

Teachers' Notes (Primary & Secondary)
by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Shoestring, the Boy Who Walks on Air

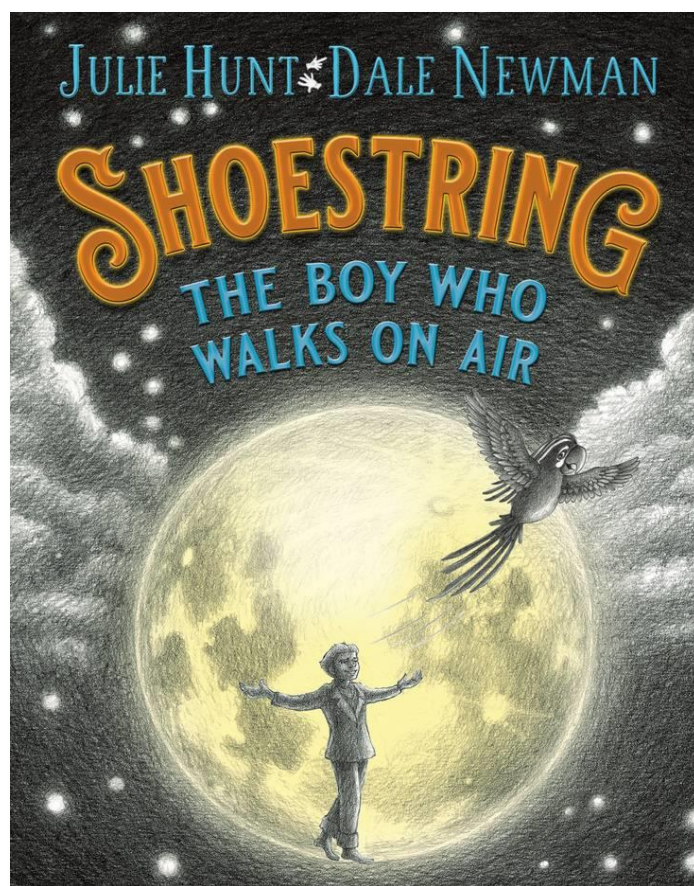
By Julie Hunt
Illustrated by Dale Newman

Recommended for ages 8–12

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INTRODUCTION

STORY SUMMARY

'Shoestring loved hearing the sudden intake of breath as he stepped onto the rope. He loved it when he looked down and saw all the upturned faces. They made him think of coins, hundreds of coins scattered at his feet, more coins than he had ever taken when he was a pickpocket.' (p 83)

Twelve-year-old Shoestring is leaving behind his life of crime and starting a new career with the Troupe of Marvels. Their lead performer, he has an invisible tightrope and an act to die for. But trouble is brewing – the magical gloves that caused so much turmoil for KidGlovz are back.

When he's wearing the gloves, the world is at Shoestring's fingertips. It's so easy to help himself to whatever he likes – even other people's hopes and dreams. But when he steals his best friend's mind, he's at risk of losing what he values most.

Shoestring, the Boy Who Walks on Air is a thrilling, fast-paced adventure full of humour, mystery and magic. The characters are memorable and richly imagined, from Mot the grumpy hermit, who is plagued with an endless stream of visitors, to the terrifying Mistress Adamantine (Marm), who has a diamond where her heart should be and will stop at nothing in her quest for revenge. The extremity of the ordeal that young Shoestring and his friends experience is matched by the strength of their relationships, and love and loyalty triumph in a breathtaking conclusion.

Dale Newman's beautifully rendered landscapes and her theatrical depiction of characters make this a fabulous companion book to *KidGlovz* (2015).

In the end, Shoestring learns the valuable lesson that pride comes before a fall, and that true friends are worth more than any amount of fame or fortune.

