Out of Copley Street: A Working-Class Boyhood

By Geoff Goodfellow

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RRP: $24.95   **Pages:** 174
**Reviewer:** Daniel Howard

THE GENESIS for this childhood memoir *Out of Copley Street: A Working-Class Boyhood* was incepted by American author Ken Kesey some three decades prior to its publication. In 1986 Kesey, a big fan of Goodfellow's work but cognisant of the difficulty of making a living as a poet, urged him to, "stop writing poetry and write a goddamned novel." (p1). Goodfellow self-deprecatingly suggests he must be a 'slow learner' but 'just bloody stubborn' would be a far more apt descriptor.

Copley Street's opener, 'Bluey Gets a Start' sees five-year-old Geoff venture out of the family home to assist the local milkman on his neighbourhood delivery run. Eleven chapters and twelve years later, Geoff is thumbing a ride 'Out of Copley Street' to Mount Gambier for a job on an oilrig. On the pages between, young Bluey learns lessons from his father, fixes up a motorbike, and begins work as a butcher's apprentice. Amongst it all, Goodfellow's (both figurative and literal) voice is there, in every line of every page – imbued into the ink.

In a literary career spanning thirty-plus years, this is Goodfellow's first full-scale foray outside of poetry. One could easily reach the determination that *Out of Copley Street* marks a significant departure for the working-class writer; however, all the hallmarks of Goodfellow's poetry have more-than survived the transition to prose. His fondness for playing with language is as present as ever with clever puns, rhyming slang and similes aplenty. There's also attention to detail, dry wit and humorous insight, understatement, and - yes - his trademark brutal honesty. An economical writer, Goodfellow efficiently orients the reader at the start of each story and ends each anecdote with a punchy closing line. Above all, there are the stories of people, postcodes and professions that aren't always given their fair share of shelf space in Australia's library.

Out of Copley Street boasts cover quotes from Australian literary luminaries Helen Garner and Tim Winton - as well as American literary icon Ken Kesey. Goodfellow's admirers include, among others, the likes of H.G. Nelson, Martin Flanagan, Hunters & Collectors' frontman Mark Seymour and The Hon. Chris Kourakis, Chief Justice of S.A. - all judicious users and lovers of language. A recommendation from this reviewer feels redundant.

Three decades ago, Kesey told his friend to, "write about little things and to invest them with interest." (p2). In his own rebellious way, Geoff Goodfellow has very obediently done just that. 💎
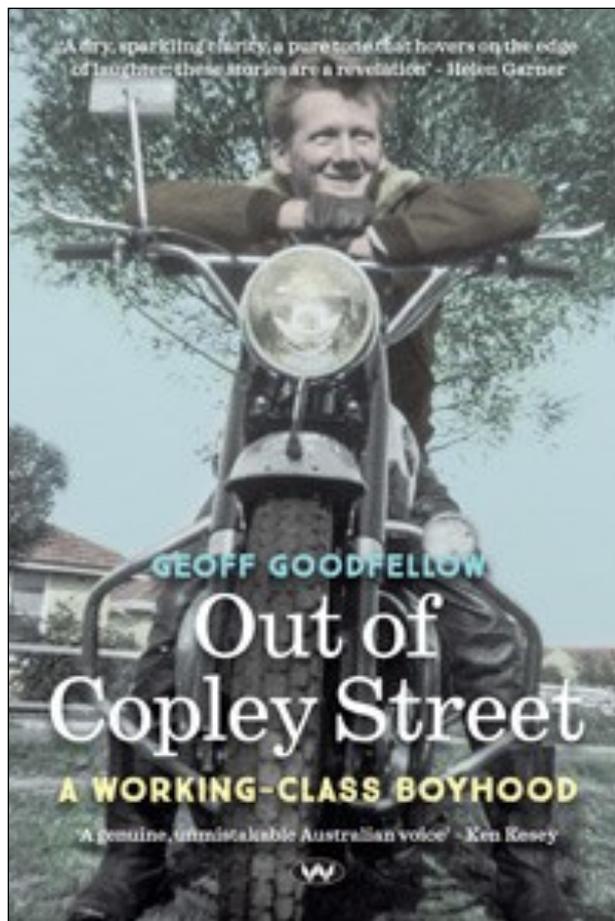
~ YEAR NINE TEACHING IDEAS ~

"A genuine, unmistakable Australian voice"
The AC:E requires students: identify specific vocabulary choices (ACELA1561); evaluate an individual author's literary style (ACELT1636) and understand how they innovate with language (ACELA1553); and reflect on notions of literary value (ACELT1634). Using the Gradual Release of Responsibility, observe these elements in four stories – first 'lecture style', then with student input, then in small groups and finally as individuals. Have students write-up their analysis.

"Your stories too, should be written and recorded"
Discuss the types of lives Goodfellow details. Tell students their lives are also worthy of being recorded. To show this is achievable, have students summarise a chapter's events in five dot-points or fewer. Challenge them to, "write about little things and to invest them with interest." (p2). This involves appropriation of other texts (ACELT1773) and experimenting with the playfulness of language (ACELT1638).

~ YEAR TEN TEACHING IDEA ~

"As busy as a tin full of worms"
Have students search for and list the colloquialisms (words, phrases, sayings…) Goodfellow uses to accurately represent people, places and periods. Ask students to write a glossary, providing translations or modern-day versions for a Generation Z audience. This task requires learners to understand that that language evolves (ACELA1563).