

# Lightning Strikes Series

## Why incorporate *Lightning Strikes* in your reading program?

- Short, fast-moving, plot-driven stories that will spark enthusiasm for books and reading
- Topics and themes full of humour that will appeal to the interests of today's children aged 9-14
- Short chapters – perfect for guided reading sessions
- Eye-catching design and covers
- Perfect stepping stone into more complex fiction
- Includes stories that will appeal to both boys and girls



## Australian and New Zealand Authors

The *Lightning Strikes* series are written by a variety of authors including highly acclaimed, bestselling authors from Australia and New Zealand.

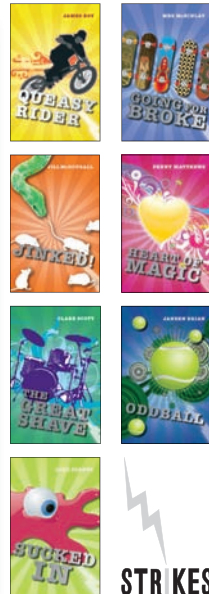
## Stylistic Features

- Short chapters
- Non-threatening, easy-to-read type with plenty of white space
- Text interspersed with graphics of various informal text types e.g. advertisements, text messages, notes, letters and instructions
- Contemporary look matched with contemporary stories



## The Future with *Lightning Strikes*

Build up a great collection of authors, stories and genres over time with this fantastic new series. With ten new stories being released in 2008 and more to follow in 2009, these are sure to encourage and develop further reading with your students. Start your collection now!



## Lightning Strikes: Black Baron By Robyn Opie

ISBN: 9781921150586

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

### Themes:

Animals and Pets  
Care and Compassion  
Humour  
Understanding and Tolerance  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

Black Baron, Jake's champion racing cockroach hasn't lost a race and Jake is on top of the world. But then his mum decides to clean up his bedroom and discovers Black Baron in a shoebox under Jake's bed. Mum is aghast — how could Jake keep such a filthy pest? But Black Baron escapes and Jake's Mum calls the pest exterminator and a humorous slapstick tale ensues.

## Author Focus

**Robyn Opie** is the author of more than 70 published children's books. She has been writing for children for 8 years and most of her books are sold around the world and many have been translated into foreign languages.

Robyn lives in Adelaide, South Australia, with her partner (also a writer), two dogs and thousands of children's books. She works full time writing for children.

### Robyn Opie's inspiration for writing *Black Baron*:

"I wanted to write a humorous story for boys. I thought about the things boys are interested in and eventually settled on bugs, then cockroaches. At the time, I hated cockroaches and killed them on sight. Two words that sprang to mind when thinking about them were dirty and disease. It was obvious to me that the cockroach in my story would die, as all good cockroaches should.

Then I began writing, developing my characters. Black Baron is a racing legend. He's won 17 races in a row. He lives in a shoebox under Jake's bed. He likes potato crisps, a treat Jake gives him after winning a race. He also likes hiding in pockets.

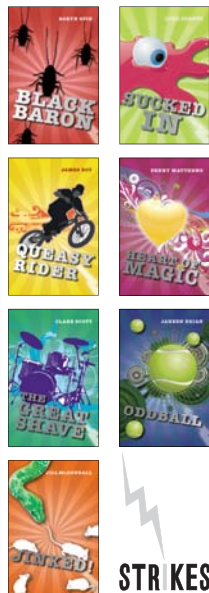
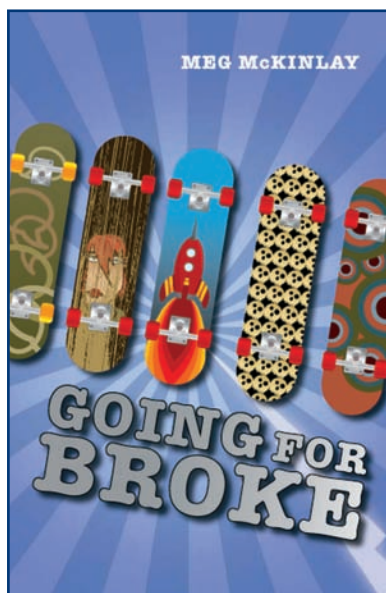
I was about half way through the story when I realised I'd become seriously attached to Black Baron. I liked him a lot. I'd call him 'cute' in a way people talk about their dogs and cats. I no longer wanted Black Baron to die. Long live the champ! So I had to rethink my story. Should I save Black Baron from certain death? How could I do it? Would Black Baron live to see another race? Since then I haven't been able to kill a cockroach — it might be Black Baron."