'He gazed at his hands, which were his own now, the hands of an ordinary boy. Then he looked at May and his friends, who were anything but ordinary, and thought how lucky he was. Even Metropolis, who had landed on his shoulder so as not to miss out on anything, didn't annoy him. His feet were planted firmly on the ground and his heart was so light he might have been walking on air.' (p 350)

BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Discussion Point: Before opening *Shoestring, the Boy Who Walks on Air*, consider the title and cover design. Discuss what sort of story students think this might be and the things on the cover that make them think that. Ask questions such as:

- What mood does the cover create when you first look at it?
- What sort of story might this be? An adventure, a mystery, a fairy tale? Something else?
- Is this likely to be a story set in the modern era? If not, what on the cover conveys the idea of a story set in the past?
- What do you think the boy is doing in the illustration?
- Look closely at the font used for the word **Shoestring**. Does it remind you of the kind of font you might see on a circus poster? How might this font and the illustration of the boy be connected?

THEMES

There are several key ideas or themes which flow through this work. These notes are ideal for classroom discussion from Years 3 to 7. They have application to core subjects such as Art, English and HSIE. These themes could be considered in conjunction with the following school curriculum areas.

CURRICULUM TOPICS

1. Studies of history, society and environment
2. English language and literacy
3. Visual literacy
4. Creative arts
5. Learning technologies

The notes which follow are designed to be used largely in middle to upper primary and lower secondary classrooms. Teachers should be able to adapt them to suit the demands of their particular curriculum.

I. STUDIES OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

FRIENDSHIP

- *Discussion Point:* This novel is first and foremost about friendship and love. When those things are threatened we lose our sense of self, as well. Shoestring sets out with his best friend KidGlovz, and the rest of the troupe. They have always supported each other, but the journey threatens that cohesion. Even the twins start to bicker! What emotions threaten the friendships depicted in this novel?
- *Discussion Point:* What does this novel suggest about friendship?

ADDICTION

- *Discussion Point:* Shoestring finds himself in thrall to the power of the gloves: 'They were empty gloves. Shoestring could see there was nothing inside them, yet they seemed full of themselves. Both hands hovered before him, palms up with the fingers spread. Then they flipped over so the openings gaped in his direction, as if daring him to try them on.' (p 92) Discuss with students the dangers of being addicted to something, whether it be to a substance such as alcohol or drugs or to a tangible thing such as the white gloves.
- *Discussion Point:* Mistress Adamantine is addicted to diamonds, and in particular to 'the fire diamond, which Marm called the Eye of the Dragon.' (p 89) 'She couldn't wait to reach her prize. The floor of the pit was red-hot and burned the soles off her shoes, but she didn't care. It was a small price to pay for recovering her treasure. 'My darling one, my brightest star,' she cried, as she reached for the diamond. A second later Mount Adamantine erupted.' (p 333) Addiction makes people forget the basic needs of life and to deny feelings for others. 'Marm' is a classic example of that. The only person she has ever really cared about, her son, Jack, is dead and she will stop at nothing to keep the diamond and to destroy those who she holds responsible for this death. Is she addicted to her own evil?

POWER

- *Discussion point:* Mistress Adamantine is the cruellest of enemies in her quest for power and wealth: 'To steal away her words was a cruel and vicious crime. She was a bird full of opinions and to be rendered mute was agony. She opened her beak but the only sound she could make was a dry rattle, like wind blowing through seed heads beside an abandoned railway line.' (p 142) Is power ultimately a disappointment? Can achieving power ever really match up to one's dreams of power? Refer in this question to some national leaders whose grasp of power has proved very tenuous and quite conflicted.
- *Discussion Point:* Who else in this novel craves power, apart from Mistress Adamantine?

SELF-DISCOVERY AND INDEPENDENCE

- *Discussion Point:* Shoestring learns more about himself in the course of the narrative. What does he discover?
- *Discussion Point:* 'I wanted to tell people that a certain member of the troupe had distinguished herself in action and was about to be presented with an award. I had prepared the acceptance speech in my head. It irked me that I had to present the award as well as accept it, but if I didn't do it, who would? Everyone was so busy they didn't notice the marvellous macaw in their midst.' (p 342) Does Metropolis learn any new skills or discover anything about her character during the course of this novel?

