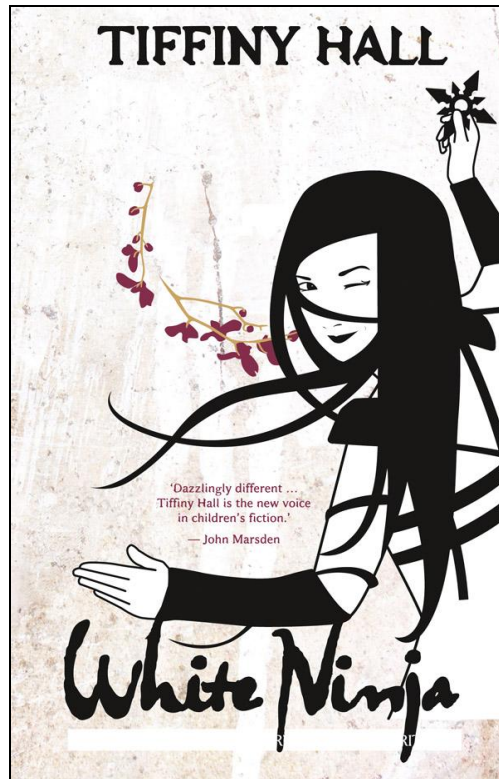


White Ninja

TEACHERS' NOTES



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

INTRODUCTION

For twelve- year- old Roxy Ran, school is a place she dreads going to every single day. Her lack of popularity means she's a victim to constant ridicule and bullying. Her gorgeous older sister Elekra, is more interested in what to wear than Roxy's problems, and her mother is a ninja who refuses to pass on her advanced skills and training.

When Cinnamon, Roxy's chubby and unpopular best-friend, rescues a kitten, Roxy stops Hero, the class bully, from drowning it by confronting him and his friends with a bewildering display of skills she never knew she had. And when handsome new boy Jackson Axe introduces Roxy to the world of martial arts and Roxy learns that she is a ninja-in-waiting, she must undergo rigorous training to play a crucial part in a struggle between the ninjas and their age-old enemies, the Red Samurai.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Writer, Taekwondo champion and TV personality, Tiffany has many titles tucked under her Fifth Dan Black Belt. Tiffany has a Bachelor of Arts/Media and Communications and a Diploma of Modern Languages in French from University of Melbourne and works as a journalist in print and radio and as a trainer on Channel Ten's *The Biggest Loser*. *White Ninja* is Tiffany's first novel in the Roxy Ran series.

AUTHOR INSPIRATION

Australian author John Marsden has been Tiffany's role-model ever since she won the national John Marsden award for creative writing in 1996, and when he read *White Ninja* John said he was 'blown away by it. It's a really startling book – startling for its polish, freshness, wisdom.'

John went on to say that it's:

'Dazzlingly different ... a novel about transformation that has the power to transform every reader. Tiffany Hall is the new voice in children's fiction.'

While Tiffany has a profile in health and fitness, exercising her creativity has always been her passion. She grew up in a family of black belts where martial arts was a way of life for Tiffany. Her parents run Taekwondo schools and Tiffany loved teaching and being surrounded by kids. Tiffany has said:

'I love kids and I am obsessed with martial arts, so writing a martial arts adventure series is perfect. The world of martial arts has always been so magical to me, and I wanted to share the energy, fun and friendship I found in that world with my readers. I wanted to write about kids standing up for themselves, discovering the gift of confidence and feeling empowered to be warriors in pursuit of their dreams.'

STUDY NOTES ON THEMES AND CURRICULUM TOPICS

Learning Outcomes

Students will have the opportunity to:

- Read texts independently and in groups
- Respond to themes and issues in a text
- Draw on a range of skills and strategies to read and comprehend a text
- Locate places on a map
- Use an art form to create and interpret a scene from the book

Before You Read

Look at the title and front cover of *White Ninja*. Write a short paragraph about what you think the story may be about. Read out your ideas to the rest of the class and compare your thoughts. Share your experiences of other books of the same genre that you have read.

Challenging Assumptions

Read out the introduction of the book. Roxy finds herself thrown into the world of martial arts. Discuss as a class what you know about martial arts and what you think a Ninja is and does. Make a note of any interesting preconceptions you can come back to after reading the book.

Making Connections

Roxy has had an unconventional upbringing in a number of ways. Her mother is a Ninja, a Shadow Warrior. Although she isn't prepared to teach her children the Ninja way, its influence is evident in how she has raised them. Discuss how Roxy's home life is different to yours and how that has informed the person she is.

