

Task for *The Bodysurfers*

Structure: the ricochet principle

According to Michael Ackland, Robert Drewe wrote (some of his) novels on the principle of the ricochet where 'people and events career off each other only to remain inextricably linked'.

He reports Drewe as saying:

The idea of photographs I find intriguing, too. I've always been more interested, even as a child, in what was going on outside the frame. Was some kid making a face? Was there someone watering their lawn? If you look at your own family photographs you can sometimes remember what was happening, and the missing bits to me are more interesting and important than the posed bits. [...] I was also trying to show that life has a definite if irregular narrative line based on a ricochet effect. I wanted to give the impression that there are unseen forces at work all the time, call them politics if you like. Unseen forces to some extent dictate what sort of life you're going to lead. These are things over which the individual has no control whatsoever.

From Ackland, M. (2005). 'In the service of complex truths: the aims and art of Robert Drewe's fiction'. *Westerly* Vol. 50: Nov, pp.26–41. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/IELAPA.200512407>

Discussion questions

1. In what ways does *The Bodysurfers* display qualities of the ricochet principle? How do characters and events ricochet off each other both within and across stories?
2. Is there evidence in the stories of more happening 'outside the frame'? To what extent do readers need to infer the 'missing bits'?
3. What 'unseen forces' are at work in these stories? Do the characters have control of their lives?
4. Consider how the stories might have been read differently if they had been arranged in chronological order. What has been lost and gained by arranging them out of chronological sequence?