INTEGRITY

- *Discussion Point:* Metropolis reveals (p 24) that she often cheats by telling May the cards of her opponents. Is this fair and decent behaviour?
- *Discussion Point:* 'I watched you grow into the best thief in Cadenza and I was proud of you. Then, when you became a performer, I was even more proud because I didn't have to worry that one day you would get caught.' (p 167) Is May correct in suggesting that being a good thief is ever a thing to be proud of?

COURAGE

- *Discussion Point:* 'I could still protect her, I told myself. Metropolis, be brave. You've got a beak. You've got claws ... I thought of Mistress Adamantine – her claws were like talons and she was fierce as an eagle. What chance would I stand against her? She'd snatch me from the air and bite my head off. I put my head under my wing as Ace pushed his way through the crowd.' (p 292) Metropolis summons up all her courage to defend May. Does courage always stem from love as it does here?
- *Discussion Point:* Who else in this novel evinces courage or bravery?

LOYALTY

- *Discussion Point:* Metropolis would do anything for May; KidGlovz is loyal to Shoestring; Braid joins them in order to redress the mistake she made earlier; discuss the role of loyalty in this novel.
- *Discussion Point:* 'May sighed. 'I don't want to go, but I must.'(p 275) Why is May so loyal to Shoestring?

AMBITION – 'BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR...'

- *Discussion Point:* 'Throw them away, Shoe. No good will come of them.' 'Why? They're precious. They're magic. They can get me whatever I want.' Shoestring held the gloves out in front of him. 'You had them. You should know—' Kid feared for his friend. 'Drop them, Shoe. Drop them into the gorge and let that be the end of it.' (p 101) Once Shoestring has tasted the power of the gloves he is very reluctant to give them up. But they threaten to destroy him. Discuss the power of ambition to take over our lives.

- *Discussion Point:* ‘He’d miss the Festival of Marvels and he wouldn’t win the Death-Defying Fame and Fortune Award.’ (p 106) Shoestring is determined to win this award and is willing to risk wearing the gloves in order to do so. But pride comes before a fall, as they say... does Shoestring eventually get what he wishes for?

REVENGE

- *Discussion Point:* Marm has a vindictive desire to destroy May by killing Shoestring: ‘I’m going to break her heart, my darling,’ she whispered. ‘As she broke mine.’ (p 279) And ‘You see, May, it’s an eye for an eye and a life for a life. You killed Jack Diamond and now you must pay the price.’ (p 293) Is revenge ever really the source of satisfaction that the vengeful hope for?
- *Discussion Point:* Discuss revenge and its potential effects on a person.

2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

VOICE

This text is largely written in third person about Shoestring’s adventures, but some sections are in the voice of Metropolis, and both are written in **immediate past tense**.

- *Discussion Point:* Does Metropolis write in first, second or third person narrative? Is this the same as the rest of the story? How does this change the way you read her segments of the story? Do you understand her better than the other characters because she writes in this person? Do you think these segments are funnier because of this? Can you find examples of where she seems to be talking to the reader directly? Why do you think the author chose to mix first and third person narrative?

STRUCTURE

- *Discussion Point:* Discuss the structure of the story – with exposition, turning point, resolution, open ending.
- *Discussion Point:* Suspense is another aspect of structuring a story which ensures reader engagement, for example, we are led to wonder ‘who is this boy?’ (on p322). But not until the end do we discover that he is one of the Silverstrings family and that they are Sylvie’s long-lost family, as well. What other mysteries were resolved during the course of this narrative?

CONCLUSION

A story’s conclusion should cement its themes.

- *Discussion Point:* What do the final words in the novel suggest about the future? The text has what is called an ‘open’ ending. What might happen next to Shoestring, KidGlovz, and the rest of the troupe? Write a synopsis for a third book about these characters.

POETRY

Poetry can offer a strong and immediate response to the issues raised here.

- *Activity:* Encourage students to write their own poetic responses to the issues explored in this book, in any poetic form they choose.

CHARACTERS

The Cast of Characters is listed at the front of the book, with brief notes explaining their roles in the narrative.

