

TEACHERS' NOTES

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Deadly!

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Discussion and Debate

1. Cover each of the 6 books of a number of editions of *Deadly!* with temporary brown paper covers so that it is impossible to know which book has which position in the series. Divide into 6 groups so that each group has a different part of *Deadly!* Have each group make a written synopsis of the key events of their book. One member of each group narrates the events occurring in that group's book and the other class members decide where in the series the narration fits. Join the synopses together in the correct order.
2. Have each small group discuss one book of *Deadly!*, taking notes on group members' opinions. Use the following questions as a discussion guide. Each group reports back to the whole class on their reaction to their particular book.
 - a. Was there anything you liked about this book?
 - b. Was there anything you disliked?
 - c. Was there anything that puzzled you?
 - d. Were there any patterns that you noticed?
3. The tea plant in *Deadly!* confers eternal youth (Book 4, page 27). Pooper Scooper rails against ageing. 'Old is ugly. Old is painful. Old is senseless.' His mother's view is that 'Life is a circle... We must return from where we started. Everyone has to make the whole journey (Book 6, page 8).' What support can you find for each of these views? List your arguments and debate them.
4. When Sprocket smells the perfume of the tea plant flower all he can think about is getting to a plant and eating the seed, even though he knows the terrible pain it causes (Book 6, page 43). Quite a number of substances have an addictive effect and some people are more susceptible to them than others. Using the technique of mind mapping on black or whiteboard, record collective understanding of the issues surrounding addiction. Use the map as a reminder of the issues to spur further research if this is appropriate.
5. Give each group a different book of *Deadly!* and have them rewrite all the events in their book as a Good Luck/Bad Luck story. (Example: 'Good luck! Sprocket has been found by a bunch of small kids. Bad luck! They kidnap him'.) Starting with the group that has Book 1 each group member narrates an event in Good Luck/Bad Luck terms, taking turns around the group until all events have been told. The group that has Book 2 takes over the narration and it continues in order through each book until the whole story is narrated.
6. Referring to life and living, Sprocket says, 'You only get one go.' (Book 6, page 76) and 'A life well lived leaves a mark for ever.' (Book 6, page 90). Many people have alternative views regarding life. What are some of these views? How have they come about? Where can we find out more about them? What areas of study specialise in these questions? How can we deal with what appear to be conflicting views? Discuss in small groups.

You could
die laughing!

Research

7. Sprocket has lived in foster homes since he was a baby, and Amy has been at boarding school for years. Find out what some of the advantages and disadvantages of living in these two situations would be. Which do you think would be preferable and why? Discuss your findings.
8. Sprocket's family wanted the 'tea' plant so badly that they would do anything to get it. Research the history of the plant commonly used to make tea, looking for any parallels. What stories can you find out about any other plants that people have wanted very much?
9. Like the tea plant in *Deadly!* other plants require passage of their seed through the gut of an animal or bird to germinate. An example is the relationship between the mistletoebird and the parasitic mistletoe plant. The bird feeds almost exclusively on the plant, which benefits from the sticky covering its seed receives when passing through the gut of the bird. This allows the seed to stick to tree branches where it can germinate. Find other instances of this process of propagation. Walk the boundaries of your schoolyard and identify the plants growing right along the fence line. Research (take a leaf, flower, seed or berry and either ask knowledgeable adults for identification or match up with a diagrams in a field guide in your library) to find which of these plants has germinated from fruit or berries. See if your research can match them up with the diet of any local bird or animal species.
10. The plot of *Deadly!* follows the growth of Mrs Tunks-Livingstone from babyhood to adulthood and the transition of the Brats through childhood to old age. In small groups research the physical characteristics of Babyhood, Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood, Middle Age, and Old Age. (The BBC documentary 'The Human Body' is a good resource for this.) Present the research as posters using pictures from magazines to illustrate the characteristics. How does this information help us in our understanding of ourselves? How does it help us understand our relationships with others?

Role Play

11. Amy rang the police using her mother's mobile phone (Book 2, page 58). The police decided the call was a crank call and took no action. How could Amy have told them what was going on in a way that would have allowed them to take her seriously? Rewrite the conversation and role play it in pairs.

