

## Liar & Spy

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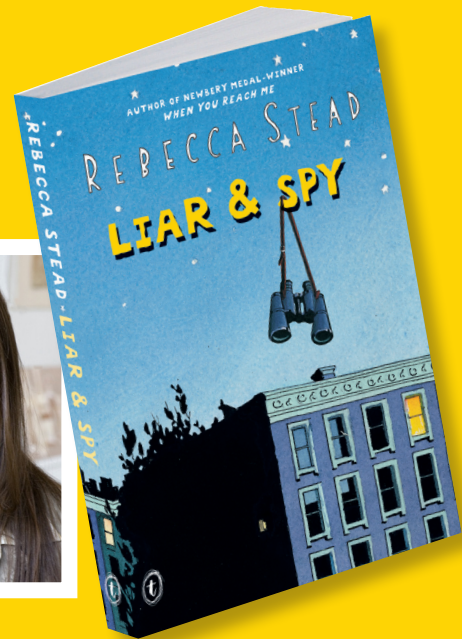
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Fiction, B paperback

Age range 10+

### Resource Kit Contains

- Use in the curriculum
- Key learning areas
- About the author
- Synopsis, themes, characters, language
- Pre-reading and reading questions
- Discussion, creative writing, art and drama activities



### USE IN THE CURRICULUM

Suitable for students aged 10+, particularly years 5, 6 and 7.

*Liar & Spy* is recommended for students aged 9 to 13. Consequently, these notes are aimed at upper primary and lower secondary classrooms (Middle School). The activities are designed to be used mainly as part of an English program, although given the book's focus on science, there is a strong science component. The book deals with issues of bullying and can, therefore, be used as part of a SOSE or Health curriculum. The teacher notes also have activities that can be used for art and drama exploration.

### KEY LEARNING AREAS

English, Creative Writing, SOSE, Art, Drama. Also includes some areas that may be explored as part of a science curriculum.

### STUDENTS WILL ACHIEVE

Reflecting on text, Shared reading, Creative responses to text, Speaking and Listening, Research, Debate, Visual exploration of story

Using *Liar & Spy* as a class text will lead to developing appreciation of a novel that has the potential to enrich students' lives and expand the scope of their experience. It will lead to in-depth discussions about lies and truth, bullying, phobias, friendship and family.

- Students will learn new vocabulary.
- They will also use Georges' experiences as a catalyst to think about their own life and memories.

- They will use key scenes in the book as a catalyst for their own creative writing, drama and art.
- They will debate the ethics behind key scenes in the book.
- They will also learn about the sciences of medicine and biology.
- They will come to a greater understanding of the psychology of phobias.
- The book will also lead to philosophical discussions on right and wrong, and lies versus truth.
- The book will also lead to discussions about bullying and strategies to deal with it.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

(courtesy of [www.rebeccasteadbooks.com](http://www.rebeccasteadbooks.com))

I grew up in New York City, where I was lucky enough to attend the kind of elementary school where a person could sit in a windowsill, or even under a table, and read a book, and no one told you to come out and be serious (well, eventually someone did, but not right away).

It was at school that I began writing. Sometimes I invented stories, and other times I just wrote down things I overheard – jokes, or snatches of conversation.

Much, much later, I became a lawyer (I believed that being a writer was impractical), got married, and started working as a public defender. But I still wrote *Very Serious Stories* when I could find the time.

My first child, a fabulous son, was born. A few years later, I had another fabulous son. There wasn't much time for writing stories after that. But I still tried.

One day, my then-four-year-old son, though fabulous, accidentally pushed my laptop off the dining-room table, and the Very Serious Stories were gone. Poof.

So. It was time to write something new. Something joyful (to cheer me up: I was pretty grouchy about the lost stories). I went to a bookstore and bought an armload of books that I remembered loving as a kid. I read them. I went back to the store and bought more books. I read them. And then I began to write, and I began to love writing. That's when I became a writer.

Some people will tell you that real writers don't use parentheses (which is nonsense). The most important thing to know about writing is that there are no rules.

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### SYNOPSIS

Georges' mom always tells him that life is a thousand little dots that make up a beautiful big picture. She tells him not to worry about the little dots; to concentrate instead on the picture they make.