- *Discussion Point:* Which character is your favourite, and why? Which character is your least favourite, and why? Who would you like to have read more about?

GENRE

This book, and its prequel (*KidGlovz*), have elements of mystery, and magic (or fantasy).

- *Discussion Point:* 'I was glad I couldn't speak aloud because I would have had to eat my words – suddenly the little table was spread with teapot, cups, cake and bread, cheese and biscuits. The teapot had a feather cosy and Peg plucked it off the pot and put it on her head. 'That's better,' she said. 'Pour the tea before it gets cold.' (p 251) This is the sort of fantasy detail which makes a fantasy world credible. What other details in the novel cemented the world of fantasy and magic?

COMPREHENSION

- *Activity:* Test your students' comprehension of the text by asking some questions, for example:

Comprehension questions, Chapter One and Chapter Two:

- Why did Shoestring need to make a quick getaway when he was a street performer? (page 3, 13)
- What sort of creature is Metropolis? (page 6)
- Name each member of the Troupe of Marvels and the skill each performs (pages 10-11)
- What card did Ace pull from May's feather boa? (page 12)
- What is special about Shoestring's rope? (page 13)
- What is Lobe's extraordinary power? (page 17)
- What is the name of May's establishment? (page 17)
- According to Metropolis, how did Shoestring meet May? (page 21)
- What does Metropolis suggest May give to Shoestring? (page 21)
- What does she give Shoestring instead? (page 22)
- What does Metropolis do in the Luck Palace when she is in a good mood? (page 24)
- *Discussion Point:* Do you think the gloves are the only reason why Shoestring turned away from his friends in the troupe? Might he have been the most likely member of the troupe to fall under the spell of the gloves? Can you find examples in the earlier part of the novel to illustrate this? [Hint: he is desperate to be famous and wants everyone to admire him.] What has he learned by the end of the novel and what were the major turning points in the novel that made him change?
- *Activity:* Invite students to create their own list of questions about the rest of the novel, with which to test their fellow classmates.

- *Activity:* Read this list: (p 278)

Death-Defying Fame & Fortune Award

all contestants register here:

Shoestring — The Boy Who Walks on Air

The Great Alexis — Airwalker Extraordinaire

Mr Speltani Vertigo

The Altitudinous Tumblers

Mike the Kite

High-Flying Phillip

Then make up a another series of names for death-defying aerialists, like this one.

WORD PLAY

This novel is full of clever word play.

- *Discussion Point:* Chapter 21 Twine Valley (pp 234–243) contains word play regarding twine, thread, weaving, weft, spindle, loom, and the troupe is looking for a spinner named Braid. Make a list of all the words which refer to weaving and then add to that list.
- *Discussion Point:* ‘There was a fire eater next to the snake man. He wore a dragon mask that was singed at the edges and had a blackened hole where the mouth should have been. He stood on a box and held a flaming torch. ‘Hear the Legendary Flambé,’ he cried. ‘Tall tales and true, straight from the tongue of fire!’ He waited until a crowd gathered around him then began telling a story. ‘There was once a one-eyed dragon. His belly was a forge and his breath...’ The man paused and a small flame issued from the hole in his mask. ‘His breath was fire!’ The crowd cheered and the man took off his mask and licked his lips before continuing. ‘That dragon was smouldering deep under the earth. His snoring made the mountain rumble...’ (p 283) This section of the novel plays with words associated with fire. Diamonds and geology are also constant themes throughout the novel and Mistress Adamantine’s name is associated with that. What other examples of word play did you discover in this novel?

HUMOUR

- *Discussion Point:* This novel is full of humour, particularly when Metropolis is involved: ‘May never ate poultry out of respect for my feelings and she often said the only thing she’d ever pluck was her eyebrows.’ (p 284) What other passages were particularly amusing, in your students’ views?

COMPARATIVE STUDIES

- *Discussion Point:* Compare this novel with picture books and novels on similar topics and discuss. [See **Bibliography of Related Texts.**]

3. VISUAL LITERACY

CRITICAL LITERACY SKILLS

Visual texts may be interpreted very differently by each reader. Develop students' Critical Literacy Skills by discussing images in the book with them, and by discovering inter-textual references.

