

## TEACHERS' NOTES

'Duty Free' (Lothian Crime Wave series, 2002)  
ISBN 0-7344-0334-8 written by Hazel Edwards

Nominated for the 2004 Davitt Award for Crime Writing  
Included in Premier's Reading Challenge 2005-

***These notes contain ideas for curriculum linked; classroom activities which involve students in reviewing and moving into performance and multi-media but are based on the author's process of researching and adapting the novel.***

1. Outline of issues & Curriculum Links
2. Casting ( for a film script)& 'Creating a Scene' Activity for Classroom Performance
3. Plotting from an Author's Perspective
4. Themes
5. Book Launch
6. Reviews

### 1. Outline of Issues & Curriculum Links

'Duty Free' poses questions about whether being politically involved is a duty or a liability for a family. With the Olympics being held in Beijing, the Chinese setting is very topical.

#### **Cross Curricula Issues:**

- Timely Chinese setting because of the prospective Olympics '2008
- Ethical dilemma what is your duty? And is anything free? And is it a crime for Sam's Mum put her daughter at risk?
- Intellectual property. Who owns it? Should scientists share their knowledge internationally? Is it a crime to carry a secret?

#### **Curriculum Links:**

LOTE: Mandarin language and Chinese culture

Social Learning : School systems in other cultures. Super-normal students.

Civics Dual meaning of 'duty free'.

History; Chinese historic monuments like Great Wall. Communism.

Maths: Exchanging currencies. Yuan or dollars?

English: Interpreting. Challenges of translating some English words

Interpersonal relationships: Should your mother ask you to do something illegal?

Technology: Customs security. Intellectual property. Should the State own ideas or formula? Plumbing in China.

Health & Physical Education Tai chi and all-age exercising in Chinese parks.

Bike transport. Chinese medicine.

## **'Duty Free' Outline**

Sam (14) travels to China, with her mother, the pacifist Dr Lee, who is scientific tour-guide of Experts Anonymous. Chinese dissidents have proof of Chinese Government atomic underground testing in Tibet, and photos of long range missile bases. They want to smuggle out anti-Government evidence that Tibetans do not want these bases.

Carrying proof of atomic testing to the Western media is dangerous, and Mum's editor Mike, gets them involved. Mum has 'carried out' personal baby photos or love letters for dissidents before, but political maps or scientific formula are a different issue. Officially that's spying even if Mum believes it helps world peace to share scientific information. Worried, Sam starts imagining they are being watched, everywhere.

While Sam loves the food, the people and the Great Wall, there are many hidden faces to China. As they travel via Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing, Sam is culture shocked. It's not just the different food, noise, bike-jams and millions of people. Or even the 'super-normal' students Sam meets at the 'Normal' uni in the fast-track courses for 'brains'. After all, hers is a one-child family, (apart from Dad's other daughters) just like the official Chinese policy. Sam e-mails Dad a lot from China.

But is it her 'duty' to help Mum smuggle out the map, formula and photos? Who is involved? Why? How will it be done? Sam wants to help her Mum, but is it just someone else's politics? If Mum won't do it, will another group member?

Sam starts suspecting the others, especially Green Shirt who keeps hanging around. When Sam is pushed off the great Wall, is that to do with black market \$US currency deals? Are some of the 'Experts' illegally trading \$US on the black market? Are they trading anything else? Why does Kim the chemist suddenly look fatter?

Returning through Australian Customs, Sam pieces together the clues and there's a chase in the Customs Hall. No duty to pay on the anti-wrinkle cream which Sam buys for her mother at the Chinese Medicine shop, but maybe scientific ideas are not duty-free?

