
Styles and Genres

Fantasy (Speculative Fiction): *High Flyers; Not Another Skeleton; Dragon Mastery; Skeleton Dance.*

Humour: *Not Another Skeleton; Boney Maloney; 20-20 Vision.*

Satire: *20-20 Vision.*

Reality Fiction/ Naturalism: *Zara; Ghosts Who Walk; Alexa Nervosa; Boney Maloney; Homecoming; Mr Bones.*

Thriller: *Ate by Eight; The Old Soldier's Ghost; Cave Girl; If the Cap Fits.*

Horror: *Only a Game.*

Follow up activities:

Comprehension: *High Flyers; Ate by Eight; Ghosts Who Walk; Mr Bones; The Old Soldier's Ghost; Dragon Mastery; Skeleton Dance.*

Creative writing

- **characterisation** *Not Another Skeleton; If the Cap Fits; Dragon Mastery.*
- **plot** *Cave Girl.*
- **setting** *Cave Girl; Ghosts Who Walk.*

Critical Literacy *Not Another Skeleton; 20-20 Vision; Cave Girl.*

Genre Focus and Literary Analysis *Ate by Eight; 20-20 Vision; Boney Maloney; Homecoming; Cave Girl; Dragon Mastery;*

Philosophy Circle Discussion *Zara; The Old Soldier's Ghost; Skeleton Dance; If the Cap Fits; Only a Game.*

Social Issues/ Themes *High Flyers; 20-20 Vision; Zara; Alexa Nervosa; Boney Maloney; Mr Bones.*

Extensions *Not Another Skeleton; Ghosts Who Walk; Alexa Nervosa; Homecoming; If the Cap Fits; Only a Game.*

HIGH FLYERS**Helen Bowers**

In the transition between childhood and adulthood, dreams (including daydreams) of flying are common. This author has adopted that theme and built a fanciful story around a family who literally 'fly', except for the narrator. She resents being the odd one out until a family crisis allows her to discover her lost skill.

NOT ANOTHER SKELETON**Barry Rosenberg**

When the Grim Reaper arrives at Jamie and Kaylee's home, it turns out GR's got the wrong address. Worse, having already tried to claim Jamie, GR admits arthritis is becoming a pain, but the kids soon work out what to do about that, and send him on his way.

ATE BY EIGHT**Helen Irvine**

The author subtly draws readers in to the narrator's fear of spiders, and builds tension by setting the action during an eclipse of the moon. A Dad familiar with biology provides interesting information about aquarium fish and huntsman spiders.

20-20 VISION**Joan Rigby**

Should we take drugs to win at sport? This story draws our attention to the issue by suggesting that we may in future be genetically modified by certain drugs to give us an edge in competitive games. This is a fine example of satirical writing.

ZARA**Miriam McGoldrick**

What's wrong with leaving a small child in a car, if you leave the motor running and the air conditioning on, if you are a Mum and you are only going to be a couple of minutes?
Exciting ... frightening ... how many victims are there? A good story for class discussion about 'what would you do in that situation?'

GHOSTS WHO WALK**John Strano**

An adventure story to make your hair stand on end. Many of our national parks contain natural features with special significance to the local indigenous people. Travel with a young explorer who takes off alone into an isolated chasm and becomes spooked by the notion of ancient spirits, to the point where those thoughts almost become a fear that traps the young explorer.

ALEXA NERVOSA**Jennifer Riggs**

More than a story about *anorexia nervosa* and *bulemia*, this story is also about family relationships. Alexa's sister, grandmother and her parents are all worried about Alexa's condition, but no one quite knows what to do about it. Then a boy comes on the scene ... Could that be the beginning of a change in Alexa's eating pattern?

BONEY MALONEY**Rose Marwick**

When a group of girls go to an all-boys school for special studies, they meet a couple of oddball teachers who just ought to get together because they deserve each other; a student who loses it and goes psycho in class; and events conspire towards a truly wicked ending.

HOMECOMING**Muriel Sargent**

This very short piece is a literary *cameo or vignette* that captures the moment when a young person first catches sight of a once-favourite uncle after he has returned from a war. The simple sad observation helps us understand at once, the terrible price war can exact on those involved ... on either side.

MR BONES**Hazel Forsyth**

Jack's Dad is dead, and now his mother needs an operation. Jack's neighbours take him in and look after him, and Jack and Geoff, the neighbour's son, get busy writing a thriller together. Through this and a new friend, Jack copes with his new independence, while he waits for his world to return to normal.

