

LT2 ■ Buzzard Breath
& Brains

Upper Primary

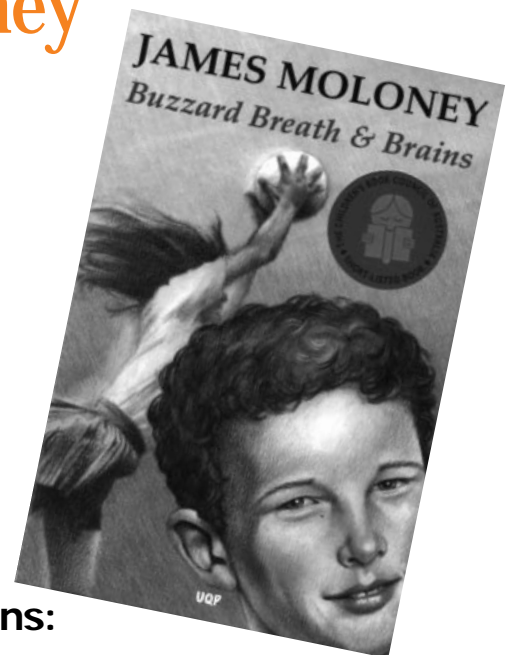


Blake's Topic Bank

Buzzard Breath & Brains

by James Moloney

by Lynne Sung



Each literature unit contains:

- 8 pages of teaching notes
- Activities to take students into the book, through the book and beyond the book
- Discussion questions
- 10 practical blackline masters
- National Profile outcomes

Introduction



Synopsis

When the Principal's prize rose garden is vandalised the blame is sheeted to the school bully, Tony, and his friend Rex. On this occasion they are innocent so through intimidation they set out to find who has set them up. Natalie, Rex's popular cousin, finds out the truth and determines to clear her cousin's name. In the process, she and Rex are allied. Rex begins to realise that bullying does not win him any friends. The climax arrives when he is forced to choose between supporting Tony in his intimidation or supporting a would-be friend.

Through the experiences in the story Rex, who lacks self-esteem and is isolated in the group, becomes a confident group member and friend and is finally able to stand up to his bully brother. Natalie becomes aware of her uncaring, superior attitude to Lucy Harrington and grows into a more thoughtful person.

Reading Level

Upper Primary, whole group listening, small group and individual reading.

Overview of Unit

This unit focuses on the relationships between characters as they interact during the events that are described. Ideas about the importance of friendship and trust are introduced in the *Into the Book* section. The activities in the section *Reading the Book* explore these notions in more detail as well as developing further knowledge about how narrative texts work. The *Beyond the Book* section allows students to explore other works by the same author to develop a deeper knowledge of his work. The *Integration* section suggests opportunities for teachers to link this novel with other areas of the curriculum.

Major Themes

Friendship, bullying, honesty, confidence and self-esteem.

Literary Techniques

Told from the point-of-view of the two main characters, Rex and Natalie, who are cousins. The story is narrated through the voice of the characters in alternate chapters written in the first person.

Grammar Focus

Use of first person singular pronoun
I as narrator.

Useful Resources

Begin a collection of the other works of James Moloney. Have these available for students to read in spare time.

Assessment

Students will:

Talking and Listening

- 4.1 Interact confidently with others in a variety of situations to develop and present familiar ideas, events and information.
- Listen to the reading and recall details of characters.
 - Present a point of view and talk about solutions to a problem.
 - Practise and present a role play.

Reading and Viewing

- 4.5 Justify own interpretation of ideas, information and events in texts containing some unfamiliar concepts and topics and which introduce relatively complex linguistic structures and features.
- Find information about a character.
 - Make inferences based on knowledge of a character.
- 4.6 Explains possible reasons for people's varying interpretations of a text.
- Discuss their own and other interpretations of relationships in the novel.
- 4.7 With assistance, identifies and discusses how linguistic structures and features work to shape readers' understanding of texts.
- Identify the structure of the novel.
 - Identify the author's purpose.

Writing

- 4.11 Controls most distinguishing linguistic structures and features of stories.
- Understand and use first person narrative using pronoun 'I'.