## 2. CASTING & Creating a Scene for Classroom Performance

*Imagine you are a director. This is the way in which a cast could be described for a film based on the novel and was requested of the author by a director.*

*Choose a scene of about a page) from the novel which you can perform for the classroom. The benefit is an opportunity to read for a purpose and perform in public. You may decide to include a Narrator to introduce and put the scene in context*

*e.g. This scene is taken from the novel 'Duty Free' and is important within the story because.....*

*Choose:*

*A complete scene with a definite finish*

*Dialogue*

*2-3 characters*

*Maybe SFX (sound effects) and costumes or props but keep to minimum.*

### ...creating a scene

Possible scenes from 'Duty Free' might include:

P. 8 Beijing Bike Jam

P 71-74 Place of secrets

P33 Early Tai Chi cast can do the exercises but there's also some suspense with the video

P 92 Anything to declare in the Customs Hall at the airport

Videoing: You may choose to use a web cam or video these performances later.

### **CAST:**

**Sam** (14) Australian. Red haired. Hates being called Samantha. Apprehensive of being stuck with 'olds' on tour in China but willing to experiment with new foods etc. Generally sensitive but occasionally suffers 'Motor mouth'. Curious, observant and courageous when challenged.

**Mollie:** (Mum a.k.a. Dr Lee) Australian. Late 30s. Pacifist scientist and former long-time 'ratbag' protestor, who believe scientific knowledge, should be shared. Vegetarian. Guides group called Experts Anonymous on a tour of China, but has a hidden agenda. Previously smuggled baby photos and love letters for dissidents.

**Bea:** Late sixties. Australian. Feisty and pragmatic. Respects Chinese medicine. Does early morning Tai Chi in Chinese parks and wants Sam and Mollie to pretend to be her family, for status. Carries documents in her breast prosthesis.

**Ying** (Chinese, thirty-ish)) Whited shirted and black spectacled official escort and translator who 'worries' if they do anything unplanned. Represents Chinese political bureaucracy.

**Green Shirt:** (Chinese) Suspicious male who appears to be following them but turns out to be back-up tourist coach driver.

**Ted** (mid 40s) Predatory Aussie tourist and scientist. Thinks he 'owns' anything he's photographed. Willing to 'pass off' the Chinese formula as his own work.

**Kim** (40) Australian. Red headed and physically like Sam at a distance. Chemist and one of Experts Anonymous. Plays black market currency. Drives a hard bargain and 'rips off' locals. 'Involved' with Ted.

**Dad:** (mid 40s) Australian. Supportive, 'conventional' older Dad who has daughters from former marriage. Provides 'balance' to 'politically involved' Mum.

### 3. Plotting 'Duty Free' ... an author's view

#### Where did you get your ideas?

This is usually the first question authors are asked. I had been in China, but I had also researched in the Customs area and was interested in the concept that you didn't pay duty on ideas when they were brought into the country.

#### Titles:

'Duty Free' was one title I've always liked. Often my 'working' titles are changed up to twenty times, but this one was kept for the final title. It's ambiguous, but all the meanings apply to the story. "Duty Free" usually refers to the no-tax 'goodies' which travellers carry through Customs like expensive perfumes and computer games. But other types of duty exist and 14 year old Sam has to face that question. Partly the book is about the mother-daughter relationship and whether a girl has a duty to support her mother's political views, especially if it can be a crime in the country which they are visiting.

And whether it's unfair of a mother to ask her child to do something illegal by that country's laws.

Another theme or idea thread is the concept of freedom or fair payment for effort and whether ideas, especially scientific ones, should be shared freely.

### **My Research:**

Travelling in China a few years ago, I had visited Beijing and Shanghai, so the details of the settings were an important aspect of the story. I knew the terms for the currency (yuan), kinds of food and how schools were numbered. I'd even been caught in a Beijing bike jam and had written travel articles for newspapers about issues like one- child families and attitudes towards girl babies.

### **Cover:**

The red cover with the Great Wall of China as a 'divide' providing two perspectives is symbolic. I loved the symbolism of the Great Wall of China, and wanted my character to appreciate the size and history of the place, while noticing the Master Card signs and tourist junk like 'I Climbed the Great Wall' t shirts.

