



# Teachers' Notes

## THE KEY TO RONDO

EMILY RODDA

Teachers' Notes written by Kate Rowe

### OMNIBUS BOOKS

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Author	Emily Rodda
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### CONTENTS

Introduction.....	2
About the Author.....	2
Writing Style.....	3
Before Reading the Text.....	3
Reading the Text.....	3
Questions About the Text.....	4
Creative Activities.....	5
Extension Activities.....	8
Further Reading.....	8
Websites.....	9

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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*The day that Leo Zifkak became the owner of the music box, his life changed forever.*

*Leo didn't know this at the time. His heart didn't miss a beat as he took the box calmly from his mother and put it on his desk. He had no idea what he was holding in his hands.*

Leo, a sensible and reliable boy, inherits a family heirloom from his Aunt Bethany. The antique music box, with beautiful, intricate scenes on every side, has very strict rules attached to it: turn the key three times only, never turn the key or pick up the box while the music is playing, and never close the lid before the music has stopped. But when Leo's least-favourite cousin Mimi and her beloved dog Mutt come to stay, the rules are broken before they know it. And they discover the secret that cautious Aunt Bethany never knew: a magical world inside the music box. When they meet the beautiful, cruel Blue Queen who kidnaps Mutt, Leo and Mimi's lives change forever as they are plunged into the world of Rondo — a world with its own people, magic, and very real danger.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Emily Rodda's real name is Jennifer Rowe. She was born in Sydney and completed an MA (Hons) in English Literature at Sydney University in 1973. She worked in publishing for many years, as an editor and then a publisher at Angus & Robertson, before becoming the editor of the *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine in 1988.

Always a keen reader and writer, Emily began writing children's stories in her spare time to entertain her young daughter Kate. She submitted her first manuscript to Angus & Robertson using a pseudonym – her grandmother's name, Emily Rodda – to make sure that she got an honest opinion of her work from her colleagues. This book, *Something Special*, won the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award, as did four other of her books in subsequent years: *Pigs Might Fly*, *The Best-Kept Secret*, *Finders Keepers*, and *Rowan of Rin*.

A full-time writer since 1992, Emily Rodda has published over ninety books. In recent times she is best known for the popular Deltora Quest fantasy series, which has sold more than any other Australian series, has been made into a successful animated TV series in Japan and is published in over thirty countries around the world.

In 1995 Emily Rodda won the prestigious Dromkeen Medal. The judges of the award said of her that she 'maintains a prolific writing schedule, continues to provide a role model in promoting children's literature and still spends many hours sharing her love of books with children and educators'. She has also won many different kids' choice awards across Australia. Emily has written seven crime novels for adults under her real name, Jennifer Rowe. Her favourite hobbies are reading and writing stories. She has four children and lives in the Blue Mountains with her husband.

For further information please consult Emily Rodda's online biography at <<http://www.emilyrodda.com>>

## **WRITING STYLE**

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Emily Rodda's richly descriptive language brings to life a world both familiar and new. Rondo is a metaphor for the imagination – a place where anything can happen. Rodda has crafted a landscape in the tradition of children's fairytales and reinvented the world through her vibrant characters. Leo and Mimi are flawed characters, but the many challenges they undergo allow them to grow into their hero status. The mystery drives the narrative and the twists are expertly handled, culminating in an exciting conclusion.

## **BEFORE READING THE TEXT**

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Before reading *The Key to Rondo* it may be helpful for students to familiarise themselves with common fairy tales and nursery rhymes. This could be done as part of a library presentation, or simply a class discussion based around the following questions:

- How many fairytales and nursery rhymes do you know?
- Do you know which countries these fairytales and nursery rhymes come from?
- Do you know who wrote them?
- What sorts of things do fairytales have that other stories don't always have? (i.e. how do you know that what you're reading is a fairytale?)

## **READING THE TEXT**

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The teacher might like to read the first chapters to the class and ask the first comprehension questions orally, either for students to work on alone, in pairs or as part

of a class discussion. The teacher could continue to read the text or ask the students to carry on reading on their own.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEXT**

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Please note that in order to help students engage with the text, many of these questions ask for opinions and therefore may not have one 'right' answer. It would be a good idea for each student to answer these questions alone and then compare notes with a partner or with the class.

