



# Teachers' Notes

## Chook Shed Snake

PHIL CUMMINGS  
ILLUSTRATED BY GREG HOLFELD

### OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Young Readers
Title	Mates: Chook Shed Snake
Author	Phil Cummings
Illustrator	Greg Holfeld
Extent	64 pp
Age	6+
Australian RRP	\$10.99
Binding	Paperback
Printing	Colour
ISBN	978 1 86291 811 5
Format	198 x 128 mm

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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Mum's on to Dad again about the state of the chook yard. He's patched it with sheets of old iron, a toilet pan, a tractor wheel and an old car bonnet, but he can't get away with that any longer. It's time to do a proper job. But the trouble he's in with Mum is nothing compared to the mischief that a slithery brown snake has in mind!

From tall tales to spooky stories and everything in between, Mates are all-Australian stories for Aussie kids, illustrated in colour on every page.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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**Phil Cummings** was born in the small seaside town of Port Broughton in South Australia. He is the youngest of eight children with four brothers and three sisters. Life as a kid for Phil was a fabulous adventure. He lived on a farm for the first nine years of his life. When his family left the farm, they moved to the mid-north of South Australia to a railway town called Peterborough where his older brothers worked on the steam trains. The windows in his house would rattle constantly as the trains rumbled through the rail yards. After school, Phil worked in a local garage and in the abattoirs. He played sport constantly until he left to attend teachers' college.

Phil's interest in writing started with poetry and writing songs. With the beginning of teacher training, Phil was exposed to a great deal of children's literature, particularly picture books. So Phil decided to sit down and write one. He mistakenly believed it would not be difficult at all! His work was rejected time and time again but, having the writing bug, he kept on going. He soon learnt that writing for children was a lot harder than he ever imagined. Seven years after his first attempts, Phil had a book published. *Goodness Gracious!* – illustrated by Craig Smith – was published by Omnibus Books in 1989.

## **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

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**Greg Holfeld** was born and raised on the Canadian prairies, where he filled the long, cold winters with cartoons, comic books and drawing. He now lives in Adelaide with his wife and two sons, and he spends our hot summers (and not so cold winters) working as a freelance illustrator and animator. His books include *Wolf's Sunday Dinner*, a CBCA Notable Children's Book in 2004, *The Perfect Pet*,

and *Captain Congo and the Crocodile King*. He was shortlisted for the CBCA Crichton Award for book illustrators in 2001.

## **ACTIVITIES**

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The following questions can be used to begin a class discussion, or they can be answered individually, in pairs or in groups.

### **1. English**

Phil Cummings uses fun and interesting words to describe things and sounds: 'Fat buzzing beetles' and 'It rustled like a whisper.'

a) When you use several words in a row that begin with the same letter (buzzing beetles), you call this alliteration.

- Can you think of any great-sounding expressions using this pattern? E.g. careless critters crunch their cereal and miserable monsters mope on Monday mornings. How many can you come up with?
- Can you think of one to describe yourself? E.g. Sarah Smith is stupendously super or David draws dazzling dinosaurs.

b) Using 'like' to describe something is called a simile. If you're describing your grandma to a friend and say her skin is *like* stretchy chewing gum, you're using an image to explain what she looks like. You might tell your friend that your Grandma's voice is *like* the honk of a horn.

- Pick someone you know and use similes to describe their features e.g. their body shape, hair and eye colour, the sound of their voice, how they run or walk. Look at the example below.

Ella has hair *like* straw. When she speaks to me, her voice crackles *like* my rice bubbles when I chew them. If she is running late for school, she sprints *like* an Olympic runner in the final. Her eyes are *like* grey pebbles.

You may like to get together with a friend to complete this activity.

## 2. History

a) Two hundred and nine chooks arrived in Australia with the First Fleet in 1788.

- Why do you think people brought chooks with them? What special problems do you think chooks must have had in their new environment?
- Do you keep chooks or do you know anyone who does? Apart from eggs, what are the benefits of keeping chooks?
- What other livestock do you think people on the First Fleet brought? If you were sailing somewhere new, what would you take with you?

b) When European settlers arrived in Australia, some people began to build farms near settlements. These early farmers grew wheat crops and raised sheep.

- Do you know if any of your ancestors were farmers? Do you have any family members who are farmers?
- What would you grow if you ran a farm? Would you like to live on a farm?

## 3. Creative Activities

a) What do you think of Lilly and Harry's dad's invention? Can you think of a task that you wish you didn't have to do? Invent a machine that would solve your problem. Draw your invention, describe how it works and list all the things it does. You could even make a model of your invention using recycled materials.

b) Imagine you have to fix a chook yard fence. In the form of a recipe, list all the things you would need and how you would go about it.

c) Invent a new blurb for the back cover of *Chook Shed Snake*. Remember, you are trying to entice people to read it!

d) Imagine it is your job to make advertisements for radio. Prepare a short audiotape advertising *Chook Shed Snake* or the Mates series.

e) If you removed the words, the pictures of *Chook Shed Snake* would tell the story. Over a week, compose a visual diary where you draw an event that happens to you each day.

f) What next? Write about a possible future for the characters in the story.

#### **4. Natural History**

Points for discussion:

a) What are your experiences with snakes? Do you have any funny or freaky stories you can share?

b) Many people have a fear of this particular reptile. Are you one of them? Do you know what this fear is called?

c) Do you know anyone who keeps snakes as pets? Would you like a snake as a pet?

d) Though some snakes are venomous, there are many Australian species that are not. Can you name different kinds of snakes?

e) Do you know what to do if you come across a snake in the bush? What should you do if you or someone else is bitten by a snake?

f) The snake in this story is a brown snake. What do you know about this type of snake? Where are they found?

#### **5. Geography**

a) What identifies this as an Australian story? Do you think it could take place anywhere in the world?

b) Imagine you had to write a story based somewhere in Australia. Where would you choose and why?

c) Find out where you can expect to find brown snakes and mark these places on the map. Can you fill in any other landmarks?



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