

Unit of Work for

Alex Jackson:

Dropping In

By Pat Flynn

Introduction

Welcome to the world of Alex Jackson. A world created for young readers to laugh and learn as they enter via their imagination, a place where both boys and girls are welcome. And, of course, their teachers! This unit of work has been written to help teachers provide students with positive reading and learning experiences.

The unit is divided into three sections. Chapters 1-5, 6-10 and 11-15. Each section has a listening comprehension quiz, two-level questions, a 10-word spelling list, fill-in-the-blanks vocabulary and a language lesson. At the end of the unit are suggested major activities and an answer section.

The language sections cover: punctuation at the end of a sentence; whose/who's, accept/except; writing non-boring sentences. The major activities include a book review, persuasive speech, and diary entry.

This unit of work is published both in hard copy and on the Internet at www.patflynnwriter.com The hard copy can be ordered by phoning University of Queensland Press Sales at 07 33652440, or fax – 07 33651988. The teacher section on the website includes reviews of the Alex Jackson titles, and a link off the home page provides information about the author.

Parts of this unit are interactive, including writing a book review to the author. To obtain a reply make sure students write "review" in the subject of the email. The email address is author@patflynnwriter.com If students don't have access to the net and would like to send letters, please include a stamped addressed envelope to Pat Flynn C/O UQP, PO Box 6042, St Lucia, QLD, 4067.

Thank you for entering Alex's world. I hope you enjoy reading and teaching about his journey and that this unit of work makes learning enjoyable for both students and teachers.

Themes

The Alex Jackson series charts the journey of **self-discovery** that one boy takes on his way to becoming a man. Although written last, *Dropping In* is the first instalment in the series – with an 11-year-old Alex becoming aware that he is moving into a new phase of his life.

The major theme of the novel is **uniqueness**. Like many boys and girls entering adolescence, Alex has a desire to be more than average. His search to be special sees him try various activities where he hopes he can make his mark. These include soccer, boxing, academics, and finally, skateboarding.

At first, Alex feels like he fails at everything he tries. He misses the winning goal in soccer and loses the boxing match. After studying hard (or obsessively) he does top the class in the science test, but even that satisfaction is taken away when Sarah says that she let him win.

At the end of the book Alex discovers he has a talent for skateboarding. His mentor, Casey, predicts the future when he says, “You’re gonna be good mate. Real good. I can feel it.” Alex now has something that will help him feel special, but hopefully he learns that it takes more than this to be happy.

On page 45 Alex’s mum, Sharon, says, “Your dad and I don’t care if you win a fight or get an A in a test. We love you because you’re you. You don’t have to prove anything, to us or yourself.” Although Alex is more interested in watching Casey skate, it is wise advice.

Other themes covered briefly in the book include **refugees, boy/girl relations, violence in society/computer games**, and the **fine line between winning and losing**.

CHAPTERS 1-5

Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension – Quiz 1

1. Miss Connors tells Alex that the type of train referred to in the maths question is: (p.2)
 - a. Electric
 - b. Magnetic
 - c. Diesel
 - d. Steam

2. Which colour medal did Chief win at the Commonwealth Games? (p.7)
 - a. Gold
 - b. Silver
 - c. Bronze
 - d. He didn't win a medal

3. Who scores the first goal in the soccer game between Beeton and Trinity? (p.13)
 - a. Billy
 - b. Beard
 - c. Ravi
 - d. Alex

4. What did Alex get for his 11th birthday? (p.20)
 - a. Boxing Gloves
 - b. Skateboard
 - c. Mouthguard
 - d. Both A and C

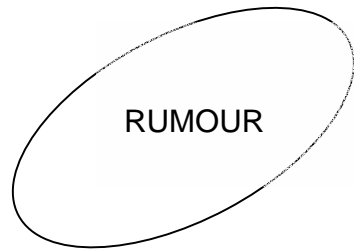
5. Coming home from boxing training, Chief bought some drinks at the NightOwl for himself and Alex. The drinks were: (p.24)
 - a. Cokes
 - b. Milks
 - c. Milkshakes
 - d. Gatorades

Chapters 1-5

Spelling

When we first learned how to spell it was often helpful to sound out words. MAT. M— A—T. However, as words get more difficult, sounding out doesn't always help. For example, school could be spelt skool, liquid could be lickwud, etc. Fortunately, our brains are incredible computers, and after seeing a word a few times it can usually remember how to spell it. Successful spellers are very good at having a picture of the whole word in their head, rather than simply trying to sound the word out. They will then write it down and see if it looks right on paper. One way to practise this is to imagine the word in your head written across your favourite skateboard, bicycle, T-shirt, etc. This helps you to remember it better.