### **Length:**

Originally this had been written as a 4000 word short story set in the Customs Hall, as the group returned to Australia. Then the publishers asked me to lengthen it, and that was a challenge. I couldn't just add extra description, the plot had to develop several sub plots. So what I did was to develop some of the minor characters such as Dad and Bea. I decided to have Sam e-mail her Dad as a way of providing another view on Sam's thoughts.

### **Clues:**

Clues like carrying money in a prosthesis, was a real story I had heard from an experienced older traveller. So I gave it to Bea. I had been to one of the early morning exercise classes, so I made it part of Sam's experience too. Chapter scenes should be varied so they will stay in the reader's mind, but also so they could be filmed later. The Green Shirt character was based on an incident that did happen.

I am not fourteen, so Sam had to be believably that age. By making her mother the tour guide leader, it was believable that Sam would have a chance to travel in China. Sam is observant, partly because she's tired of being with the 'oldies' and partly because when you are on a new place, you notice more.

### **The Ending?**

This was difficult to write, and the reader will have to work out from the clues what might have happened.

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#### 4. Themes

Some of these idea threads are woven throughout the story. A few were planned and others grew as the story progressed.

- Is it a crime for a parent put her daughter at risk?
- Does the end justify the means?
- Pacifism versus action? Which is preferable?
- Should you follow your parents' political views?
- Is it a crime to carry a secret? Or to refuse to carry it?
- Intellectual property. Who owns ideas? The originator or the user?
- Should scientists share their knowledge internationally?
- Are some issues bigger than any one country?
- What is your duty? And is anything free?

What do you consider is the major theme of 'Duty Free'?

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#### Bio

Hazel Edwards has travelled extensively in Asia, including China and even on a scientific expedition to Antarctica to research her books. She enjoys criminal plotting and plans more plots, but not a life of crime! Some of Hazel's stories including 'Stickybeak' (Penguin) and some of her 'Hippopotamus on the Roof Eating Cake' stories have been translated into Chinese.' Stalker' is her previous YA thriller published by Lothian. Her web site at [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) answers FAQs

## 5. Book Launch:

Imagine that you have been appointed event manager of a film launch of 'Duty Free'. This is how the book launch was organised. Read this and then plan your film launch.

- Where will you hold the launch?
- Who will launch the film?
- Who will be invited?
- Who will be in the cast?
- Will you provide any thematic food in keeping with the story?
- Design your invitation
- Write a media release for 'Duty Free' the movie.

### **A 'Great Wall of China' book launch in Mount Waverley North**

A 'Great Wall of China' cake, calligraphy saying 'Duty Free' on a red wall hanging and Grade 6 student Eva Jiang, who was born in China, launched local author Hazel Edwards' 146<sup>th</sup> book at Mount Waverley North Primary school. A memorable opening to the new school library during Education Week where several students wore Chinese clothing and 'red' for good luck was the major colour.

'I remember Beijing bike-jams and the Chinese medicine shops with dried seahorses. Just like in Hazel Edwards' book 'Duty Free' which is a mystery set in China,' said Eva who read the story three times in preparation for her first 'launch'.

Parents, staff and students listened as author Hazel Edwards talked of researching, and the process by which a book is plotted, edited, illustrated and published and how important it is to get the facts right.

Hazel paid credit to graphic designer Gabrielle Wang who created the Chinese characters saying 'Duty Free' on the striking red cover which features the great wall of China, symbolising two viewpoints, and the multiple meanings of the title.

Students asked questions such as, 'Which is your favourite book,' and 'How long did it take you to write this book?'

Hazel refused to give away the ending, and suggested the students read the clues and worked it out for themselves. Several have decided to e-mail their reviews to Hazel's website [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) once they've finished reading the book.

Deputy Principal Sheryl Chard welcomed the parents, Lothian publishers provided autographed copies and students nibbled at 'The Great Wall of China' which didn't last as long as the original.