Into the Book



1 Issues

Make up a series of question cards to display around the room for about a week before you plan to begin reading *Buzzard Breath & Brains*. The questions should set students thinking about the kinds of issues the book raises. Questions might include:

- What if your best friend was a bully?
- What if you had to go to a party wearing something you hated?
- What if your friend is blamed for something they did not do?
- What if you find you really like your teacher?
- What if everyone deserts you because you are a bully?

The book explores notions about friendship, bullying and power in school group dynamics. Introduce a discussion of these ideas through the questions that you have already displayed around the classroom. Conduct a general discussion with the class about situations like these in which members of the class have found themselves.

2 Friendship

Ask students to try to define what a friend is. List the suggestions that students offer. Pose the question, 'Do you reject a friend just because there are some things about him/her that you do not like?'

Distribute **BLM 1**. Have students consider and write what makes them a good friend to someone and the things they like and dislike about the person they consider to be a best friend. The information recorded should be treated with respect so it is not necessary for students to show anyone what they have written.

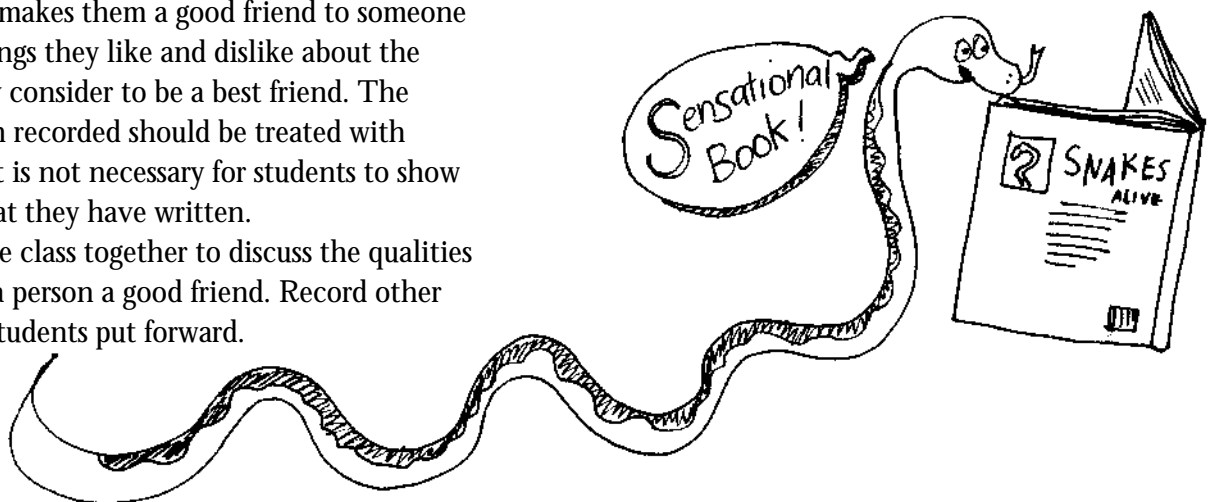
Bring the class together to discuss the qualities that make a person a good friend. Record other ideas that students put forward.

3 Being a good friend

Explain that there is an expression to describe a particular kind of friend. Sometimes people are called 'fair weather friends'. Have students suggest what this expression might mean. Give students time to reflect upon a time when they showed their friendship through their actions. Ask them to record that event on **BLM 2** and explain how their own actions showed the degree of their friendship. The information can remain private but students can share generalised ideas in the whole class group.

4 Author please

Gather the class together and ask what students know about the author, James Moloney. Relate information found inside the front cover of *Buzzard Breath & Brains* about this prize-winning author. List the books by this author that students have read. Ask individuals to briefly talk about the books they have read. As a group, identify some of the common themes of this author's work. Suggest that students talk with the school librarian about the author and ask for more books and information about him.



Reading the Book



Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the main characters Rex and Natalie and gives background information about their relationship, and their relationships within their families.

Questions

- Who are the main characters in this book?
- How are these characters related to one another?
- What do we know about Rex's family?
- What do we know about Natalie's family?
- Why does Natalie think that boys should be put to sleep when they turn twelve and woken up when they are twenty?

Session 1

Introduce the book *Buzzard Breath & Brains*. Explain that this is a book by James Moloney. Show the cover and ask students to predict what this book might be about. Talk about the word *buzzard* in the title. Make certain students understand the meaning of the word. Ask students to talk about what the word makes them think of and to imagine what a buzzard's breath would be like. Ask them to suggest what the title might be referring to.

