



## **CHICKENPOX**

Created by REMY LAI

**RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 8–12 YEARS OLD (UPPER PRIMARY)**

**GENRE:** Contemporary realism, Humour, Graphic Novel

**THEMES:** family, sibling relationships, friendships, childhood illness, chickenpox

**CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:**

- English: Literature, literacy and language

**NOTES WRITTEN BY:** Jennifer Asha

**ISBN (AUS):** 978 | 76106 862 |

## INTRODUCTION

Abby Lai is sick of being trapped at home with her four younger siblings! As she says on page 3, 'Younger siblings are like viruses. They're tiny, and they can make you sick.'

In *Chickenpox*, her latest graphic novel, Remy Lai uses a conventional graphic novel layout. The story of *Chickenpox* is told through dialogue between the protagonist, Abby, her family and her friends along with rich illustrations.

Remy Lai has employed a full colour palette in her illustrations that have echoes of *Pie in the Sky*, *Pawcasso* and *Ghost Book*. However, the characters of *Chickenpox* demonstrate an illustrative style unique to this story. True to graphic novel conventions, Lai's illustrations give detailed facial expressions that clearly characterise each member of the Lai family and Abby's school friends and communicate the emotional depth of the story.

Focalising Abby, the story follows the struggles of growing up in a large family and the emotional rollercoaster of tween-hood. Readers of all ages will be able to relate to the themes of navigating family relationships, being seen in different ways by different family members and finding out who you want to be at different stages of life.

These teachers' notes have been formulated with Years 3 and 4 in mind. However, the suggested activities could be adapted for older year levels to include more extended composing opportunities, and wide reading of novels and graphic novels with more mature content.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Abby Lai is sick of being trapped at home with her FOUR younger siblings! All she wants is to spend more time with her friends, far away from the sticky fingers and snooping eyes of her annoying brothers and sisters. But when a case of chickenpox leaves the Lai kids covered in scratchy red spots and stuck at home for two weeks of nonstop mayhem, Abby thinks this might be the end ... of her sanity. Yet she feels responsible for the situation, since her best friend was Patient Zero and brought chickenpox into their home. Abby comes to realise that being a big sister isn't all bad. Full of heart and hijinks, *Chickenpox* showcases what gets us through good times and bad: family.

## Q&A WITH REMY LAI

### What do you see as the main themes of this book?

'Sibling relationships, friendships, growing up.'

### Can you tell us about your inspiration, how you came to write this book?

'I have four siblings. As kids, we had so much fun together, but we also fought a lot. A LOT. We did catch chickenpox around the same time. I don't remember much from that particular time, but I'm guessing it was more mayhem and chaos than usual. The events in *Chickenpox* are inspired by events from my childhood.'

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

### BEFORE READING

- **Discuss:** Discuss different family structures and relationships. Use a picture book such as *Family Forest* by Kim Kane and Lucia Masciullo to set a tone of celebrating diversity in families. Have the students share things they like to do with their families and how they get through tough times together.
- **Watch:** Watch the following video about character and how authors convey characterisation. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/english/textual-concepts#/asset14>
- **Listen:** Explain to children the nature of chickenpox, how it is contracted, the treatment etc. Use a source such as: <https://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/chickenpox-factsheet> or <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/chicken-pox.html> to provide you with the necessary information.
- **Read:** Stock the classroom library with a range of picture books, novels, short stories and graphic novels. Include other publications by Remy Lai and other age appropriate books in the humour and contemporary realism genres:
  - By Remy Lai: *Pie in the Sky*, *Pawcasso*, *Fly on the Wall*.
  - Novels about siblings and families: *Bindi* by Kirli Saunders, *My Brother Ben* by Peter Carnavas, *The Kingdom of Silk* series by Glenda Millard, *Huda was Here* by H. Hayek, *Sickbay* by Nova Weetman.
  - Graphic novels about family and fitting in: *The Odds* by Matt Stanton, *Leaf-light* by Trace Balla.
  - Learn about the conventions of graphic novels: [https://www.readwritethink.org/sites/default/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson1102/terms.pdf](https://www.readwritethink.org/sites/default/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1102/terms.pdf)

## ENGLISH

### LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LITERACY

#### Characteristics of coming-of-age stories

Plot out the story structure of *Chickenpox*. Use the conventional narrative structure of Orientation > Series of events > Complication > Resolution, to summarise the storyline. Compare it to that of other coming-of-age stories. Discuss the following:

- How do the illustrations orient the reader/viewer to the setting and main characters?
- How do the series of events demonstrate Abby's character traits? How do the series of events show the relationships between the characters?
- What are the major and minor Complications?
- How is the Complication resolved?

