

COLIN THIELE
WEDGETAIL

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WEDGETAIL TEACHERS' GUIDE

Wedgetail Colin Thiele

Wedgetail is another novel from master storyteller Colin Thiele that will be eagerly read by children from middle primary to lower secondary levels. It tells the story of Andy Long, who is passionate about eagles. He lives with his family on a farm near a rugged National Park, and he loves seeing and learning about these majestic creatures. When the ranger, who is a friend of the family, takes him and his sister Katie to see a nest he is rapt. Soon after, however, the ranger brings down an abandoned eaglet and Andy, with his mother's support and against his father's better judgment, undertakes to raise the bird. The neighbour on the adjoining property has been known to shoot eagles and any other creature that he thinks is attacking his stock.

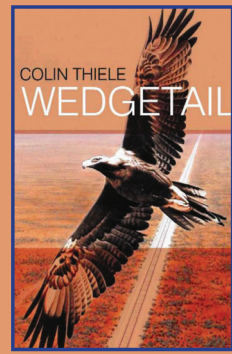
The story relates how Andy forges a close relationship with the eagle and the difficulties of bringing up such a big and powerful bird. Andy knows that one day he will have to release his eagle to the wild, but he does not look forward to that day. Pressure is brought to bear on him by the new ranger who is not at all understanding of the situation and when Caesar is released all seems well as he returns at night to be fed, and thus Andy still has contact with him. There is a terrible twist at the end of the story when the magnificent bird is caught in devices strung to prevent corellas attacking the pecan nut crop next door. Colin Thiele includes lots of instruction and messages in his beautifully written novel for children.

Language and Literature

- Why did people shoot eagles?
- Where was the Long's farm situated?
- Who is Lefty Rumble?
- What unusual plants did old Lefty plant?
- What did Lefty call pests?
- What was his attitude to these creatures?
- What is Andy's father's reply? (13)
- What lay to the east of the farms? (15)
- Who is Terry Lewis?
- Where did Andy and his father and sister go with the ranger?
- What did Skitter do that caused a *terrible crisis with Lefty Rumble*? (26)
- Who is Mr. Lovely?
- What is he like?
- Why does Terry Lewis come to the Long's house early one morning? (40)
- What is the real name for a wedgetail eagle? (56)
- What did the Long's call him?
- Why?
- What is Andy's dilemma as the eagle grows? (64)
- Why was Andy *outraged* on page 99?
- Describe the freeing of Caesar. (118ff)

Characters

- Do a pen portrait of Andy Long covering what he is like as a person, his interests, what he does, where he lives, his family background and anything else you found out about him from the story.
- What is Katie, Andy's sister like?
- What sort of a person is Andy's mother?
- Jot down a few words to describe all the characters in the novel.



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Speaking/Listening

Talk about:

- The natural chain of events
- The problems farmers have
- The problems in National Parks
- The difficulty of trying to please the farmers (26, 42)
- The way people see things from a different perspective -look at the way Lefty believes the eagles kill his lambs, and Mr. Long's version of what happens on page 13.
- Find other instances where things are seen from a different point-of-view.
- Talk about the bond that exists between Andy and the eagle.
- Describe Caesar.
- Who or what are the enemies of wedgetail eagles?

- Tell the story of Lefty's hickory trees.
In a roundabout way, Terry Lewis changed Andy's life? (16)
- Outline how.
- After reading *Wedgetail* by Colin Thiele, do you agree with the new ranger Jim Taylor, that: It's better to let nature take its course?
- Should humans intervene in nature?
- Outline what was involved in caring for Caesar. There is one instance on page 58.
- Relate the story of Caesar, saying what disasters befell him
- What does Andy learn from keeping Caesar?
- Discuss: change, friends, trust.
- Talk about what happens at the end of the story.

Writing

- As Andy, do an assignment on wedgetail eagles including as much as you can of what you found out about them from the story.
- Write an email to a friend who has recently gone interstate telling them about *Wedgetail*, the latest book you have just read by Colin Thiele.

Vocabulary

- Different words can be used in different and unusual ways. Look at the following words and see how the author has used them.
entranced (6), *brewing* (9), *ground* (17), *weave* (17), *gambolling* (27)
- What is the meaning of: *carrion* (9), *zealously* (16), *adamant* (49),
- Find other words for *curious*, *winkled* (11)
- What is a *blunderbuss*? (32)
- From the story, compile a list of words that describe wedgetail eagles.
- Expand your own vocabulary by experimenting with words and looking up ones that you do not know the meaning of in the dictionary as you read.

The Craft of Writing

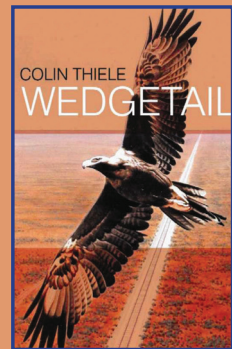
- Colin Thiele writes beautiful stories that are keenly read by children. He is a masterful storyteller and it is worthwhile looking at some of the factors that make him so.
- Colin Thiele uses graphic imagery to make his stories come alive such as: [The eagles] were "*like a pair of skaters skimming on ice*" (6), "*as mischievous as a monkey*" (25) And he's "*as hungry as a hyena*" (55).
- Find some word pictures from the novel that made a scene come alive for you.

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- Try to emulate such language in your own writing.
- Consider how Colin Thiele indicates time passing in his novel.
- There are many places where Colin Thiele puts forward his views on subjects. What are some of these?
- Make a list of them and discuss them as a class.
- Examine how Colin Thiele tells his story.
- Find places where tension is created and look at the ingredients used to do this.
- What do you consider the climax of the novel?
- Find a passage where Andy's feelings are conveyed and look at the way the author does this.

Find out more about

- Wedgetail eagles
- National Parks
- Conservation
- How wildlife can be protected
- The practice of falconry

About the author

Australia's most distinguished writer for children, Colin Thiele has written over 100 books in a career spanning more than half a century. His books include the multi-award-winning *Storm Boy*, *The Sun on the Stubble* and *Blue Fin*, and have won numerous Australian and international awards. Many have also been made into classic films, TV series, plays and picture books.

Notes written by Nancy Mortimer