## Activity Ideas

- What is a 'baron'? Research the meaning of this word on the internet or in the library. Why is it strange that a cockroach would be called a 'baron'?
- Look at the 'birth certificate' on page 19. Create your own birth certificate, or if you have a pet create one for them. You can make things up or use facts.
- On page 46 Jake's mother describes cockroaches as "Ugly. Creepy. Filthy. Useless. Bothersome." Think about cockroaches from Jake's perspective. How would he describe them? What other words could Jake's mother use to describe cockroaches? Create a word bank.
- Write a descriptive paragraph about cockroaches from Jake's point of view and then from his mother's point of view.
- Jake and his friends like to race cockroaches. What other animals can you think of that are raced? E.g. horses, crabs, dogs, camels. Divide the class into groups. Each group researches one animal and its racing history. Discuss issues such as — is it fair that animals are raced?
- Research cockroaches on the internet. Create a fact file listing ten interesting facts about cockroaches e.g. cockroaches can live one month without food.
- Cockroaches are filthy, disgusting pests and they should all be exterminated. Discuss or debate.
- Do you think Jake's parents position on cockroaches is reasonable? Discuss.
- Research Robyn Opie and some of the other books she has written at:

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

Create a poster about Robyn Opie and her books.



## Lightning Strikes: Going for Broke

By Meg McKinlay

ISBN: 9781921150616

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

### Themes:

Friendship  
Teamwork  
Courage  
Danger/Safety  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

Nathan is tired of watching other kids receive awards at assembly so he hatches a plan to do something 'amazingly amazing' by breaking a record in the Amazing World Records book. With little planning but lots of daring, Nathan and his mates, Weasel and Ronnie, make numerous attempts at a variety of World Record feats. Each attempt is unsuccessful and quite frequently painful. Just as the boys are about to admit defeat, they discover that they indeed have broken a record – the most world record attempts in 48 hours!

## Author Focus

**Meg McKinlay** grew up in Bendigo, Victoria. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school, and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. Along the way, she has worked in a variety of jobs including, swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. These days she lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese, and Creative Writing. Her first children's novel, *Annabel, again*, was published in 2007 by Walker Books.

### Meg McKinlay's inspiration for writing *Going for Broke*:

"Growing up, I had a brother on each side of me; one older, one younger, and both crazy-daring in their own way. I spent a lot of time 'hooning around' the bush on my bike, trying to do jumps and tricks with them, and a lot of time eating dirt as a result. My older brother, in particular, was always interested in becoming famous for something, and I remember him poring over the *Guinness Book of Records*, trying to think of ways he could make it in there. He had grand plans to roll to Melbourne at one point, and used to practice on the road in front of our house, but my father stopped him before he was able to get very far. I still love watching kids crowd around *Guinness World Records* in the school library and listening to their grand plans for world domination. I was thinking about this during a school assembly one morning as I watched kids going up to receive merit awards for various worthy but generally unspectacular activities. I found myself wondering what my brothers would have made of all this. I pulled out my little notebook to start jotting down ideas and soon the story was on its way."

