



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary
(ages 8+)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Critical and creative thinking; Information and communication technology capability; Literacy.

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Communicate through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing
- Use language to shape and make meaning according to purpose, audience and context
- Think in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive and critical
- Express themselves and their relationships with others and their world

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

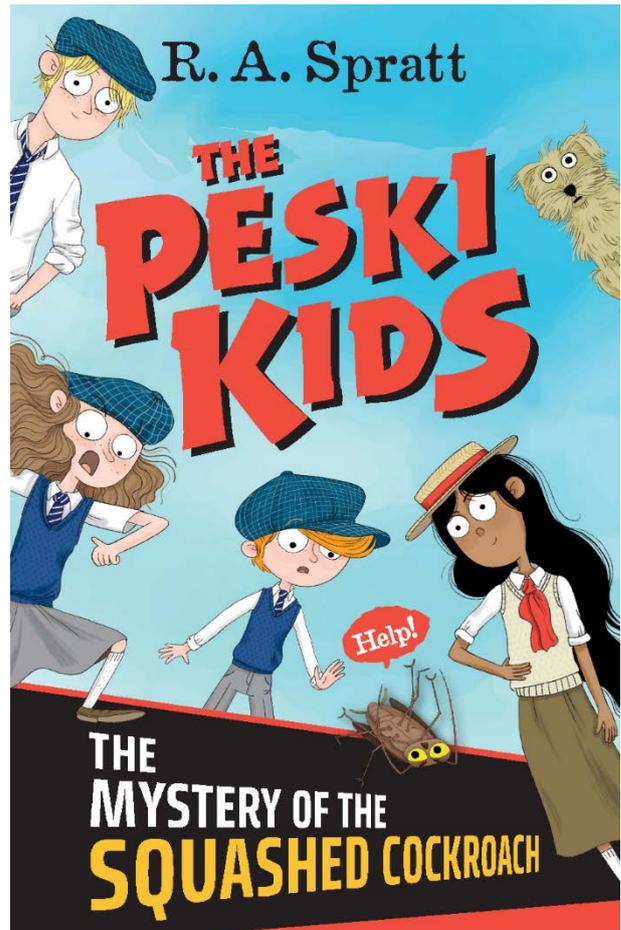
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The Mystery of the Squashed Cockroach

R. A. Spratt

ABOUT THE BOOK

Three squabbling siblings. One all-too perfect next-door neighbour. A missing mum, a bumbling dad, a kooky cockroach mystery and an eccentric country town. What could possibly go wrong?

Life is hard enough without having to spend time with your siblings. But there is no other way for Joe, Fin and April Peski to solve the mystery of the cockroach catastrophes that is rocking their new home town of Currawong.

Along with Loretta, their stunningly beautiful yet sociopathic next-door neighbour, and Pumpkin, the world's worst trained dog, they set out to catch the culprit.

Together they are The Peski Kids.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R.A. Spratt is an award winning author and television writer. She is best known for writing the Nanny Piggins and Friday Barnes series.

R.A. Spratt got her first writing job in 1997, as a staff writer at *Good News Week* (a satirical TV game show). R.A. has gone on to write for dozens of TV programs. After several years of writing comedy, she started writing preschool drama and in recent years has mainly written children's animation.

R.A. Spratt wrote her first book, *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins*, in 2006. It was published in Australia in March, 2009, and the USA in August, 2010.

R.A. Spratt lives in Bowral, NSW, where she has three chickens, two goldfish and a dog. She also has a husband and two daughters. Unlike the Peski kids, R.A. Spratt never fights with her brother, but only because he moved to Hong Kong to get away from her.

For more information, visit: raspratt.com

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

R. A. Spratt was inspired by two main ideas:

Firstly, how awful all other books are. She believes none of them reflect the way brothers and sisters really talk to each other. R.A. Spratt says that, in the real world, siblings talk to each other in a constant stream of sarcasm, needling, yelling, accusations, wheedling and verbal abuse. Which is far more interesting than being nice, kind and considerate. She wanted to reflect this in her writing and characters in *The Peski Kids*.

Secondly, the town she lives in, located in the Southern Highlands. It is very nice but also very strange, with bizarre festivals for all sorts of random annual events. Life is totally different when you live in a small place where everyone knows everyone. It makes everything a little bit claustrophobic, which is the perfect setting for a mystery.

