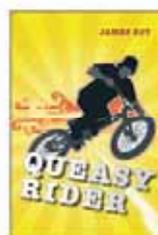


Lightning Strikes Series

Why incorporate *Lightning Strikes* in your reading program?

- Short, fast-moving, plot-driven stories that will spark enthusiasm for books and reading
- Topics and themes full of humour that will appeal to the interests of today's children aged 9-14
- Short chapters – perfect for guided reading sessions
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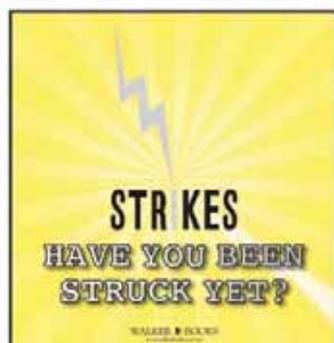


Australian and New Zealand Authors

The *Lightning Strikes* series are written by a variety of authors including highly acclaimed, bestselling authors from Australia and New Zealand.

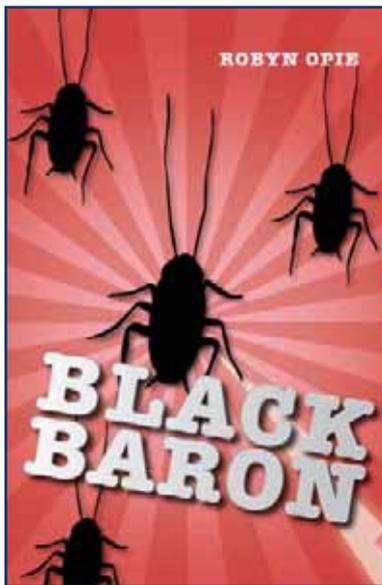
Stylistic Features

- Short chapters
- Non-threatening, easy-to-read type with plenty of white space
- Text interspersed with graphics of various informal text types e.g. advertisements, text messages, notes, letters and instructions
- Contemporary look matched with contemporary stories



The Future with *Lightning Strikes*

Build up a great collection of authors, stories and genres over time with this fantastic new series. With ten new stories being released in 2008 and more to follow in 2009, these are sure to encourage and develop further reading with your students. Start your collection now!



Lightning Strikes: Black Baron By Robyn Opie

ISBN: 9781921150586

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

Themes:

Animals and Pets
Care and Compassion
Humour
Understanding and Tolerance
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Black Baron, Jake's champion racing cockroach hasn't lost a race and Jake is on top of the world. But then his mum decides to clean up his bedroom and discovers Black Baron in a shoebox under Jake's bed. Mum is aghast — how could Jake keep such a filthy pest? But Black Baron escapes and Jake's Mum calls the pest exterminator and a humorous slapstick tale ensues.

Author Focus

Robyn Opie is the author of more than 70 published children's books. She has been writing for children for 8 years and most of her books are sold around the world and many have been translated into foreign languages.

Robyn lives in Adelaide, South Australia, with her partner (also a writer), two dogs and thousands of children's books. She works full time writing for children.

Robyn Opie's inspiration for writing *Black Baron*:

"I wanted to write a humorous story for boys. I thought about the things boys are interested in and eventually settled on bugs, then cockroaches. At the time, I hated cockroaches and killed them on sight. Two words that sprang to mind when thinking about them were dirty and disease. It was obvious to me that the cockroach in my story would die, as all good cockroaches should.

Then I began writing, developing my characters. Black Baron is a racing legend. He's won 17 races in a row. He lives in a shoebox under Jake's bed. He likes potato crisps, a treat Jake gives him after winning a race. He also likes hiding in pockets.

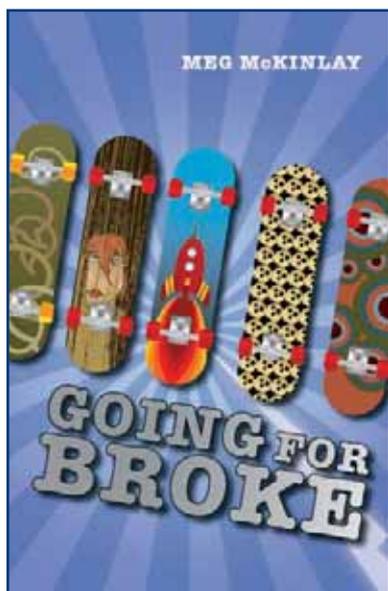
I was about half way through the story when I realised I'd become seriously attached to Black Baron. I liked him a lot. I'd call him 'cute' in a way people talk about their dogs and cats. I no longer wanted Black Baron to die. Long live the champ! So I had to rethink my story. Should I save Black Baron from certain death? How could I do it? Would Black Baron live to see another race? Since then I haven't been able to kill a cockroach — it might be Black Baron."

Activity Ideas

- What is a 'baron'? Research the meaning of this word on the internet or in the library. Why is it strange that a cockroach would be called a 'baron'?
- Look at the 'birth certificate' on page 19. Create your own birth certificate, or if you have a pet create one for them. You can make things up or use facts.
- On page 46 Jake's mother describes cockroaches as "Ugly. Creepy. Filthy. Useless. Bothersome." Think about cockroaches from Jake's perspective. How would he describe them? What other words could Jake's mother use to describe cockroaches? Create a word bank.
- Write a descriptive paragraph about cockroaches from Jake's point of view and then from his mother's point of view.
- Jake and his friends like to race cockroaches. What other animals can you think of that are raced? E.g. horses, crabs, dogs, camels. Divide the class into groups. Each group researches one animal and its racing history. Discuss issues such as — is it fair that animals are raced?
- Research cockroaches on the internet. Create a fact file listing ten interesting facts about cockroaches e.g. cockroaches can live one month without food.
- Cockroaches are filthy, disgusting pests and they should all be exterminated. Discuss or debate.
- Do you think Jake's parents position on cockroaches is reasonable? Discuss.
- Research Robyn Opie and some of the other books she has written at:

www.robynopie.com

Create a poster about Robyn Opie and her books.



Lightning Strikes: Going for Broke

By Meg McKinlay

ISBN: 9781921150616

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

Themes:

Friendship
Teamwork
Courage
Danger/Safety
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Nathan is tired of watching other kids receive awards at assembly so he hatches a plan to do something 'amazingly amazing' by breaking a record in the Amazing World Records book. With little planning but lots of daring, Nathan and his mates, Weasel and Ronnie, make numerous attempts at a variety of World Record feats. Each attempt is unsuccessful and quite frequently painful. Just as the boys are about to admit defeat, they discover that they indeed have broken a record – the most world record attempts in 48 hours!

Author Focus

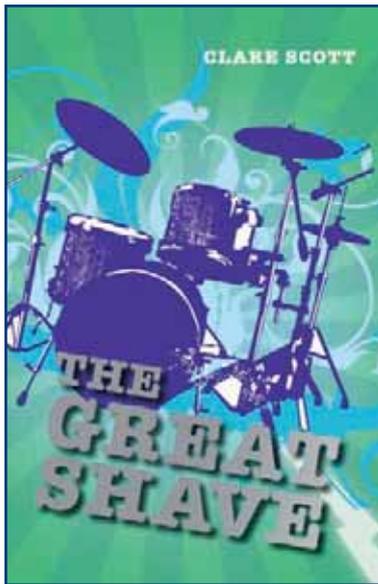
Meg McKinlay grew up in Bendigo, Victoria. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school, and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. Along the way, she has worked in a variety of jobs including, swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. These days she lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese, and Creative Writing. Her first children's novel, *Annabel, again*, was published in 2007 by Walker Books.