THE OLD SOLDIER'S GHOST**Richard Blackburn**

While the parents go out for the evening, Grandfather entertains his three grandchildren with stories about his wartime experiences. One of those involves the ghost of a soldier who returns periodically to his unit. Tense and excited, one of the children awakes later that night on hearing footsteps on the stairs. What happens next is scary for the whole family.

CAVE GIRL**Duncan Richardson**

An Australian family are camping out in a wildlife reserve during a holiday in Africa. When the daughter begins sleepwalking, she disturbs her brother who tries to follow her through the dark bush. She seems to be possessed by an ancient spirit that leads them both to a gruesome discovery in a cave.

DRAGON MASTERY**Jennifer Riggs**

Dragon Master Traynor and his apprentice Perry come across a dying dragon. In its death throes it hisses the name of its killer, but in so doing almost blinds Traynor. Young Perry realises it is up to him to try to find and destroy this fiend before any more dragons are lost. With the help of Traynor's dragon Ruth, and Perry's faithful horse Dobbin, they set out on an action-packed adventure.

SKELETON DANCE**Carol Barney**

Toby and Nathan will do anything to avoid sitting for the school exam. Instead of studying they've been out skateboarding and decorating neighbourhood fences and trees with graffiti. When they suddenly appear as skeletons to all but themselves, the boys decide to go to school where their teacher mistakes them for terrorists. Before the end of the day they learn more than would be found in any book.

IF THE CAP FITS**Joan Rigby**

This story begins innocently enough when a young girl becomes fascinated by the craft of hat making. She becomes so captivated by the milliner she fails to notice that some of the materials in the hats are a bit unusual. In the end, she discovers enough realities behind the milliner's success to reassess her own career goal.

ONLY A GAME**James Hamilton**

This is a horror story for kids who like gruesome tales. The narrator tries to piece together what is the reality and what is the dream, but his mind doesn't seem to be making sense anymore. It's as though the narrator is caught in a time warp between the present in England and the Mayan era in South America.

High Flyers

Themes

The author has explored a few themes in this story. Think carefully about the story before answering the questions below:

What do you think this story is really about (the main *theme*)?

What parts of the story show this?

Find one other theme and explain how the writer dealt with it in this story.

Other Theme _____

How is it shown in the story? _____

Comprehension

Each story in this collection has 'a skeleton connection' somewhere. Find it in this story and write the line or part of the line where it is mentioned:

In this family, who flew at the youngest age? _____

The author plays happily with words that relate to flight and flying. Example: *Gotta fly*. Can you find four more flying references she uses when talking about members of the family?

1 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

A *euphemism* is a gentler term we use instead of one with a harsher meaning, eg: *passed away* to mean 'died'. The mother uses the term *recreational character assassination* when referring to one of Gran's social activities. Can you suggest a simple everyday word or phrase that this could mean?

Why did the narrator feel like 'the odd one out' in this family, and did you understand why?

NOT ANOTHER SKELETON

Creative Writing: Character

How do we know the character *Death*?

- through his voice eg "a million echoes"
- through his appearance eg "like a skeleton"

What else do we know? (and how?)

What does he carry? _____

How does he speak? (eg the words he uses) _____

What problems does he have? _____

What is his personality like ? (give a reason) _____

Critical Literacy (Answer only ONE of the next two questions)

If you found this story funny, list a couple of things that amused you:

1 _____

2. If you didn't find the story funny, explain why: _____

Extension

Death mentioned his relative, *Time*. If you met this character, what do you think she or he would be like? Why?

What other strange characters like this can you think of? Describe one. (Think about characters in other stories eg: The Ghost of Christmas in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*)

ATE BY EIGHT

Comprehension

The narrator in this story is surrounded by people and pets. Name any five:

1 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

5 _____

By the end of the story, which ones do you think the story is *really* about?

When the narrator awoke and had trouble speaking, what did you think had happened?

What had, in fact, happened? _____

Who do you think really understood what had happened during the night? Explain why.

Analysis

Would you classify this story as realism, science fiction, or a thriller? Say why.

What natural event did the writer include to create a spooky atmosphere?

What did you find important as you read the story? (Mark your choices with a ✓.)

How different pet fish react in an aquarium. _____

How the person telling the story felt. _____

The mother's comfort and support. _____

The father's scientific knowledge. _____

The reassurance that the dog slept in the room with the narrator. _____

The girl's knowledge that she was sharing her room with a spider. _____

The unusual natural event. _____

Think about all the characters (human and animal) in the story: Do you think any of them were actually affected by the strange natural occurrence? If YES, say which one(s).

