

***Real Guns* Teacher's Guide**

Background

Real Guns was based on a real life experience from the author's childhood. As a child of eight, growing up in the United States, he recounts overhearing his parents talking about there being a gun in the house. His father was a self-employed truck driver and had to work in some unsavory areas, so he probably wanted a gun in self-defense and to protect his family. Like most boys of that age, he became curious about this and went in search for the gun, finding it in a wooden box under his parents' bed. He recalls "lifting the pistol from the box and feeling the cold, heavy metal" in his hands.

Nothing came of the real experience. Afraid of being discovered, he replaced the gun and nothing was ever said about it. To this day, the author is convinced his parents never found out about his discovery of the gun. Yet the germ of the idea stayed with the author until it found expression in the story.

Real Guns is not one-sided against guns. It recognises the important place that firearms and weapons still occupy in our society and the fascination that many people, especially boys, still have with them. The author's purpose is encourage discussion about a subject that is taboo with many people who believe it's better to ignore guns than to confront the danger that irresponsible gun ownership poses. Rather than argue for a complete ban of guns, the book suggests that education and dialogue between parents and children is an important first step in developing respect for weapons and the consequences of leaving them in unsecured places.

The book seeks to appeal to a universal audience, given the presence of guns in every country on Earth. It is interesting to note that those who feel children should not be exposed to books like this, lest they be given 'ideas', argue that Australia, where the book was originally published, has regulations on gun control. The implication is that *Real Guns* then is not relevant to a society with strict gun control. However, even in Australia, guns are still *present* if not readily available, and children are still exposed to media that glorify the use of violence as a means of establishing power, exerting authority and settling disputes. Without proper education, many children will continue to believe that war is a better way of solving problem between nations than diplomacy, and that brute force is justifiable means of getting your own way with other people.

It goes without saying that books like *Real Guns* are essential reading in societies where gun control laws are lax, especially in the United States, where the right to bear arms is part of the Constitution. Again, the purpose is not to argue for the abolition of guns, but to make parents aware that weapons must be kept in secure places at all times, and that there is good reason to counter the messages that glorify weapons in our society with information that makes it clear that irresponsible gun ownership can have consequences when people choose to settle disputes with weapons rather than words.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the difference between imaginary guns like water pistols and real guns?
2. Is it OK to have fun with imaginary guns as long as we understand the dangers of 'playing' with real guns?

3. If you overheard your parents talking about there being a gun in the house, would you go looking for it?
4. Why did Jon's father keep a gun in the house? Was it right for him to do that?
5. The gun that Jon found was in an unlocked box. Would it have been OK for there to be a gun as long as it was locked away?
6. Why is it OK for police and soldiers to have guns but not ordinary people?
7. The author doesn't tell us where the family lives. Why?
8. Do the illustrations make it easier for us to decide where and when the story takes place? If so, how?
9. Some people think that having guns keeps them safe. Do you think this is true?
10. Think of your favourite computer game. Does it involve guns? Would there be other ways to keep us interested in the game if weapons were not a part of it?
11. Does *Real Guns* have a happy ending? Why?
12. Look at the illustrations. Which ones are your favourites? Do we learn things about the story from the drawings that we don't see in the text?
13. Close your eyes and try to remember something that happened to you when you were very young. Could you make that into a story? What things would you change?