[AC9E3LA03](#) [AC9E3LA05](#) [AC9E4LA03](#) [AC9E4LE02](#)

#### What is character?

Authors and illustrators use a variety of devices to characterise. The S.T.E.A.L. model can help readers notice how characterisation is achieved. Use it to explore the way Remy Lai characterises Abby and the other characters:

- **Speech:** Abby's dialogue, the words she uses and the way she speaks when talking to her siblings, her mum or her friends.
- **Thought:** Abby's thoughts and feelings expressed via thought bubbles or reported by the narrator.
- **Effect:** The impact Abby has on the behaviour, thoughts and opinions of other characters.
- **Actions:** How Abby behaves and why she behaves that way.
- **Looks:** Abby's physical appearance.

Assign small groups of students one part of the S.T.E.A.L. model and one character to examine how characterisation is built.

[AC9E3LE01](#) [AC9E3LY03](#) [AC9E4LE03](#)

## How can illustrations characterise?

Remy Lai uses a number of techniques to develop her characters. Use the following examples to conduct modelled viewings and to act as mentor texts to help students experiment with illustrating techniques. Use the following 'think-alouds' & questions as prompts for initiating small group or class discussions:

- **Change in illustrative style**

Changing illustrative style creates a break in the storyline and helps the audience to notice details.

- How does the change of illustrative style give background information about the relationships between Abby and her siblings on pgs 62-63?
- How does the change of shape of characters' eyes and a symbolic background represent characters' feelings on pg 181?

- **Use of symbols**

Symbols are used to visually represent meanings and connotations.

- How does the inclusion of halos over the heads of characters symbolise the way they are behaving on pg. 114?

- **Diagrams**

Diagrams are usually a feature of informative texts. They include details of features through labels.

- How are diagram conventions used to introduce and give details about Abby, her friends and her siblings on pgs 6, 12, 146, 218-221?

[AC9E3LA09](#) [AC9E3LY03](#) [AC9E4LA10](#)

## Create a character

Encourage students to draw a self-portrait replicating one of Lai's illustrative styles, using symbols and/or diagrams. Incorporate labels and descriptions similar to those used in the graphic novel to introduce characters and to share students' character traits.

[AC9E3LY06](#) [AC9E4LY06](#)

### Using dialogue to characterise

Use examples of the dialogue in the book to demonstrate the difference between speech bubbles and reported speech. Model appropriate punctuation and the use of dialogue tags with verbs of speech.

Turn some of the dialogue between characters into reported speech and include speaking verbs that help characterise the speakers. Discuss how readers can infer the way dialogue is said in graphic novels by using the plot, what we know about characters, context and our own experiences.

[AC9E3LA07](#) [AC9E4LA07](#) [AC9E4LA12](#)

### How can the text be re-represented through Reader's Theatre?

Choose sections of the story to act out in the style of Reader's Theatre. Ask students to choose a scene or several pages to read aloud and assign characters. Encourage students to consider how their assigned character has been characterised so far in the story and how they could use their voice to represent that character.

[AC9E3LY07](#) [AC9E3LY05](#) [AC9E4LY07](#)

### Using dialogue to communicate clearly

In pairs or small groups, have students practise using respectful dialogue to discuss their responses to the story. Demonstrate then encourage students to use 'talk moves', such as 'building on', 'rephrasing', 'clarifying meaning' and 'respectfully disagreeing'. Some examples of discussion topics:

- Of the characters in *Chickenpox*, what character traits do you recognise in yourself?
- What friendship challenges have you experienced that are similar to Abby and her friends?
- What experiences of Abby's chickenpox lockdown can you relate to?
- Why do you think Remy Lai had to wait until she was an adult to write this story?

[AC9E3LA01](#) [AC9E3LE02](#) [AC9E4LA02](#) [AC9E4LY02](#)

### Focalisation

In prose novels, one character is usually focalised and the story is told from their point of view. In stories written in third person, the narrator tells the reader the focalised characters' thoughts and feelings. In first-person narratives, the focalised character narrates the story, sharing their point of view. Conduct a close reading of *Chickenpox* to determine how Abby is focalised in this graphic novel.