Roxy learns that she has supernatural powers yet she is still an ordinary school girl dealing with peer pressure, family conflict and her school studies. In groups discuss what you have in common with Roxy and how this helps you identify with her character.

Family Tree

Roxy is tormented by the secrets within her family and her mother's past. She's so tormented she searches the house to try and find clues (p.59). Ask students how much they know about their family's genealogy?

Activity: Students can draw a simple family tree. *Follow up exercise:* Have students interview a member of their extended family. What did they learn that they didn't already know? Did the interview uncover any family secrets?

Mapping

The Ninja originated in Japan in the 14th Century. They were professional spies during the age of the Samurai. Locate Japan on a map and write down ten things you know about Japan. Discuss what it means to be a spy.

Write a Happiness List

Studies have shown that positive thinking and reflection about the things that make you happy, leads to increased levels of happiness. Roxy writes a list of the things that make her feel good (p.35). Have students write their own happiness list and in pairs describe why certain activities bring them joy.

Write the Sequel

This is the first book in the Roxy Ran series. The ending is left open for the sequel.

Activity: Write a synopsis for the second book, *Red Samurai*. Imagine what you think will happen to Roxy and her mother when the Endless Fight is unleashed. Who do you think Roxy's father really is and what role does he play in the Ninja world?

Unleash the Power

'Sometimes we do hold ourselves back.' (p.119)

Roxy says this to Cinnamon after they fly into school together. *Activity:* In groups write a list of ways that we as individuals can hold ourselves back from attaining our full potential. Discuss why we are harder on ourselves than on others?

Create a Visual Interpretation of a Passage

Read pages three and four of the description of Hero's bullying and Roxy's surprising reaction when her palms burn into the wood of the bench. Using paint, paper and craft supplies create a picture, collage or painting which visually interprets the way Roxy was feeling at the time Hero attacked her. Discuss these emotions.

Exploring Different Cultures

Roxy is thrown into the world of Ninja and she visits a dojang for the first time. A dojang is a formal place where training in martial arts can take place. Roxy feels a sense of peace when she enters the dojang for the first time (p. 75). Discuss how this can be when a dojang is a place where fighting takes place .

Activity: Research the origin of the dojang and the meaning behind the word.

The Illusion of Perfection

'When I land, I see him as if through a sheet of water, shimmering, perfect, a battle light in his eyes.'

(p.147)

Roxy is describing Jackson. She sees him through water as if he is kept at a distance from her, somehow so perfect that he is unattainable for her. Discuss the friendship and potential relationship between Roxy and Jackson. Why was he showing interest in Elektra?

Literary Devices

Fantasy

The novel begins firmly based in reality but enters into the world of fantasy when Roxy discovers that she has supernatural powers. What seemed impossible now becomes possible and launches her into a new world. *Discuss:*

1. What was the catalyst for Roxy discovering she had supernatural powers? Did you find the transformation believable and why?
2. What techniques does the writer use to make the reader believe that this fantasy world is plausible?
3. Roxy is given a quest or journey to fulfil in the fantasy world - to find the White Warrior. She has a parallel journey of discovery in the real world – to accept herself for who she is. How do these two quests complement each other?

Imagery

The text is rich with imagery. For example, the author describes, “*My stomach turns to barbed wire. My tongue swells and grows bark.*” (p.22) Have students find other examples of imagery from the text. How does it enrich the story telling?

Activity: What other ways could a writer describe what Roxy is feeling?

The Orchid

‘Like an orchid, I rise above all the hurt. All those hang-ups rinse out of my skin and soak deep into the grass,’ (p.133)

Roxy’s surname ‘Ran’ means orchid in Japanese. In what ways does Roxy’s name reflect her personality?

Point of View

The point of view of the story *White Ninja* is told from Roxy’s perspective. *Activity:* Imagine the situation through the eyes of one of the other characters.

Choose a character in the book other than Roxy and write a journal entry for that character for the morning of Casual Clothes Day. Use information that Roxy gives you as a starting point to inform what you know about the character and build from there.

Themes

Physical Fitness

One of the themes throughout the text is physical fitness and the power of the body.

1. Roxy is good at sport but tries to hide her ability from other kids. Why do you think she does this?

2. Cinnamon is not physically fit and her emotional eating has led to her having to stop doing activities she loves such as riding her horse. Discuss ways Cinnamon could break out of the cycle she is perpetuating.
3. Discuss how the power of the mind and the power of the body are inter connected and why.

