



Stolen

John Wilson

Reading level: 4.0

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Book Summary

On a visit to a seaside town in Australia, fifteen-year-old Sam meets Annabel, who works at the local museum. Annabel's interest in history is infectious, and Sam soon finds himself eager to hunt for the remains of a boat called the *Mahogany Ship*—a shipwreck sought after by many. When a storm creates an erosion hole that exposes a structure, Sam and Annabel are convinced it's the fabled ship. Soon all of the museum staff are at the erosion site to check it out. But the same storm also destroys the museum's power. Someone knows the alarms aren't working and steals the museum's most treasured artifact, a large porcelain peacock worth four million dollars. As Sam and Annabel search for the thief, they realize there may be a link between the fabled shipwreck and the recent theft.

Author Biography

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, **John Wilson** grew up on the Isle of Skye and outside Glasgow without the slightest idea that he would ever write books. After a degree in Geology from St. Andrews University, he worked in Zimbabwe and Alberta, Canada, before taking up writing and moving to Lantzville on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, in 1991. John is addicted to history and firmly believes that the past must have been just as exciting, confusing and complex to those who lived through it as our world is to us. John spends significant portions of his year travelling across the country telling stories from his books and their historical background and getting young readers (particularly, but not exclusively, boys) energized and wanting to read and find out more about the past.

Connecting to the Text

The Writer's Craft

John Wilson creates many powerful images in *Stolen*. Ask students to consider the following three scenes from the novel. How do these descriptions help readers “get into” the novel?

- ch. 3: The Loch Ard peacock: *It's perfect—the feathers on the tail are painted in incredible detail, the eyes real enough to be looking at me, the talons curled to grip the rock on which it stands, the blues, greens and browns so bright, they almost hurt my eyes.*
- ch. 4: The storm: *...the lightning is nonstop, and the thunder feels as if it's coming from the ground beneath my feet. The rain lashes across the scene horizontally, and there are small rivers running over the open ground.*
- ch. 9: The 1950's diner: *The countertops are red Formica, and gleaming chrome-and-plastic swivel chairs are lined along a bar. There's a shiny soda fountain, and Buddy Holly is warbling away in the background.*

Following this, ask students to identify something in the novel they wish had more description—something they are interested in. Possible answers include Willem Janszoon, the Xuande Emperor, Sam's dad, the heritage village at Warrnambool, the two-masted ketch *Reginald M*, or the steamship *Rowitta*.

Building Vocabulary

The following boats and ships are mentioned in *Stolen*. Ask students to write a brief description of each that distinguishes it from the others. You may also ask them to identify the importance of each in the novel. Ask students to find out the difference between a boat and a ship. In this list, which are boats and which are ships?

Chinese junk	ketch	sailing ship
ferry	Portuguese caravel	steamship
freighter	rowboat	Zodiac

Connecting to the Curriculum

History & Geography

1. A number of cities, countries and continents are mentioned in *Stolen*. Invite students to respond to at least 5 of the examples in the chart below. For each, students should note its relevance to the novel. Victoria, BC is provided as an example.

	City, Country or Continent?	Why is this place mentioned in the novel? What's important or interesting about it?
Victoria	<i>City in British Columbia, Canada</i>	<i>Sam is from Victoria. He lived here with his mom and dad before his mom left to "find herself." (Victoria is also a state in Australia)</i>
Adelaide		
Antartica		
Asia		
Baghdad		
China		
England		
Egypt		
Europe		
Indonesia		
Ireland		
Kansas		
Melbourne		
Netherlands		
Portugal		
Vietnam		
Warnambool		

2. Sam learns a lot while looking for treasure with Annabel on the beaches in Warrnambool, Australia. As a research project, invite students to find out more about Willem Janszoon, the Dutch explorer mentioned in *Stolen*.

Willem Janszoon was a Dutch navigator. He lived from 1570-1630 and was famous for sailing from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies. He is said to be the first European to land in Australia, arriving in 1606—the equivalent of Christopher Columbus for the USA.

- ♦ Chart Janszoon's voyage from Bantam, Indonesia, to the Cape York Peninsula in Australia. How long did the journey take? (See Web Resources listed below.)
- ♦ Write a short description about the *Duyfken*. How big was it, and what was special about it? Find an original illustration of the *Duyfken* and a

photo of its modern replica. Imagine you lived in the time of Janszoon. Do you think you would want to be part of the crew of the *Duyfken*? What challenges (and rewards) might you experience?