Focus and Reflection

Stories are quite different when told by different people. Imagine the father telling his version of this story to a friend at work: Mark with a + those things he would probably draw special attention to, mark with a 0 anything he might leave out, and mark with a — things he might just mention but not pay much attention to.

the dog sleeping in the room	_____
the huntsman spider in the corner	_____
whose room this was	_____
the whole fish collection	_____
the fish that jumped out	_____
the strange natural occurrence	_____
his knowledge about huntsmen spiders	_____
his wife's attempt to spray the spider	_____
how the 'bag of bones' got on the floor	_____
his daughter's morning throat problem	_____
his wife's part in the morning events	_____
write here anything else you think he might mention.	_____

Now go back and add another + to the thing or things he might stress most strongly.

[There are no right or wrong answers here but it would be an interesting exercise to break into small groups and discuss your different points of view.]

20-20 VISION

Critical Literacy

What issue is the writer drawing our attention to in this story?

Which character does she want us to identify with? _____

How does the author try to achieve this? _____

What qualities does that character have? _____

Why do you think the author chose to set the action at an Olympics event rather than a state championship?

The characters names may be unfamiliar to you. Suggest why the writer chose them.

Literary Analysis

This style of writing is called *satire*. It usually involves taking a familiar social situation and extending it to an illogical or unreal conclusion. List the **real** or **familiar** aspects in this story.

Now list the aspects that seem **unreal**.

Can you think of any other stories, poems, songs, comics, radio or television programmes that are written in a **satirical** style?

ZARA

Issues and Story Structure

This writer has explored real **issues** that occur daily eg: underage driving.
List another three issues that were dealt with in this story:

- 1 _____ 2 _____
3 _____

Think carefully about the sequence of events in the story when answering these questions:

The story is called **Zara**. Which issue do you think the writer wanted to draw your attention to?

Suppose the story had been called **The Skeleton That Caught My Eye**.
What issue would that draw your attention to, as a reader?

In real life, accidents and crimes can be triggered by one or more events. In this story there is a chain of events. What part did Zara play at the start of the story?

What event was triggered by the skeleton in this story?

Reflection

Put yourself in the mother's shoes. What could you have done differently to avoid what happened?

Why do you think the mother didn't do that in this case?

ZARA

Philosophy Circle Discussion

Events similar to the one Miriam McGoldrick created for this story happen every day in cities and towns. They are called *opportunistic* crimes because they are almost accidental—they happen because a series of small events fall together in a particular way that allows the bigger event to take place.

Discuss

What do you think Josie set out to do that day? _____

What first drew Josie's attention to this particular car?

By the end of this story, Josie had committed a series of crimes, probably without thinking about them. Mark with X any from the list below that you think Josie was guilty of, and be prepared to say when and how you think she committed the crime:

Car theft _____ Theft of property _____ Kidnapping _____

Breaking and entering _____ Driving without a licence _____

Murder _____ Property damage _____ Drink driving _____

Child abuse _____ Dangerous driving _____ Child neglect _____

Find two places in this story where Josie acted kindly (either explain the situation, or quote lines):

1 _____

2 _____

How did Zara affect Josie's plan? _____

What do you think of the way Josie behaved after she became aware of the child in the back?

How does Josie feel about what has happened? Explain how you arrived at your opinion using only what information is in the story.

GHOSTS WHO WALK

Comprehension

Right at the beginning the author introduces an incident that sets the mood for the rest of the action. What is it?

Why does the boy set off alone?

What evidence of aboriginal habitation does the boy find in the gorge?

What do you think "spooked" this young explorer?

Creative Writing - Setting - Writing Style

List three things about the gorge that add to its spooky atmosphere

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

List some things about the writer's style that helped to create a spooky mood. eg short sentences, long sentences, sound words, images. Give examples.

Reflection

How do you think the boy would look back on this experience later in his life?

Suppose one parent or both went with the boy into the gorge. How would the experience have differed for the boy?

GHOSTS WHO WALK

Extension: Field Trip with a Ranger or Visit by an Indigenous person.

Find out some rules for behaviour in National Parks:

Which rules do you think are broken most often? Why is that?

List any other interesting things you learnt or saw:

ALEXA NERVOSA

Issue – Eating disorder Information and Research

What do you think encouraged Alexa to have some pizza?

Research: Find some information that would help you detect if a friend has an eating disorder. Make a short list.

Imagine you are Alexa's sister. What would you write in your journal or diary about this night's event?

Now write what Alexa might have written.