Georges tries.

He tries when his father is laid off and they have to move from the family home he loved.

He tries when the bullies at school target him, day after day, calling him a 'geek'.

He tries when his best friend decides to be friends with the bullies instead of him.

He tries when his mom has to work overtime at the hospital, and the only way he can communicate with her is through messages spelled out in Scrabble tiles.

Georges tries to see the big picture, but sometimes it's hard, especially when he has no friends to fill his big picture with life and laughter. The highlight of Georges' week is the high five he gives his sports teacher every Friday afternoon, because it means his week at school is over.

But then Georges and his dad spot a crumpled invitation to go to a spy club meeting in his new building and Georges' dad responds. Georges' doesn't want to go along, but he's worried the note was written by a young child who'll be disappointed if he doesn't show up.

It turns out the invitation was written by Safer, a boy Georges' age, and his younger sister, Candy. Safer and Candy live in the apartment building, with their mom and their big brother, Pigeon. Pigeon got his name because he loves birds. Candy loves to eat lollies. Safer won't tell Georges how he got his name, and it's only one of many strange and mysterious things about Georges' new friend.

At first, Georges is reluctant to get involved with Safer's spy club. He is afraid of the dangerous mission Safer is involved in – finding out what the sinister, black-clad 'Mr X' is doing in his apartment, with the hand saw and the heavy-looking suitcases – and he doesn't like all the lies

the spying necessitates. He especially hates lying to his dad.

But then, it's not the only lie that's being told in Georges' house, is it?

The spying and his new friendship with Safer do provide a distraction, though, from the bad things that are happening at school – the bullying and the forthcoming 'taste test' game in Science that the bullies are sure will prove once and for all that Georges is the biggest freak in their class.

But, as the spying gets more and more dangerous – and he finds himself telling more and more lies – Georges begins to wonder if it's all worth it. And he also begins to suspect that Safer isn't all he appears.

Can Georges solve the mystery of Safer? Can he come to terms with what's happening in his family?

And, with the help of 'Bob English Who Draws', can he finally beat the bullies at their own game?

All the little dots of Georges' life are coming together to form a big picture that is his life. Will it be a life Georges is proud of? Will he finally learn not to be afraid?

And will he be able to help Safer too, when it turns out he needs more help than he's willing to admit?

As Georges learns how to be a liar and a spy, he also learns how to be himself.

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### THEMES

Lies and truth

Bullying

Phobias

Family

Language

Courage

Friendship

Games

Science

History

Fear

Education

Financial stress

Growing up

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### CHARACTERS

**Georges:** The main protagonist and narrator of the story. Georges is in seventh grade. He lives with his mother and father in New York. Georges is shy and 'different' and is bullied at school. Georges is good at school, but terrible at sport. He is fascinated by science

and history. Georges has trouble making friends and this worries his parents. Georges has a strong moral code – he hates lying and is kind to his classmates, even when they're not kind to him.

**Georges' Dad:** Georges' dad is an architect who has just been laid off from his work and is now pursuing a freelance career as an interior designer. He is creative and artistic and worries about his son. He attempts to engage his son in conversation about his problems, and encourages him to make friends. He has secrets, too, and talks in a lowered voice on his phone at night time.

**Georges' Mom:** Georges' Mom is a nurse who spends most of her time at work. Georges doesn't see her very often and communicates with her in Scrabble tile messages. Georges' mom encourages Georges to look at the bright side of life, and gives him tapes of America's Funniest Home Videos to cheer him up.

**Safer:** Safer is a boy the same age as Georges, and lives in Georges' building. Safer is fascinated by spies and spying and takes it upon himself to spy on the other residents of the apartment building where he and Georges live. Safer also loves dogs and walks the dogs of some of the apartment block residents, though he never takes them outside, instead walking them in the apartment block courtyard. Safer spends most of his time babysitting his younger sister, Candy, inside his apartment. Safer is resentful of his older brother, Pigeon, for going to a public high school instead of continuing to be homeschooled, as Safer and Candy are. Safer is bossy and likes to be in charge. He sees himself as a teacher to Georges and Candy in the art of spying.