## Activity Ideas

- What does the expression "going for broke" mean? How does this relate to the story? Why do you think the author chose this title? What other titles would be appropriate?
- Make a list of all the records mentioned in *Going for Broke*. Read through your list. Would you attempt any of these records yourself? Why or why not?
- Have a look at the *Guinness World Records* book and see if you can find any of the *Going for Broke* records in there. Are they all there? Which ones are missing? Of those which are there, are the details the same? What do you think the reasons are for any differences?
- In chapter 3, the kids build a bike ramp. Read the description of how they make it and view the diagram. What are the main steps? Write a procedure on how Nathan and his mates made the ramp.
- Who are the main characters in *Going for Broke*? Make a list of the characters and then choose one word that best describes each character.
- Why do you think that Nathan and his mates were unsuccessful in their world record attempts? What could they have done to improve their chances?
- The boys' record-breaking adventures make it into the local newspaper. The headline states: *Amazing Boys take on the World*. View other headlines and a variety of real newspaper reports. What makes a good newspaper report? Based on your knowledge of the story, write a newspaper report that would match the headline on page 91.
- What is the official process for attempting a *Guinness World Record*? Would Nathan really have been awarded a world record for doing what he did in *Going for Broke*? Does knowing this affect the way you read the story?



## Lightning Strikes: The Great Shave By Clare Scott

ISBN: 9781921150609

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

### Themes:

Music  
School Environment  
Humour  
Competitions and Prizes  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

Stix reckons he's the Screaming Greenie Meanies' biggest fan, so when the band holds a concert in his town, Stix and his mates just have to go. And to get into the spirit of the event, they decide to dye their hair green. Stix's mates use green hair mousse — but there's not enough for Stix. In desperation he uses green food colouring, and the consequences are devastating. But Stix is able to use his misfortune to his advantage and becomes a legend instead of a joke!

## Author Focus

**Clare Scott** was born in South Auckland and has tried lots of things in her life, such as manufacturing, nursing, selling, administrating, wife-ing, mothering, nana-ing, teaching and writing. All of these things involve using lots of words, but writing is the best! Clare has had many readers published, with some translated into other languages. She has also had poems, articles, and adult short stories published in books, newspapers and magazines. This is her first novel.

### Clare Scott's inspiration for writing *The Great Shave*:

"I have a vague disturbing hair-disaster memory from when I was little. My apprentice hairdresser sister convinced my Dad that she could dye his (grey-white) hair brown. But something went wrong, his hair went green, and the air went blue! Years later, my daughter's friend decided to do exactly the same as Stix (in my story) when she attended a concert. She had glorious long blonde hair which went – and stayed – bright green after she'd doused it with food colouring. Unluckily for her, school was not forgiving. Luckily for her, her mother was both forgiving and sympathetic, and paid (HEAP\$!) to get it fixed. I got to thinking, how would teens deal with the (literal) fallout of something like that? Would they become losers or legends?"

## Activity Ideas

- What is your favourite band/song? Write a letter to the band/singer telling them why you like their music.
- Read chapter 4. Explore the phrase 'close shave' on page 43. What does this mean? How is this phrase used in relation to the title of the book?
- Look at the text messages on page 47. Re-write these text messages using correct spelling and punctuation. Discuss why words are abbreviated when being texted. When is it important to use formal language?
- Stix has to write, in 20 words or less, why he should win the prize to go to see the Screaming Greenie Meanies in USA. Have a look at some of the examples on pages 53-55. Which ones are effective and why? Write your own in small groups.
- In class, conduct a survey on popular bands. Graph your results.
- Stix becomes a legend. People are often envious of others who are famous. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being famous or called a legend?
- Stix and his mates dye their hair green to show support for the band. Have you ever done anything like this? What could they have done that would have had less implications?
- The school has an 'extreme hair policy'. In groups devise what the five main rules of this policy could be. Do you think it is right for a school to have such a policy? Does it restrict personal freedom? Discuss.



## Lightning Strikes: Jinxed By Jill McDougall

ISBN: 9781921150593

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 112

### Themes:

Friendship  
Problem solving  
Identity  
Self-esteem  
Ideas and Creativity

## Synopsis

Jinx might be the clown of the family, but accidentally smashing her next-door neighbour's pet python's tank is no laughing matter. Jinx has to come up with a plan for some fast cash to pay for a new tank – otherwise she will end up having to work at her dad's bakery, "The Little Miss Muffin" and wear a cinnamon scroll shaped hat. And that is something Jinx doesn't even want to consider. Jinx devises a number of money-making schemes, but they all end in disaster – adding to Jinx's debts and almost undermining her Dad's relationship with his new girlfriend. Just when Jinx is feeling that she is truly living up to her name, a new opportunity arises that gives Jinx the chance to use her talent for comedy and pay back her debts at the same time.