- How do we know that the story is told from her point of view?
- How do the illustrations show that Abby is the focalised character?
- How do speech bubbles, thought bubbles and narrative boxes give different information about characters' thoughts and feelings?

[AC9E3LE03](#) [AC9E4LE03](#)

### Creating a comic

Encourage students to demonstrate their learning about characterisation, dialogue and focalisation by creating a short comic strip to tell a story about their family. Have students use the narrative structure and include one or more frames to provide an Orientation, Series of events, Complication and Resolution. Use illustrations (change in style, symbols and diagrams) and focalisation (speech and thought bubbles, and narrative boxes) to build characterisation.

[AC9E3LE05](#) [AC9E4LE05](#)

### Classroom library

Use student-composed comic strips, favourite comic books, graphic novels, novels and picture books to create a classroom library that students can borrow from. Encourage students to write reviews, summarising and recommending books for different audiences.

[AC9E3LY05](#) [AC9E4LY05](#)

## ASSESSMENT

Assess students' comprehension of the novel using questions such as the following after reading the story.

- LITERAL COMPREHENSION
  - What were each of the characters' relationships with Abby?
  - What time period was the story likely to have been set in, considering the children catch chickenpox?
- INFERENCE COMPREHENSION
  - How did Abby change across the story? What character traits did she develop?
- INTERPRETATIVE COMPREHENSION
  - How can you relate to Abby? What shared experiences do you have?

- What message about siblings/family is Remy Lai hoping to convey through the story?
- How do the illustrations give insight into characters' thoughts & feelings?

Collect students' comic strips and assess them for use of narrative structure, illustrations and dialogue for characterisation as learned about during the activities. Use or adapt the following rubric to assist with assessment of the comic.

<b>Visual or verbal feature used</b>	<b>Working towards</b>	<b>Achieving</b>	<b>Working beyond</b>
<i>Narrative structure</i>	All elements of the narrative structure included conventionally to tell a complete story.	Adaptation of the narrative structure used to tell an interesting story.	Innovative use of the narrative structure used to tell a highly engaging story.
<i>Aspects of the S.T.E.A.L. model</i>	One or two elements of the S.T.E.A.L. model used to build characterisation.	Two or three elements of the S.T.E.A.L. model used to build characterisation.	Four or five elements of the S.T.E.A.L. model used to build characterisation.
<i>Illustration choices</i>	Use of either: - Change in illustrative style across the comic strip. - Use of symbols - Use of diagram	Use of two of the illustrative choices to visually build characterisation.	Use of all three illustrative choices to visually build characterisation in an engaging way.
<i>Dialogue</i>	Use of speech bubbles to include dialogue.	Use of speech bubbles and thought bubbles to include dialogue and build characterisation.	Use of speech bubbles and thought bubbles to include dialogue and very effectively build characterisation.
<i>Focalisation</i>	Focalisation not evident.	Use illustration and dialogue to focalise one character.	Use illustration and dialogue to focalise one character effectively.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**REMY LAI** was born in Indonesia, grew up in Singapore and currently lives in Brisbane, Australia, where she writes and draws stories for kids. Remy is also the award-winning creator of *Pie in the Sky*, *Fly on the Wall*, *Pawcasso*, the *Surviving the Wild* series, *Ghost Book* and *Read At Your Own Risk*.

[www.remylai.com](http://www.remylai.com)

## ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

**Jennifer Asha** is a lover of children's literature. When she is not immersed in a good book, Jennifer is an academic at the Australian Catholic University where she enjoys sharing her passion for literature, language and literacy with her Initial Teacher Education students. Jennifer is also an experienced primary school teacher who has taught in the classroom and in the library, across all grades. Jennifer has conducted classroom-based research and published articles and books that encourage teachers to teach literacy and language using rich literature resources. Her areas of special interest include the teaching of grammar, multimodal texts and visual literacy.

## CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

(In alphabetical order of authors)

*Fly on the Wall* by Remy Lai

*Ghost Book* by Remy Lai

*Pawcasso* by Remy Lai

*Pie in the Sky* by Remy Lai

## ONLINE LINKS IN FULL

Literacy and numeracy: Stage 2 reading - Exploring characters:

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/teaching-and-learning-resources/literacy/teaching-strategies/stage-2/reading/stage-2-characterisation>

Literacy and numeracy: Talk moves: <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/literacy-and-numeracy/teaching-and-learning-resources/numeracy/talk-moves>

Reader's Theatre: <https://www.readingrockets.org/classroom/classroom-strategies/readers-theater>