



Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest

Felice Arena and Garry Lyon

Specky Magee and the great footy contest is the sequel to *Specky Magee*. In this book, Specky finds his relationship with his father vastly improved but his footy life sent into turmoil with the arrival of Screamer. Though Specky sees Screamer for the bully, and the victim, that he really is, Screamer's true self stays hidden from Specky's best friends for some time, causing trouble for Specky. While this drama unfolds, Specky forms a relationship, via an internet chat room, with a young girl named Christine. Whilst on a business trip for his father to the Northern Territory, Specky makes a new friend in the talented Johnny and joins with him to compete in the Great Footy Contest. The contest proves both challenging and entertaining, and the winners are a surprise to many!

This book's greatest assets are its popular appeal and its understanding of, and links to, the culture of today's students, particularly boys. As a class text it would be excellent read aloud, particularly as a serial read over a series of lessons with a class or a small group.

Specky Magee and the great Footy Contest deals with a variety of issues: amongst them family relationships, particularly the relationship between father and son, the problem of bullying in its many guises, friendship, and sport as an important pastime. These are issues that students may have strong views about and discussion that allowed them to share their own opinions and experiences could be a valuable classroom activity leading to either responses to the text or creative responses to the themes.

Through consideration of the various communication media used throughout the book – computer chat groups, the Internet and television, the text allows students to explore modern media and its use, or abuse, by their peers and, ultimately, the part it plays in their lives. Some of the following classroom activities explore how the students can mirror or extend the media represented in their book for their own responses to the text.

Book Structure

This book is co-authored by Felice Arena and Garry Lyon, both well-known media personalities. It would be valuable to explore this kind of working relationship.

- Do they think it would be difficult or easy to write something with someone else?
- What if there were clashes of opinion?
- Why would two people choose to write together?
- What would the practical difficulties, or benefits, be?

Explore other examples of similar creative partnerships.

Other authors who have collaborated together include Morris Gleitzman and Paul Jennings, and Boori Pryor and Meme McDonald.

- Consider the relationship between picture book creators – author and illustrator. Does this work? Why or why not? Is it the same as two people working on one text?

Major themes

Father/Son Relationships

The relationships between fathers and sons are central to both *Specky Magee* books. Specky's relationship with his father in the sequel is very different to what it was at the beginning of the first *Specky Magee* book.

- What changes have occurred? Why? How is their relationship portrayed in the sequel?

The relationships between Screamer and his father and Specky and his dad are vastly different.

- How does the book display these differences?

In *Boots and All*, a *Chomps* (Penguin) title by Sherryl Clark, Tony's dad wants him to be a footy superstar, yet Tony is more interested in, and perhaps better at, drawing. Tony wants his Dad to be happy with him, making some choices very difficult. Read *Boots and All*.

- Compare the relationship between the father and sons in both texts. In what ways are they similar? In what ways different?

Other books that have interesting father / son relationships:

Lockie Leonard series by Tim Winton

Treasure Hunters by Allan Baillie

There are many books that deal with other close family relationships and the problems that they may face. Check with your teacher or librarian for recommendations.

Bullying

Screamer's father is a bully. Look at the following passages that show him bullying others:

Screamer during a footy match (p154)

Coach Pate (p134)

Screamer at home (p163)

- Why does Mr Johnson behave in this manner?
- His motives are not made clear, but what do you think might be the reason for his behaviour?
- Why does Screamer bully Specky and others at school?
- What makes a bully?

Other novels that look at bullying:

The Present Takers by Aidan Chambers

Monstered by Bernie Monagle

Swashbuckler by James Moloney

Mike by Brain Caswell
Surfing Mr Petrovic by Colin Bowles

Picture Books

Rebel! by Di Wu and Allan Baillie
Willy the Wimp by Anthony Browne
Hector and Maggie by Andrew and Janet McLean
Amy's Monster by Terry Denton and Jenny Wagner

Minor Themes

Competition / Rivalry

Specky Magee is full of examples of competition and rivalry.