**Candy:** Candy is Safer's little sister. She is obsessed with sweet treats, particularly 'seasonal foods' – lollies that can only be bought at certain times of the year. Candy acts as Safer's doorman and 'scout', and is paid a dollar an hour (money she spends on more lollies). Safer often says he is babysitting Candy, but often it seems like it's Candy who's looking after Safer.

**Pigeon:** Pigeon is the older brother of Candy and Safer. Pigeon has upset Safer by choosing to go to a public high school, with other children. Pigeon loves birds – the reason behind his name – but is also enjoying being a regular teenager, something else that angers Safer.

**Safer's Mom:** Safer's mom is a 'bohemian' who home-schools Safer and Candy. Safer's mom isn't an authoritative parent, instead encouraging her children to explore their passions. She is a stickler for table manners, though!

**Mr Landau and Ms Warner:** Two of Georges' teachers. Mr Landau is a science teacher, who is teaching his students about the science of taste. Ms Landau is a sports teacher, obsessed with 'Volleyball!' Both teachers are friendly and kind towards Georges', and attempt to help him with his bullying problems, but seem unable to really make a difference.

**Bob English Who Draws:** Bob English Who Draws is another 'unpopular' student, who attempts to make friends with Georges. Bob is also obsessed with language – in particular the unnecessarily complicated nature of the English language. He prefers spelling phonetically – something that irritates Georges.

**Dallas and Carter:** Dallas and Carter are bullies who target Georges and make his life at school unpleasant. They are 'popular' kids, who attain their popularity by making the other students afraid to cross them.

**Jason:** Jason is Georges' former best friend, who has rejected him in favour of becoming friends with the bullies. Jason is still friendly towards Georges, but does not stand up for Georges when Dallas and Carter are harassing him.

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## LANGUAGE

*Liar & Spy* is what is known as a 'first-person narrative'. Wikipedia defines a first-person narrative as follows: 'First-person narrative is a narrative mode where a story is narrated by one character at a time, speaking for and about themselves. First-person narrative may be singular, plural or multiple as well as being an authoritative, reliable or deceptive 'voice' and represents point of view in the writing.

The narrators explicitly refer to themselves using words and phrases involving 'I' (referred to as the first person singular) and/or 'we' (the first person plural). This allows the reader or audience to see the point of view (including opinions, thoughts, and feelings) only of the narrator, and no other characters. In some stories, first-person narrators may refer to information they have heard from the other characters, in order to try to deliver a larger point of view.' ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-person\\_narrative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-person_narrative)).

The narrator of this story is Georges. Georges can be described as an 'unreliable narrator', because we only get to hear his point of view, and, at times, the truth of this point of view may be debated. As the story goes on, we learn more and more that we cannot always believe what Georges says.

Georges' language is often quite poetic, with heavy use of metaphors and similes. A metaphor is a figure of speech that suggests that one thing is the same as another thing. For example, 'He was a mouse' is a metaphor that could be used to suggest that someone is shy and fearful. A simile, on the other hand, suggests that one thing is *like* another. So, a simile for a shy and fearful person might be, 'He was as shy as a mouse.' See if you can identify similes and metaphors as you read through the text.

The chapters in *Liar & Spy* are quite short. This makes the book fast-paced and exciting, and is a common technique used in spy novels.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### The setting

Show students a map of the United States and point out New York City. Find a map of New York City and talk about the different boroughs within the city.

Find current population statistics for New York City. Compare the population and land size of New York City with that of your city and state. Have students in groups use the internet and other sources to research aspects of New York City, e.g. geographical features, social organisation, religion and history. Allow time for presentation of the information that students find and for discussion of issues that are raised by it.

### Taste

Either before or after reading the text have your students do some research into the science of taste.

### Bullying

Talk to children about issues of bullying. Find examples of bullying situations in the news and invite students to comment on their reaction to these articles.

### Lies and truth

The novel raises important issues about lies and truth. Encourage them to examine lies and truth in their own lives, and to discuss the morality behind lying.

### Phobias

Encourage students to research phobias, and to talk about phobias and fears in their own lives.