Turn to the back of the book and read the blurb

to students. Ask them to identify the characters that have been introduced in the blurb. List the names on a black or whiteboard.

Explain that the first chapter is titled 'Natalie'. Explain that you will read the first chapter to the students and that when you are finished they will try to note everything they can about the characters.

Ask students to listen carefully while you read the first chapter.

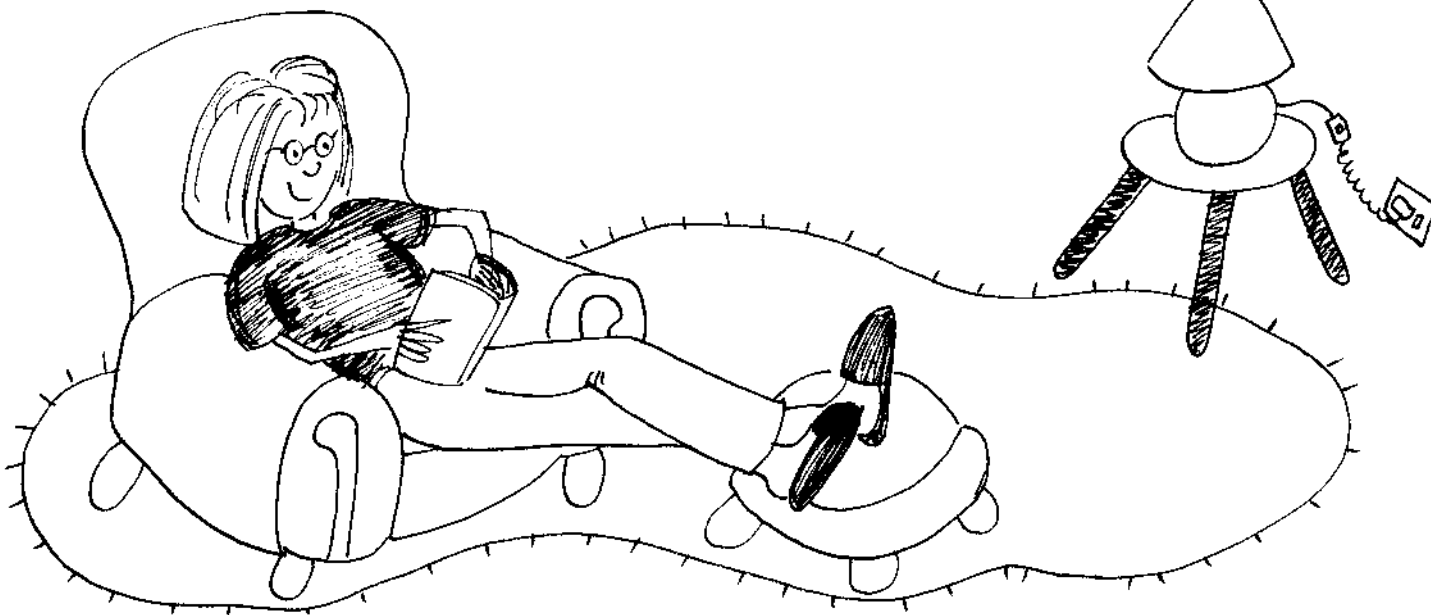
When you have completed reading, add any new characters to the list already begun. Beside each one record any information that the students can recall about the characters, for example, Rex has two older brothers, Kerrod and Harry.

Session 2

In groups, have the students discuss the following:

In the story Natalie has to wear a dress that she does not like because it will hurt her aunt's feelings if she refuses. Think of a time when you have had to do something that you really did not want to do. How did it feel to be in that position and what did you do? How could you get out of a situation like this?

Have students come back as a whole class and share some of the discussions.