- ◆ The East India Company sailed throughout Asia and Australia in the 1600's, trading in Asia, Southeast Asia and Australia. There were companies from the Netherlands, Britain, Portugal and France. What kind of trade goods would the East India Company have interest in then, and why?

orca currents

3. In chapter 2, Sam tells Annabel about the sinking of the *Princess Sophia* in 1918: "She was a steamer out on Canada's west coast. She struck a reef in a storm and sank...The *Sophia* sat on the reef for two days with rescue ships around her and the weather too rough to take the passengers off. Then she slid off the reef, and everyone drowned."

Ask students to research this tragic event, answering two or more of the questions below. There are many resources available online.

Option: You may wish to present this short documentary which has underwater footage of a dive to the wreck site:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CRhNwN1QpEE (Note: This is the first video of a series, and as with all online resources, preview to ensure its appropriateness for your students.)

- ◆ The *Princess Sophia* was one of four sister ships. Where were they built, and for whom were they named?
- ◆ At what cities did the coastal liner ship stop along the Inside Passage route in British Columbia and Alaska?
- ◆ What happened when the *Sophia* hit the Vanderbilt Reef? How many passengers and crew lost their lives? Why weren't they rescued?
- ◆ Describe one thing about the sinking of the *Princess Sophia* that is interesting to you. **Prompts:** letters and wills written by the passengers; use of wireless communications; tragedy occurred a few days before the end of WWI; or Captain Locke's decision not to evacuate.
- ◆ In what ways is the story of the *Princess Sophia* similar to the sinking of the *Loch Ard* in 1878?

Art

As a creative project, invite students to illustrate the beach scenery in Warrnambool as described by Sam. In chapter 1 he says, "To my left, the featureless beach stretches down to the where the ocean waves roll in, foaming and crashing as if angry that they can't climb higher toward me." Students may wish to sketch or paint the scenery, or create a diorama of the seaside. (Ask students which media would best capture the seaside, and why.)

Prompt: read or post the following descriptive words from the novel:

beach	grass-covered dunes	relics
black driftwood	hollow	soft surf
buried seaweed and grass	huge rollers	stretch of coast
cloudless	ocean	washed-out blue sky

Connecting to the World

Topics for Discussion and Discovery

- In chapter 7, Annabel tells Sam about the profitable business of smuggling and selling artifacts to rich collectors and art dealers. She says, "It's a thriving trade in Egypt...It's well organized and linked to the big crime syndicates." Ask students to find out more about the illegal trade of national heritage artifacts.
 - From what you have learned about the work done by archeologists in *Stolen*, what is wrong with selling historical artifacts to collectors? Consider what was learned from the inspection of the "softball-sized clay pot" that Annabel found in the sand.
- In *Stolen*, Sam and Annabel learn about famous shipwrecks in Australia. Willem Janszoon is famous for being the first European to touch on Australian soil. He was a Dutch explorer who was sent by the East India Company to find spices and trade routes. Annabel said, "A lot of people forget that history's about people just like us" (ch. 2).
 - Challenge students to find out more about the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, noted through a recent genome study as the oldest indigenous culture on earth. What was their culture like in 1600?
 - Research *Tjukurrpa*, known as Dreamtime, or Dreaming. This rich tradition passes important knowledge from one generation to the next. Describe an area of *Tjukurrpa* that interests you, such as the link to spirituality, ancestor spirits, the Rainbow Serpent or sacred places.
 - Imagine you are Janszoon and have first arrived in Australia. Write a journal entry describing what you have seen: the coastline and the Indigenous peoples.

Web Resources

European exploration of Australia

<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/60542/20060914-0000/www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/southland/intro.html>

www.australianhistory.org/willem-janszoon

www.voc.iinet.net.au

The Princess Sophia wreck

www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/sos/shipwrecks/002031-5150-e.html

www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?25186

Australian Aboriginal culture

www.australiangeographic.com.au/journal/Aboriginal-Australians-the-oldest-culture-on-Earth.htm

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-indigenous-cultural-heritage>