## Author Focus

**Jill McDougall** started writing at school by selling short pieces for magazines so she could buy eclairs from the tuckshop. Later, while working in a remote Indigenous community, she began writing poems for her class. They become her first book *Anna the Goanna and Other Poems*. Jill has since published a vast array of work for children - mostly for use in schools. She particularly enjoys writing humour and the neighbours have become accustomed to hearing an array of snorts and guffaws at odd hours. Jill lives in a cottage by the sea with her partner, three hens, two hyperactive dogs and a rather large spider called Ruth.

### Jill McDougall's inspiration for writing *Jinxed*:

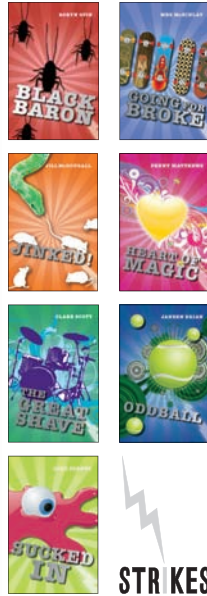
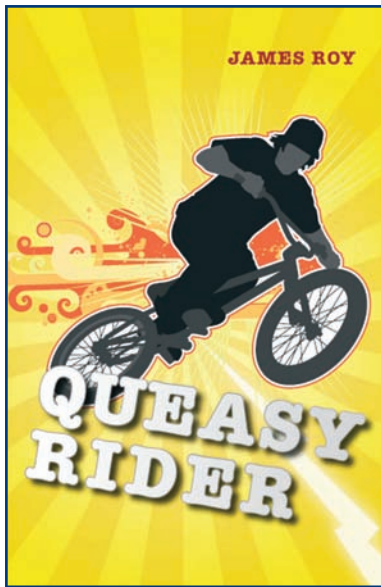
"I was the kid who spilled ink on my sister's science project and then walked it through the carpet. I was the kid who spent days teeing up good homes for my kittens, only to have them escape from the back of my bike after a long hot ride. I was the teenager who offered to help plough the paddock, only to mow down a section of fence line. I was the teenager who drove the car into a dam on my first solo trip. I was the teacher whose classroom pets ate their babies and who donated her eyebrows to Science. I AM Jinx!!"

## Activity Ideas

- Research the word Jinx using the internet and the definition in the front of the book.  
What does it mean?  
Where did this word originate?
- Look at the "Treasure List" on page 9.  
Think about things that you own, or have in your room that you might consider treasures e.g. your favourite CD, or a toy that you love. Create your own "treasure list". Explain why these items are treasures to you.
- Explore the phrase:  
"One person's junk = someone else's treasure".  
Discuss garage sales, second-hand bookstores, trash and treasure markets in relation to this.
- Create your own garage sale poster. What would you draw on this to attract attention? Think about what other elements need to be on the poster.
- Jinx comes up with several money making schemes. What are these? List them.  
In groups think of other money making ideas that you could do e.g. jobs around the house, making objects etc.
- One of the characters in *Jinxed!* is afraid of mice. What are phobias? Research different types of phobias.
- Compile all of the jokes that appear in the book. Create your own joke book and illustrate it.
- In class create a survey about which jokes are funnier than others. Graph your results.
- Research Jill McDougall on the internet.

[www.jillmcdougall.com.au](http://www.jillmcdougall.com.au)

What other books has she written? Create a poster or powerpoint presentation on this author.