Meg McKinlay's inspiration for writing *Going for Broke*:

"Growing up, I had a brother on each side of me; one older, one younger, and both crazy-daring in their own way. I spent a lot of time 'hooning around' the bush on my bike, trying to do jumps and tricks with them, and a lot of time eating dirt as a result. My older brother, in particular, was always interested in becoming famous for something, and I remember him poring over the *Guinness Book of Records*, trying to think of ways he could make it in there. He had grand plans to roll to Melbourne at one point, and used to practice on the road in front of our house, but my father stopped him before he was able to get very far. I still love watching kids crowd around *Guinness World Records* in the school library and listening to their grand plans for world domination. I was thinking about this during a school assembly one morning as I watched kids going up to receive merit awards for various worthy but generally unspectacular activities. I found myself wondering what my brothers would have made of all this. I pulled out my little notebook to start jotting down ideas and soon the story was on its way."

Activity Ideas

- What does the expression "going for broke" mean? How does this relate to the story? Why do you think the author chose this title? What other titles would be appropriate?
- Make a list of all the records mentioned in *Going for Broke*. Read through your list. Would you attempt any of these records yourself? Why or why not?
- Have a look at the *Guinness World Records* book and see if you can find any of the *Going for Broke* records in there. Are they all there? Which ones are missing? Of those which are there, are the details the same? What do you think the reasons are for any differences?
- In chapter 3, the kids build a bike ramp. Read the description of how they make it and view the diagram. What are the main steps? Write a procedure on how Nathan and his mates made the ramp.
- Who are the main characters in *Going for Broke*? Make a list of the characters and then choose one word that best describes each character.
- Why do you think that Nathan and his mates were unsuccessful in their world record attempts? What could they have done to improve their chances?
- The boys' record-breaking adventures make it into the local newspaper. The headline states: *Amazing Boys take on the World*. View other headlines and a variety of real newspaper reports. What makes a good newspaper report? Based on your knowledge of the story, write a newspaper report that would match the headline on page 91.
- What is the official process for attempting a *Guinness World Record*? Would Nathan really have been awarded a world record for doing what he did in *Going for Broke*? Does knowing this affect the way you read the story?



STR KES

Lightning Strikes: The Great Shave By Clare Scott

ISBN: 9781921150609

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

Themes:

Music
School Environment
Humour
Competitions and Prizes
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Stix reckons he's the Screaming Greenie Meanies' biggest fan, so when the band holds a concert in his town, Stix and his mates just have to go. And to get into the spirit of the event, they decide to dye their hair green. Stix's mates use green hair mousse — but there's not enough for Stix. In desperation he uses green food colouring, and the consequences are devastating. But Stix is able to use his misfortune to his advantage and becomes a legend instead of a joke!

Author Focus

Clare Scott was born in South Auckland and has tried lots of things in her life, such as manufacturing, nursing, selling, administrating, wife-ing, mothering, nana-ing, teaching and writing. All of these things involve using lots of words, but writing is the best! Clare has had many readers published, with some translated into other languages. She has also had poems, articles, and adult short stories published in books, newspapers and magazines. This is her first novel.

Clare Scott's inspiration for writing *The Great Shave*:

"I have a vague disturbing hair-disaster memory from when I was little. My apprentice hairdresser sister convinced my Dad that she could dye his (grey-white) hair brown. But something went wrong, his hair went green, and the air went blue! Years later, my daughter's friend decided to do exactly the same as Stix (in my story) when she attended a concert. She had glorious long blonde hair which went – and stayed – bright green after she'd doused it with food colouring. Unluckily for her, school was not forgiving. Luckily for her, her mother was both forgiving and sympathetic, and paid (HEAP\$!) to get it fixed. I got to thinking, how would teens deal with the (literal) fallout of something like that? Would they become losers or legends?"

Activity Ideas

- What is your favourite band/song? Write a letter to the band/singer telling them why you like their music.
- Read chapter 4. Explore the phrase 'close shave' on page 43. What does this mean? How is this phrase used in relation to the title of the book?
- Look at the text messages on page 47. Re-write these text messages using correct spelling and punctuation. Discuss why words are abbreviated when being texted. When is it important to use formal language?
- Stix has to write, in 20 words or less, why he should win the prize to go to see the Screaming Greenie Meanies in USA. Have a look at some of the examples on pages 53-55. Which ones are effective and why? Write your own in small groups.
- In class, conduct a survey on popular bands. Graph your results.
- Stix becomes a legend. People are often envious of others who are famous. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being famous or called a legend?
- Stix and his mates dye their hair green to show support for the band. Have you ever done anything like this? What could they have done that would have had less implications?
- The school has an 'extreme hair policy'. In groups devise what the five main rules of this policy could be. Do you think it is right for a school to have such a policy? Does it restrict personal freedom? Discuss.



STRIKES

Lightning Strikes: Jinxed By Jill McDougall

ISBN: 9781921150593

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 112

Themes:

Friendship
Problem solving
Identity
Self-esteem
Ideas and Creativity

Synopsis

Jinx might be the clown of the family, but accidentally smashing her next-door neighbour's pet python's tank is no laughing matter. Jinx has to come up with a plan for some fast cash to pay for a new tank – otherwise she will end up having to work at her dad's bakery, "The Little Miss Muffin" and wear a cinnamon scroll shaped hat. And that is something Jinx doesn't even want to consider. Jinx devises a number of money-making schemes, but they all end in disaster – adding to Jinx's debts and almost undermining her Dad's relationship with his new girlfriend. Just when Jinx is feeling that she is truly living up to her name, a new opportunity arises that gives Jinx the chance to use her talent for comedy and pay back her debts at the same time.

Author Focus

Jill McDougall started writing at school by selling short pieces for magazines so she could buy eclairs from the tuckshop. Later, while working in a remote Indigenous community, she began writing poems for her class. They become her first book *Anna the Goanna and Other Poems*. Jill has since published a vast array of work for children - mostly for use in schools. She particularly enjoys writing humour and the neighbours have become accustomed to hearing an array of snorts and guffaws at odd hours. Jill lives in a cottage by the sea with her partner, three hens, two hyperactive dogs and a rather large spider called Ruth.

