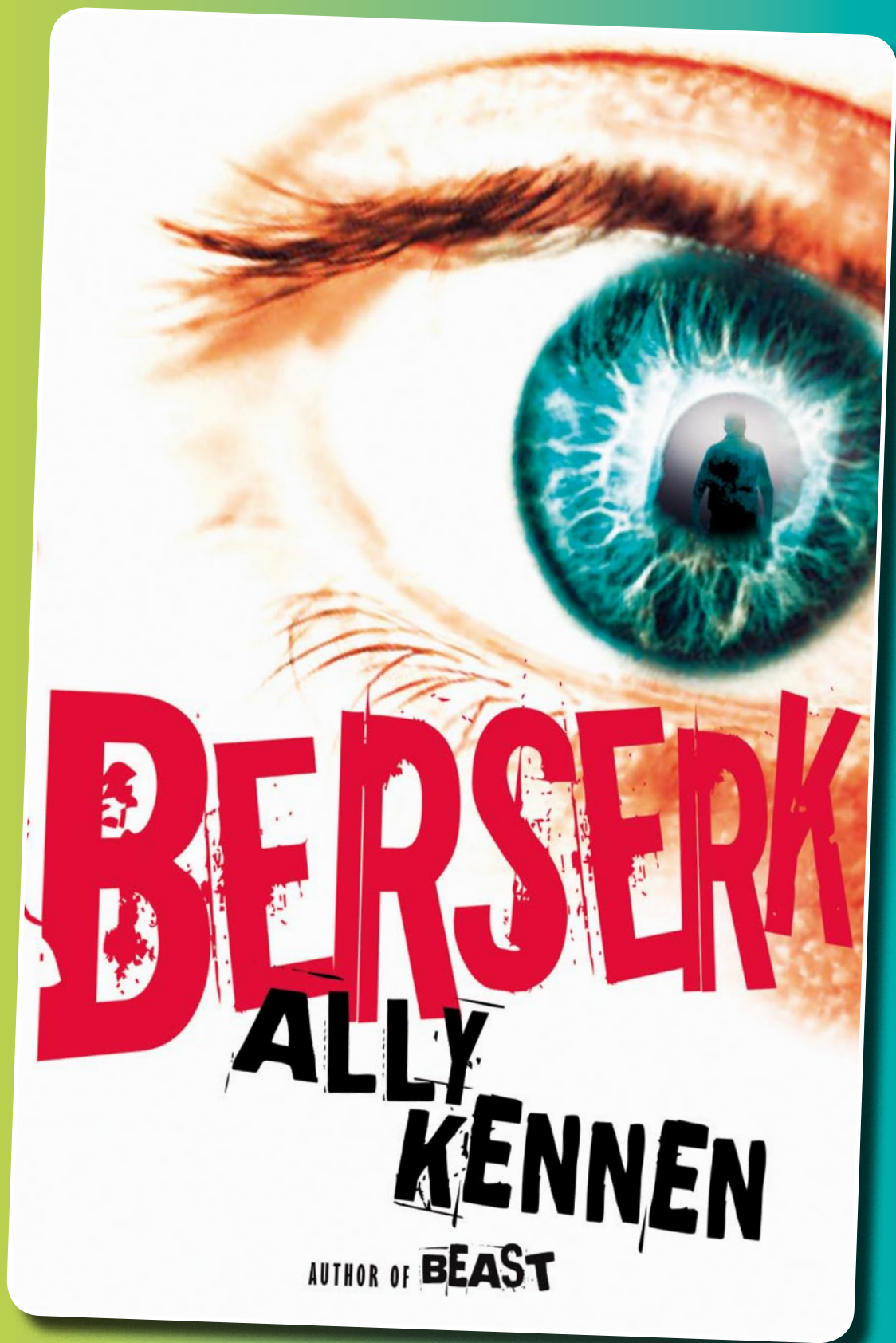


 SCHOLASTIC



BERSERK Ally Kennen

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Getting children reading. Giving books to schools.