## Lightning Strikes: Queasy Rider

By James Roy

ISBN: 9781921150579

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

### Themes:

Friendship  
Understanding and Inclusion  
Sport and Activity  
Creativity and Innovation  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

Thicky and Nobby find an old discarded bike near the railway tracks. Nobby thinks the bike is rubbish but Thicky can see 'potential'. It is not until they meet up with Shirley that the true potential of the bike – and its possibility for making money – is revealed. The kids set up a daring challenge: each rider puts 20 cents in a jar, and the person brave enough to ride the bike (now called 'Queasy Rider') to the bottom of the hill wins the loot. Conditions apply, of course – and those conditions are that the kids are certain no-one will make it more than half way, thus allowing them to pocket all the money. On the day of the challenge, several local kids make the attempt and fail miserably. But just when they think the cat is in the bag, a tiny boy called Trent comes along who hustles his way to victory. It turns out that he comes from a rodeo family and he rides the bike to the bottom of the hill as though it were a bucking bronco. Thicky, Nobby and Shirley hand over the money but it's not long before they set their sights on the next money-making scheme ...

## Author Focus

**James Roy** lives in the Blue Mountains with his family and writes both fiction and non-fiction for children and young adults. Born in country NSW, James spent his childhood growing up in the islands of the South Pacific with his missionary parents. He attributes much of his early interest in books to the absence of TV, a wonderful library full of adventure books, and a wild, adventurous playground. James Roy is a highly commended Australian author and has been shortlisted for several awards including receiving Honour Book for *Billy Mack's War* and *Captain Mack* in the Children's Book Council of the Year Awards.

### James Roy's inspiration for writing *Queasy Rider*:

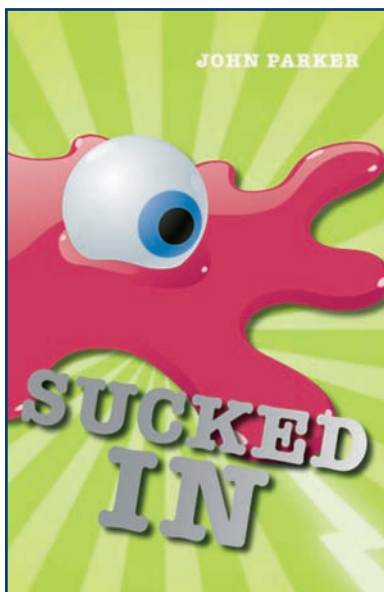
"This is a story based on events from my own childhood in Fiji. We found an old, rusty bike, made it rideable (just) and charged the local kids a few cents to ride it to the bottom of the hill. Whoever could make it to the bottom could keep the pot. No one ever succeeded."

## Activity Ideas

- In the first chapter of *Queasy Rider*, when Thicky and Nobby find the old bike, they brainstorm the different uses it could have. Write down these different ideas. Can you think of any others?
- The boys discover that the bike is called 'Easy Rider' and rename it 'Queasy Rider'. Why do you think they call it 'Queasy Rider'? What other names do you think could be appropriate for the bike? Design your own label for the bike with the new name that you have chosen.
- Look at the poster on page 44. Create your own poster selling rides on 'Queasy Rider' (or use the alternative bike name you have chosen). Compare this with the new 'Queasy Rider' poster on page 62.
- Thicky, Nobby and Shirley all think that Trent can't ride the bike down the hill because he is too little, but he proves them wrong. Read the Aesop's fable *The Lion and the Mouse*: what do these stories say about judging a person by their size?
- *Queasy Rider* ends with Shirley telling Nobby about a hang glider that is for sale. Write a story about Shirley, Nobby, Thicky and what they would do with a hang glider.
- Look at the blurb on the back of the book. Discuss the purpose of a blurb and why it is important for a book. Write your own blurb for *Queasy Rider*.
- "Riding Queasy Rider down the hill was dangerous", do you agree? What safety precautions could have been taken? Would you ride 'Queasy Rider'?
- Find out more on James Roy at:

[www.jamesroy.com.au](http://www.jamesroy.com.au)

Research this author and the other books that he has written. Using the information on his website create a character profile about him.