Chapter 2

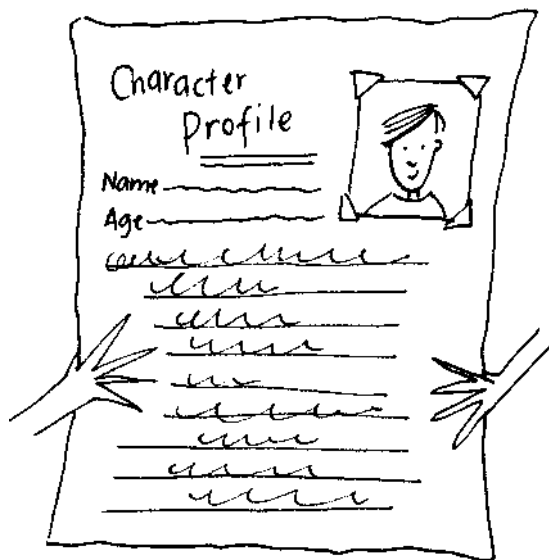
This chapter enlarges on the character of Rex and allows the reader to see Rex in the context of school. It also introduces the teacher, Ms Silec, who becomes an influential character later in the book.

Questions

- What do you know about Ms Silec? Find the part in the book that describes her appearance.
- What kind of teacher is she? How do you know this?
- What is Rex's opinion of himself?
- Why do you think he thinks this way?
- Why do you think the girls in the class accept the teacher quickly?

Session 3

Divide the class into small groups to read to the end of Chapter 2 and then complete a character profile for Rex (**BLM 3**). Explain that they may need to read both Chapters 1 and 2 again to get all the information they need. Gather the class together and talk about the things students recorded on the profile. Suggest that students keep this profile as they may want to add more information as they read more of the book.



Chapters 3, 4 and 5

In these chapters the reader gains a picture of Natalie at school and her relationships with her friends. The character of Tony O'Brien is also introduced and the reader begins to get a picture of the group dynamics of the class. Tony, the bully, intimidates Lucy Harrington who is treated as an outsider by the girls.

Questions

- What opinion do you think most people at school hold about Rex?
- Explain the title, *Buzzard Breath & Brains*.
- What kind of friend is Tony? Justify your answer.
- In your opinion, should Rex remain friends with him? Why or why not?

Session 4

Have students read to the end of Chapter 5. In the last paragraph of the chapter the words in the title *Buzzard Breath & Brains* are referred to. Distribute **BLM 4**. Ask students to write in their own words what they think the title means and also suggest an alternative title based on their knowledge of the book so far.

Session 5

The book is told from the perspective of the two main characters, Natalie and Rex. As a class discuss what first person narration means by using an extract from the book as an example. Point out that sentences in the book contain the first person pronoun *I* and give one person's view of events.

Have students read the last two paragraphs of Chapter 5 again. Then have them imagine that they are either Tony or Lucy and rewrite these paragraphs from the point of view of one of these characters and using first person narration. (See **BLM 5**.)



Chapters 6, 7 and 8

Natalie sees Rex in a new light. She begins to realise that Rex has been framed by someone and she determines to find out who it is. The reader is given insight into the relationship between Kerrod and Rex, and Rex's relationships with his parents.

Questions

- Natalie decides she must find out who destroyed the Principal's rose garden. What happens in the story that makes her so determined?
- What does Natalie think about Rex and his friendship with Tony? How do you know this?
- Rex says that being around Tony makes him feel big. What do you think he means by this?
- Why does Rex have trouble talking to his dad about his problem with Kerrod?

Session 6

Draw the class together and discuss the relationships that exist in Rex's family. Begin to construct a diagram which shows these relationships. Assist students to come up with words appropriate to describing the relationships, for example on the arrows between Rex and his mother the words *trust* and *protection* might appear. Once the idea of the diagram has been introduced, have students complete one individually using **BLM 6**. This will allow you to gain insight into students' understandings of these relationships. Take time to move about the classroom talking with students about their work. Ask them to give reasons, based on the knowledge of the text, for their choice of words.



Chapters 9 to 14

Natalie gains the help of Ms Silec in her quest to get Rex exonerated. Ms Silec will help if Natalie promises to return the favour by including Lucy Harrington in her group. Although Natalie is reluctant at first, she has no choice. However, when the time comes to choose players in a netball game against the boys, Natalie deliberately leaves Lucy out. At first it appears that the girls will easily win the net ball game but when Ms Silec joins the boys side the score is evened. It is Lucy's final shot that wins the game for the girls.

Ms Silec reprimands Natalie for her negative approach to Lucy and makes her agree to accept an invitation to Lucy's birthday party. This puts Natalie in a dilemma as she will be forced to wear the frilly party dress that Aunty Jane has made for her. But Natalie has more important things to think about as she finds out from Peter McNeill who is really responsible for the rose garden fiasco.