BERSERK Reading Notes

The following activities address the QCA Assessment Focuses for Reading. These are used to formulate and assess the Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 NCTs. Many of the activities also address the Assessment Focuses for Writing, however, the AF code at the start of each task/activity specifically refers to reading.

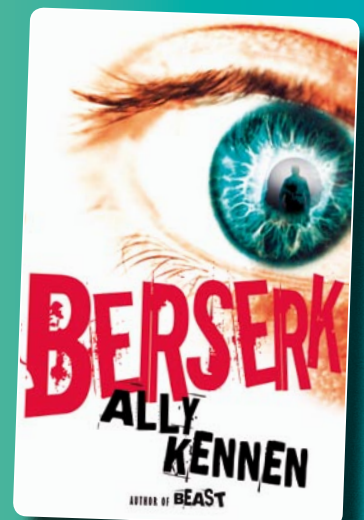
A reminder of the Assessment Focuses for Reading:

- **AF1** – use a range of strategies, including accurate decoding of text, to read for meaning.
- **AF2** – understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to text.
- **AF3** – deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts.
- **AF4** – identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and presentational features at text level.
- **AF5** – explain and comment on writers' uses of language, including grammatical and literary features at word and sentence level.
- **AF6** – identify and comment on writers' purposes and viewpoints and the overall effect of the text on the reader.
- **AF7** – relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary tradition.

Following, you will find a child/pupil friendly version of the Assessment Focuses.

**Assessment Focuses for Reading
– or – how your work will be marked!**

- **AF1** – You understand what the story is about and can explain the plot of the story in your writing or when you talk about the story.
- **AF2** – You can understand, describe, choose or find information, events or ideas from the story. In your writing or when you talk about the story you can use quotations and refer to the story.
- **AF3** – You can take events or ideas from the story and work out what they might mean or suggest how they will affect the characters and the storyline.
- **AF4** – You can identify and explain how the whole story and particular sections fit together. You can explain why the writer uses certain words, phrases or grammatical features to tell his story. You can explain why the pages are set out in a particular way.
- **AF5** – You can look at particular words, phrases and sentences and explain the writer's choices. You can explain and make suggestions about particular words, phrases and grammatical features.
- **AF6** – You can explain what the writer might want a reader to think about or learn from the story. You can describe how the story might affect you or other readers.
- **AF7** – You can compare this story to other similar stories. You understand how this story tells the reader about the world that we live in.



A reading guide based around QCA's Assessment Focuses for Reading.

Pre-reading activity:

- What does the word 'berserk' mean? Find and write down a dictionary definition of the word. Does this definition give you any clues about what might happen in the story?

Read part one – chapters 1 to 5

AF2 – You can understand, describe, choose or find information, events or ideas from the story. In your writing or when you talk about the story you can use quotations and refer to the story.

- Read chapter 1. The story begins with a dramatic game of "Knife". Chas describes Devil as, "sort of my best mate." How would you feel if your best mate cut off the top of your finger? Make a list of all the characters that we meet in chapter 1. Beside each character's name, write a sentence recording your first impressions of each of them.
- Read chapter 2. Look closely at Lenny Darling's letter to Chas. Which words, phrases or sentences stand out for you? Jot them down and explain why they interest you. How would you feel about receiving a letter from a prisoner on death row?

AF3 – You can take events or ideas from the story and work out what they might mean or suggest how they will affect the characters and the storyline.

- In chapter 4, Devil and Chas steal a forty-ton articulated lorry. Driving it on the motorway, Chas says, "I'm getting a real buzz out of driving this thing." Can you explain why? One of the most interesting aspects of the novel is the way that all the characters deal with the consequences of their actions. What do you think will be the consequence of this theft? Consider what we already know about the history of each character.
- In chapter 5, Chas writes his second letter to Lenny Darling. His letter is full of lies about his family life. What might this tell us about Chas

and about his thoughts and feelings about family life? What do you think will be the consequences of these lies?

Read part two – chapters 6 to 13

AF4 – You can identify and explain how the whole story and particular sections fit together. You can explain why the writer uses certain words, phrases or grammatical features to tell his story. You can explain why the pages are set out in a particular way.