THEMES

Family

The Peski kids family is torn apart in the opening chapters of the novel. They are used to living with their mum and haven't seen their dad for years. Their father is an unknown quantity and at first, the Peski kids treat him with mild disrespect and amusement. Over the course of the story however, their relationship with him begins to grow and the family dynamic shifts.

New experiences

As the Peski Kids are forced to move to Currawong they find themselves having many new experiences; a new school, new identities, new friends (and enemies), new social standing, new living situation and so on. In a way, these new experiences encourage the kids to pull together as they find their feet and attempt to solve the mystery of the squashed cockroach.

Mystery

Underpinning the whole story are two main mystery elements – who is responsible for killing all the cockroaches, and what has happened to their mother. While the majority of time is spent on the cockroach mystery, the fact that their mother has been kidnapped by the Kolektiv is an undercurrent throughout and appears to be tied into the explosive ending of the book.

CHARACTER PROFILES

The Peski Kids is a character-driven story and each of the main characters have very different personalities.

Joe

The oldest of the Peski kids, Joe is 16 going on 60. A nervous sort, Joe often finds words performing acrobatics on the tip of his tongue and ends up stammering. As a result he says very little – except to break up fights between April and Fin!

Joe is tall and muscly and has quite the knack for sports – and, to his horror, teenage girls! Even his lack of conversation seems to spur them on, and Joe can often be found hiding in strange places during recess and lunch.

Ever-growing and ever-hungry, Joe is never sure what he wants more – food, or peace and quiet. Unfortunately for him, he's likely to get neither throughout the course of this book!



Fin

Small in stature but big on provoking April, at age 13 Fin is the middle Peski kid. He's smart, serious and always has a quick retort to deliver in his poker-faced way.



Fin would much rather blend into a crowd than stand out, but he's also not going to let himself get walked over – so don't push him too far, some of April's wrestling tricks have definitely rubbed off!



Although not terribly in touch with his emotions, Fin's in for a rollercoaster ride of feelings in this book. And unfortunately, Fin's pale skin means that his blushing face stands out a mile away . . . did someone say Loretta?!

April

At age 12, April is the youngest of the Peski kids – but she doesn't let that stand in her way! April is a girl that knows her own mind and isn't afraid to use it. A lover of wrestling, an award-winning arguer and a firm feminist, April explodes out of the pages of the book.

Having been diagnosed with a social anxiety disorder (read: anger management issues), April is rarely seen without her furry – and somewhat fiery – companion, Pumpkin the dog.

Apparently, he has a calming influence on her . . . despite his tendency for biting.

Surprisingly, April is happiest in art class – things like painting and basket weaving seem to have a therapeutic effect on her. Go figure.



Loretta

Beautiful, polite and most likely a criminal mastermind, Loretta is the Peski kids' next-door neighbour. A keen horse rider, Loretta loves nothing more than cantering her chestnut stallion through Mr Peski's garden, with little regard for the garden itself.



Loretta's parents are both doctors and she, unlike the Peski kids, attends private school – and is driven there in the latest-model electric car by her Swedish au pair, Ingrid.

While boys may throw themselves at Loretta's endless legs, the rest of the town does not think highly of her underhand ways. Does Loretta care? Not one little bit!

Pumpkin

Technically April's 'therapy dog', Pumpkin the terrier's favourite form of therapy is biting people's ankles. Hairy ankles, if he has the choice. He's yappy, snappy and often manages to get his four paws right in the centre of the action.



Like all dogs, Pumpkin likes running, barking, sleeping and getting treats from the one person he truly adores (that's April, of course).

Questions and activities:

1. Pick a secondary character in *The Peski Kids* (for example, Dad or Ingrid) and write a character profile for them.
2. Pick another book and, following the style of the above character profiles, write profiles for each of the main characters of the book.

LANGUAGE

Use language to shape and make meaning according to purpose, audience and context.

Purpose and audience

Watch R. A. Spratt talk about her new book on the link below:

<https://raspratt.com/2018/05/14/explaining-the-peski-kids/>

Questions and activities:

1. Discuss the purpose of writing this book and who it is written for (e.g. audience).
2. From the way the author talks during this short clip how would you describe her?
3. Is this reflected in her writing? What is your evidence from the text?