### Some more activities before you start reading (and things to think about while you read):

1. Make a timeline of all the events of Georges' story. Every time something important happens in the book, mark it on this timeline. You can use pictures or words to mark out the events on the timeline.
2. What do you know about spies? Write a short paragraph about everything that comes into your head when you think of spies and spying.
3. Write a poem about lies and liars.
4. When you think of New York City, what are the first five words that come into your head?
5. *Liar & Spy* is a book about growing up. Are you looking forward to being a grown-up? Why or why not?
6. In the book there are lots of descriptions of foods, objects and places you may not see in everyday life in Australia. Whenever you encounter one of these Indian objects or descriptions use the internet to find a picture of them. Make these pictures into a poster. Make your poster colourful and fun.
7. Looking at the cover and title of the book, what do you think the book will be about? What genre of book do you think it will be? Do you think it will be a funny book or a serious one?

8. Read the blurb of the book. Does the blurb make you want to read more? Do you think you will enjoy this book? Why or why not?
9. *Liar & Spy* is a book about family. Use ten describing words to describe your family.
10. Make a dictionary of all the new vocabulary words you learn while reading the book.

### Spy Notebook

As you read through the text, pretend that you are a spy, investigating the mystery that is the novel. In a special exercise book – which you may want to decorate to make it look like a notebook a spy might use – keep notes about the text that might give you clues to how it might end. In particular, make notes about:

- Safer
- Georges' Mom
- The bullies at Georges' schoolbooks

At certain points in the book, your teacher will ask you to make suggestions as to how the book might end, and what will happen to certain characters. Use your notes to help you form these predictions. At the end of the book, once you know the outcomes for the characters, you can look back over your notes and see if they provided clues to what would happen.

## READING ACTIVITIES

**Page 1:** Using the internet or reference books, find a picture of a map of the human tongue and copy it on a piece of paper. Now, think about your four favourite foods. Instead of the four sections of taste described in the tongue map, add your four favourite foods. Draw a picture of them, and write a few words about the way they taste and why you like them.

**Page 2:** Bob English Who Draws gets his nickname because he likes to draw pictures in his school exercise book. If you were to be given a nickname like this, what would it be and why?

**Page 4:** *America's Funniest Home Videos* makes Georges laugh. Is there one thing, person, movie, book or television program that always makes you laugh? Write about it and why you find it funny.

**Page 5:** Georges' sports class is playing volleyball. What is volleyball? What are its rules? What is the history of the game? Do some research and write a short report on your findings.

**Page 6:** Georges talks about the philosophical question, 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?'. Where did this question originate and what does it mean? Do some research and write a short report on your findings.

**Page 8:** Georges says that lying down suggests that he's dying and attracts vultures. Do some research about vultures. What are they and why are they associated with death? Do some research and write a short report on your findings. Find a picture of a vulture to illustrate your report.

**Page 14:** The painting in Georges' house is by an artist called Georges Seurat. Do some research into Seurat. When was he alive? What techniques is he famous for? What are some of his most famous paintings? What subjects did he like to paint? Find some pictures of art by Seurat to illustrate your report.

**Page 15:** Georges wishes that his parents had called him George, without the S on the end. How do you feel about your name? Do you like it? Why or why not? If you could choose to be called any name in the world, what would it be and why?

**Page 16:** Do you have a special job or chore in your household? What is it? Do you enjoy performing this chore? What job would you prefer to be doing?

**Page 32:** Georges' favourite restaurant is a Chinese restaurant, called Yum Li's. What is your favourite restaurant and why?

**Page 44:** Make a list of as many salty foods as you can think of.

**Page 44:** Pick a food item (your teacher may provide this, or you might choose a snack from your lunch box), and write down notes about what you can taste.

**Page 46:** Georges says that measuring the volume of all the tears in the world is impossible. Can you think of some other unanswerable questions? Make a list of as many unanswerable questions as you can think of.

**Page 50:** The young boy in Georges' apartment building tells a silly joke about an interrupting cow. What is your favourite silly joke?

**Page 52:** Safer tells Georges about the spy slang word 'Uncle'. He tells him it's spy lingo for the headquarters of an espionage organisation. See if you can find some other spy slang, lingo or jargon and make your own spy slang glossary.