Jill McDougall's inspiration for writing *Jinxed*:

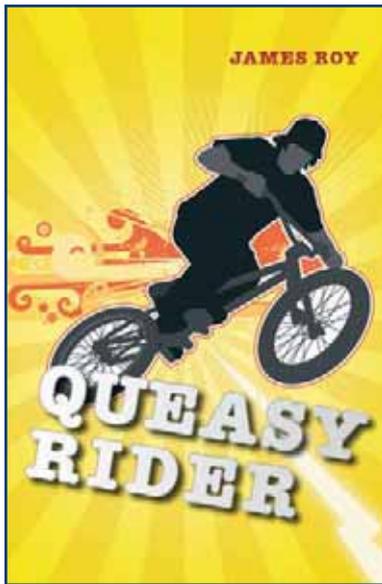
"I was the kid who spilled ink on my sister's science project and then walked it through the carpet. I was the kid who spent days teeing up good homes for my kittens, only to have them escape from the back of my bike after a long hot ride. I was the teenager who offered to help plough the paddock, only to mow down a section of fence line. I was the teenager who drove the car into a dam on my first solo trip. I was the teacher whose classroom pets ate their babies and who donated her eyebrows to Science. I AM Jinx!!"

Activity Ideas

- Research the word Jinx using the internet and the definition in the front of the book.
What does it mean?
Where did this word originate?
- Look at the "Treasure List" on page 9.
Think about things that you own, or have in your room that you might consider treasures e.g. your favourite CD, or a toy that you love. Create your own "treasure list". Explain why these items are treasures to you.
- Explore the phrase:
"One person's junk = someone else's treasure".
Discuss garage sales, second-hand bookstores, trash and treasure markets in relation to this.
- Create your own garage sale poster. What would you draw on this to attract attention? Think about what other elements need to be on the poster.
- Jinx comes up with several money making schemes. What are these? List them.
In groups think of other money making ideas that you could do e.g. jobs around the house, making objects etc.
- One of the characters in *Jinxed!* is afraid of mice. What are phobias? Research different types of phobias.
- Compile all of the jokes that appear in the book. Create your own joke book and illustrate it.
- In class create a survey about which jokes are funnier than others. Graph your results.
- Research Jill McDougall on the internet.

www.jillmcdougall.com.au

What other books has she written? Create a poster or powerpoint presentation on this author.



Lightning Strikes: Queasy Rider By James Roy

ISBN: 9781921150579

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

Themes:

Friendship
Understanding and Inclusion
Sport and Activity
Creativity and Innovation
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Thicky and Nobby find an old discarded bike near the railway tracks. Nobby thinks the bike is rubbish but Thicky can see 'potential'. It is not until they meet up with Shirley that the true potential of the bike – and its possibility for making money – is revealed. The kids set up a daring challenge: each rider puts 20 cents in a jar, and the person brave enough to ride the bike (now called 'Queasy Rider') to the bottom of the hill wins the loot. Conditions apply, of course – and those conditions are that the kids are certain no-one will make it more than half way, thus allowing them to pocket all the money. On the day of the challenge, several local kids make the attempt and fail miserably. But just when they think the cat is in the bag, a tiny boy called Trent comes along who hustles his way to victory. It turns out that he comes from a rodeo family and he rides the bike to the bottom of the hill as though it were a bucking bronco. Thicky, Nobby and Shirley hand over the money but it's not long before they set their sights on the next money-making scheme ...

Author Focus

James Roy lives in the Blue Mountains with his family and writes both fiction and non-fiction for children and young adults. Born in country NSW, James spent his childhood growing up in the islands of the South Pacific with his missionary parents. He attributes much of his early interest in books to the absence of TV, a wonderful library full of adventure books, and a wild, adventurous playground. James Roy is a highly commended Australian author and has been shortlisted for several awards including receiving Honour Book for *Billy Mack's War* and *Captain Mack* in the Children's Book Council of the Year Awards.

James Roy's inspiration for writing *Queasy Rider*:

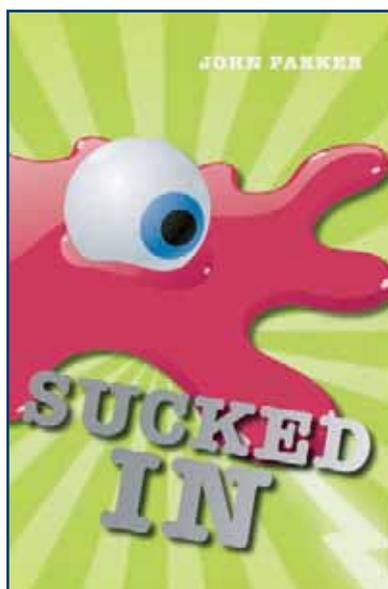
"This is a story based on events from my own childhood in Fiji. We found an old, rusty bike, made it rideable (just) and charged the local kids a few cents to ride it to the bottom of the hill. Whoever could make it to the bottom could keep the pot. No one ever succeeded."

Activity Ideas

- In the first chapter of *Queasy Rider*, when Thicky and Nobby find the old bike, they brainstorm the different uses it could have. Write down these different ideas. Can you think of any others?
- The boys discover that the bike is called 'Easy Rider' and rename it 'Queasy Rider'. Why do you think they call it 'Queasy Rider'? What other names do you think could be appropriate for the bike? Design your own label for the bike with the new name that you have chosen.
- Look at the poster on page 44. Create your own poster selling rides on 'Queasy Rider' (or use the alternative bike name you have chosen). Compare this with the new 'Queasy Rider' poster on page 62.
- Thicky, Nobby and Shirley all think that Trent can't ride the bike down the hill because he is too little, but he proves them wrong. Read the Aesop's fable *The Lion and the Mouse*: what do these stories say about judging a person by their size?
- *Queasy Rider* ends with Shirley telling Nobby about a hang glider that is for sale. Write a story about Shirley, Nobby, Thicky and what they would do with a hang glider.
- Look at the blurb on the back of the book. Discuss the purpose of a blurb and why it is important for a book. Write your own blurb for *Queasy Rider*.
- "Riding Queasy Rider down the hill was dangerous", do you agree? What safety precautions could have been taken? Would you ride 'Queasy Rider'?
- Find out more on James Roy at:

www.jamesroy.com.au

Research this author and the other books that he has written. Using the information on his website create a character profile about him.



Lightning Strikes: Sucked In By John Parker

ISBN: 9781921150623

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

Themes:

Friendship
Coping with bullying/teasing
Identity
Self-esteem
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Zainey is extremely small for his age and the brunt of many a joke from his mates. In desperation, he sells his bike and responds to a strange ad in the back of a comic book to buy an eye, which he hopes will make him taller – and which everyone else thinks is a total scam. His mate, Dan, thinks Zainey has lost it and can't believe he would waste his money on junk. But he is also more than a little curious as to how an eye could possibly make you taller. They both soon discover that the eye is more than anyone expected – this eye is very much alive and it is after blood. When the eye becomes attached to Zainey – with a view to becoming a permanent fixture – it looks as though he will have to lose his finger! But Caro, a girl from school, comes to his aid and they get rid of it for good... or do they?