## Lightning Strikes: Sucked In By John Parker

ISBN: 9781921150623

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

### Themes:

Friendship  
Coping with bullying/teasing  
Identity  
Self-esteem  
Informal Text Types

### Synopsis

Zainey is extremely small for his age and the brunt of many a joke from his mates. In desperation, he sells his bike and responds to a strange ad in the back of a comic book to buy an eye, which he hopes will make him taller – and which everyone else thinks is a total scam. His mate, Dan, thinks Zainey has lost it and can't believe he would waste his money on junk. But he is also more than a little curious as to how an eye could possibly make you taller. They both soon discover that the eye is more than anyone expected – this eye is very much alive and it is after blood. When the eye becomes attached to Zainey – with a view to becoming a permanent fixture – it looks as though he will have to lose his finger! But Caro, a girl from school, comes to his aid and they get rid of it for good... or do they?

### Author Focus

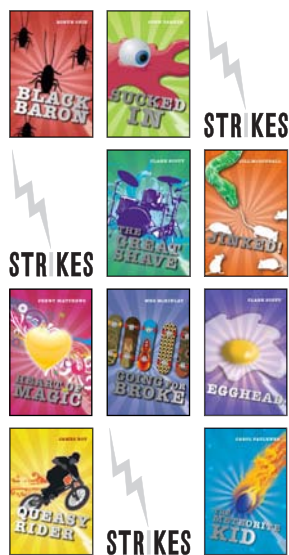
**John Parker** is a children's writer who also writes for adults as a journalist and radio scriptwriter. Born in Christchurch, he graduated from the University of Auckland in 1964 with an MA in history before leaving New Zealand to travel around England and Europe as a professional opera singer. John has published over 130 fiction and non-fiction books for children, including picture books, junior readers, chapter books, non-fiction books and novels for early teens. Around 70 of his poems, stories, articles and plays have appeared in the *School Journal* and other publications. *Radio New Zealand* and *BBC School Radio* have broadcast a number of his children's stories and radio plays.

#### John Parker's inspiration for writing *Sucked In*:

"I've always been fascinated by the way the periscope allows someone in a submarine, underwater, to see things above the surface. I thought how useful that would be in certain situations – as in, trying to see over a crowd, or looking into a second-story window or over the top of a bush. And that made me think about having a kind of periscope in the arm – an eye in the sky. That's how *Sucked In* got started."

### Activity Ideas

- Look at the cover and title: what do you think the book is about? After reading the book, discuss how the title *Sucked In* relates to the story. Was the story what you expected from the title?
- Zainey and Dan lose the eye for a while. Create a "lost eye" poster.
- Zainey is willing to sell his bike for the eye. What would you consider your most precious possession? Think of a situation (an occasion, a person, a skill, an attribute etc.) you'd gladly sell or give your precious possession away for. In small groups share your situations.
- Read the ads on pages 14–16. View other print media ads. What are the common features? What makes an ad effective? What other types of things could be advertised at the back of a comic such as "Perils on Pluto"? Write an ad for the back of a "Perils on Pluto" comic.
- Who are the main characters? Who are the secondary characters? Scan the text and try to find as much information as possible about each character. Create character profiles for Dan, Zainey, Grimmo and Caro. Which character do you like the best? Why?
- Main ideas: there are ten chapters in this story. Identify the main idea for each chapter. Do any chapters have more than one main idea?
- Imagine Zainey is successful in his quest to have an eye at the end of his finger. What would it be like? What could Zainey do with it? Where could an eye on a finger be advantageous? Where could it be problematic? How could an eye change a life? Pretend you are Zainey. Write an email to Dan, written by Zainey, recounting his first day with an eye on his finger. Then write Dan's reply.



## Lightning Strikes: Oddball

By Janeen Brian

ISBN: 9781921150562

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

June 2008

### Themes:

Friendship  
Bullying  
Grief  
School Environment  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

In a moment of temporary insanity, Sol Tranter challenges school bully, Aggo, to a game of handball – and what's worse he blurts out that he is going to beat Aggo using hypnotism. He tries everything he can think of to get out of it, but with no plan forthcoming, he hopes for a miracle. The miracle arrives when his elderly next-door neighbour reveals that he was once a hypnotist. Sol thinks he is saved – he will get Mr Barassi to hypnotise him! But Mr Barassi is unable to help, and Sol has to face Aggo on the court armed with only his wit. In standing up for himself, Sol finds that his courage is a much more powerful weapon than hypnotism.