Questions

- What does the netball match reveal about Natalie's character and her attitude to the girls in her class?
- What words would you use to describe Natalie's personality?
- What would you do if you were Peter or Lucy and you were left out of a team?
- How does Ms Silec's intervention in the game change the result?
- What effect did the game have on the class?
- How did it affect Rex's attitude towards Peter?
- What happened to Lucy as a result of the match?
- In your judgement, what kind of person is Peter?
- Why does Rex begin to doubt whether Tony is really his friend?



Session 7

Have students use **BLM 7** to write their thoughts about how the netball match changed how the members of the class thought about one another. Then bring the group back together and discuss the relationships.

Chapters 15 to 17

Lucy comes to the rescue and provides Natalie with a perfect answer to her party dress problem. Rex is finally able to stand up to his bullying brother, Kerrod, and he also realises that he can stand up to Tony.

Questions

- What is it that finally makes Rex realise that he no longer wants to be around Tony?
- How does Rex feel when he is finally able to tell his parents about Kerrod's intimidation?
- Explain in your own words how Kerrod and Tony are similar.
- What changes do you see in Rex up to this point in the story?

Session 8

Select a section of the book in which two characters are having a conversation, for example Rex and Natalie talking about the party dress in Chapter 6. Photocopy these pages and mark the words spoken using underline or marker pen. Ask for volunteers to play the parts of Rex and Natalie. Have them use the underlined words as a script.

Demonstrate how this conversation might look if it were written as a play script. Show students how a script uses the names of the characters and records the actual words they say. The other information in the novel text can then become stage directions.

Use one or two more examples from the text. Then ask students to work in pairs and imagine a conversation that might have taken place between two characters, for example, between Peter

McNeill and Mr Pascoe, between Ms Silec and a teacher in the staff room, or between Rex's parents and Kerrod. They can use **BLM 8** to draft their dialogue.

Have students construct a short dialogue to present to the class as a role-play with each student taking a part. Suggest that students talk about their presentation and make notes before attempting to write. If students wish to add stage directions they may. Allow time for students to prepare their role-play presentation and then have them present them to the class.

Chapter 18

The story reaches a climax in this chapter. Rex overcomes his fear and dependence on Tony and makes friends with Peter.

Questions

- Why does Rex stay at the creek?
- If you were Rex, how would you have acted in this situation?
- Is this a satisfying ending to the story? Is so, why? If not, why not?
- How will things change for Rex now?
- How will things change for Peter?

Session 9

Revise the structure of a novel. Then have students work in pairs to use **BLMs 9** and **10** to identify the parts of this novel that make up the narrative. Discuss the results of the activity. Notice that the resolution comes very close to the end of the book. Point out that this is a device to build interest and encourage the reader to read on. Students may be able to identify other novels like this one.



