she cope with these losses? Why doesn't she find solace in religion like Luana does? Have you ever lost someone close to you? How did you cope? What do you believe is the best way to remember someone who has passed on?
- How does Rowan react when her mother starts dating again? What does this suggest about her character? What do you think that Rowan's experiences this year have taught her?
- Why does Rowan continue to hang out with Francine when she gets her into trouble and keeps treating her badly? What is it about Francine that appeals to Rowan? Have you ever had a friend that your parents considered a bad influence on you? If so, why? Did your parents' opinion affect your friendship with this person? Why/why not?
- What does Alex's dad mean when he says "Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little"?

- What changes could you make to your lifestyle that would benefit the environment?
- How does the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior* backfire on the French government?

Activities

Research – Complete a research assignment on the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*. Formulate 3 focussing questions to help focus your research. Gather your information from a range of written, visual and oral sources. Record your research process in a log. Present your research as a report. Include a bibliography.

Research – Conduct a research assignment on David Lange, focussing particularly on his anti-nuclear stance. Present your research to the class in role as David Lange.

Static Image – Design a poster for Greenpeace that protests against nuclear testing. Combine verbal and visual language features to convey your ideas.

Plot – Make a timeline of the important events that occur in the novel.

Police Interview – Imagine that the police were able to catch up with René. Make up 8 interview questions for him.

Newspaper Article – Write a newspaper article about the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*. Remember to use the inverted pyramid style of writing and include who, what, where, when, why and how. Include quotes from people interviewed.

Writing – Write a letter to the editor about the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*. Remember to include your own opinion about what has happened.

Review – Write a review of *Sabotage!* suitable for publication in a school magazine. Include information about characters, the style of the book, setting and themes. Discuss the issues raised in the novel. Remember to include your own opinion about the book.

Poem – Write a poem about the bombing of the *Rainbow Warrior*. Include figurative language features to create imagery.

Personal Effects – Put together a collection of Rowan's personal effects (objects or things that are important to her). Explain the significance of these items to Rowan.

Notes written by Vicki Williams