## Author Focus

**Janeen Brian** spent her childhood in Brighton, South Australia. At age 16 she trained as a primary teacher at Wattle Park Teachers' College and at 18 stood in front of her first class of Year 5 Students. Her teaching career saw her work in Junior Primary, Primary, Drama and as a Teacher-Librarian. While raising a family of two daughters, she also began a 4-year career with a professional children's theatre company, both acting and writing. She has also been involved in over 100 television and radio commercials as well as dozens of voiceovers for radio and video. She began dabbling in writing in her thirties but it was several years before she began to be published. Since then she has written over 60 books. Janeen has won several awards and many of her books have been translated and published overseas. She also writes for national and overseas children's magazines and has over 100 poems, plays, stories or articles published.

### Janeen Brian's inspiration for writing *Oddball*:

"When I was part-time teaching and part-time writing, I wrote a small comment in my 'writers' notebook' about boys playing handball on the playground. I overheard one boy telling someone they'd never let so-and-so play because he always won. It became simply part of my collection of thoughts and notes until a few years ago I looked at it again and wondered what if the tables were turned. What would it be like for a boy who never got a turn because there was always that 'king' of handball who beat everyone? How would the weaker player feel? I wanted that boy to win, but I wanted him to win/improve because he inadvertently practised more or harder... The idea of using hypnotism came as a flash – that magic, that inspiration that sometimes occurs in writing – which meant the protagonist had something very difficult to overcome."

## Activity Ideas

- Research hypnotism. Where did it originate? What techniques are used to hypnotise? How can hypnotism be useful?
- The story starts with Sol having a bad day. What is causing his bad day? How do these things impact on Sol throughout the story? Why do you think Sol challenged Aggo to a game of handball?
- Hypnotism ends in the suffix 'ism'. What other words can you think of that end this way? Further research heroism, optimism and Cubism.
- Discuss in class the different ball games that you play at school and make a list of them. Take a survey/vote in class and create a data chart of the games from favourite to least favourite.
- Read the 'Good things list' on page 42. Make a list of the good things that you you have done lately. Then make a list of what you would like to do. Do you think these are achievable? Why/Why not?
- Read the chant on page 51. Create a chant for your own name.
- Read page 53. Sol describes his mother's eyes as 'light blue like a bleached lake'. This is a simile. Think of characteristics of your friends, pets, home and describe them using similes.
- Look at the ad on page 56. Create your own ad based on a local business. You could use the school, post office, newsagency, dentist etc.
- On page 70 Sol reads an article that describes something a hypnotist cannot do. Choose a job e.g. firefighter, accountant, surgeon and create a list of the things that these people can do.
- Read the instructions for hypnotising on page 71. Write your own brief instructions for something you do everyday. It could be getting ready for school, what you do when you get home etc.
- Read chapter 9. In groups discuss magic vs skill. Do you think it is important to be skilful at something?





## Lightning Strikes: Heart of Magic

By Penny Matthews

ISBN: 9781921150685

ARRP: \$12.95

NZRRP: \$14.99

No. of Pages: 96

June 2008

### Themes:

Friendship  
Bullying/Teasing  
Self-Esteem  
Magic/Astrology  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

Shy, unconfident Stacey Bunn and outgoing, grown-up Twyla Popovic are exact opposites but also the best of friends. On the day of Twyla's birthday, they are both set to go to the Royal Show. But before they leave they read their horoscopes which tell them that their best friend is going to betray them! They dismiss the notion, but before long Twyla meets up with a boy from her school – Archie – and makes plans with him that don't involve Stacey. Stacey is devastated. The horoscope was right; Twyla has betrayed her. She goes off on her own and stumbles upon a fortune-teller. She tells the fortune-teller that she wishes to be like her ex-friend. The fortune-teller gives her a gold heart pin and tells her that it will give her power. Soon, Stacey starts to feel more confident and in control. Is it the pin giving her power or is Stacey achieving everything by herself?