Peer Pressure

For much of the book Roxy and Cinnamon are obsessed with the idea of being able to enter through Gate One. The gate represents having 'made it' in the school social hierarchy. Considering they each go on to beat the school bully and challenge the dark forces in the underworld, does the symbol of the gate still hold meaning by the end of the narrative? Do you think the author did this intentionally to show just how meaningless the gate obsession was?

Self Actualisation

Both Cinnamon and Roxy undergo a transformation and become more confident people by the end of the book. Discuss the ways their friendship helped them both to become stronger and more resilient as individuals. Use examples.

Self-esteem

Roxy says *'I realise that I don't need Elektra to accept me; all this time I needed to accept myself,'*
(p.183)

Although Elektra appears confident, Elektra's self-esteem is forged by what other people think of her, whereas Roxy's self-esteem develops through her interests, passions and skills.

Activity: Find examples in the text of Roxy discovering her confidence and building her self-esteem to accept herself for who she is.

Confidence

At the beginning of the novel Roxy wishes she was invisible in order to escape bullying. She then discovers she has the power to become invisible 'the invisible streams erode old beliefs like rocks and nourish new thought like trees.' How does the author link the theme of invisibility to confidence?

'I no longer look lame or feel invisible,' Roxy says (p.183). How has Roxy faced her fears?

Negative self-talk

What does 'Old Roxy' represent in the novel?

Bullying

Roxy suffers tremendous anxiety at the hands of Hero's bullying. Her anxiety becomes so extreme that she has a panic attack. As a class:

- Discuss the different types of bullying and cyber bullying using emails, text messages, tweets, chat-rooms, social networking sites and photos.
- Why can cyber bullying be more harmful than face-to-face bullying?
- Do you think the school is in some way responsible for encouraging cliques and bullying by allowing the two gate policy to continue?

Follow up activities:

- Create anti-bullying slogans

In small groups discuss the answers to these questions and report back to the class;

1. If you saw someone being bullied at school would you report it?
2. Why is the library considered a safe place?

Courage

Roxy displays great physical and mental courage in her fighting as ninja. There are plenty of times when she could have given up. She trains her mind to have a more positive outlook and begins to no longer listen to 'old Roxy'. In small groups discuss a situation where you felt like giving up and what techniques you used to persevere. Do you believe that self talk can make a difference to how you feel?

Good versus Evil

One of the devices used in the fantasy genre is the battle between good and evil. The Ninja are seen as good and the Samurai represent evil. One wants to protect, the other to destroy. Can you think of examples of this struggle in today's modern world? Why is Hero considered evil? What factors could have contributed to him being so aggressive and filled with hate?

Animal Cruelty

How is animal cruelty explored in the novel?

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

Use these questions to promote discussion of the book. The answers can be discussed as a group or written down individually.

1. Why do you think Hero bullies Roxy?
2. Roxy tidies her room when she feels most anxious. Why do you think she does this?
3. Is Elektra a good sister to Roxy? Use examples from the text.
4. Is Cinnamon and Roxy's friendship based only on the fact that they are both social outcasts? What makes for a strong friendship?
5. Roxy feels a thrill at belonging to a group — the Ninja. Discuss how important it is to belong to groups. What kind of groups do you belong to?

6. Roxy wears her Ninja suit like armour. Elecktra wears her clothes as a kind of armour. How are the two the same? How are they different?
7. Sergeant Major is an interesting character. What do you think the author is trying to say by choosing an ex military officer as Roxy's teacher?
8. What do you think Art represents?
9. How important is it to Roxy and her family to eat healthy and exercise? Find examples in the text of Roxy leading a healthy lifestyle.
10. What do you think martial arts represents in the novel? Who is Roxy's greatest opponent in the story?
11. How do you think social media has changed bullying and the way kids interact and form friendships?
12. What would you get up to if you were the White Warrior and could control fire, earth, wind, water and invisibility?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Jess Black has written for children's television, the *Bindi Wildlife Adventure* series, *The Bindi Behind the Scenes* series and the *RSPCA Animal Tales* series. She has published over 20 chapter books for primary aged children. She lives in Newcastle with her husband and two children.

Jess studied Theatre and holds a BA Honours Degree in Theatre Directing. She has written, directed and performed for the theatre.