- List some examples of people who compete against each other in the book. In each, who comes out the winner? How do they react?
- How do you think you would react in similar situations?

Friendship

Specky feels let down by his friends because they seem to favour Screamer over him. At one stage he questions what means more to them – a few of Screamer's Tim Tams or years of being best mates (p145).

- Look at this section – where Specky confronts his mates. Have you ever been in this situation? How did you feel? Do you think that confronting Robbo and Danny was the best thing for Specky to do? Did it help?

Aboriginal Australia

Aboriginal Australians have made a significant contribution to our modern society in a variety of fields.

- Can you name some famous Aboriginal sportspeople? What about a famous Aboriginal artist? Which other Aboriginals can you name who have made an impact on our society? Explore the life of one of these people and tell the class something about your chosen person.
- Investigate famous Aboriginal football players. Who was the first Aboriginal to play with a VFL/ AFL club?

Australia

Johnny and his father come from a small community in the town of Katherine, near Alice Springs. Specky describes the Northern Territory trip (p45 onwards) in glowing terms. It is beautiful country, and the people he meets are very welcoming. His footy and his interest in the game are instant attractions for like-minded footy fans.

- Have your sport interests ever helped you make friends?
- Have you ever travelled around Australia?
- What are your favourite places to visit?
- Research the Northern Territory (or perhaps another state in Australia), its people and its history. Is football as popular everywhere? What other games might people from other states be just as interested in as Specky is in Australian Rules football?

History – the 1970s

Look at the sections where Specky dreams he is living in the 1970s (pp125–131)

- What differences does he notice between his life and the life of 70's Specky? What other differences can you find? Do you think you would have liked living then?
- Interview a teacher or parent about what it was like when they were your age.
- What do they remember about sport, school or entertainment? Would you have preferred to grow up then?
- Who was their favourite football player or their favourite sportsperson?
- Choose a famous player that is no longer playing today and write a short biography of them. List their achievements and try to find out in what ways it was different when they played compared to the game we know today (for example – What was the VFL? Was the AFL arranged differently then? Was football a fulltime activity for the players? How much did they train? Did they stay with same club?).

Your library will have a collection of sport and football books that will help you in your research. Of general use will be:

The Clubs: the complete history of every club in the VFL/AFL (Viking, 1998)
100 years of Australian Football (Penguin).

The AFL website at: www.afl.com.au also has a great deal of background information on the origins of football and club history. There are links from this website to all of the individual club websites.

Activities

- Find a photograph of a sportsperson in action. Write a descriptive caption for this photo. Write a paragraph describing what may have happened before and after the photo was taken.
- Write a description of a 'cliffhanger' in your favorite sport.
- Brainstorm with your class complimentary sporting nicknames, like *Specky* and *Screamer*.
- Write your own section of dialogue, in the form of a play script, for the television show 'Sensational Stuff'. Put yourself and your favorite players in the piece.
- Choose a scene from the book to rewrite or extend. Perhaps you could write a description of a football match that Specky might play in with his friends from the Northern Territory (see p52). Rewrite a scene, such as the one where Specky plays football against Christine and knocks her over (see p87), or any other scene that you think could have had a different outcome.
- You are the Captain. You are in the rooms before the big game. Write your own motivational talk for your team.
- Write your own skills hints (like those in *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest* that begin with the little football). Write a piece describing how to kick a football, hit a cricket ball or shoot a netball goal to someone who has never played the sport.
- Then:
 - Make the description into a power point presentation.
 - Illustrate your piece with stick figure drawings.
 - Make a video showing how to perform the chosen skill.

