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Blue Dog by Louis de Bernières **based on a screenplay by Daniel Taplitz**

Publisher: Knopf Australia

RRP \$34.00 hardback

Eleven-year-old Mick is numb with shock at the sudden death of his father, and his mother's withdrawal from reality at the loss of her husband. When his mother is hospitalised, Mick is sent to his grandfather who lives on a remote Pilbara station in North Western Australia.

Although Mick's grandfather is a laconic man of few words, he is a loving guardian to his grandson. They become good companions, and Mick begins to love the spartan outback life. A few farmhands help to run the station and Mick learns a lot from the odd bunch of men who choose to live in the dry and dusty Pilbara.

Mick and his grandfather are well-developed characters. The older man misses his son and understands his grandson's sadness at his father's death, and anxiety about his mother's state of mind. Together they work through their understated grief. When Mick finds a half-drowned puppy his new companion fills a deep void in his life.

Daily chores, dramas, and activities on the Pilbara station are fascinating. The storyline gives an insight into a harsh world where providing for basic needs is of prime importance. They survive a cyclone, firestorm, plague of locusts, extreme heat and drought.

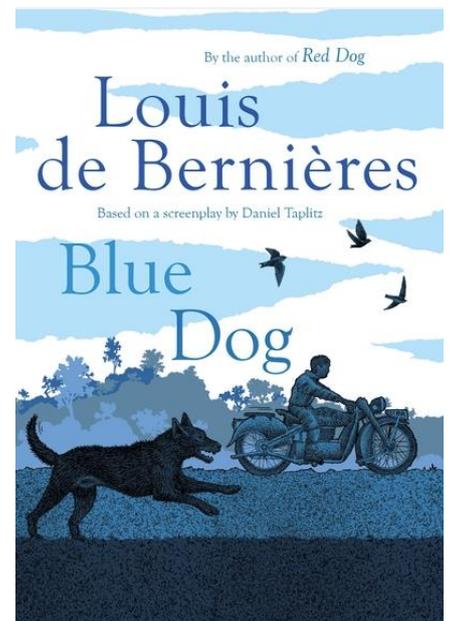
The interaction between the mostly male characters is well portrayed. When a young female tutor arrives, then tensions develop. The text and dialogue are peppered with Australian slang that occasionally sounds rather dated. A glossary explains some of the terminology along with brief information about outback wildlife.

This poignant coming-of-age tale will appeal to intermediate-age readers. The movie, *Red Dog: True Blue*, will be released in 2016.

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Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett



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