Author Focus

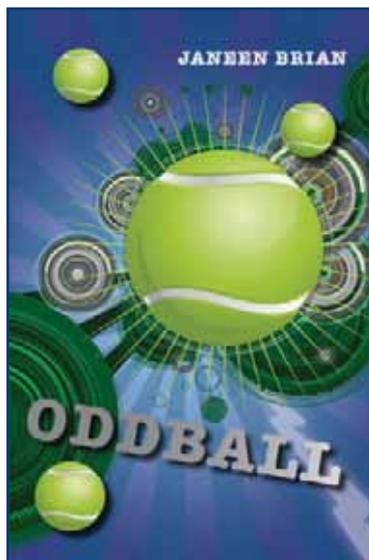
John Parker is a children's writer who also writes for adults as a journalist and radio scriptwriter. Born in Christchurch, he graduated from the University of Auckland in 1964 with an MA in history before leaving New Zealand to travel around England and Europe as a professional opera singer. John has published over 130 fiction and non-fiction books for children, including picture books, junior readers, chapter books, non-fiction books and novels for early teens. Around 70 of his poems, stories, articles and plays have appeared in the *School Journal* and other publications. *Radio New Zealand* and *BBC School Radio* have broadcast a number of his children's stories and radio plays.

John Parker's inspiration for writing *Sucked In*:

"I've always been fascinated by the way the periscope allows someone in a submarine, underwater, to see things above the surface. I thought how useful that would be in certain situations – as in, trying to see over a crowd, or looking into a second-story window or over the top of a bush. And that made me think about having a kind of periscope in the arm – an eye in the sky. That's how *Sucked In* got started."

Activity Ideas

- Look at the cover and title: what do you think the book is about? After reading the book, discuss how the title *Sucked In* relates to the story. Was the story what you expected from the title?
- Zainey and Dan lose the eye for a while. Create a "lost eye" poster.
- Zainey is willing to sell his bike for the eye. What would you consider your most precious possession? Think of a situation (an occasion, a person, a skill, an attribute etc.) you'd gladly sell or give your precious possession away for. In small groups share your situations.
- Read the ads on pages 14–16. View other print media ads. What are the common features? What makes an ad effective? What other types of things could be advertised at the back of a comic such as "Perils on Pluto"? Write an ad for the back of a "Perils on Pluto" comic.
- Who are the main characters? Who are the secondary characters? Scan the text and try to find as much information as possible about each character. Create character profiles for Dan, Zainey, Grimmo and Caro. Which character do you like the best? Why?
- Main ideas: there are ten chapters in this story. Identify the main idea for each chapter. Do any chapters have more than one main idea?
- Imagine Zainey is successful in his quest to have an eye at the end of his finger. What would it be like? What could Zainey do with it? Where could an eye on a finger be advantageous? Where could it be problematic? How could an eye change a life? Pretend you are Zainey. Write an email to Dan, written by Zainey, recounting his first day with an eye on his finger. Then write Dan's reply.



Lightning Strikes: Oddball

By Janeen Brian

ISBN: 9781921150562

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

June 2008

Themes:

Friendship
Bullying
Grief
School Environment
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

In a moment of temporary insanity, Sol Tranter challenges school bully, Aggo, to a game of handball – and what's worse he blurts out that he is going to beat Aggo using hypnotism. He tries everything he can think of to get out of it, but with no plan forthcoming, he hopes for a miracle. The miracle arrives when his elderly next-door neighbour reveals that he was once a hypnotist. Sol thinks he is saved – he will get Mr Barassi to hypnotise him! But Mr Barassi is unable to help, and Sol has to face Aggo on the court armed with only his wit. In standing up for himself, Sol finds that his courage is a much more powerful weapon than hypnotism.

Author Focus

Janeen Brian spent her childhood in Brighton, South Australia. At age 16 she trained as a primary teacher at Wattle Park Teachers' College and at 18 stood in front of her first class of Year 5 Students. Her teaching career saw her work in Junior Primary, Primary, Drama and as a Teacher-Librarian. While raising a family of two daughters, she also began a 4-year career with a professional children's theatre company, both acting and writing. She has also been involved in over 100 television and radio commercials as well as dozens of voiceovers for radio and video. She began dabbling in writing in her thirties but it was several years before she began to be published. Since then she has written over 60 books. Janeen has won several awards and many of her books have been translated and published overseas. She also writes for national and overseas children's magazines and has over 100 poems, plays, stories or articles published.

Janeen Brian's inspiration for writing *Oddball*:

"When I was part-time teaching and part-time writing, I wrote a small comment in my 'writers' notebook' about boys playing handball on the playground. I overheard one boy telling someone they'd never let so-and-so play because he always won. It became simply part of my collection of thoughts and notes until a few years ago I looked at it again and wondered what if the tables were turned. What would it be like for a boy who never got a turn because there was always that 'king' of handball who beat everyone? How would the weaker player feel? I wanted that boy to win, but I wanted him to win/improve because he inadvertently practised more or harder... The idea of using hypnotism came as a flash – that magic, that inspiration that sometimes occurs in writing – which meant the protagonist had something very difficult to overcome."

Activity Ideas

- Research hypnotism. Where did it originate? What techniques are used to hypnotise? How can hypnotism be useful?
- The story starts with Sol having a bad day. What is causing his bad day? How do these things impact on Sol throughout the story? Why do you think Sol challenged Aggo to a game of handball?
- Hypnotism ends in the suffix 'ism'. What other words can you think of that end this way? Further research heroism, optimism and Cubism.
- Discuss in class the different ball games that you play at school and make a list of them. Take a survey/vote in class and create a data chart of the games from favourite to least favourite.
- Read the 'Good things list' on page 42. Make a list of the good things that you you have done lately. Then make a list of what you would like to do. Do you think these are achievable? Why/Why not?
- Read the chant on page 51. Create a chant for your own name.
- Read page 53. Sol describes his mother's eyes as 'light blue like a bleached lake'. This is a simile. Think of characteristics of your friends, pets, home and describe them using similes.
- Look at the ad on page 56. Create your own ad based on a local business. You could use the school, post office, newsagency, dentist etc.
- On page 70 Sol reads an article that describes something a hypnotist cannot do. Choose a job e.g. firefighter, accountant, surgeon and create a list of the things that these people can do.
- Read the instructions for hypnotising on page 71. Write your own brief instructions for something you do everyday. It could be getting ready for school, what you do when you get home etc.
- Read chapter 9. In groups discuss magic vs skill. Do you think it is important to be skilful at something?



Lightning Strikes: Heart of Magic

By Penny Matthews

ISBN: 9781921150685

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

June 2008

Themes:

Friendship
Bullying/Teasing
Self-Esteem
Magic/Astrology
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Shy, unconfident Stacey Bunn and outgoing, grown-up Twyla Popovic are exact opposites but also the best of friends. On the day of Twyla's birthday, they are both set to go to the Royal Show. But before they leave they read their horoscopes which tell them that their best friend is going to betray them! They dismiss the notion, but before long Twyla meets up with a boy from her school – Archie – and makes plans with him that don't involve Stacey. Stacey is devastated. The horoscope was right; Twyla has betrayed her. She goes off on her own and stumbles upon a fortune-teller. She tells the fortune-teller that she wishes to be like her ex-friend. The fortune-teller gives her a gold heart pin and tells her that it will give her power. Soon, Stacey starts to feel more confident and in control. Is it the pin giving her power or is Stacey achieving everything by herself?