Analysis

12. Look for patterns in the presentation of *Deadly!*. The word *Deadly!* is spelt across the spines of the books when they are all together and the pictures on front and back covers and the title page are all segments of the postcards at the end of each part. Every part contains a continuation of each author's story, each contains a map and there is a preview of the next book in all but the last. On each back cover is a blurb which is identical to the one inside except in the first book. What is the purpose of each of the patterns? How do they affect the reader's approach to the books?
13. What patterns can you find in the text? What is the effect of having Sprocket and Amy take turns to tell the story? How well is the storyline supported by repetition through the text? Why do chapters and books end on a point of suspense? What effect does it have on the reader when Amy plays the part of her mother's mother, and Sprocket is physically older than his older brothers.
14. Each book has a different name. What do you think each name represents? What do you think the title *Deadly!* refers to in the series? Why are the authors' names rotated? What did you think of the section at the end of each book about the authors? Have you read any other

books by these authors? From your previous reading can you identify which author has written the part of Sprocket and which the part of Amy? What is your opinion of the success of this way of sharing the writing? What problems do you think the authors would have had to solve when writing *Deadly!*?

15. Amy thinks that she has a responsibility to her mother to give her a happy childhood. She believes that a second happy childhood for her mother will compensate for the sadness of the first one and her mother will then be a different person. Think about an event in your own childhood where the people in charge of you made a decision that had an adverse impact on you. What decision would have had a happier outcome for you? Write about the event explaining the different choice that could have been taken and the effect you think it may have had on your life.
16. Amy and Sprocket meet for the first time at the end of Book 1 in embarrassing circumstances and for the last time after Sprocket's mum's funeral at the very end of *Deadly!* By this time they have strong positive feelings for each other. Find the parts in each book where the relationship between them is revealed in thought, dialogue, or action. For example, when Sprocket passes the blue seed (Book 2, page 21) Amy reacts with humour and support rather than repulsion. In response to that support Sprocket acts as a decoy to divert the Brats from Amy (page 57). Record the events between them as a tree chart showing each reaction that occurred as well as the other potential choices of reaction.
17. Sprocket says, 'An older parent is a terrific parent.' (Book 6, page 90) when he is making a speech at the funeral of his mother. Survey other classmates to see what sort of age range of parents exists within the same class level. Graph your results. Conduct a class debate to see whether Sprocket's opinion is generally confirmed. What are the characteristics of a terrific parent?
18. The blurb on the front cover of the first five books of *Deadly!* claims, 'You could die laughing!' Think of a part of *Deadly!* that makes you laugh and write about it to a friend that you think would enjoy it too. Explain why you think it's so funny.
19. Often an event is funny because the author leads us to expect a particular outcome and something totally different happens. Or it's funny because the words referring to it can mean more than one thing. Or the circumstances are so exaggerated that they are ridiculous. Find examples of these types of humour in *Deadly!*.
20. List the names of the characters in *Deadly!*. Why do you think such unusual names have been chosen? What characteristics do you think their names represent? If you were going to rename your friends for their characteristics what would you call them? List them and then compare with others' versions. Research, either in groups or individually, by asking other people about nicknames. These could be grouped in a variety of ways. They may be family nicknames as a result of childish mispronunciations, nicknames for sporting or media heroes, the result of shortening of names, or have arisen from a particular situation. When is the use of nicknames endearing and when is it destructive?

Graphics/Design

21. *Deadly!* is full of vivid events. Some of these are represented in the illustrations in each book. What information do you get from the illustrations about the characters, events and the mood of the narrative? How well does the way the pictures are drawn suit the story? Choose a scene such as the one where Sprocket and Amy ride the frozen Germinator down the river (Book 4, page 14) and illustrate it in a similar style.

22. Using the small maps in each part of *Deadly!* as a guide, make one large map of the journey that Sprocket and Amy took, marking out the events that took place in each major location. Turn the map into a board game, marking out the steps of the journey in squares and awarding or withdrawing moves according to positive or negative events. Players throw a dice to determine number of moves and retreat or advance depending on the squares they land on.

23. Amy is given a Swiss Army knife by her dad for her birthday. In desperate situations she wishes that it had more useful tools. Redesign Amy's Swiss Army knife giving it features that would be of practical help to Amy and Sprocket in their trials with the Brats. For example, students could design an implement to help them escape from the speeding Hummer (Book 2, page 12) rather than throwing themselves out of it while it is still moving, or a tool which enables them an alternative solution to flooding the Cool Room and floating out of it on the Germinator (Book 3, page 73). Display the Swiss Army knife designs as posters, labelling the various parts and explaining their functions.

**DEADLY! PAUL JENNINGS AND MORRIS GLEITZMAN
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