Lightning Strikes: Dog Squad
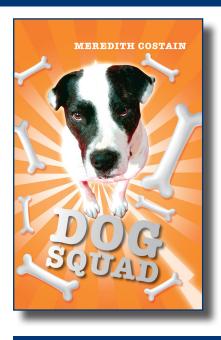
By Meredith Costain

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Themes:

Bullying
Dogs
Maths
Mystery
Informal Text Types

Synopsis

Jez has a problem. He's just broken his sister's guinea pig hutch and the guinea pigs have gone AWOL. Needing a quick solution, he enlists his mates, Cheezel and Drago, to help replace the hutch and the missing guinea pigs. The plan succeeds but Jez soon finds he's stuck with a bigger problem: unbeknownst to Jez, Drago took out a loan with his brother, Crippler, to pay for all of this and he wants to be paid back within a week. Needing money – fast – Jez stumbles on a plan to find (or rather replace) a local councillor's missing dog and make a mozza off the reward money. A madcap adventure involving dog-napping, dog-switching and a poodle called Fifibelle follows … but will Jez and the dog squad succeed?

Author Focus

Meredith Costain grew up on a dairy farm on the Koo Wee Rup swamp in West Gippsland, Victoria. After finishing school she worked as a teacher and played in a few rock and blues bands, before becoming a full-time writer. She now lives in inner-city Melbourne with a menagerie of pets, including a kelpie cross and a red heeler. Her work ranges from picture books through to popular fiction and non-fiction for older readers, and includes *Musical Harriet, A Year in Girl Hell* and CBCA Honour Book *Doodledum Dancing*.

For more information about Meredith Costain visit her website:

www.meredithcostain.com

Meredith Costain's inspiration for writing *Dog Squad*:
Dogs have always been a big part of my life. I grew up on a farm and we always had working dogs, but they were our friends as well, part of the family. There's something about dogs – they are loyal and loving and just want to be with you no matter what you're doing. So it breaks my heart to know that many dogs are dumped when it's no longer 'convenient' for their owners to look after them. I'm also fascinated by the way that dogs treat humans as part of their pack. I thought it would be fun to have a group of boys who hang out together and squabble and play-fight, just like puppies do. Every pack has a leader, and in this case it's Jez. Well, that's what he likes to think, anyway!

Activity Ideas

- Read the blurb. What do you think this story is about? Read the last line "Has the Dog Squad bitten off more than it can chew?" This is an idiom. What is an idiom? Do you know any other phrases like this?

- Read the description of Crunch in Chapter 1. Draw Crunch from this description.

- Many of the characters in this book have nicknames. What does this say about their relationships with one another? Do you have a nickname?

- Read page 30-31. If Jez doesn't pay Crippler the $96 and the interest rate is 10% per week after that, how much will Jez then owe in a week?

- Create your own dog walking poster (read page 35). What would you add/change?

- Read page 38. If Jez and Cheezel do dog walks for $2 an hour and each walk takes one hour, how many hours of dog walking would they need to do to earn $96?

- What is a lyrebird? (page 68) Lyrebirds are a native animal of Australia. Research different native animals in your country.

- Read page 71. Rewrite the text message from Crippler with the correct grammar and spelling.

- The Dog Squad try to get Whitey from the pound. Research animal rescue centres such as the RSPCA. In Chapter 14 the man from the pound says that "We can't hold onto them forever". Why can't they? How can you help organisations that look after animals without a home?

- Write a review of *Dog Squad*. Include information about the storyline, what you liked and the major themes/issues in the book.

- Do you have a pet? Create a pet profile. Draw a picture of your pet and include information about what type of animal it is, when it was born, its name and any other special facts about it.

- What is a 'squad'? What other 'squads' can you think of? If you had a squad what would it be for? What would it be called?