Author Focus

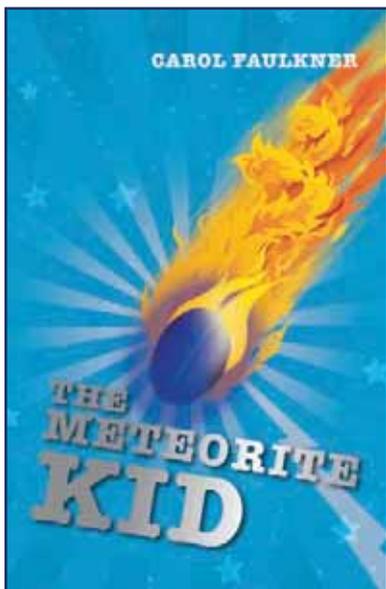
Penny Matthews has worked for many years in children's book publishing, and is now a freelance editor and writer. Her first picture book *Moving On* was published in 1993, and was followed by four more picture books, three chapter books and two junior novels. In 2003 *A Year on Our Farm*, illustrated by Andrew McLean, was the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year (Early Childhood) and an Honour Book in the Picture Book of the Year awards. Penny is married, has two grown-up children, and lives in Adelaide.

Penny Matthews' inspiration for writing *Heart of Magic*:

"I am fascinated by relationships. I think most girls are, even when they are quite young – and I wanted to write something that would appeal particularly to girls. Why do we choose the friends we do? Often you see really close friendships between people who are completely unlike. One of my best friends at school was a real party girl, while I was bookish and retiring. The 'odd couple' has become something of a cliché. But why do opposites attract? Are odd couples really more alike than you'd think they are? When I was a child, I loved going to the Royal Show. I was fascinated by the glitz and colour of the sideshows, the smell of hot fat and popcorn. It was a world that wasn't quite real, where you could be what you wanted to be. Somehow the rules were different there. So the show seemed the perfect background for my story about stylish, confident Twyla and shy, conservative Stacey. Circumstances and settings can have amazing effects on character."

Activity Ideas

- What is astrology? Find the definition of astrology and research the different star signs. What star sign are you? Do you believe in astrology - why/why not?
- Cut out the horoscope section from the newspaper and bring into class to discuss. Try and create a collection of horoscopes from the same day/week/month, but from different publications. How do they compare?
- Read chapter 2. Georgia Gwynne calls Stacey 'Sticky Bunn', to tease her about her weight. In groups discuss teasing and bullying. Do you think it is wrong to tease someone? Has anyone ever teased or bullied you? What are some ways to cope with being bullied or teased?
- Throughout the book colours are repeated, in particular pink and blue. Write down all the different references to these colours. Do you think that colours can reflect certain moods or feelings? Write down a list of colours and use emotive words to describe them e.g. happy, sad, angry etc.
- Read page 37. The phrase 'be careful what you wish for' is often used. What do you think it means? Do you know any other stories that use this idea?
- Read the gypsy's rhyme on page 40. These two sentences are similes. What is a simile? Think of similes to describe your friends and/or family.
- Read the program on page 48. Choose an event such as your school open day, sports carnival or talent night and write a program for it.
- Have you ever been to a fair or a show? What was it like? What did you see/do? Write a newspaper article on a place that you have been. Include a photo or drawing with your article.
- The gold heart that Stacey wears could be described as a 'good luck charm'. Do you think it is? Why/why not? How do you think the heart pin helped Stacey? Research other good luck charms and the different places/cultures that they come from e.g. the four-leaf clover, horseshoe, rabbit's foot. Can you think of any bad luck charms?



Lightning Strikes: The Meteorite Kid

By Carol Faulkner

ISBN: 9781921150807

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 110

Themes:

Responsibility
Care & Compassion
Sci-Fi/Fantasy
Maths
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

During a school baseball game, Morgan Mayne gets more than she bargains for when she catches a strange, unearthly object that falls from the sky. This mysterious object turns out to be a meteorite that has a strange power over anyone who touches it, giving everyone, except for Morgan, terrible flashbacks to distressing past events. As Morgan is the only one who can safely touch it, she takes possession of the meteorite. However, it is really the meteorite that takes ownership of Morgan as it has chosen her to protect it. She soon discovers that it isn't really a meteorite after all: it is a living thing – an egg – and it's about to hatch ... But what on earth is it? And can she possibly save it?

Author Focus

Carol Faulkner is a full-time children's author living in Adelaide's western suburbs. Her first book, a junior novel, was published after she completed a Diploma of Professional Children's Writing in 1999. She has since had three more junior novels published, and her first picture book is due for release in 2009. Carol is a member of the Australian Society of Authors, the South Australian Writers' Centre, and the Ekidnas Children's Writers' Group. She is married with two teenagers, a German shepherd and a green tree frog. She enjoys music, reading, crosswords, and good times with family and friends.

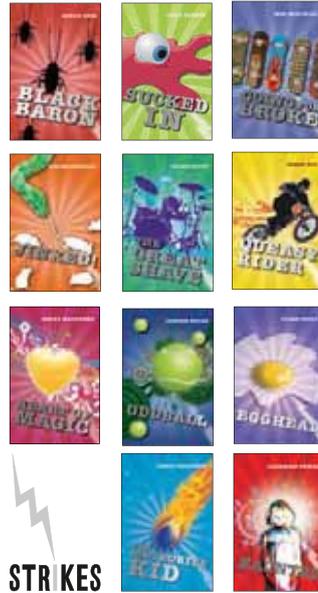
Carol Faulkner's inspiration for writing *The Meteorite Kid*:

"The book was inspired by a newspaper article about a meteorite that crashed into a suburban family's living room in Auckland, NZ. I still have the article which is pasted, alongside many others, in my "Ideas" scrapbook."

Create your own ideas scrapbook like Carol Faulkner. Collect newspaper and magazine articles and then write a short story based around one of these.

Activity Ideas

- Find the definitions of the following words that occur throughout the book: effortlessly (p13), stupor (p22), incredulous (p26), resounded (p33), unfathomable (p37), woeful (p59), scarpered (p81).
- Read the description on p11 of the object that Morgan has caught. This description explains its size, weight and colour. Write a descriptive paragraph on an item in your classroom or at home. Try to include estimated size, weight and colour.
- Look at the scoreboard on p13. Answer the following questions: Who won the third innings? If innings 7-9 did not occur, what would be the score? How many runs would Lawson need to win the game?
- View the news article on p17. Create your own news article for something that has happened recently at your school. This could be an exciting event or simply what you had for lunch. Make sure you include a topic heading and catchphrase.
- View the movie poster on p 35. Create your own movie poster for something that is currently showing. Use the same layout as the poster in *The Meteorite Kid*.
- Read chapter 8. What do you think a "pegasoid" is? As a class, come up with some definitions for a "pegasoid". Answer questions such as: Where do you think it is from? How old is it? Who does it belong to?
- Read chapter 10, when Morgan discovers what the object is. What do you think might be in it? Draw a picture or write a description of what you think could hatch.
- The object gives Morgan psychic powers. Make a table with two columns. Label the columns pros and cons. List the pros and cons of having psychic powers. When would they be an advantage? When would they be a disadvantage?
- Morgan does everything she can to protect the object, even lying and deceiving others. Discuss in groups when it was helpful for Morgan to lie and when it wasn't. Do you think she made the right decisions?
- When you have finished reading *The Meteorite Kid* write a review.