- *Discussion Point:* Open the book to the illustrated panels showing the hooded character and explain in a short paragraph what you think is happening in this sequence of images. Did this story happen over one day, one week or a much longer time? How did the illustrator convey the sense of the passage of time? Did the weather change, as well? How did the illustrator convey changes in weather? Now think about how you responded to these images. Did they change your idea about what sort of story might lie ahead? Did they leave you thinking ominous things might happen in the story? What elements in the panels suggested the sense that something bad was about to happen? Now turn the page to see the image opposite the title page and explain in your own words how the story in the panel ends.
- *Discussion Point:* How does this sense of something bad about to happen contrast with the two double-page spreads that follow? Why do you think the book's creators wanted to include a Cast of Characters and the image of the boy on the balcony? Now turn the page and read the short piece by Shoestring. How does this last element make you feel just as the story is about to begin?
- *Discussion Point:* Look carefully at the illustrations in Chapter One – Cadenza Towers. From what perspective are you, the reader, looking at the first two images? Why do you think the illustrator wanted you to look down upon the town and the street outside Madame Lovegrove's School of Music? Do you think this is the same reason why the illustrator has you looking straight down at Shoestring in the last image of the chapter? If not, why not? Now turn back to the image of Shoestring introducing the members of his troupe. How does the way Sylvie has been shown compare with the other characters and emphasise the fact that she is a tiny little girl?
- *Activity:* Invite students to create a visual response to this text. It might be another image to be added to the text, or some other visual image. Create a class display and an online gallery of these artworks. Discuss the differences between each interpretation.

COVER

The Cover of this book gives the reader a very good indication of its contents.

- *Activity:* After answering the questions under **Before Reading the Book**, above, create your own cover for this book.

MEDIUM

The Medium used here is pencil on paper.

- *Activity:* Dale Newman's images are haunting and suggestive. Invite students to draw an image illustrating an event in this novel, using a similar style.

EMOTION

Emotions are conveyed in the images in this book, too, via spatial perspective.

- *Activity:* Choose a particular image and describe the emotions conveyed in it, for example, pp 328, where the people are fleeing from the volcano's eruption. What emotions are explored here?

DESIGN

Design encompasses every aspect of a book's construction, including the front and back cover image, a half-title, illustrated pages, a title page, etc.

- *Discussion Point:* The title page depicts the gloves as a bird. What does this image suggest to the reader?
- *Activity:* Invite students to examine each page carefully and discuss the composition and perspective used in the images. For example, compare and discuss the city (p 1), The Troupe of Marvels setting off on tour (pp 42–3), May cleaning the ceilings (p 112), or the image of The Invisible String Band (p 348).

GRAPHIC DEVICES

The prequel to this book was a graphic novel. *Shoestring* opens with a sequence of graphic novel images between the half-title and the title page.

- *Activity:* Create a cartoon or a comic strip of an incident in *Shoestring*.

4. CREATIVE ARTS

This text will encourage students to explore various other creative arts.

DRAMA AND PERFORMANCE

- *Activity:* Invite students to write a short playscript based on some of the events which take place in this book.
- *Activity:* Learn some simple circus tricks and encourage students to put on their own 'Troupe of Marvels' show. [See **Bibliography of Related Texts.**] As another exercise, the class might be taken to see one of the many smaller circuses now performing in Australia.

MUSIC

- *Activity:* Choose music or write a song to enhance the play you are performing.

CRAFT AND DESIGN

- *Activity:* Design a poster advertising the Troupe of Marvels' show. Before embarking on this activity, study other posters, and consult this reference for advice: 'Poster Design to Change the World' *Oxfam Australia* <https://www.oxfam.org.au/secondary-section-1-part-3-what-makes-a-successful-campaign-poster/>

FILM

- *Activity:* Create a Book Trailer for this book. [See **Bibliography of Related Texts.**]

5. LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

This book might be used as a tool for investigations on the Internet.