### **Chapters 1-5:**

- Create a character chart with four columns. The columns should be headed *Name, Personality, Appearance, Skills*. Throughout the book, whenever you meet a new character write their name in the left-hand column, and leave about six lines before writing the next character's name. As you hear more about them you can fill in the other columns.
- What words does the author use to describe Aunt Bethany's house? Would you say these are positive or negative words?
- What are the four rules of the music box?
- Why can the Blue Queen control Mutt but not Mimi?

### **Chapters 6-10:**

- Make a list of the things in Rondo that are different in our world.
- What very surprising hiding place do Leo and Mimi find in Chapter 9? Name three things you would do if you could hide in this way.
- Why does Leo finally decide to stay in Rondo? What would you have done in his place?
- In Chapter 10, Leo and Mimi discover who sent them the note by mouse in Chapter 4. Who was it?

### **Chapters 11-15:**

- If you chose clothes from the red hooks in the Black Sheep, what do you think they would be? How about your brother or sister, or a friend? Remember the clothes make the person look amazing, so think carefully about the style and colour.
- Describe Conker and Freda in your own words (and add them to your character list).
- What are dots? What kind of pests do they remind you of in our world?

- Who or what are the Flitters?

### **Chapters 16-20:**

- What is a Gap?
- Many of the characters in Polly and Jim's family are from fairytales or nursery rhymes. Can you work out who belongs where?
- Leo and Bertha save Rosebud from the wolf. What do you learn about their personalities and skills from this part of the story? And which skill of Mimi's comes in handy at Polly and Jim's house?
- What is Spoiler's true identity? How do you think Leo would feel about that?

### **Chapters 21-25:**

- List three of the dangers on the way to the castle.
- Leo, Mimi and Bertha know they must pass a troll on the bridge. But what unforeseen circumstance makes this more difficult?
- Who do you think would win in a battle between the troll on the bridge and the wolf who lives in Polly and Jim's house? Why?

### **Chapters 26-34:**

- Which of the monsters in the Queen's palace is your favourite?
- Add Hal and Tye to your character list and fill in the blanks as you go along.
- According to the hidey-hole, what are the six rules of successful hiding?

## **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES**

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### **1. ART**

- Draw a picture of your favourite character from *The Key to Rondo* using clues from the book to make them look exactly how you think the author describes them.
- Make a map showing Mimi and Leo's journey to the Blue Castle and everywhere they stop on the way.
- Mimi and Leo wear special adventuring clothes when they are in Rondo. What clothes would you wear if you visited Rondo? What colours would they be, and what material would they be made from? Would you have a hat? How about weapons or jewellery? Draw and describe your outfit.

- Imagine that you have a music box like Leo's, but with a different world inside it. What would your imaginary world look like? What would it be called? Draw panels for each side of your music box.
- Paint your own picture of Bertha for Monsieur Rouge-et-Noir at the art gallery.
- Draw one of the Blue Queen's monsters, then design your own!
- Consider the Blue Queen's castle. What kind of castle would you live in? Design your idea. It can have as many floors and as many rooms as you like. What is in each room? What colour is it? What fun things are there to do there?
- Using information from your character chart, draw a character web showing how each character is connected to the others. For each person, draw a quick sketch of them and write three keywords to describe them. Then draw lines between characters and explain how they know each other, e.g. cousins, friends, stepmother and stepdaughter. You might want to do this in pencil first as the web could get complicated!

## **2. CREATIVE WRITING**

- Write a message from one Rondo character to another giving news of the events that have occurred in Rondo, e.g. Posy the flower-seller to her friend on the coast, Farmer Macdonald to his mother, the troll on the bridge to its brother. Remember the message has to be fairly short so that it won't be too heavy for a mouse to deliver.
- Many of the characters in the world of Rondo are based on well-known fairytale characters. How many can you spot? Work in pairs to find as many as you can, and then work as a class to make a full list.
- Many people in Rondo have names that suit their personalities or professions. For example, Crumble the pie-seller and Posy the flower-seller. Make a list of all those you can find. Then invent your own list of names. What do you think the Rondo butcher is called? Or the baker?

