



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 8+; years 4 to 7

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Subjects:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and creative thinking

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Studying the short story form
- Studying comedy
- Exploring creative writing and imagination

THEMES

- Imagination
- School life
- Home life
- Humour

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia & Tristan Bancks

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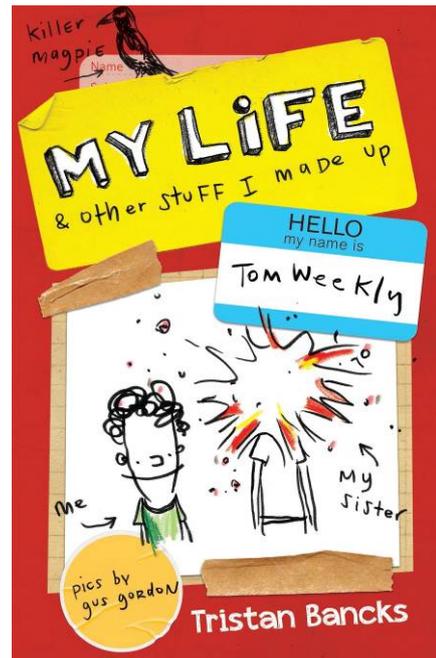
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My Life and Other Stuff that Went Wrong, My Life and Other Massive Mistakes and My Life and Other Exploding Chickens are also available now!



My Life And Other Stuff I Made Up

Tristan Bancks
Illustrated by Gus Gordon

INTRODUCTION

My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up is a collection of short stories written by Australian children's author Tristan Bancks and illustrated by Gus Gordon. Many of the stories are based on experiences from Tristan's life, while some are pure fiction.

Tristan brainstormed ideas for a number of the stories with children at schools and literature festivals in Brisbane and Sydney. He would supply a scenario and together they would come up with dozens of ideas. Tristan plans to write the second book in the series entirely in collaboration with children, sparking their imaginations and giving them an opportunity to see their own ideas in a published book with acknowledgement for their contribution.

The activities in these teaching notes are mainly creative writing exercises to encourage students to tell their own stories and mash them with fiction, just like Tom Weekly does in the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tristan Bancks is a children's and teen author with a background in acting and filmmaking. His books include *Two Wolves*, the *My Life* series (weird-funny-gross short stories featuring Tom Weekly), the *Mac Slater*, *Coolhunter* series and *It's Yr Life* co-written with Tempany Deckert. His short films as writer and director have won a number of awards and have screened widely in festivals and on TV. Tristan's drive is to tell inspiring, fast-moving stories for young people. Visit his website for lots of information and resources, including book trailers and writing tips: www.tristanbancks.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Gus Gordon is an author and illustrator. He writes books about motorbike riding stunt chickens, dogs that live in trees and singing on rooftops in New York. Gus lives with his wife and three kids on the Northern beaches of Sydney where he has written and illustrated over 70 books for children, including *Herman and Rosie*, *Wendy* and *A Day With Noodles*. *Herman and Rosie* was a 2013 Children's Book Council of Australia Honour Book in the picture book category. He has visited over 300 hundred schools around Australia and loves speaking to kids about illustration, character design and the desire to control a wiggly line. Visit Gus at: www.gusgordon.com

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Tristan Bancks says:

All stories are part fact and part fiction. Even history is part fact and part fiction.

Many of the stories in *My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up* sprang from things that have happened to me. I have then embellished those stories to make for a series of (hopefully) funny and surprising tales.

I grew up reading Paul Jennings books like *Unreal*, *Unbelievable* and *Quirky Tails*. I loved these books.

Nobody else, at the time, was writing surprising, funny, odd tales for children quite like these. I have used my love of those stories to motivate the writing of my own stories.

As a kid I always jotted my ideas down in exercise books and notebooks. I didn't know what I would do with them but I just had to get them down. I encourage all kids to get their ideas down – ideas for stories, movies, inventions, video games, jokes, cartoon characters and just general thoughts on life. You never know when they might come in handy.

This book looks and feels a bit like one of my notepads as a kid, with pictures and weird, funny, gross stories and things that would make me laugh. A book like this is a space for a child to make their own, to come back to, and to feel safe to explore. I encourage children and young people, as soon as they can write, to have a book like this where they can be bold and adventurous without needing to be 'right' or having to prove anything to anybody.

