

The Sugar Glider

Aim

• To stimulate students to read the book.

1 Tell students that *The Sugar Glider* is an adventure story. Ask them whether they have read an adventure story before, or whether they have seen an adventure film, and encourage them to give some examples. Write these up on the board (e.g. *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *King Kong*, *Tarzan*, *Jaws*, *Cliffhanger*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, etc.). Tell them that the landscape or terrain often plays a big part in an adventure film or story, making things more difficult or dangerous for the hero or heroine (main characters in the book or film). Ask them whether they think this is the case in any of the stories or films they have named. (In the examples above, the jungle features in *Tarzan*, the ocean in *Jaws*, the desert in *Lawrence of Arabia* and the skyscrapers of New York in *King Kong*.)

2 Tell students that a sugar glider is a native animal of Australia, but in *The Sugar Glider* it is also the name of a plane. Tell them that the story is mainly set in the Australian Outback, in Queensland and New South Wales. Ask them what they know about the Australian Outback, and write their suggestions on the board.

Suggested answers: It is very large, hot and not very well populated.

Ask them how they think the landscape might play a part in *The Sugar Glider*.

Optional extra: Ask students to think of a place they have been to that is very vivid, or means a lot to them. Ask them to make some notes about this place and then write a descriptive passage about it. When they have finished, ask them to take turns to read what they have written out loud to a partner. Next, ask them to discuss with their partner whether and how the place they have described could be used in an adventure story.

3 Ask students to look at Extract 1 (next page), then ask them to suggest words to describe what Don then Judy are feeling (teach vocabulary if necessary).

Suggested answers: Don – regret, sadness, shame, hope; Judy – sadness, confusion, curiosity, interest.

4 Ask students to look at Extract 2, which is an action scene from the book that is out of order. Divide students into pairs and ask them to work together to put the scene in the right order. Alternatively, you could give each pair a numbered part of the extract and ask students to walk around the room reading out their piece until they think they know the right order. Note: a Brumby is a wild Australian horse.

Correct order: g, c, e, a, i, h, b, f, d.

5 Tell students that Extract 2 is part of the *climax* of the book. The climax of a story comes near the end and is the place where – in adventure stories – there is a lot of action, often with heroes and villains battling it out (teach vocabulary as necessary). Divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss what happens in the climax of the films or stories already discussed in stage 1. How are climax scenes written or directed? Are they fast or slow? How much description is there? Are we given actions or thoughts?

Suggested answer: Climax scenes are generally full of action; dialogue, if there is any, is usually short and quick.

6 Divide the class into pairs and give the members of each pair the number one or two. Ask all the number ones to read out Extract 3 to their number twos, and tell the number twos to listen very carefully as they will be asked questions about what they have heard. Then ask the number ones to do the same with Extract 4. Alternatively, you might want to write some of the questions below up onto the board for students to ask.

Questions about Extract 3

- What was the name of the place where the boat landed? (South Bank)
- How old was the passenger who got off the boat? (In his late fifties.)
- What colour was his hair? (White)
- What was the name of the café he went into? (Café Marcos)
- What day of the week was it? (Saturday)
- What time of year was it? (Spring – November)
- What city was the man in? (Brisbane, Australia)
- What time was it? (Two o'clock)
- Where were families walking? (On the path next to the river.)

Questions about Extract 4

- What was the name of the man flying the plane? (Don Radcliffe.)
- How many seats did the plane have? (Two.)
- What ocean had he been flying over for two hours? (Pacific.)
- What coast of Australia did he fly over? (East.)
- How long was it since he had been in Australia? (A year.)
- Where had he been working for that time? (Pacific islands.)
- What was the name of his old friend who telephoned him? (Paul Copeman.)
- Why did this friend phone him? (To ask him to come back to Australia to start a flying school with him.)
- What was the name of his friend's wife? (Beulah.)
- What is the name of the pilot's daughter? (Judy.)

7 If there are enough copies of *The Sugar Glider* to go round, give them out to students and ask them to start reading.

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Extract 1

Judy looked into his eyes. 'Dad, why did you go away? Mum's been so lonely.'

Don shook his head. 'She told me. I'm very sorry that I hurt you both.'

He changed the subject. 'Look, you're getting cold. Go back to the cockpit; it's warmer there. Get Paul to show you the controls. I want to see what else is back here.' He didn't want to talk about the past. He knew he'd made mistakes, but at least Judy was here with him now.

Back in the cockpit, Paul invited her to sit in the co-pilot's seat.

'The controls aren't really that difficult,' Paul told her. 'You could fly most planes with one hand.'

'Are helicopters easy too?' She was thinking of Patrick's visit to the airfield.

'They're different. I've never flown one, but I know you always need both hands to land and take off. So it's best not to disturb a helicopter pilot at those times!'

'I'd like to learn to fly,' Judy said.

'Well, if your dad and I get this flying school started . . .'

Paul smiled at her.

Extract 2

a 'Mr Forsha, we do not have much time,' Berjenka began.

b 'I work at Tarong. I wasn't doing anything,' said Joe.

c 'It's just a brumby,' said Petersen's pilot.

d 'No, wait. Maybe he's up to something,' said Patrick. 'Bring him here.'

e 'Something frightened it, or someone. Go and look,' Patrick said. Petersen and the pilot went off towards the trees, guns ready.

f 'Berjenka took out a gun and pointed it at Joe. 'This has gone far enough – ' he began.

g There was a noise in the bush. 'What's that?' Patrick turned around. A horse ran out of the bush. Judy saw it was Kylie, the horse she had ridden all the way to Tarong!

h Patrick looked at the young man, furious. He didn't want any more problems. 'Who is this?'

i Suddenly a shot rang out. A voice in the trees shouted, 'Don't move.' The men came out of the bush, holding someone tightly by the arms. It was Joe.

Extract 3

The boat came to a stop. A man in a blue shirt shouted 'South Bank' and opened a gate in the side of the boat. The passengers began walking off the boat, into the beautiful park in the heart of the city.

Among the passengers was a man in his late fifties with white hair and a red face. He walked slowly, breathing a little heavily. He went across the grass to the Café Marcos and sat down at one of the tables outside, facing the river. On the opposite bank he could see the tall modern buildings of the city centre. It was a bright Saturday afternoon in November, a typical late spring day in Brisbane, Australia. There was a cool wind.

He looked at his watch: two o'clock, the time he had agreed to meet a man he didn't know. He looked around. There was a play area nearby, full of children. Groups of families were walking on the path next to the river. He heard a voice behind him.

Extract 4

Don Radcliffe looked ahead from the window of his new aeroplane. It was small, a two-seater. He had been flying for hours, with nothing but the blue Pacific Ocean beneath him. Now he could see a green line coming towards him. It was the east coast of Australia. Home. Or was it? He wasn't sure any more. Perhaps his real home was up here, high above the earth.

It was a year since he'd seen Australia; a year of jobs flying around the beautiful islands of the Pacific; a year since his divorce. He'd saved enough to buy this small plane, and had money left over. Then his old friend and teacher Paul Copeman had called him. Paul wanted to retire and start a flying school. Why didn't Don come back and join him, Paul had asked. Don knew it wasn't just for the business. Paul and his wife Beulah had been upset about Don's divorce. He had always been like a son to the older couple, and it had hurt them to see Don leave his wife Sylvia and his teenage daughter Judy.