- Read a description of football action from the book (eg. p53 onwards).
- Write your own description of a passage of play in football or another sport.
- Choose a character from *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest* and write a short piece describing your own visual picture of them.
- Specky's friend Christine is a very keen footy player. What are your views about women in football? The AFL website has an information sheet on the topic of women in football. Go to www.afl.com.au and look for the link to the info sheets page.
- Specky's sister Alice meets Shane Crawford and 'falls in love' with him – for a short time (see p120). Specky also meets Michael Voss on the plane (see p41).
 - Have you ever meet anyone famous?
 - Which famous sportsperson would you like to meet?
 - If you could meet them what would you ask them?
- Attend a local sports game or an inter-school match of your favorite sport and write up a newspaper-style report of the experience. See if you can arrange to have it published in the school newsletter or submit it to the local paper. Perhaps make up your own sports newspaper from your class's efforts.
- Write twenty questions for your own Great Footy Quiz (or another sport that you know really well). Swap with another member of your class and see who the Great Quiz winner will be. (Perhaps your teacher might find a prize!)
- Theme songs: Visit your favorite football club's website. (There are links to all clubs from www.afl.com.au). Find the words to their theme song (you may already know it!) Find others to compare. What is a common thread amongst the songs? What do they all include? Look carefully at the language and what they are trying to communicate. Choose a song of which you know the tune very well and try and write words for a new club song using this music. Or write out your theme in the form of a poem. Try and incorporate those factors you found in the club songs that you explored.
- Write a conversation, in script form, between you and a friend. You are talking on the telephone after the recent nail biting match of the year that your favorite teams were involved in. Now write out the same conversation as a chat room exchange – use code names, emoticons and abbreviations. See the conversation between Specky and Christine on pages 27, 77, 101, 143 and 196.
- On the AFL website, and the various club websites, there are a number of communication activities that you can take part in. These include writing to players, asking questions of coaches, and participating in a variety of games and activities. Classes could either participate in these activities online or if this is not appropriate they could simulate such exercises. What would they say, or ask, if they could?
- Read one of the books from the Sports in Fiction list, or an article from the newspaper describing a game or a piece of action. Compare the way they are written. Focus on how the authors write about the sport, the descriptive passages, the action pieces, the words that are used and the dialogue between the players.
- Can you see similarities/differences between this and *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*? What makes good writing about sport special? Is it the same as other writing, about romance or fantastical creatures? Why/Why not?

- The end of *Specky Magee & the Great Footy Contest* leaves a lot up in the air. What does Christine want to tell Specky about Screamer? Will Specky end his relationship with Christine? Write a short outline of what you think might happen in the next book to resolve these questions that we are left with or write a description of the competition winner's trip abroad.
- Discuss with your class what team you think Specky will eventually barrack for. At present he seems to be having trouble making up his mind! Justify your reasons by looking carefully at passages from the book that help give weight to your opinion.
- Visit the Specky website: www.speckymagee.com. Write a letter to the authors telling them what you thought of *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*. Or perhaps you would like to share with them the results of your work on their book in class.

Sport in fiction

There are many other great books written with sports as part of the story here are just a few, many of them will be in your school library.

Allan Baillie	<i>The Last Shot</i> (Basketball)
Bob Cattell	<i>The Glory Garden</i> series (Cricket)
Ruth Starke	<i>Nips XI</i> <i>Nips Go National</i> (Cricket)
Tessa Duder	<i>Alex</i> series (Swimming)
Phillip Gwynne	<i>Deadly, Unna?</i> (AFL) <i>The Worst Team Ever</i> (AFL)
Wendy Jenkins	<i>Killer Boots</i> <i>The Big Game</i> (AFL)
Daryl McCann	<i>Culture Shock</i> (AFL)
David Metzenthien	<i>Danger Wave</i> (Surfing)
Sherryl Clark	<i>Boots and All</i> (AFL)
Colin Thiele	<i>Jodie's Journey</i> (Horse riding)
Kerry Wakefield	<i>Shooting Stars</i> (Netball) <i>Young Bloods</i> (AFL)
John Larkin	<i>Western Wildcats</i> series (Soccer)
Tim Winton	<i>Lockie Leonard</i> series (Surfing)
Krista Bell	<i>The Slammers</i> (Basketball)
Brian Caswell	<i>Mike</i> (Swimming)
Margaret Clark	<i>Footy Shorts</i> (AFL)
John Heffernan	<i>More than Gold</i> (Athletics)
Nicole Pluss	<i>Black Belt</i> (Martial arts)

www.penguin.com.au