Beyond the Book

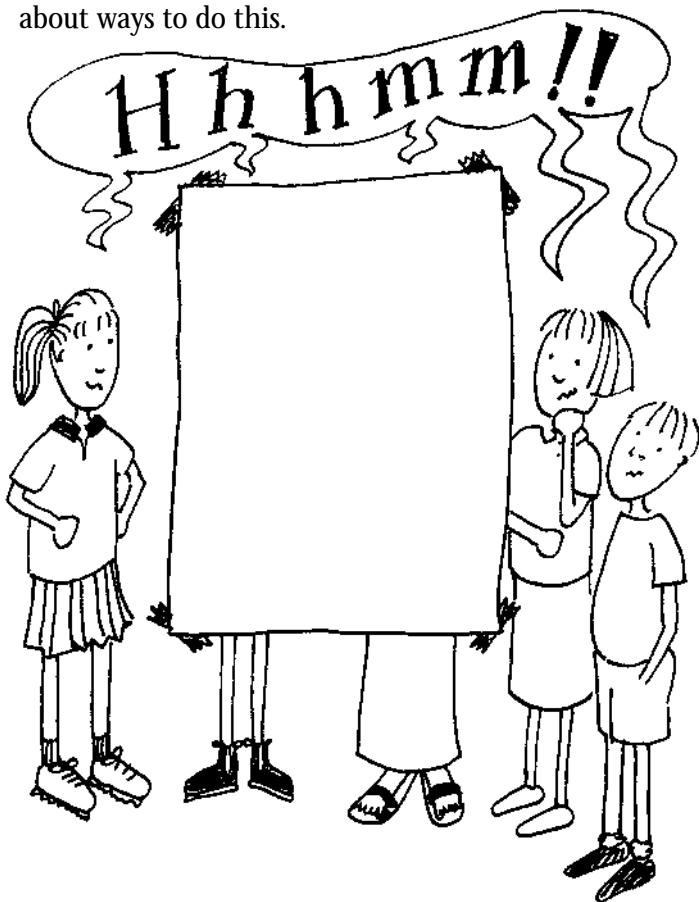


1 Review

Now that students have studied the book closely, they should have been able to form an opinion of it. Revise methods of review writing and then ask students to write their own review of *Buzzard Breath & Brains* for publication in the library. Explain that their opinion of the book will allow other students to gain some idea about the novel and the author and they may be encouraged to read the book too.

2 Poster

Have students design a poster to be displayed in a prominent position. Talk about the need to 'sell' the book to others using a few apt descriptions and bright attractive presentation. Discuss possible illustration that will give further insight into what the book is about. These need to attract attention and give a lot of information in a few words. Talk about ways to do this.



3 Author study

Encourage students to read other books by the same author. Then use the knowledge they gain to conduct an author study. Have students record details such as the themes of James Moloney's novels, development of characters, similarities and differences in the types of characters he writes about, similarities and differences in the situations in which he puts his characters. Organise small discussion groups to talk about aspects of the novels such as characters that are like real life people that students may know and situations that are similar to those that students have experienced.

4 Author visit

If possible, arrange for the author to visit the school to speak with students. Have students compile a list of questions that they would like to ask this author about aspects of his work and his writing. If it is not possible to arrange a visit, students could make an audio tape of these questions and send them to the author, via the publisher, requesting answers.

5 Poetry

In Chapter 5 of the novel two humorous poems are featured. Use these as a springboard for the study of poetry. The poem about the boys describes them as they are in the beginning of the novel and is disparaging. Both characters have made changes during the course of the novel. Have students construct a poem that describes the characters as they are at the end of the novel. These may be a little kinder in their descriptions.

6 New cover

Arrange for groups to discuss the changes that have taken place in the characters and come up with a new title which reflects these changes. Ask them to design a new cover on which to put their new title. The cover should reflect another important aspect of the novel.

Integrated Activities



1 Nicknames

In this novel the character Lucy Harrington is given the nickname Juicy Lamington. She is excluded from a group of girls in her class and the nickname serves to make fun of her and alienate her further. Talk with students about the effect of name calling. Sometimes nicknames can be an expression of friendship and express affection. In this case a nickname is not destructive. Have students share their own nicknames if they choose to do so.

2 Behaviour guidelines

Students like Tony can cause problems for all who are associated with him. Have the students divide into groups and discuss ways in which the behaviour of someone like Tony could be modified. Draw the group back together and discuss the ideas that students have come up with. Suggest that drawing up a set of guidelines for group behaviour might be useful. Jointly construct a list of useful guidelines for this behaviour. Make certain that students do not use the words *do not* in their guidelines but rather phrase the ideas in positive statements, for example *Treat all group members with respect*. When complete, display these guidelines for all to see and use.

3 Bullies

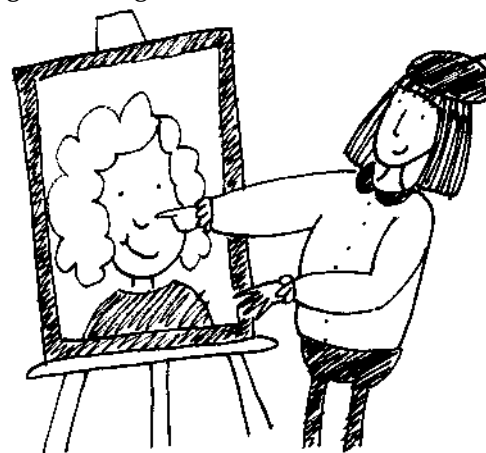
Discuss ways of dealing with bullying behaviour. Examine the reasons for Rex's bullying behaviour. Talk about the way he is treated by his brother and talk about the connection with his own behaviour. Identify strategies that might be used to deal with a bully. Encourage students to discuss bullying incidents in their own experience but be mindful of the emotional stress which this might cause for some children.