- Leo inherits the music box from Aunt Bethany and Mimi inherits the pendant. Does your family have precious things that have been handed down? Describe one of these things and explain why it is valued.
- Leo and Mimi have also inherited parts of their personality from their relatives. Who are they like in their families and describe these similarities.
- Have you inherited any talents from family members? Who are you similar to in your family? Who are you different from? Why? It might be the way you look, something you're good at, the way you speak or something else entirely.
- Write about the world you created in the art section. What kind of place is it – city, country, desert, outer space or something else? What sounds would there be? What types of animals and plants? What would it smell like? Are there people? What do they look like and what do they do? There is no right answer. The aim is to describe a place with enough detail that it would seem believable to someone else reading it.
- When you have a good description of your world, visualise yourself in it. Imagine that suddenly someone runs up to you and says, 'Quick! I need your help!'. Who is this person, what do they look like, and why do they need your help? Write about what happens in the next ten minutes of your adventure!
- '*Leo! Do you realise that we're fairytales to these people, just like they're fairytales to us?*' (Mimi, Chapter 2). Make up your own Langlander tale. Imagine someone from another world heard a story about your life ... a trip to the beach, a football match, a day at school. When writing your tale, imagine that everything here seems very strange and magical to the person reading it, because our world has things that they have never seen before.

### **3. MUSIC**

- What tune do you imagine the music box plays? Compose a melody using whichever instrument you like, for example a piano, recorder, xylophone, or even your voice. See if you and a friend can make a duet using two instruments and perform it for the class!
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## **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

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- From the list of fairytales that you made in the creative writing section pick one and do some research on it. Which country did it come from? Who wrote it? Find an example of a fairytale from your own family's country of origin and write it in your own words. (If you don't know any fairytales from your own culture, ask your parents or grandparents for help.)
- Sometimes the original version of a fairytale is a lot more frightening than its modern version. Compare, for example, the differences between Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* and the Disney animated version of *The Little Mermaid*. See if you can find other fairytales that were different in their original versions, but be prepared as some of them are a little gory!
- You might think that the author invented the name of the world where these adventures take place. Use a dictionary to look up the word Rondo. Write down the definition. Why do you think the author chose this name for the world.
- Authors often use people they either knew, or know now, to base their characters on when they are writing. Emily Rodda had a great aunt who was rather like Aunt Bethany. If you were to choose a relative as a character in a book you were writing, who would you choose and why? How might you disguise them so they did not know you had based your character on them?
- If you liked *The Key to Rondo*, write and tell Emily Rodda why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write and ask her about it! Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can send your letter to the following address:

Emily Rodda c/- Omnibus Books, 335 Unley Rd, Malvern SA 5061

## **FURTHER READING**

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Read other books by Emily Rodda, including the sequel, *The Wizard of Rondo*, books from the Deltora Quest series and/or books from the Rowan of Rin series. In your opinion how do they compare to *The Key to Rondo*?



If you enjoyed *The Key to Rondo* you might also enjoy fantasy works by other Australian authors, such as *Foundling* and *Lamplighter* by D.M. Cornish. And if you enjoy fairytales in general, you might enjoy *The Storyteller* TV series, available on DVD, or movies such as *The Princess Bride* or *Willow*.

## **WEBSITES**

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### **EMILY RODDA**

For information about Emily Rodda, including answers to frequently asked questions and a current booklist, please go to:

<<http://www.emilyrodda.com>> and

<<http://www.scholasticaustralia.com.au>>

### **FAIRYTALES AND NURSERY RHYMES**

#### **General information:**

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy\\_tale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy_tale)>

#### **Fairytales and nursery rhymes:**

<<http://www.ivyjoy.com/fables/index.shtml>>

#### **Grimm brothers fairytales:**

<<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimtmp/>> (plain text version)

<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm/>>

#### **Grimm brothers info:**

<<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html>>

#### **Worksheets:**

<[http://abcteach.com/directory/theme\\_units/literature/fairy\\_tales/](http://abcteach.com/directory/theme_units/literature/fairy_tales/)>

<[http://www.schools.net.au/edu/lesson\\_ideas/fairytales/fairy\\_url.html](http://www.schools.net.au/edu/lesson_ideas/fairytales/fairy_url.html)>

#### **Links to games and resources:**

<<http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/fairytales.htm>>

<[www.primaryschool.com.au](http://www.primaryschool.com.au)> (do a search for fairy tales)

#### **Webquest:**

<<http://www-ma.beth.k12.pa.us/jhoke/jhwebquest/jhwebquest.htm>>

(N.B. the reading level of some of the stories may be too advanced for some students to follow).

**Quizzes:**

<<http://www.abc.net.au/myfavouritebook/kids/quiz/default.htm>>