## Author Focus

**Penny Matthews** has worked for many years in children's book publishing, and is now a freelance editor and writer. Her first picture book *Moving On* was published in 1993, and was followed by four more picture books, three chapter books and two junior novels. In 2003 *A Year on Our Farm*, illustrated by Andrew McLean, was the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year (Early Childhood) and an Honour Book in the Picture Book of the Year awards. Penny is married, has two grown-up children, and lives in Adelaide.

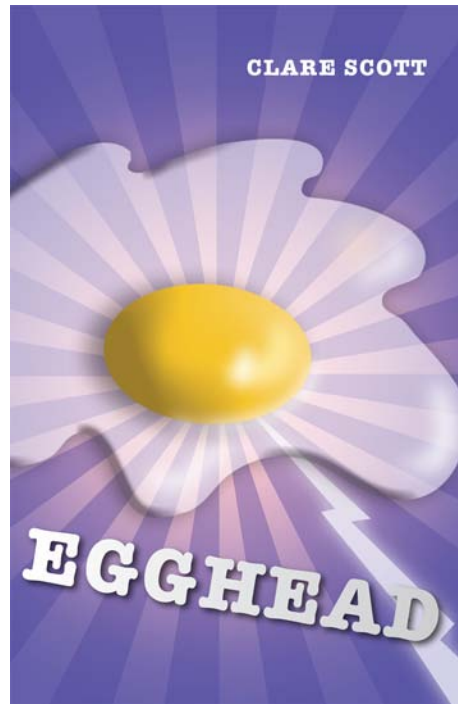
### Penny Matthews' inspiration for writing *Heart of Magic*:

"I am fascinated by relationships. I think most girls are, even when they are quite young – and I wanted to write something that would appeal particularly to girls. Why do we choose the friends we do? Often you see really close friendships between people who are completely unlike. One of my best friends at school was a real party girl, while I was bookish and retiring. The 'odd couple' has become something of a cliché. But why do opposites attract? Are odd couples really more alike than you'd think they are? When I was a child, I loved going to the Royal Show. I was fascinated by the glitz and colour of the sideshows, the smell of hot fat and popcorn. It was a world that wasn't quite real, where you could be what you wanted to be. Somehow the rules were different there. So the show seemed the perfect background for my story about stylish, confident Twyla and shy, conservative Stacey. Circumstances and settings can have amazing effects on character."

## Activity Ideas

- What is astrology? Find the definition of astrology and research the different star signs. What star sign are you? Do you believe in astrology - why/why not?
- Cut out the horoscope section from the newspaper and bring into class to discuss. Try and create a collection of horoscopes from the same day/week/month, but from different publications. How do they compare?
- Read chapter 2. Georgia Gwynne calls Stacey 'Sticky Bunn', to tease her about her weight. In groups discuss teasing and bullying. Do you think it is wrong to tease someone? Has anyone ever teased or bullied you? What are some ways to cope with being bullied or teased?
- Throughout the book colours are repeated, in particular pink and blue. Write down all the different references to these colours. Do you think that colours can reflect certain moods or feelings? Write down a list of colours and use emotive words to describe them e.g. happy, sad, angry etc.
- Read page 37. The phrase 'be careful what you wish for' is often used. What do you think it means? Do you know any other stories that use this idea?
- Read the gypsy's rhyme on page 40. These two sentences are similes. What is a simile? Think of similes to describe your friends and/or family.
- Read the program on page 48. Choose an event such as your school open day, sports carnival or talent night and write a program for it.
- Have you ever been to a fair or a show? What was it like? What did you see/do? Write a newspaper article on a place that you have been. Include a photo or drawing with your article.
- The gold heart that Stacey wears could be described as a 'good luck charm'. Do you think it is? Why/why not? How do you think the heart pin helped Stacey? Research other good luck charms and the different places/cultures that they come from e.g. the four-leaf clover, horseshoe, rabbit's foot. Can you think of any bad luck charms?

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