**Page 53:** You have one minute to memorise exactly what five people in your class are wearing and then write it down without looking at them. If your school has a school uniform, your teacher might take you to the staffroom, the school office or the canteen. Memorise what three staff members are wearing, go back to the classroom and write down what you remember.

**Page 63:** Can you find a better definition of the taste 'umami'? What are some foods that have an umami flavour? How was it discovered?

**Page 67:** What is 'spelling reform'? Do some research into the history of spelling reform and write a short report based on your findings.

**Page 74:** The boys use a chewing gum wrapper to try and track 'Mr X's' movements. What are some other ways you can think of to observe when Mr X comes and goes from his apartment?

**Page 78:** Make a list of all the meats you can think of and research which animals they come from. Were you

surprised at some of your findings? Write a report on what you discover and your reaction to your discoveries.

**Page 80:** Do some research into homeschooling, in particular homeschooling in Australia. Write a report on what you find out.

**Page 83:** Who are 'The Mets'? Do some research and write a report based on your findings.

**Page 85:** Who was Benjamin Franklin? Do some research and write a report based on your findings.

**Page 91:** What is a bird of prey? Pick one bird of prey on which to do some in-depth research. What do they look like? Where do they live? What animals do they prey upon? Write a report based on your discoveries.

**Page 91:** Candy is worried about contracting 'avian flu'. What is this? Where did it come from? What effect does it have on humans? How many people have died from avian flu? Do some research and write a report on your findings.

**Page 94:** What is the term for a word whose sound is very similar to its meaning (for example 'bang' or 'crash')? Write a list of words that use this technique.

**Page 107:** Georges says that Candy must have 'bat ears' when she hears his discussion with Safer from a long distance. Why would Georges say Candy has bat ears? Do some research into how bats hear and write a report based on your findings.

**Page 111:** As a class, with the help of your teacher, think of some other words that might have alternative spellings, just like the one that Bob demonstrates to Georges. Write the words on the board as you go. How many can you make? Do you prefer these alternative spellings to the original ones?

**Page 116:** Safer, Pigeon and Candy are all named after things they like, or qualities they have. If your parents had named you in this way, what do you think your name would be, and why?

**Page 125:** Candy really hates eating oranges. Is there a food you really hate eating? Why do you hate it? Think about this question carefully, and avoid answering that you just don't enjoy the taste! What is it in particular that you don't enjoy?

**Page 137:** Georges' mother shares with him some facts about Australian animals. Find five animals native to North America and find out one interesting fact about each of them.

**Page 151:** What do you think could be opened with the gold key that Safer finds? Be creative in your answer! It could be a key to a spaceship or a cupboard leading to a magical land. Be as detailed as possible as you write.

**Page 187:** Georges says there are lots of unwritten rules that people live by. What are some unwritten rules that you or your family lives by?



**Page 192:** Find out some more information about PROP. What is its proper name? What other uses does it have? What determines your ability to taste it? Write a short report based on your findings.

**Page 197:** Georges says that 'lamosity' is not technically a word. Do you have some words that you and your friends use that are not 'technically' words? What are they and what do they mean? Why do you think young people make up their own slang that adults don't understand?

**Page 202:** Is there something you're *not* afraid of that many other people are? What is it? Why do you not find it frightening?

### DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

**Page 4:** Georges' mom says that 'if you smile for no reason at all you will actually start to feel happy'. Do you think there is truth in this? Why or why not?

**Page 26:** Debate question – 'Coffee is bad for you.'

**Page 28:** Debate question – 'Wearing black all the time is a sign of evil.'

**Page 59:** Debate question – 'The English language should be reformed, in order to 'make English spelling more consistent and more phonetic (which means that words should be spelled the way they sound), so that spellings match pronunciations' ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English-language\\_spelling\\_reform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English-language_spelling_reform)).'

**Page 80:** Debate question – 'Homeschooling is bad for children.'

**Pages 87–88:** Debate question – 'Ignoring bullies makes them go away.'

**Pages 87–88:** Debate question – 'It is up to teachers to stop bullies.'

**Page 95:** As a class, discuss what Mr X might be carrying in his heavy suitcases. Be creative in your responses!

Talk with the other members of your class, and your teacher, about the use of Photoshop in magazines. Photoshop is used by magazines to make celebrities and models look 'thinner' or 'prettier' (according to the opinion of the magazines), or more muscled or tanned. Do you think that Photoshop should be allowed in magazines? Do you think the magazines should inform readers when it is used? What effect do you think the use of Photoshop has on young people reading magazines?