Lightning Strikes: Freaky

By Sue Whiting

ISBN: 9781921150791

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

March 2009

Themes:

Urban myths
Obsession
Family
Courage / bravery
Taking initiative
Informal text types

Synopsis

When Jayden's parents go off on their second honeymoon, he's forced to stay with his eccentric and prickly cactus-devoted relatives in Nullaloo. He can't wait for the three weeks to be over. But Jayden's boredom turns to distress when his aunt and uncle bring home an unusual cactus that instantly gives him the shivers. There's just something spooky about it ... evil even. And when it starts shaking and increasing in size, he knows his instincts are right. Jayden soon discovers that it's an extremely rare – and dangerous – cactus that houses a nest of tarantula eggs. The eggs usually stay dormant for years and will only hatch during periods of heavy rain. However, a good soaking from the tap at his uncle's request unwittingly releases the spiders and Jayden soon finds himself in a situation straight out of a late-night horror movie. Can Jayden face his fears and rescue them all?

Author Focus

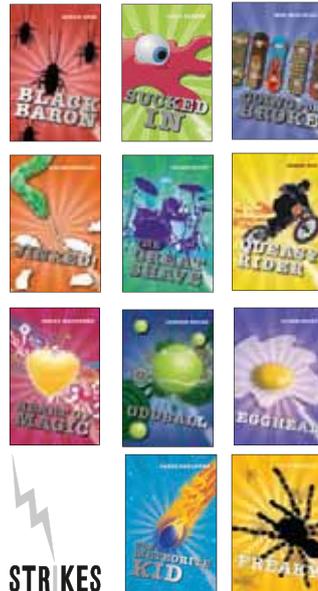
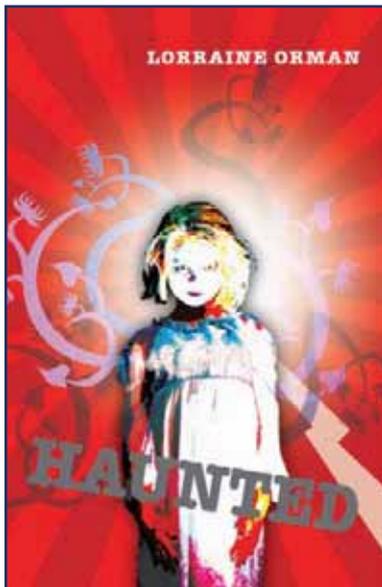
After developing a passion for children's literature as a primary school teacher, **Sue Whiting** now works full time in the field she loves, dividing her time between working as a children's book editor and writing stories for young people. Sue has had almost sixty children's books published, ranging from rhyming romping verse for the very young to novels for pre-teens. For more information about the author, please visit her website: www.suewhiting.com

Sue Whiting's inspiration for writing *Freaky*:

"I was sitting in the staffroom at the school I used to teach at, when the school secretary came in with an email she received from a friend. The email told how a "friend of the friend" had bought a rare cactus from Mexico and planted it in his garden. Everything was fine until the day the cactus exploded and revealed huge spiders nesting inside it. Being arachnophobic, I was horrified – aghast! When I discovered the story was a hoax, an urban myth, I felt rather foolish – I had been totally sucked in by it – but I also had a rather delicious idea for a new story ..."

Activity Ideas

- This story is based on an urban myth. What is an urban myth? Find other examples of urban myths. What is it about an urban myth that makes people believe it? (E.g. Type of language used/ usually states it is from a trusted source etc.) What role does the internet play in the spreading of these stories?
- Auntie Nina and Uncle Trev are obsessed with their garden. Oscar is obsessed with computer games. Find evidence in the book to support these statements. What is an obsession? How is being obsessed with something different than just being interested in it? What are the advantages/disadvantages of having an obsession? Do you think Jayden is obsessed with skateboarding? Discuss.
- Jayden's relatives live at Cactus Court. What is a cactus? What are its defining features? Research rare cacti. Write an information report on one.
- The scientific name for the cactus in the story is *CACTORIUM TARANTULLA GIGARTUM*. What clues about the cactus are there in this name? Create "fake" scientific names for various "real" plants and animals.
- On p56, there is the start of an internet article about *CACTORIUM TARANTULLA GIGARTUM*. What other things might this article have gone on to say? What do we know about this cactus from the story? Complete the article using this knowledge.
- Spiders feature in this story. Do tiger-striped bird-eating tarantulas really exist? Research these spiders on the internet to determine this.
- On p71, it says: "Then I discovered what evil lay inside." What other "evils" other than spiders could have been found inside the cactus? How would the story change? Write the next scene in the story, but with a different creature emerging from the cactus.



Lightning Strikes: Haunted

By Lorraine Orman

ISBN: 9781921150821

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

Themes:

Bullying
Sibling Relationships
Supernatural
Fear/Courage
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

When Georgia's parents send her and her brother, Ned, off to their Uncle and Aunt's sheep farm for the holidays, Georgia thinks things couldn't get any worse. She soon finds, however, that not only does she have to spend time with her bully of a cousin, Jeff, but that Ned has deserted her to become Jeff's new best friend. Left with little else than to go for lonely treks across the paddocks, she discovers an old rundown homestead. There she meets a strange local girl called Lily who wants to be friends. Georgia thinks she's weird but decides anything is better than spending time with Ned and Jeff and so she goes back to visit her. But Georgia soon discovers Lily is more than just a little odd – she's been dead for over 150 years. And Lily wants them all to be best friends ... forever.

Author Focus

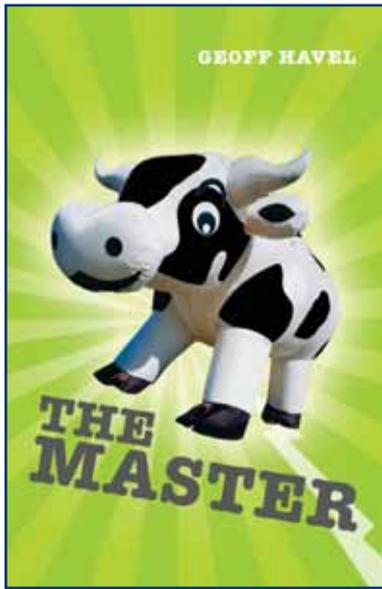
Lorraine Orman has worn many hats, most of them relating to children's books: reader, librarian, parent, book reviewer, book promoter, and lastly, author. Having written short stories as a hobby for most of her life, she gave up full-time library work a few years ago to concentrate on writing children's novels. Her first novel, *Cross Tides*, launched her career as a writer and her other books include teenage novels, historical books and junior fiction. She also reviews children's books for *Magpies*.

Lorraine Orman's inspiration for writing *Haunted*:

"When I was young I sometimes stayed on a friend's dairy/sheep farm south of Auckland. There was a derelict homestead on the farm and we often used to play there. One room was full of hay bales – great fun. We also turned an upstairs bedroom into a den. But we knew we couldn't go into some of the rooms because the floors were rotten. Sometimes we peeled the wallpaper off the scrim and revealed old newspapers stuck underneath, dating back to the 1800s. Looking back, I think the freedom we had to romp through the old house and play inventive games was very precious. I have always wanted to write a story set in this homestead, and *Hauntea* is the result."