Humour

Writing funny stories is one of the hardest forms of the craft. You may have a great sense of humour, but capturing that in your writing takes skill and practice. Here are some of the techniques that R. A. Spratt employs that you may want to use in your own writing.

Irony: The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect. A simple way of putting it is that irony usually signals a difference between the appearance of things and reality.

Hyperbole: Exaggeration used to evoke strong feelings or create an impression which is not meant to be taken



literally. Often involves a surprise or unexpected event or consequence.

Parody: The opportunity to imitate the style of an individual, place, object or institution with a nonsensical approach.

Activity: critical and creative thinking

1. Ask students in pairs to individually list the five events in the story that they consider to be the funniest. The pairs will then link up to share their lists and together form the top three funniest events. Students critically analyse their top three events and determine which technique the author used. Class to then share and collate.

Individual examples from *The Peski Kids: The Mystery of the Squashed Cockroach*:

The Peski kid's house being blown up (p.20) - Hyperbole

Loretta breaking and entering (p.111) - Irony

April accusing people of murder (p.237) - Parody

2. Students write about a short humorous event that has happened to them at school or at home.

3. Consider which technique (e.g. irony, hyperbole, parody) could be used to make this paragraph even funnier and rewrite the event.

Dialogue

In the author's inspiration for *The Peski Kids*, R. A. Spratt mentioned that she wanted to reflect the way siblings communicate in the real world.

Register: a stylistic variety of a language, such as formal or informal.

Colloquial language: appropriate to or characteristic of conversational speech or writing in which the speaker or writer is under no particular constraint to choose

standard, formal, conservative, deferential, polite, or grammatically unchallengeable words, but feels free to choose words as appropriate from the informal, slang, vulgar, or taboo elements of the lexicon.

Questions and activities:

1. Discuss how you talk to your siblings or best friends. Do you ever yell, wheedle or use sarcasm? How does the language you use differ from how you would speak to your parents or an adult?

2. How would you describe the dialogue in *The Peski Kids*?

3. How does R. A. Spratt reflect the Peski kids' age and interpersonal relationships in their dialogue? Find some true-to-life examples of how the Peski kids talk to one another in the book.

4. Write your own dialogue between siblings, based on your own experiences. How does your writing and the language you use differ to a formal piece of writing such as a newspaper report or essay?

Cliff-hanger endings

Questions and activities:

1. What is the purpose of this type of ending?

2. How did you feel when this story ended?

3. Brainstorm all the possible ideas for what will happen in the next *The Peski Kids* book.

4. Create a book trailer for *The Peski Kids*.

View some examples of completed book trailers online and discuss:

- What is the purpose of a book trailer?
- Who is the audience?
- What techniques are used to motivate you to buy to book?



WORKSHEET: HOW TO MAKE A BOOK TRAILER

Read the book and consider what the story is about. Who are the most important characters and what are the key points?

1. Write a 30-second to 1-minute trailer script and remember to keep it short and sweet.
2. Visualise your trailer by gathering images and music.
3. Try using Story Scrapbook, Tristan Bancks' free transmedia story brainstorming app:
<http://www.tristanbancks.com/p/story-scrapbook.html>
4. Complete your book trailer if you are using still images or shoot and edit if you are using video.
5. View your trailer and reflect on it to see if you have achieved your purpose. Edit if necessary.
6. When you are satisfied, share it with your class or add it to your school website.



WORKSHEET: NEWSPAPER REPORT

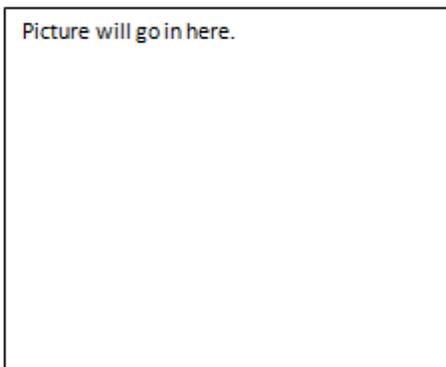
Let's learn what makes a good newspaper article and grab the reader's attention with an arresting headline (adapted from <http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/english/englishD9.htm>).

Use the newspaper template to complete your report on the cockroach mystery which the Peski kids have solved.