**Page 115:** Debate question – 'Marriage is not important in today's society.'

**Pages 177–183:** As a class, discuss the development that has occurred at the end of this chapter. Did you see it coming? Why / why not? Go back to your spy notebook to find clues to support your answer. You might also like to discuss what your thoughts are on Safer's character at this point in the story.

**Page 186:** Debate question – 'Children who are bullied should tell their parents.'

**Page 186:** Debate question – 'It is better to look at the big picture than to concentrate on small moments.'

**Page 199:** Stop reading at the bottom of page 204. Now, as a class, discuss reasons why Safer may have that name. Then keep reading and see how correct you are!

**Page 216–19:** Debate question – 'Georges was wrong to not visit his mother in hospital.'

**Pages 220–25:** As a class, discuss the ending of the book. How has Georges changed in the book? Did you like the ending?

### CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITIES

**Page 3:** Georges describes the smell of the cafeteria at his school as 'fried and sweet, like fish sticks and cookies'. Pick a room at your school (your teacher might ask you to write about the room you're in, or they might let you go for a walk to another room), and describe how it smells. Write down a list of adjectives to describe it, then turn these words into a poem about the room.

**Page 21:** At the end of this chapter, stop reading and pick up your pen. Georges' dad has just replied to the Spy Club invitation. Write a few paragraphs about what you think will happen next.

**Page 37:** Georges and his dad get fortune cookies from the Chinese restaurant. Write a silly fortune for each member of your class.

**Page 40:** If your school has Scrabble, work in groups or as a whole class to make up a poem created entirely from Scrabble tiles.

**Pages 63–64:** Just like Georges' class does, spend twenty minutes writing about a memory that's either sweet, salty, sour, bitter or umami.

**Page 187:** Georges says, 'Why does Bob have to spell dumb with a B?' Rewrite this page of the book phonetically (spelling it as it sounds, for example 'dum' instead of 'dumb').

**Page 200:** Safer and Georges talk about things that worry them, like bugs and lightning strikes. What is something that worries you? Write a poem about it.

**Page 212:** Have you been in a plane before? Describe the view from the plane in a poem.

**Page 225:** After reading the end of the book, have a think about what might happen next. Write a few pages about what happens to the characters after the close of the book.



### ART ACTIVITIES

Choose one of the main characters from the book and make an artwork about them. This might be a drawing of how they look, or it might be a collage of their favourite things, or even an abstract sculpture based on how they make you feel.

**Page 14:** Georges Seurat paints using a technique called pointillism: pictures made of up thousands of tiny dots. Have a go yourself at painting a pointillism picture. It's not as easy as it looks!

**Page 33:** Georges' old bedroom sounds very interesting. Draw a picture of how you imagine it to look.

**Page 71:** If it's a nice day, go outside your classroom and see if you can find some birds in your school playground. Draw a picture of the bird you find. Do you know what kind of bird it is? Once you're back in the classroom, use the internet to see if you can find out.

**Page 113:** Find a photo in a magazine of a close-up of a famous person. Using any art materials you can find, alter this picture so the celebrity looks completely different. You could turn them into a monster or an alien if you like.

**Page 214:** Georges mom describes the view from her plane as follows: 'It was as if heavy clothes, embroidered with glowing threads of gold and red, had been tossed down by a giant or a god, and were just floating there, on top of the water.' Using whatever artistic technique you like – drawing, painting, sculpture, collage or whatever else you can think of – illustrate Georges' mom's description.

### DRAMA ACTIVITIES

Choose a character from the novel, other than Georges, and rewrite a scene as a monologue from their point of view. Perform your monologue to the class. Use costume and props to make your presentation interesting for your audience.

**Pages 50, 97:** Perform a stand-up comedy routine consisting only of very bad jokes.

**Page 190:** In a group, rewrite the 'taste test' scene as a play and act it out for your class. Use costume and props to make your presentation interesting for your audience.