

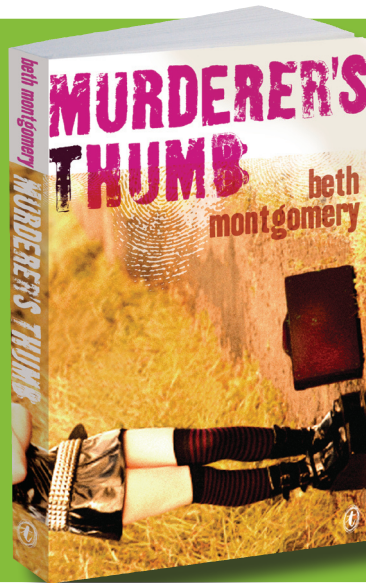
Murderer's Thumb

Beth Montgomery

ISBN 978-1-921351-48-8

RRP AUS\$ 19.95, NZ\$ 25.00

Fiction paperback



Praise for *Murderer's Thumb*

'I loved *Murderers Thumb*. It raced along like a runaway tractor, rang as true as a steel post and felt as natural as old boots. I love Beth's eye for country – I know the farm she's talking about! Well, ten or so that it could easily be. Finally, a murder mystery for young adults worth talking about.'

Scot Gardner

About Beth Montgomery

Beth Montgomery grew up on Melbourne's fringe. She worked as a teacher in the Pacific Islands and now lives in Wonthaggi, in south-eastern Victoria, with her husband and three children. Beth released the critically acclaimed YA novel *The Birthmark* in 2006, and it was shortlisted for the inaugural Gold INKY, the Centre for Youth Literature's teenager choice award, in 2007.

A reader's introduction to *Murderer's Thumb*.

Adam, a 14-year-old city boy moves reluctantly to the country with his mother to escape his obsessive and controlling father. Almost immediately he comes across the bones of a young girl who had disappeared with her friend, six years before. Bored, and following rather naively in the footsteps of his dead grandfather, a tough Lithuanian police inspector, Adam sets out to discover the identity of the murderer, while searching for the diary left by the dead girl's friend. This compelling novel is packed with cryptic clues and the reader is lured by Adam into an increasing distrust of almost every character in the book.

Besides being an intriguing murder mystery, this novel also has many other themes. It creates a vivid picture of the culture of a small drought-stricken country town and its environs and we are constantly reminded of the contrasting mind-sets of Adam and the locals. It examines the secrets we all carry around in our lives and the effect this can have on our view of our world. It

dives into the angst of dysfunctional families as well as the problems of intolerance, narrow-mindedness, religious mania, sexual assault, bullying, fear and suffering. All this is tempered, of course, by the local football club. It is also a story which involves itself with teenage sexuality and all its accompanying yearning and self-doubt.

Some of the characters are very difficult to like, but remain nevertheless believable. Although *Murderer's Thumb* is a chilling thriller it is more importantly a study of growing up and the emergence of self-awareness along with a deeper understanding of other people.

Questions for discussion.

1. The novel begins with Adam smelling 'death' in Falcon Ridge and he sees his first acquaintance as a 'loser' in an akubra. Why are Adam's first impressions of country life and people so hostile? How does the book convey the nuances of rural culture and the way that the people at Falcon Ridge think, act and survive in adversity?
2. The diary is a very elaborate tool for sustaining suspense. What other functions does it have in the book? Is it important to understand the diary writer and the murder victim?
3. Secrets are an important theme of the book. Matt says he must 'act dumb' in order to survive. His mother says, 'No one knows the truth. People always assume.' Do we all carry secrets with us? How can they be a burden?
4. How are some characters in the book moulded by their dysfunctional families? Which is the most 'normal' family in the book?
5. Adam loves his mother but he is often ruthlessly vicious towards her. How do you explain Adam's hostility towards his mother's pottery, which is described as 'off-centre'?

6. Adam denigrates his father as an obsessive control freak who spies on other people. How far would you say this describes Adam himself?
7. In what way can Adam's injured eye and the subsequent double vision which it causes be seen as a metaphor? What other symbols are there in the book?
8. In the end, what valuable lessons has Adam learnt about human nature and love, about friendship and families and rural culture? How effectively has he learned to see in himself some of the faults he is so quick to attribute to others?