<h1>Name of Paper</h1>		
Date	YOUR DAILY FAVOURITE NEWSPAPER	Price

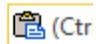
WRITE HEADLINE HERE

Picture will go in here.



Continue writing here

Continue writing here

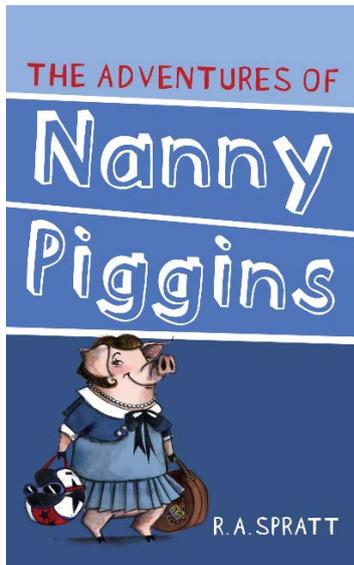


Caption for a picture

Start writing here.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



The Adventures of Nanny Piggins
by R. A. Spratt

A Nanny with trotters!

Nanny Piggins, the world's most glamorous flying pig, runs away from the circus and goes to live with the Greens as their nanny.

The Green children, Derrick, Samantha and Michael, fall in love with her instantly. Who could not fall in love with a Nanny whose only job qualifications are her astonishing ability to be fired out of a cannon and her amazing ability to make chocolate cake, sometimes both at the same time?

Teachers' resources available.



Friday Barnes: Girl Detective
by R. A. Spratt

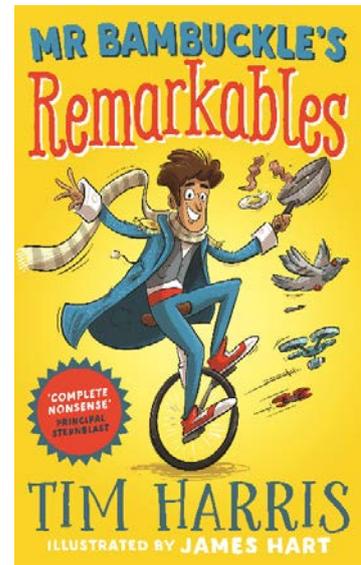
Imagine if Sherlock Holmes was an eleven-year-old girl!

When girl detective Friday Barnes solves a bank robbery she uses the reward money to send herself to the most exclusive boarding school in the country, Highcrest Academy.

On arrival, Friday is shocked to discover the respectable school is actually a hotbed of crime. She's soon investigating everything from disappearing homework to the Yeti running around the school swamp. That's when she's not dealing with her own problem – Ian Wainscott, the handsomest boy in school, who inexplicably hates Friday and loves nasty pranks.

Can Friday solve Highcrest Academy's many strange mysteries, including the biggest mystery of all – what's the point of high school?

Teachers' resources available.



Mr Bambuckle's Remarkables
by Tim Harris

When Mr Bambuckle arrives, laughs, thrills, silliness and imagination are guaranteed to follow!

He's the first teacher to cook us breakfast.

Is his spark-maker beetle really that dangerous?

I heard he drank yak's milk in Mongolia.

He's the only person who isn't afraid of Canteen Carol.

My mum says he used to be in the circus.

The class in room 12B has a new teacher, and nothing is ever going to be the same . . .

Teachers' resources available.



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
The Peski Kids: The Mystery of the Squashed Cockroach	R. A. Spratt	9780143788812	6 – 7	\$16.99		
The Peski Kids: Bear in the Woods <i>(available 8/1/2019)</i>	R. A. Spratt	9780143788836	6 – 7	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes: Girl Detective	R. A. Spratt	9781742759623	6 – 7	\$15.99		
The Adventures of Nanny Piggins	R. A. Spratt	9781742755298	4 – 5	\$15.99		
TOTAL						

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<p>NAME: _____</p> <p>SCHOOL: _____</p> <p>ADDRESS: _____</p> <p>STATE: _____</p> <p>POSTCODE: _____</p> <p>TEL: _____</p> <p>EMAIL: _____</p> <p>ACCOUNT NO.: _____</p> <p>PURCHASE ORDER NO.: _____</p>	<p>PLEASE SEND ORDER FORMS TO YOUR LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPLIER.</p>
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