Activity Ideas

- Read page 7. Describe a morning in your household. What is everyone doing? What do you need to get ready for school?
- Read page 12. Rewrite the text messages with correct spelling and punctuation. Discuss why you think words are abbreviated for text messaging.
- Read Ch 2. Georgia is being teased by her brother and cousin and asks why they are being so cruel. Why do you think they are being mean to her? As a class discuss bullying and why it is important to be accepting of others.
- Read pages 19-20. Draw/illustrate the house that has been described.
- Read chapter 3. Who do you think Lily is? Do you think Georgia is right in her assumptions?
- Read the riddle on page 33. What is the definition of a riddle? Find other riddles and test them on your classmates. Use the riddles that you have collected to create your own riddle book.
- Read page 47. Write a letter in the style of an email about what you did on the weekend. You could do this activity in pairs so that your partner can write a response. Be sure to include an interesting subject.
- Jeff is afraid of the ghost in the homestead. Are you afraid of anything? What is the difference between fear and phobia? Look at different types of phobias and what they are called.
- Do you believe in ghosts? Have a debate about whether ghosts are real or not.
- Read Ch 11. Ned and Georgia are escaping the burning house. What should you do if there is a fire in your home? What are the safety precautions for preventing a fire in the home? Visit your local Fire Brigade website for more information.
- Look at the image of the headstone on page 80. Research the headstone of somebody famous. What does it say about the person?



Lightning Strikes: The Master

By Geoff Havel

ISBN: 9781921150852

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

May 2009

Themes:

Tricks/Jokes/Pranks
Design & Technology
Grandparents
Humour
Farms
Informal text types

Synopsis

Rick and his grandpa are competing for the title of 'The Master' in a battle of practical jokes ... but will it all go too far?

Rick loves a good prank. Almost as much as Grandpa does. His grandfather thinks Rick has much to learn but Rick thinks otherwise – his latest idea is going to be the best prank ever and will show Grandpa a thing or two. But Rick and Grandpa will have to put aside their games while they are working on a billycart for the School Billycart Trials. Can they concentrate on the billycart and win the race? Will Rick be able to formulate the best prank ever and become 'The Master'? An hilarious tale that shows the fun in competition and the concentration and planning that goes into building a billycart or creating the best prank of all time.

Author Focus

Geoff Havel was born in the mountains of New Guinea but now lives in Perth with his wife, Sindy. His two children, Jade and Josh have grown up and left home and now, Geoff is a grandfather. Geoff has been a primary school teacher for 22 years and has written two picture books and three children's novels. *The Master* is his first book for Walker Books.

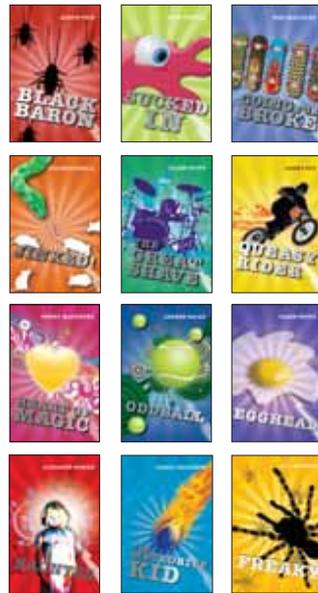
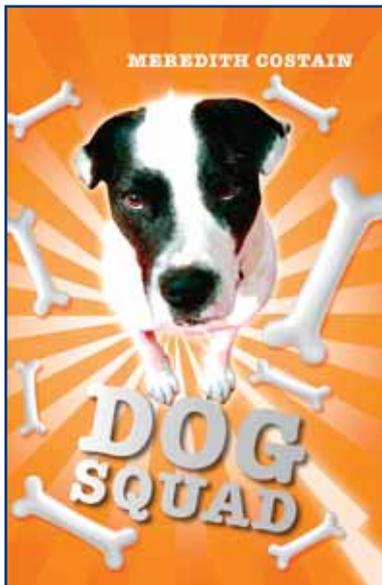
About the series

Why incorporate *Lightning Strikes* in your reading program?

- Short, fast-moving, plot-driven stories that will spark enthusiasm for books and reading
- Topics and themes full of humour that will appeal to the interests of today's children aged 9-14
- Short chapters - perfect for guided reading sessions
- Eye-catching design and covers
- Perfect stepping stone into more complex fiction
- Includes stories that will appeal to both boys and girls

Activity Ideas

- Read the blurb on the back cover. Who do you think 'The Master' is? What is a prank?
- View the billycart notice in the newsletter on page 9. Re-create this notice as a poster. Remember to include the relevant information and add imagery as well. The notice asks parents to fill in an entry form. Create this entry form.
- On page 12 Grandpa uses the line "The Master promises no tricks while working on the Grasshopper's billycart". In this sentence who is 'The Master' and who is 'the Grasshopper'? Why do you think Grandpa has assigned these two names?
- View the billycart plan on page 14. Find an object at home or at school and draw it in a similar way, from a side view, front view and top view. Where possible include the length, depth and height measurements. Why are plans important when designing an object? What could happen if we didn't have plans?
- On page 23 Rick thinks "He wanted Gramps to be caught just like a fly in that spider's web". This is a simile. What other similes can you think of?
- Read pages 23-24. Rick has made a list to help him organise his thoughts. List the benefits of making a list.
- Read chapter 4. Discuss the prank that Rick plays on Grandpa. Write down all the steps, numbered 1, 2, 3... that Rick has to go through to play the prank on Grandpa. Do you think it was a good prank? What was it that gave Rick away in the end?
- Read page 37. Rick uses different search combinations to look for tyres on the internet. Which of the three searches do you think would provide the most results/least results? Brian states "You can't believe everything you read on the web". Discuss internet research. Why is it important to make sure that facts are correct and from a reliable source?
- Read pages 54-55. Who is Michael Schumacher and why is he mentioned here?
- Make a list of the different tricks that occur in the story. Rate these tricks from 1-10, 1 being 'the least effective' and 10 being 'the most effective'. Compare your ratings with the class. Which trick was rated the best overall?



Lightning Strikes: Dog Squad

By Meredith Costain

ISBN: 9781921529160

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 112

July 2009

Themes:

Bullying
Dogs
Maths
Mystery
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Jez has a problem. He's just broken his sister's guinea pig hutch and the guinea pigs have gone AWOL. Needing a quick solution, he enlists his mates, Cheezel and Drago, to help replace the hutch and the missing guinea pigs. The plan succeeds but Jez soon finds he's stuck with a bigger problem: unbeknownst to Jez, Drago took out a loan with his brother, Crippler, to pay for all of this and he wants to be paid back within a week. Needing money – fast – Jez stumbles on a plan to find (or rather replace) a local councillor's missing dog and make a mozza off the reward money. A madcap adventure involving dog-napping, dog-switching and a poodle called Fifibelle follows ... but will Jez and the dog squad succeed?