ILLUSTRATOR'S INSPIRATION

Gus Gordon says:

Tom Weekly reminded me very much of my 12-year-old self. It wasn't too difficult a task to channel the random thoughts of that younger, fantastically naïve, enthusiastic, imaginative boy as it is pretty much how I am today. I still, like Tom, daydream about incredible situations and still have the propensity to think in a random, fractured manner, jumping from thought to thought with no real segue as if I am picking my thoughts out of a hat. Drawing for me was the most efficient way of communicating these unorganised ideas. Off-kilter illustrations and pointless list writing were a speciality of mine. I drew in every class, in every margin on everything and anything I had in front of me. This kind of fervour – the need to express myself through drawing – was how I approached the illustrations, or more specifically, how I saw Tom drawing them – a natural extension of his rambling imagination.

The subjects (awkward encounters, gross bodily functions, eating, girls) were also all too familiar to me. Whether it was a panicked list about an operation, escaping false teeth or a drawing of a floating poo, it all felt disturbingly normal. Obviously it was the same for Tom!



ACTIVITIES ON EACH STORY

The Dog Kisser

The story behind the story

Tristan Banks: 'I used to run into a dog kisser whenever I walked my dog to the beach. I was totally grossed out at the thought of having a dog lick me. I wrote this story thinking that others would relate to this and understand. They don't. My research in the field suggests that at least 65% of any given group of people are dog kissers. Unlike Tom Weekly, I have not crossed the line. I am still

firmly in the un-Dog Kisser camp. Call me crazy.'

Activity

a) Spend five minutes freewriting a list of memories from your childhood. They can be significant or mundane

events. The goal is to write as many memories as possible in five minutes rather than just come up with your 'best' memory. See freewriting worksheet attached.

Once you have a list, some students should read out their work.

b) Each choose one of your memories from the exercise above and, in a five-minute freewrite, tell that story in greater detail. But, this time, add one detail that isn't true. Tell us the true story but just add something false. When the work is read out, see if other students can pick which of the details you made up.

This exercise encourages students to use their own experience in their stories but to not be afraid to meld those experiences with fiction. First-hand experience gives detail and authenticity to a fictionalised story.

Hot Dog Eat

The story behind the story

Tristan Banks: 'I heard about the annual Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Competition held at Coney Island, New York, and I was fascinated by the concept of "professional eating". I am an enormous fan of Stephen King's fantastic story *The Body*, made into the film *Stand By Me*. In that story there is an unforgettable "pie-eat" scene. This is my homage to it.'

Activity

Food, glorious food. What is your favourite or least favourite food? Tell a story about it. The story can celebrate the beauty of food or, like *Hot Dog Eat*, it can be a little bit gross. See food worksheet attached.

Resources

Google 'Nathan's Hot Dog Eat' and click on a video of the famous Dog Eat that inspired the story.

Teleporter

The story behind the story

Tristan Banks: 'This story seemed to almost write itself. It came very easily to me. I spent a lot of time with my cousins as a child playing make-believe and I remember a time between primary and high school when I realised that it no longer seemed okay to pretend like this anymore. I was devastated, so I continued to play by pursuing acting and filmmaking and writing throughout high school and into adult life. I am still playing.

'I also have strong memories of indoor ball games at home that often required superglue at some point.'

Activity

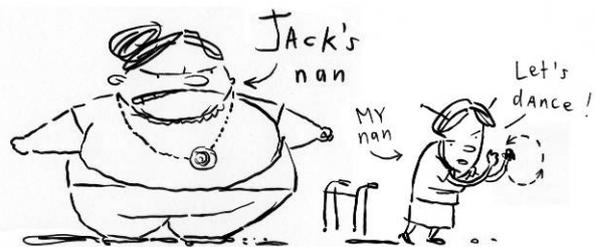
If you could invent an amazing machine like a teleporter, what would it be?

Draw your machine.

Now see if you can tell a story about your machine.

If you could choose anyone in your class to play the characters in your story, who would you choose? Can you put together a short skit based on your story using items around the classroom for props?

My Nan's Tougher



The story behind the story

Tristan Banks: 'I have no idea where this story sprang from. One of those ideas that struck me while walking down the street or when I was trying to



sleep, I imagine. I threw the scenario at a group of kids during a school visit and we had lots of fun brainstorming it and I went away and wrote the story. I subsequently had fun brainstorming the story with lots of other school groups and their ideas helped shape the story and make it much funnier.'

Activity

Brainstorm!

As a class, see if you can brainstorm items that two grandmothers might use if they were involved in a back-alley brawl. Write all of the ideas up on the board. Now, can you write your own *My Nan's Tougher* story, using the items that have been written on the board?