## **6. REVIEWS:**

### **1. Eva Jiang's review of Duty Free**

(This was the girl who launched the novel)

I read Duty Free. It was set in China in Beijing and Shanghai. I've been to both places and I think the way Mrs. Edwards described them was just how I remembered. For Beijing bells ringing, bike jams, people everywhere and definitely at full volume. For Shanghai tall buildings and very crowded, kind of like a newly improved Beijing.

I think the medicine was also very true. Little cupboards with medicine inside: dried sea horses, ants, starfishes and stuff like anti-ageing cream.

The idea of writing the formula on the blackboard was a great idea and the man with the green shirt leads people on a different track.

I think this book was really good and I felt worried for the characters.

By Eva Jiang Year 5T  
Mt Waverley North Primary School

### **2. VATE Victorian Assoc of Teachers of English REVIEW**

Duty Free is a fast paced adventure and at 96 pages, even the slowest reader will be entertained by 14 year old Sam who travels to China with her mother, the pacifist scientist. While I found this story interesting from the travel point of view, the interest centres on Sam and the group of scientists visiting Beijing and Shanghai where Sam's mother will be given secret knowledge to smuggle out of China to aid the dissidents' cause.

There is the addition of a moral dilemma over this, combined with Sam's increasing paranoia as she imagines spies lurking in every corner. Some interesting portraits of her fellow travellers increase the tension and moral cause-should Kim take advantage of the black market in American dollars and should we be sympathetic when customs object to her excessive baggage of silk shirts and jade objects? Dr Ted Key turns traitor too as he endeavours to take credit for the magic formula. It's all entertaining stuff. Sam, as the voice of the novel, is believable and the text is enhanced with letters e-mailed to her father back home in Australia.

Pitched at CSF level 4 or 5, and would certainly appeal to upper primary or year 7 readers, suitable mainly as wide reading texts or for literature circles with reluctant readers. Easy to read and many other suburban heroes in the making will enjoy this tale.

Virginia Mitchell, Balwyn High School.

### 3. REVIEW: [www.goldcreek.act.edu.au/yara/pages/reviews](http://www.goldcreek.act.edu.au/yara/pages/reviews)

Standing in a queue trying to clear customs and immigration into a country is a worrying task at the best of times. But if you're trying to sneak in a secret formula for scientific research, it's a real worry. It's also the setting of a good thriller. *Duty Free* by Hazel Edwards is a novel about a 14 year old girl named Sam who is touring through China with her mother Dr Lee. Sam's mother is a scientific tour guide of experts Anonymous.

The novel is a thriller full of suspense and excitement. It is written in short, sharp sentences in an easy reading style. The novel describes ancient sites, historical buildings and significant Chinese personalities in a humorous way. It also addresses current political issues such as atomic testing in Tibet. All this set in a plot about maps, spying and smuggling messages. A great read. I recommend this book for readers 10-14 years and give it a rating of 8 out of 10. It is especially good for those who like suspense and thrillers.

Harry (11) Canberra A.C.T.  
[www.goldcreek.act.edu.au/yara/pages/reviews](http://www.goldcreek.act.edu.au/yara/pages/reviews)

### 4. STUDENT REVIEW by Isaac Anderson 'A Great Mystery'

This book is a mystery book about Sam, a fourteen year old girl, her mum who is a scientific tour guide for Experts Anonymous and a group of scientists. They're visiting China while also trying to smuggle out a map showing atomic bases. A Chinese officer Ying shows them around China where a few things happen. Sam is pushed and nearly falls off the Great Wall of China but they never find who did it.

*Duty Free* is very mysterious and you never know what's going to happen next. I enjoyed reading this book because I like mystery books. A lot of the background information for this book is based on fact because Hazel Edwards has travelled through Asia and has been on a scientific expedition to Antarctica to research her books. I recommend this book to people who are 10-14 years of age and who like mysteries.

#### **Your Review:**

You've been invited to review the book and the film of 'Duty Free' for an important newspaper. You have only 200 words. What will you write?