Who do you think the author wanted us to identify with? _____

Why do you think she wrote this story? _____

BONEY MALONEY

Analysis

Think carefully about the events depicted in this story and the way the story is told. Would you classify it as realism, satire, humour, fantasy or other?

What is the major theme explored in this story?

Comedy writers classify various situations that cause readers or audience members to laugh.

One is **the shock of recognition**, that is, we recognise ourselves (or someone we know) in an awkward or embarrassing situation. Can you identify one such example in this story?

Another is **toilet (or potty) humour**, where the comedy is based around bodily functions or our private parts. Where does this occur in the story?

A third is **mistaken identity** (often used by Shakespeare in his comedies). Explain how the author uses this device in *Boney Maloney*.

Select any other moment or event in the story that amused you. Say what it was and why you found it funny.

Themes/Issues

What do you consider is the main classroom issue this writer has explored in developing the plot for this story?

THEME/ISSUE: _____

How did the author use that in the story? _____

HOMECOMING

Analysis

When you read this story or heard it read, how did it make you feel?

What made you feel this way? _____

After reading the story, what picture remained in your mind? _____

From the information in this story only, how do you think the narrator felt about the uncle before he went to war?

How does the narrator feel now the uncle has returned from the war?

The narrator did not speak to the uncle? Can you suggest why? _____

Research

Use books, encyclopaedias, the internet to find out how many wars, and what they were, that Australian troops have been involved in since Federation up to the present. List them:

1 _____ 2 _____

3 _____ 4 _____

5 _____ 6 _____

7 _____ 8 _____

9 _____ 10 _____

MR BONES

Comprehension

What is the name of the boy who tells this story?

What happened to his father?

Explain how the skeleton becomes involved in this story.

One character in particular appears to have been changed by the events in this story. Which character is that? _____

Explain the change you detected. _____

What do think brought about that change? _____

Issues

This story deals with several issues that some young people face as they grow up. List those issues or challenges that you recognised:

Some people describe **family** as those who love, support, advise, and protect us when we need them. Apart from his mother, which of the other characters became 'family' to the narrator during the period covered in this story?

Mrs Swan _____
Geoff _____
Jo-Ann _____

Sam Rae _____
Auntie Jenny _____
Mr Bones _____

THE OLD SOLDIER'S GHOST

Pre-reading Discussion

Have you ever been part of a ghost stories night, either when at home or away on a camping trip? _____

What was it like for you? _____

Why? _____

(What do you think it might be like (if you haven't had the experience)

If so, how did it affect you when it was time to go to bed?

Now read the story

Philosophy Circle Discussion

Who do you think was responsible for Grandpa's heart attack?

Grandpa himself for telling ghost stories at bedtime. _____

Grandpa for daring Jenny to be brave. _____

Jenny, for frightening him on the stairs. _____

It was no one's fault, it happened because of the circumstances. _____

Something else. (Explain) _____

The ambulance man told the parents that the twins were the heroes of the night. Why do you think he said that?

Do you agree with that point of view? If not, say what you think.

Comprehension

How old is Jenny? _____

Are the twins older or younger than Jenny? And how do you know? _____

What is the last thing Grandpa tells Jenny to do as she leaves the room?

Does she do it? Explain your answer. _____

CAVE GIRL

Places Alive 1

This story depends a lot on the sense of place developed. We learn about the place from Ben, the main character.

Fill in the table with the information he gives us and try to work out how he feels about it. The first one is done as an example.

Information	Ben's feeling
The Game Park is a noisy place full of wild animals.	It's a dangerous place. Death is lurking.
There are lots of things to see in the day time.	
Where are the family staying in this place?	
Explain how the events in the story depend on where the family stayed.	

Places Alive 2

The cave in this story is a special place because of what happened there in the past. Have you ever been to a place like that?

Describe a place that you have been to or know about.

How could this setting be used in a story? What happened there? What might happen there?

CAVE GIRL

Plot

This story begins with meeting the character, the setting and some hint of the problem the characters might face. This is called the Orientation.

What was the complication that Ben faced next?

What choices did he have then?

Which one did he take?

What conclusion did these lead to?

Perspectives on the story

This story is told by an Australian boy in Africa. Why do you think the story was told that way?

The only African character is the girl who died 10,000 years ago. How do you think the story might be different if told by an African child?

What about a story by an African child on holiday in Australia? What things might he or she find strange in the bush or in the city?

Do you think the author is trying to make us think in a certain way about Africa? What evidence is there for that?

DRAGON MASTERY

Characterisation

Which character interested you most? _____

What was it about that character that attracted you? _____

Sometimes a character on the edge of story can become a very powerful reader interest in the story.

