

## Discussion points

- 1 One hundred years ago, while Banjo Paterson was writing poems that painted a romantic picture of life in the Australian bush, Henry Lawson was doing the opposite. He felt that bush life for most people was a hard, cruel, lonely, monotonous and eventually hopeless struggle against the odds. Paterson's view was optimistic and bright and Lawson's was pessimistic and gloomy. What evidence of this pessimism can you find in 'The Drover's Wife'? (In answering this question, notice the particular words Lawson uses to describe not only the children and their mother but also the landscape, trees and, at the end, even the 'daylight'.)
- 2 What do you think life in the Australian bush is like today? Is it still harsh? How has it changed – for better or worse – in the last one hundred years?
- 3 'They cannot afford to lose him' (the dog). What does this mean?
- 4 You may have noticed in the story that the kitchen is a separate building, away from the house itself. In the last century this was common practice in Australia, in towns as well as the bush. Why do you think this was done?
- 5 Lawson tells us that the drover was an 'ex-squatter'. From what you can find out about squatters, what does this simple fact tell us about his present situation?
- 6 'She takes as much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to "do the block" in the city.' One hundred years ago it was very fashionable to get dressed up and 'do the block at four o'clock' – to promenade up and down George Street, Sydney or Collins Street, Melbourne, the busiest streets, to see and be seen. Ethel Turner, in her book *Seven Little Australians*, called the block 'that happy hunting-ground of Sydney youth and fashion' and a contemporary newspaper described these streets 'ablaze with crowds of colonial fashionables and celebrities'.  
(a) Since 'the block' is far removed from the story's setting, why do you think Lawson introduces it into his story?

- (b) What does her Sunday afternoon behaviour tell us about the character of the drover's wife?

7 What do you think the *climax* of the story is?

8 Even though Henry Lawson is regarded as one of Australia's greatest writers, some people would say that some of the sentences in his story (for example, 'No undergrowth.') are not proper sentences at all. What is a 'proper sentence'? Why do you think Lawson uses verbless sentences in his story?

## Writing idea

Imagine you are Tommy and tell the story from his point of view.

## Further reading

For more short stories by Henry Lawson, see 'The Loaded Dog' in *Short Story Starters*, and 'The Ghostly Door' in *Short Story Encore* (both Macmillan). Try to find poems by A. B. Paterson (for example, 'Clancy of the Overflow' and 'The Man from Snowy River') in your library.