Author Focus

Meredith Costain grew up on a dairy farm on the Koo Wee Rup swamp in West Gippsland, Victoria. After finishing school she worked as a teacher and played in a few rock and blues bands, before becoming a full-time writer. She now lives in inner-city Melbourne with a menagerie of pets, including a kelpie cross and a red heeler. Her work ranges from picture books through to popular fiction and non-fiction for older readers, and includes *Musical Harriet*, *A Year in Girl Hell* and CBCA Honour Book *Doodledum Dancing*.

For more information about Meredith Costain visit her website:

www.meredithcostain.com

Meredith Costain's inspiration for writing *Dog Squad*:

Dogs have always been a big part of my life. I grew up on a farm and we always had working dogs, but they were our friends as well, part of the family. There's something about dogs – they are loyal and loving and just want to be with you no matter what you're doing. So it breaks my heart to know that many dogs are dumped when it's no longer 'convenient' for their owners to look after them. I'm also fascinated by the way that dogs treat humans as part of their pack. I thought it would be fun to have a group of boys who hang out together and squabble and play-fight, just like puppies do. Every pack has a leader, and in this case it's Jez. Well, that's what he likes to think, anyway!

Activity Ideas

- Read the blurb. What do you think this story is about? Read the last line "Has the Dog Squad bitten off more than it can chew?" This is an idiom. What is an idiom? Do you know any other phrases like this?
- Read the description of Crunch in Chapter 1. Draw Crunch from this description.
- Many of the characters in this book have nicknames. What does this say about their relationships with one another? Do you have a nickname?
- Read page 30-31. If Jez doesn't pay Crippler the \$96 and the interest rate is 10% per week after that, how much will Jez then owe in a week?
- Create your own dog walking poster (read page 35). What would you add/change?
- Read page 38. If Jez and Cheezel do dog walks for \$2 an hour and each walk takes one hour, how many hours of dog walking would they need to do to earn \$96?
- What is a lyrebird? (page 68) Lyrebirds are a native animal of Australia. Research different native animals in your country.
- Read page 71. Rewrite the text message from Crippler with the correct grammar and spelling.
- The Dog Squad try to get Whitey from the pound. Research animal rescue centres such as the RSPCA. In Chapter 14 the man from the pound says that "We can't hold onto them forever". Why can't they? How can you help organisations that look after animals without a home?
- Write a review of *Dog Squad*. Include information about the storyline, what you liked and the major themes/issues in the book.
- Do you have a pet? Create a pet profile. Draw a picture of your pet and include information about what type of animal it is, when it was born, its name and any other special facts about it.
- What is a 'squad'? What other 'squads' can you think of? If you had a squad what would it be for? What would it be called?



Lightning Strikes: The Big Dig

By Meg McKinlay

ISBN: 9781921529139

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

July 2009

Themes:

Science
Maths
Swimming
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

An hilarious new *Lightning Strikes* story featuring characters from *Going for Broke!*

It is a rule of the universe that Ronnie, Weasel and Nathan spend their summers at the local pool. So when they turn up as usual on opening day to buy their season passes and discover the pool is closed, the boys are devastated. With their only choices being to join the pricey BayView Leisure Centre or get the old blow-up out of storage, their summer is looking dire. That is, until Nathan comes up with the very brilliant idea to build their own pool in his mum's backyard. The plan is simple: Dig. Dig Some More. Put Water In. Swim. But perhaps the plan is a little too simple as this dig isn't going to be as easy as it seems ...

Activity Ideas

- Create an author profile using some of the information above. You can also visit Meg McKinlay's website:
www.megmckinlay.com
- Read the blurb for *The Big Dig*. The reader is asked the question "What could possibly go wrong?". What do you think could go wrong? Before reading the book write down some possible answers to this question.
- Read page 9. The boys' teacher made them work out how much it costs to swim each day. How much would it cost if you only swam every second day or once a week?
- Read Chapter 1. Why do you think the Newton Community Pool is closed? Have a discussion about possible reasons.
- Read pages 15 to 16. Why do you think the writing is wavy with bubbles around it? How would you write the text if this was for a park or a beach? Re-write "Make a SPLASH at BayView" with your own design.
- Read page 20. Do you have any rules at school e.g. no littering, out of bounds? As a class create signs for your school to demonstrate these rules.
- Read Chapter 4. What is the 'plan' that the boys come up with? Do you think this is a well formulated plan? What other steps do you think they might need to add?
- View page 50. What would the ultimate pool look like? Draw a picture of it. You might want to include plants, waterfalls, bridges and pool equipment.
- What is water aerobics? What other activities can you do in the water? Research different water sports and what they entail.
- Read page 68. Nathan says that you don't need "science or angles". What do you think of this? Think of other building structures e.g. your house, classroom. What shapes are used to create the building? Why would science and angles be important?
- What do you think the boys should call their self-made aquatic park? In groups think of a name for their pool and create a sign/pamphlet for it, outlining all the features that it has.
- After reading *The Big Dig* write a review of it.

Author Focus

Meg McKinlay grew up in Bendigo, Victoria, in a book-loving, TV and car-free household. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school, and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. Along the way, she has worked in a variety of jobs including swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. These days she lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese and Creative Writing. Meg divides her time between teaching and writing, a balance that swings wildly between chaos and calm. She is the author of *Annabel, again* and the *Lightning Strikes* title *Going for Broke* published by Walker Books.

Meg McKinlay's inspiration for writing *The Big Dig*:

"Like the boys in *The Big Dig*, my brothers and I lived at the local pool when we were kids. It was only a fifteen-minute bike ride, but that seemed far enough in the middle of summer when it was pushing 40 degrees. We were always pressuring our parents for a backyard pool and one day Dad finally snapped and said, "Yeah, you can have one if you dig it yourself." That was more than enough for my older brother, who immediately took matters, and shovels, into his own hands. Things descended into "mud-pit" very quickly, though, and he only managed to salvage the hours of work he'd put in by turning it into a cunningly concealed booby trap for the rest of us. My brother's poorly thought out backyard pool was definitely the starting point for *The Big Dig*. I needed a stronger motivation for Nathan and his mates to start digging, though, and I decided the sudden closure of their local pool would do the job. This was something that never happened to my brothers and I, although the pool we so loved was radically re-vamped many years later into the kind of whizzbang aquatic centre complex Nathan, Ronnie and Weasel encounter in *The Big Dig*, complete with warning signs of every description. When I first visited it as an adult, I remember thinking how even though it was all kinds of fantastic in some ways, it had lost much of the homegrown flavour of the old pool, and that was a shame. That memory definitely came into play in the story, too. Funnily enough, shortly after I finished the manuscript, a series of articles started appearing in my local community newspaper - "Centre Closed!", "A Fifty Minute Drive for a Swim?" and "Sad Farewell to a Local Favourite." The council had closed a community pool and was "centralising" facilities at the fabulous new aquatic centre, which locals described as "too far," "too crowded" and "packed with grandparents and swimming classes", all things the boys rail against in *The Big Dig*. It was a little spooky! Now, I'm just waiting for a follow-up article "Boys Welcome Locals to Backyard Pool" to confirm my incredible psychic powers."