We never actually meet Vaspestilan in the story, yet we feel we know a lot about him. Write three things you learnt about him from the story (you may quote the actual words or lines if you prefer).

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Comprehension

The land created for this story is very different from our own. Imagine you live there, and use only information from this story to answer these questions:

If you suffered burns or wounds, what treatment would you expect?

The land was in a bad way at the time. Name one of the problems the people on the land had to put up with:

State any person or group that the peasants were blaming for their plight:

Crows are a threat to dragons. Why? _____

What was the character Dobbin in this story? **(Mark your choice with √)**

A person _____ A mastiff _____ A peasant _____

A dragon _____ A horse _____ A wet nurse _____

DRAGON MASTERY

Literary Analysis

Generally we classify any story with a dragon as fantasy, speculative fiction or science fiction

List at least three elements that fall outside of reality:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

List three things you learned about dragons from this story:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Stories like this are often about the struggle between good and evil. List two elements in this story that represent 'good' and two that represent 'evil':

GOOD: 1 _____

2 _____

EVIL: 1 _____

2 _____

What did Vaspestilan use for gate post ornaments? _____

Check the story information as well as the chemistry information provided by the author and say what you think about Vaspestilan's gate ornaments.

SKELETON DANCE

Comprehension

In the early part of the story the two boys were in trouble with parents and teachers. What was upsetting people around the boys? (There may be more than one right answer.)

Why did teachers mistake them for terrorists at school?

We learn later in the story what the boys really did wrong. What was that?

Who revealed to everyone what the boys did wrong?

What was their punishment?

Philosophy Circle Discussion

Consider the activity that created the social problem in this story. Be prepared to think carefully about these questions and discuss your views confidently with the group members:

Is this activity always considered unacceptable? _____

If you said NO, explain when you think it can be acceptable. _____

Why do you think people become involved in this activity? _____

IF THE CAP FITS

Building Characters

How did this writer grab your attention early in the story?

From the first two pages, what did you think Mme Bonet was like?

There is one place in the story where we discover Mme Bonet's background.

Where was she born? _____

Her grandfather was the friend of a famous author. What was the author's name?

Why does the girl feel special as she gets to know Mme Bonet better?

Why does the hat maker call herself Madame Bonet, rather than Mrs Bonet?

Mme B's cat becomes an important character in this story. Name any two special things that you noticed about that cat.

1 _____

2 _____

Why was the girl secretly pleased to see that Mme B used some shiny rooster tail feathers in one creation? _____

Passers-by make comments about the hat maker. What do they think of her?

What do you think happened to Mme B's cat by the end of the story?

Say why you think this. _____

IF THE CAP FITS

Extension: Research and Philosophy Circle Discussion

Step 1

Research

Try to find out in what decade this story is set. _____

Look at still life paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries. What do you notice often among the flowers, fruit and harvest products? _____

Then look at some 20th century still life paintings and notice the differences.

[YOUR NOTES] _____

Step 2 Discussion.

Mme B uses both animal skins and bird feathers in making her hats. Was there a problem with that in the time when this story is set?

: _____

Is there a problem with that today? If so, why? _____

Mrs B's cat brings in a half-dead parrot it caught. The milliner screws the parrot's neck, harvests the bright feathers, and cuts up the bird to feed the innards to the cat?

Discuss: What do you think about this behaviour? Do you think it was normal for the period when the story is set? How do we know?

ONLY A GAME

Extension

Step 1

This writer uses a particular art work as inspiration starter for the story.
Find a picture of Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure* and look at it carefully.

Find also any information about *Chacmool* and Chichén Itsá in Mayan culture.

Also try to find information about other historic public spectacles (e.g. buzkashi in the Hunza region of Pakistan; public spectacles in the Colosseum in Rome; in the Arena in Verona; or in any other ancient Roman Empire amphitheatre).

Philosophy Circle:

Step 2

Why do you think modern sporting events are usually so competitive and aggressive?

Do you think this competitive attitude exists at all levels in sporting events?

What do you think is the main difference between ancient and modern sports for the losing side?

What similarities remain from ancient times in our modern sports?

Review: The book overall

If you have read most or all of the stories in this book, what do you think about the.....

variety? _____

arrangement? _____

quality? _____

choice of theme? _____

number of stories? _____

If you were putting together a book of stories, would you choose a theme?

Why or why not? _____

What would make a good theme? _____

How would you show this in the title? Or the cover?

Which do you prefer, short stories or novels? Why?

Which do you think are easier to write? Why?

If you would like to give your response to any of the authors, please write via the publisher.