4 Hints for teachers

Ms Silec has a very positive approach to her students and her teaching. Discuss Ms Silec's approach and talk about why she is liked by the students. Have students form into groups to draw up a list of 'handy hints for teachers' to help them to ensure a positive relationship with their students. Bring the lists together to compare.

5 Portraits

Art can be used as a way of encouraging students to express their emotions about others. Present a number of portraits by well known artists. Talk about how a portrait encapsulates the subject and usually has a way of telling a lot about that person. This can be through objects in the artwork that are associated with the person, through colour expressing personality traits, or through facial expression and choice of stance. Have students work with someone that they like. Ask them to make an initial drawing of that person's face, looking for detail of shape, eye and hair colour, measuring distances of parts of the face as markers for their drawing. Then have students make a painting of the person which shows something about them. They can use the ways suggested above or any other ways that they think will show the personality or character of the person. When artworks are complete, frame them and display for all to see. If artists wish to talk about their painting, encourage them to do so.

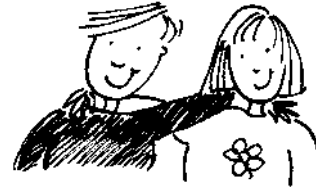


Name _____

Date _____



Friends



Me

My friend

Things I like about myself as a friend

Things I like about my friend

Things I could change about myself to be a better friend

Things I would like to change about my friend

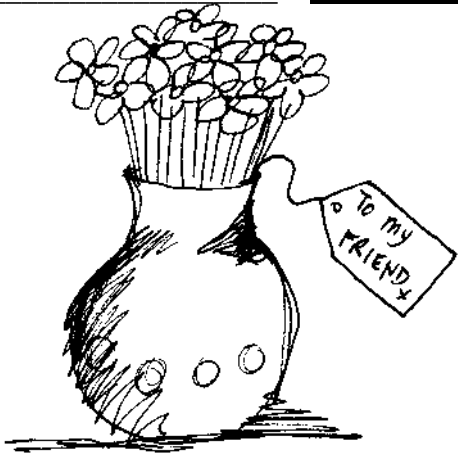
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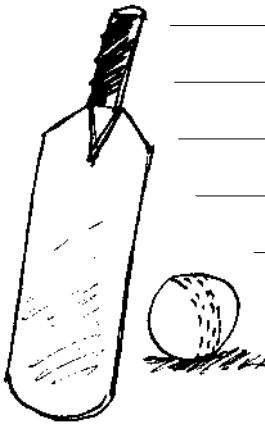
Date _____

Being a good friend

We show our friendship for someone through our actions. Think of a time when you have shown yourself to be a good friend.

Write about what you did to support your friend or show your friendship.

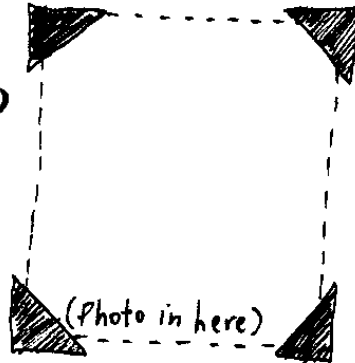




Character Profile

Fill out the character profile for Rex, based on your knowledge from the text. If you are not sure about some of the details you may have to make them up. Just make sure that whatever you put down matches the kind of person Rex is.

Character Profile



Name

Age

Mother's name

Father's name

Brothers and sisters

Appearance

Hair..... Eyes..... Height.....

Class in School

Hobbies

.....