Exercise: There are 3 lists of 10 words from the book in this unit. For words you aren't sure of, imagine them written across something you know well, perhaps as a sticker. Make sure you can see the word clearly in your head. One way to test this is to close your eyes and spell the word backwards, as well as forwards.



Chapters 1-5

Spelling

List 1

environment
guarantee
whacking
disappointing
specialist
extraordinaire
anatomy
diesel
huddle
occasion

Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 1 into the following sentences.

1. “Diesel is bad for the _____,” she said, looking up. (Chapter 1)
2. The girls formed a _____, talking intently. (Chapter 2)
3. Billy leapt in the air, his elbow _____ Ravi right in the temple. (Chapter 3)
4. Alex decided to milk the _____ for everything it was worth. (Chapter 3)
5. He brought his science book and saw that next week’s test was on _____ . (Chapter 5)

Chapters 1-5

Language — How do you end a sentence? There are three ways. Learning them is heaps cool!

There are only three punctuation symbols used at the end of a sentence: **question marks (?)** for a direct question, **exclamation marks (!)** for dramatic emphasis, and **full-stops (.)** for a statement.

Exercise: Place the correct symbol at the end of each sentence.

- Where are you going
- What's political mean
- Pencils down now
- There is a good chance you will fail
- You stink, Jackson
- Get lost
- How'd you guys go in the maths test
- Things were looking bleak for Beeton
- The whistle blew and Trinity rolled forward like a steam train
- Why can't I be the best at something, just for once in my life

Exercise: Write six sentences, using each sentence ending punctuation symbol twice.

Chapters 6-10

Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension – Quiz 2

1. What did Sarah often do to try and fool Alex's family when she rang their house? (p.26)
 - a. Put on a foreign accent
 - b. Used a computer to disguise her voice
 - c. Pretended she was a teacher
 - d. Had her mum call

2. What grade did Alex get on his maths test? (p.29)
 - a. A+
 - b. A-
 - c. C
 - d. C-

3. What did Alex and Jimmy use as a goal post in their backyard soccer game? (p.35)
 - a. A school bag
 - b. A shoe
 - c. A wheelie bin
 - d. A goal post

4. Before he fought Alex, how many previous fights had Lupo Tapini had? (p.39)
 - a. None
 - b. One
 - c. Three
 - d. Five

5. What was the first thing Sam said to Alex after he lost the fight? (p.61)
 - a. 'Never mind'
 - b. 'You'll win next time'
 - c. 'Alex is a loser'
 - d. 'Your nose is broken'

Chapters 6-10

Spelling

List 2

assembly
caning
squeezed
rehearsal
authentic
wrestling
creatures
cardiovascular
adrenaline
dissolve

Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 2 into the following sentences.

1. Chief was always going on about running 3 miles a day for _____ training. (Chapter 7)
2. Jimmy dumped Alex on the grass and they started _____. (Chapter 8)
3. "It's okay to be nervous," said Chief. "It means the _____ is kicking in." (Chapter 9)
4. The tiredness made his fear _____. (Chapter 9)
5. He must have _____ a bit too hard because her face turned red and when he let go she started crying. (Chapter 10)

Chapters 6-10

Language – Who's/Whose invitation will I accept/except?

Some words sound the same but have different meanings. Two examples that can be confusing are: **Who's/Whose** and **Accept/Except**.

Whose refers to **belonging**.

- Whose book is that?
- It's owned by the boy whose shirt is always dirty.

Who's means **who is**.

- Who's that you were hanging around with yesterday?
- Who's the best soccer player in the world?

Exercise: Place the correct whose/who's in the sentence

- "Alex?" Chief asked. "() on the phone?"
- "() soccer ball is that?"
- Alex couldn't remember () turn it was next.
- Sarah asked the clairvoyant () she going to marry.

Accept means to take or receive.

- I accept your invitation.
- She decided not to accept such a poorly paid job.

Except means to leave out.

- Everybody was asked to the movie except Ronald.
- I will eat anything except brussels sprouts.

Exercise: Place the correct accept/except in the sentence

- Alex decided not to () Sarah's offer.
- Jimmy was good at everything () soccer.
- It was hard for Alex to () that he was losing the fight.
- Everybody in the gym () Chief had a sore stomach.

Exercise: Write four sentences, one each with who's, whose, except and accept.