Toe

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I remember my sister telling me that I had to eat Vegemite off her toe or she would tell my mother about something bad that I had done. She denies it but I'm sure that it happened. I like to think that I refused. This story is my way of working through the long-term scarring inflicted by this dark episode in my childhood. By the way, I didn't really bite her toe off. And the dog didn't eat it.'

Activity

Has anything funny ever happened between you and your brothers or sisters? If you don't have any, perhaps you could choose something that happened with a friend or a cousin. Write that story down. Just take five minutes and, remember, don't stop writing. Just get it down.

When you're finished, the class can read out some of the stories.

Now, can you look at the funny story and see how you could make it even funnier? How could the funny thing that happened be even more hilarious, crazy or ridiculous? Now rewrite the story with your new, crazy ideas, pushing the story as far as it can go. Which version of the story do you like best?

Scab

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I really did have my appendix removed in order to avoid detention with a member of staff at my primary school. I pretended to be sick and was sent to hospital with acute appendicitis and they removed my appendix. I can wholeheartedly recommend that all children attend detention if

requested in order to avoid having a body part removed.'

Activity

Stories based on your own life are a powerful 'way in' to storytelling and a great place to look for inspiration. The best way to inspire and nurture young writers is to have them write in a book or journal every single day, even if it is just for five minutes. The only rule should be that their pen or pencil does not stop moving across the page for the entire five minutes. They will discover their own unique voice and overcome any fear of putting words onto the page. There is no right or wrong in this kind of book and ideas are more important than neat writing and perfect spelling. All students should have a safe place to share their stories, just like Tom Weekly. Start today!

Swoop

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'All Australians understand magpie fear. I wrote this story a few years ago to vent my frustration with the magpies living near my house. When I came to write the book I searched for the story but could not find it. So I rewrote the story from memory. I set myself the simple challenge of getting Tom to the bus stop without being swooped or humiliated. Then I threw everything I could at him to stop him getting there.'



Activity

Picture search: One of the tools that Tristan uses in his writing is to gather pictures that feel like the story he is creating. Can you use magazines, newspapers and sites like Google Images and Flickr to gather pictures that feel like the story, *Swoop*?

Or can you write your own story about a dangerous animal and gather together pictures for inspiration that might help you to write that story?

Tooth Job

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: '*Tooth Job* was inspired by a story told to me by an old friend when we were discussing the worst jobs that we had ever had.'



Activity

What do you think would be the worst job in the whole world? Is it grubby or embarrassing or dangerous? As a class you could brainstorm a big list of 'Worst Jobs' and then everyone could choose one of the jobs and write 'A day in the life of a ...'

In the TV series *Dirty Jobs* they feature a worm dung farmer, a snake wrangler and an owl vomit collector.

Resources

A list of episodes from the TV series *Dirty Jobs*:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Dirty_Jobs_episodes

Hover Everything

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I once woke to find everything in my house hovering. No, I didn't really. This story springs from the many school visits that I have done as an author. When brainstorming invention ideas with students for a new book in my *Mac Slater* series, at least one third of all invention ideas were hover-somethings. I began to wonder what it might be like to wake and find that *everything* hovered. Would it be as cool as it sounds? Or might that dream become a nightmare? I was also inspired by the book, *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs*, which I was reading to my children at the time.'

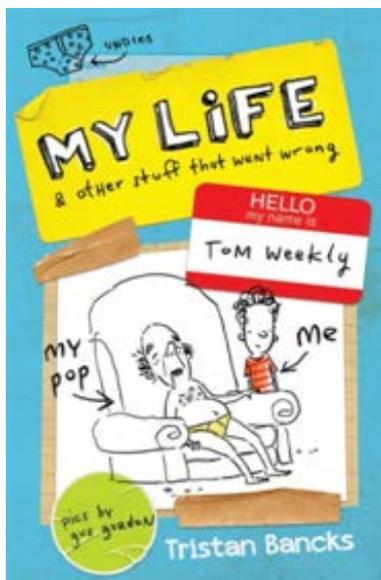
Activity

Storyboard: Filmmakers use storyboards to plot out scenes. Create a storyboard or comic strip for *Hover Everything*, showing everything that happens in the story.

See storyboard worksheet attached.



FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



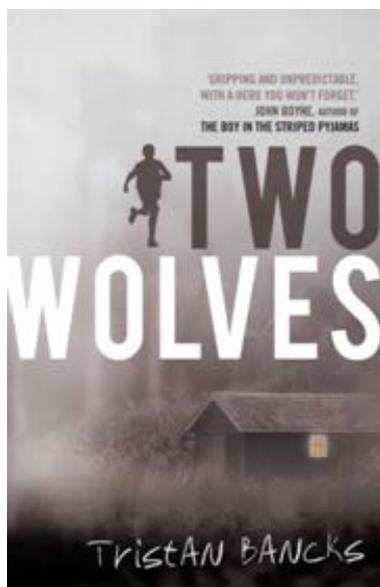
My Life and Other Stuff that Went Wrong
by Tristan Bancks

Why this story? Yes, Tom's misadventures continue!

Is your grandpa super-angry? Has your nan ever tried to climb Mt Everest? Have you started your own playground freak show? And have you ever risked your life to save your pet rat from certain destruction?

I have. I'm Tom Weekly and this is my life. Inside the covers of this book you'll read lots of weird-funny-gross stories and learn the secret of my strangest body part. But I guarantee that won't freak you out as much as the story of how Stella Holling, a girl who's been in love with me since second grade, tricked me into kissing her.

***My Life and Other Exploding Chickens*, the fourth Tom Weekly book, is also available now!**



Two Wolves
by Tristan Bancks

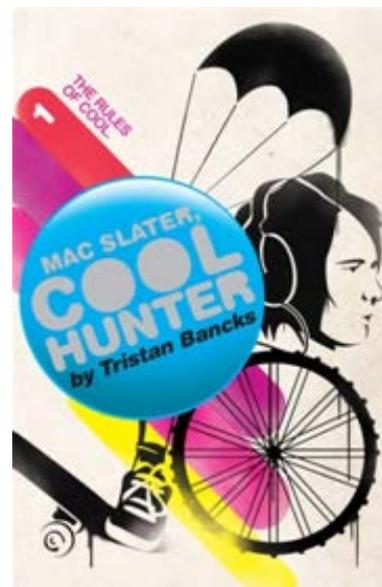
Why this story? 'Gripping and unpredictable, with a hero you won't forget.' – John Boyne

One afternoon, police officers show up at Ben Silver's front door. Minutes after they leave, his parents arrive home. Ben and his little sister Olive are bundled into the car and told they're going on a holiday. But are they?

It doesn't take long for Ben to realise that his parents are in trouble. Ben's always dreamt of becoming a detective – his dad even calls him 'Cop'. Now Ben gathers evidence and tries to uncover what his parents have done.

The problem is, if he figures it out, what does he do? Tell someone? Or keep the secret and live life on the run?

Teachers' resources available.



Mac Slater, Coolhunter
by Tristan Bancks

Why this story? An edge-of-your-seat series about the hunt for the coolest things on earth.

Mac's just crashed the latest prototype of his flying bike in front of the whole school. So when the creators of Coolhunters approach him and tell him he's an Innovator, Mac thinks they're crazy.

They offer Mac a trial. He'll vlog all the cool stuff coming out of Kings Bay for a week. If he wins he'll travel the world, uncovering stuff he loves and reporting it via Coolhunters, a massive online space.

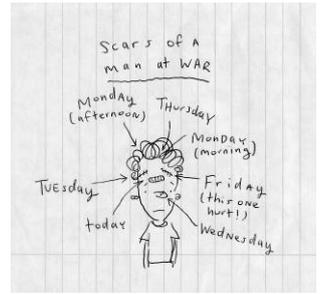
Cool or uncool? Geeks or revolutionaries? The votes are in.

Teachers' resources available.



FREEWRTING EXERCISE

Spend five minutes freewriting a list of memories from your childhood. They can be significant or mundane events. The goal is to write as many memories as possible in five minutes rather than just come up with your 'best' memory.



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____



Storyboard

Filmmakers use storyboards to plot out scenes. Create a storyboard or comic strip for the story *Hover Everything*, showing what happens in the story.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up	Tristan Bancks	9780857983190	4-7	\$15.99		
My Life and Other Stuff that Went Wrong	Tristan Bancks	9780857980373	4-7	\$15.99		
My Life and Other Massive Mistakes	Tristan Bancks	9780857985293	4-7	\$15.99		
My Life and Other Exploding Chickens	Tristan Bancks	9780857985316	4-7	\$15.99		
Two Wolves	Tristan Bancks	9780857982032	5-8	\$16.99		
Mac Slater, Coolhunter Book 1	Tristan Bancks	9781925324327	5-8	\$16.99		
Mac Slater, Coolhunter Book 2	Tristan Bancks	9781925324334	5-8	\$16.99		
TOTAL						

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