- *Activity:* Research the work of Julie Hunt or Dale Newman online.
- *Activity:* Research the topic of tightrope walking and some of the famous proponents of the art.

- *Activity:* This novel suggests a number of topics to possibly research. Sylvie, as a child prodigy, remembers everything she's read in the Encyclopedia and comes up with relevant information at various points throughout the narrative, eg. 'I believe it's a caldera – the basin of an extinct volcano.' (p 287) Students might research **travelling players and circus tricks, volcanoes, or forms of weaving** as three possible topics. [See **Bibliography of Related Texts.**]

CONCLUSION

Shoestring, the Boy Who Walks on Air is a virtuoso combination of text and art; a celebration of artistry and of the joy of performing. It is a fantasy, a mystery and a warm-hearted investigation of human frailty, and of the power of friendship and love in the face of power and malice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED TEXTS

PICTURE BOOKS

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Gerstein, Mordecai *The Man who Walked Between the Towers* Roaring Brook Press, 2003.

McCully, Emily Arnold *Mirette on the High Wire* Putnam Books, 1992.

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Rogers, Gregory *Omar the Strongman* Scholastic Press, 2013.

FICTION

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French, Jackie *The Road to Gundagai (Matilda Saga #3)* HarperCollins, 2013.

Gwyther, Sheryl *Sweet Adversity* HarperCollins, 2018.

Rundell, Katherine *Rooftoppers* Faber & Faber, 2013.

NON-FICTION

Davis, Jackie Leigh *DIY Circus Lab for Kids A Family-Friendly Guide for Juggling, Balancing, Clowning, and Show-Making (Lab Series)* Quarry Books, 2018.

St Leon, Mark *Circus: The Australian Story* Melbourne Books, 2011.

Turnbull, Stephanie *Circus Skills* W.B.Saunders Company, 2012.

West, Cathy *Starstruck: Circus Skills*, Blake Education, 2011.

ONLINE RESOURCES

'Different Types of Circus Skills and Acts' *History of Circus* <http://www.historyofcircus.com/famous-circuses/circus-skills/>

Marshall, Deidre 'Life? It's a Circus!' Teachers Resource Pack (Primary)' *Homunculus Theatre* 2016
http://homunculustheatre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Life_-_Its-A-Circus-Primary.pdf

'Phillipe Petit' *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippe_Petit

'Tightrope Walking' *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tightrope_walking

'Volcano Facts and Types of Volcanoes' by Mary Bagley *LiveScience* 7 February 2018
<https://www.livescience.com/27295-volcanoes.html>

'Volcanoes' National Geographic <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/volcano-satellite-images/>

'Weaving' *Wikipedia* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weaving>

OTHER RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

ON GRAPHIC NOVELS

Chinn, Mike, *Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel: everything you need to know to Create Great Graphic Works*, London, New Burlington Books, 2004, 2006.

ON BOOK TRAILERS

'Book Trailers - Resources: Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network' <http://idtl.net.au/book-trailers.php>

'Book Trailers for Readers' by Michelle Harclerode <https://www.youtube.com/user/mhmediaspec/videos>

ON POSTER DESIGN

'Poster Design to Change the World' *Oxfam Australia* <https://www.oxfam.org.au/secondary-section-1-part-3-what-makes-a-successful-campaign-poster/>

ABOUT THE WRITER AND ILLUSTRATOR

JULIE HUNT

Julie Hunt loves storytelling and traditional folktales. Her stories combine other-worldly elements with down-to-earth humour. She loves travel and is fascinated by landscapes and the tales they inspire. This interest has taken her from the rugged west coast of Ireland to the ice caves of Romania where she collected ideas for her graphic novel, *KidGlovz*, illustrated by Dale Newman. *KidGlovz* won the 2016 Queensland Literary Award and her latest novel, *Shine Mountain*, was shortlisted for the 2019 NSW Premier's Award. She has received many awards and commendations for earlier books, including winning Readings' inaugural Children's Book Prize for *Song for a Scarlet Runner* in 2014 and the Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year Award for *The Coat*, illustrated by Ron Brooks, in 2013. For further information see: <http://www.juliehunt.com.au/>