- Copy out the following quotation: "I thought I would get another Youth Justice order ... Instead I'm banged up here at Bevanport, which has the reputation of being one of the nastiest young offenders' institutes in the country." Underline, circle and highlight key words and phrases here. Explain how they make you feel. Re-read chapters 6 and 7 – what are your impressions of Bevanport? Do you think his imprisonment will change Chas?
- Re-read chapters 8 and 9. The structure of the story is interesting here – Chas first wrote to Lenny when Lenny was in prison, now the roles are reversed. Why do you think that Lenny has come to Bexton? How do you think Chas will cope having Devil as a cell mate?

AF5 – You can look at particular words, phrases and sentences and explain the writer's choices. You can explain and make suggestions about particular words, phrases and grammatical features.

- Chas is feeling particularly worried after Gran's visit in chapter 10, added to this 'the real' Devil returns to life in chapter 11. From the beginning of chapter 11 there is a terrible sense that Devil will create havoc. How does the writer build up this sense of tension? Make a timeline for this chapter and plot on it key words and phrases which build tension. For example, "He gives me a friendly thump in the stomach and I double over on the mattress" (page 119), "He kicks the table over ... aims a few kicks at the door..." (page 119), "He comes very close and I smell his breath..." (page 120) etc.

- The following quotations come from chapter 12. Copy them out and, for each one, underline, highlight or circle key words and phrases. Explain what you find interesting about the writer's choice of language here. Find two quotations of your own from chapter 13 and do the same.

- *"It's sad to say it, but life is definitely easier when Devil is down. It's weird, he's been my mate for years, since we were little kids, but I don't know what to say to him."*
- *"I'm Chas Parsons. Right now I hate this kid. But I'm not going to sink to his level."*

Read part 3 – chapters 14 to the end of the story

AF6 – You can explain what the writer might want a reader to think about or learn from the story. You can describe how the story might affect you or other readers.

- In chapters 14 and 15 Chas tries to reclaim his finger. These chapters are very dramatic but also very funny. Explain how Ally Kennen achieves this balance. Find 3 dramatic moments from these chapters and then balance them with 3 funny moments. In chapter 16 (page 180) Lexi says to Chas, *"I've got a conscience, unlike you. I don't want to be a bloody thief."* Consider Lexi's 'crime'. Do you think that Chas is right when he says, *"... it's nothing."*?
- Re-read chapters 19 to 23. The mystery behind Lenny Darling begins to unravel when Lexi reveals Lenny's name under the bridge and decodes the messages in his letters. Why do you think the writer chose to use Lexi to work out the mystery rather than Chas? Before you read the concluding chapters make a list of all the ways that Lenny Darling might be connected to J. Juby and Nappy Parsons. Once you have finished the novel go back to your list and see how close you were to the truth.

AF7 – You can compare this story to other similar stories. You understand how this story tells the reader about the world that we live in.

- In chapter 26 we discover the real reason for Lenny's return to Bexton. Up until this point he has been a creepy, unsympathetic character. How have your feelings towards him changed now that you know about his past?
- The novel appears to end on a happy note, however, the author uses a clever device to make us think that there might be more trouble to come. Have you worked it out yet? Does Chas work it out?
- How would you classify *Berserk*? Compare the story to others that you have read, does it fit into one genre or several? You might have read Ally Kennen's first novel, *Beast* – how does *Berserk* compare to it?

And finally ...

AF1 – You understand what the story is about and can explain the plot of the story in your writing or when you talk about the story.

- Look back at the list you made after reading chapter 1, recording your first impressions of each character. How accurate were you? How have your thoughts and feelings changed?
- Lenny says to Chas, *"Each generation carries on the evil."* Do you think that Chas, Devil and Lexi will be able to learn from their parents' mistakes?
- Bullying has terrible consequences in the novel – but it is not only Lenny who is bullied. Think back over the whole story – what other evidence is there of characters being bullied or bullying others?