Chapters 11-17

Taking Notice. Listening Comprehension – Quiz 3

1. Alex wrote down a word in his science test that he didn't know the meaning of. That word was: (p.48)
 - a. Anatomy
 - b. Cardiovascular
 - c. Fibula
 - d. Oblique

2. What did Alex get on his science test, out of 20? (p.54)
 - a. 19 ½
 - b. 19
 - c. 20
 - d. 2

3. Where did Alex run to after Casey saw him fall down the mini-ramp? (p.59)
 - a. School
 - b. The library
 - c. His bed
 - d. Jimmy's house

4. What nationality was the boxer that Chief lost to at the Commonwealth Games? (p.64)
 - a. Fijian
 - b. Samoan
 - c. Scottish
 - d. Egyptian

5. Who introduced himself to Alex at the skatepark? (p.66)
 - a. Billy
 - b. Constable Massingham
 - c. Casey
 - d. Tony Hawk

Chapters 11-17

Spelling

List 3

vicious
literally
vigilantes
unbeknownst
spared
principal
embarrassed
focused
unsuccessful
inferiority

Vocabulary

Place the correct words from List 3 into the following sentences.

1. Alex took her advice _____ . (Chapter 11)
2. _____ to Sarah, Miss Connors or anyone else, Alex and Jimmy had added a fight scene to the play. (Chapter 11)
3. "There was a whole lot of work put in to this play by the whole class," said Miss Connors, "and you two _____ ruined it. (Chapter 12)
4. "You can let go of your _____ complex," she said. (Chapter 14)
5. All of a sudden Chief got through the Samoan's defences and landed a _____ uppercut. (Chapter 15)

Chapters 11-17

Language – How do you write non-boring sentences? (Answer: non-boring sentences)

Writing is made up of a number of sentences joined together to make paragraphs. If too many sentences in a paragraph are **short** and **simple** the reader can find them boring.

- Alex winced. His gluteus maximas hurt. Big time. Yesterday, he rode his skateboard. He dropped down a gutter. He fell off.

However, even worse is if many sentences in a row are **long** or **complex**. Then the reader can find it difficult to follow.

- Alex winced as his gluteus maximas hurt big time, because yesterday while he was riding his skateboard he dropped down a gutter and fell off onto his backside and yelled, "Ouch!".

The best way to write is to make some sentences short and others longer (though not too long), always making sure to keep the writing as clear as possible. If you read books or magazines you'll soon pick up the **rhythm of writing**.

- Alex winced as he moved in his seat. His gluteus maximas hurt – big time. Yesterday, he dropped down his first gutter on a skateboard and landed on his rear end. But even though his backside felt like it had endured 1001 smacks, Alex still smiled. It was heaps of fun.

Exercise: Rewrite the following passages so there are some short and some longer sentences. Remember, linking words such as 'and' can be used to combine ideas.

- Jimmy did a flying dive. Alex did a roundhouse kick. Half the school was cheering. The other half was laughing. Jimmy grabbed Alex. He pretended to head-butt him. Alex stumbled backwards. He stumbled all the way to the edge of the stage. He fell off.

- The mini-bowl was no vert ramp with a drop of about 50 centimetres at a not too steep angle, but Alex was no Casey either, who was not only dropping in to the vert but also pulling sick tricks. Alex watched as Casey rocked to fakie and threw down tail stalls on the U-shaped skyscraper, and wished he could talk to Casey but was too intimidated as Casey was good and Alex wasn't yet.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

The following are suggested major activities to accompany the book.

Book Review

The main task of a book review is to tell the reader whether the book is worth reading.

In a Review you should:

- Give your opinion clearly.
- Support your opinion by referring to specific good and bad things about the book. For example, how realistic were the characters? Did you enjoy the plot, which is what happens in the story? What about the major issues or themes covered?
- Draw your ideas together in a clear and concise conclusion.
- Mention at least some positive points.

In a Review you should not:

- Simply describe the item without saying why you liked or disliked different parts.
- Tell the reader the ending of the book.
- Make negative comments without giving a good reason.

Activity: Check the author's website www.patflynnwriter.com and read reviews of the Alex Jackson series.

Exercise: Write your own review of *Alex Jackson: Dropping In* and if you wish, send it to the author, Pat Flynn (author@patflynnwriter.com). He'll be interested to hear your comments and will send you a reply. Make sure in the subject of the email you write 'Review'.

Diary Entry

Write a diary entry as one of the characters explaining how you feel at a particular point in the story. You could be Alex after he missed the goal in soccer, or Sarah after Alex said that he didn't like her.

Persuasive Speech

Prepare a persuasive speech on the topic:

You don't have to be the best to feel like a winner.

Use quotes from *Dropping In* to help your argument.

Answers

Chapters 1-5

Listening Comprehension

1. C
2. D
3. A
4. D
5. B

Vocabulary

1. environment
2. huddle
3. whacking
4. occasion
5. anatomy

Chapters 6-10

Listening Comprehension

1. A
2. C
3. C
4. D
5. C

Vocabulary

1. cardiovascular
2. wrestling
3. adrenaline
4. dissolve
5. squeezed

Chapters 11-17

Listening Comprehension

1. D
2. A
3. C
4. B
5. C

Vocabulary

1. literally
2. unbeknownst
3. vigilantes
4. inferiority
5. vicious