DALE NEWMAN

Dale Newman creates images full of mystery, high drama and subtle humour, so her collaboration with Julie Hunt on *KidGlovz* and *Shoestring, the Boy Who Walks on Air* has been a natural fit. She has a background in lithography and etching, which brings a love of rendering light and tone to her pencil illustrations. Her distinctive work has appeared on gallery walls, newspapers, magazines and educational books for children. She has also worked extensively as an artist in the youth health sector, and uses these skills in workshops she runs with Julie in schools around Australia.

Dale lives with her partner and son and their talkative dog on the NSW south coast. In her spare time she can be found rescuing dilapidated retro chairs from the jaws of the council crunchy truck. For further information see: daleneuman.art

IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR:

'While I was writing my graphic novel, KidGlovz, I began to wonder what would happen if the gloves in that story returned on Shoestring's hands. Stitched together with a thread that came from Kid's mother, a thread created out of love, the gloves had made young Kid into a master musician. I asked myself what they would make Shoestring into and how would it be if the thread in them was of a darker nature.'

'I wondered who had made the thread in this new incarnation of the gloves and that particular strand of the story came to me in a dream, or near enough to a dream – a sleepless night in a hotel. I saw a young woman walking on a mountain in the snow. She was dressed in rags and exhausted. When she reached a settlement she went from door to door begging for a crust of bread but nobody would help her. The town was built on the edge of a great pit, a crater that disappeared into the earth. It was a diamond mine and I imagined her peering over the side and seeing a vision of hell. That was enough to get me started.'

'There were many sources of inspiration. I remember being enthralled by a tightrope walker who crossed the Gorge in Launceston when I was about four. It was the most marvellous thing I'd ever seen. He appeared to be walking on air. I wrote some of the book in the Blue Mountains (in NSW) and that landscape provided a spectacular setting for my favourite part of the story, the town of Loom, which is the home of the magical weavers. The character of Metropolis was inspired by the black cockatoos where I live.'

'I have a postcard of a painting above my desk, a boy walking a tightrope against a starry night sky. One end of the rope is tied to the roof of a building, the rest is slung over his shoulder and he's feeding it out as he walks. That impossible image helped me write this story.'

Julie Hunt

IN THE WORDS OF THE ILLUSTRATOR:

'Shoestring, the Boy Who Walks on Air was not as labour-intensive as KidGlovz (a graphic novel), so I was able to focus on completing more 'polished' images this time around. There are plenty of aerial landscape views with great detail. I guess I like doing these kinds of drawings, and I certainly used to love poring over them when I was a child.'

'There are some circus/carnival themes in this book and I really enjoyed researching circus costumes and settings. My son, who is twelve, learns circus skills at the wonderful Circus Monoxide, and this also provided inspiration. I had so much fun developing some of the kooky new characters (and the dreadful baddies!). I find Julie's writing very playful and funny and I get swept up in trying to enhance the humour. It's not uncommon for us to laugh our way through long phone chats about current and future book projects. We also love running writing and illustrating workshops and for years have been doing joint school visits so we're always developing new activities.'

'I draw at a desk I built from recycled bookcases and wardrobe doors. My workday starts with strong coffee and is often interrupted by a talkative dog wanting snacks, or walks, or cuddles, or something. I work with simply pencil and paper and a little watercolour wash.'

Dale Newman

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES:

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and publishes regularly on children's literature, Australian fiction, and publishing history. She was inaugural director of and is a Life Member of the Queensland Writers Centre, and was co-founder of Jam Roll Press. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia (1946-2005)* (2006) co-edited with Craig Munro and *Hot Iron Corrugated Sky: 100 Years of Queensland Writing* (2002) co-edited with Stuart Glover. In 2011 she was recipient of the CBCA (Qld) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award, in 2012 of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature, and in 2014 the Queensland Writers' Centre's Johnno Award.