Best friend

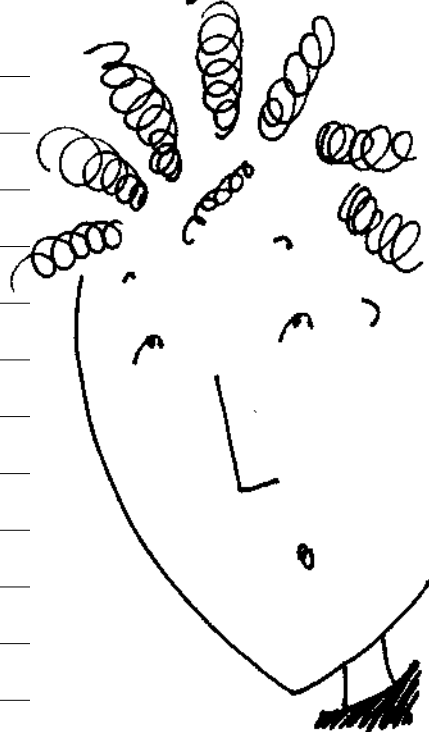
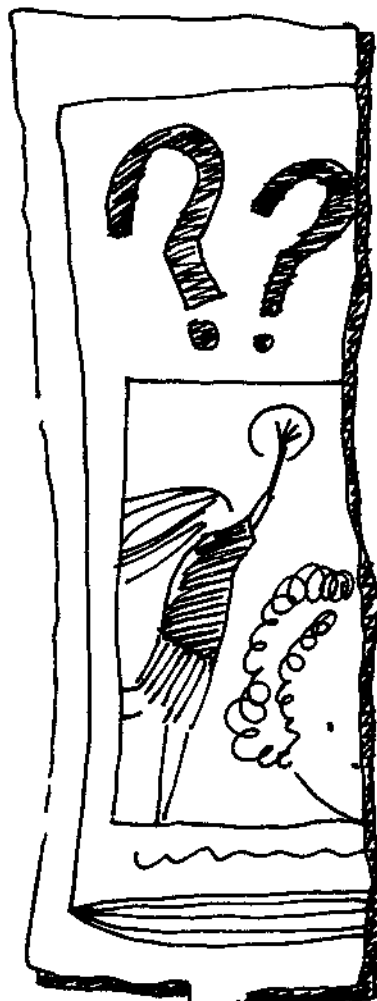
Other details

.....

Title

Use this page to explain why you think the author chose this title.
 Do you think it is an appropriate title? Why?

Suggest an alternative title and explain why you think
 your title is a good substitute.





Point of View



Read the end of Chapter 5 again. Imagine you are either Lucy or Tony.
Rewrite the last two paragraphs as if you are one of those characters.
Use the pronoun 'I' and try to use language that you think
your character would use to describe the scene.

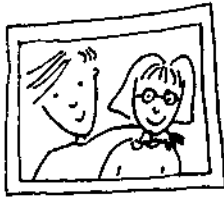
Handwriting practice area consisting of 20 horizontal lines for writing.



Relationship Diagram

Complete the relationship diagram adding all the information you know about what the characters feel about one another.

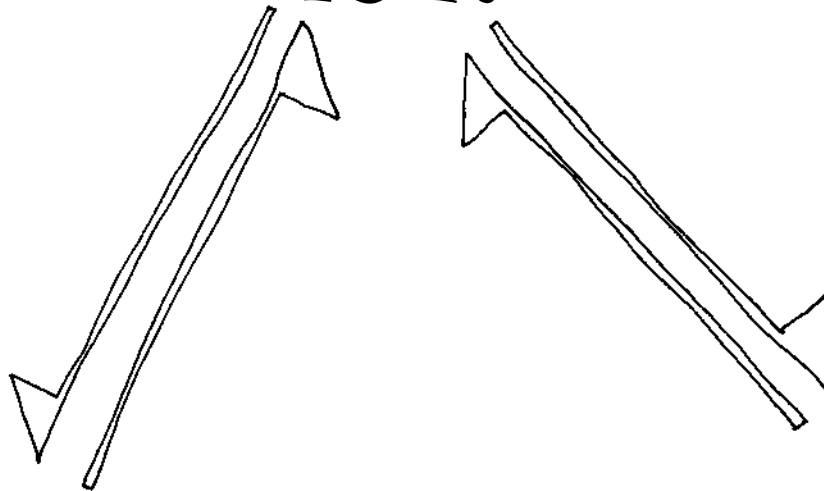
Mother



Father



Rex



Harry



Kerrod

Relationships

Since the netball match things have changed between some of the characters in the story.

Describe in your own words the changes that have taken place between the following sets of characters.

Rex and Peter

Natalie and Peter

Natalie and Rex

When did Natalie's relationship with Lucy change and why?

Dialogue



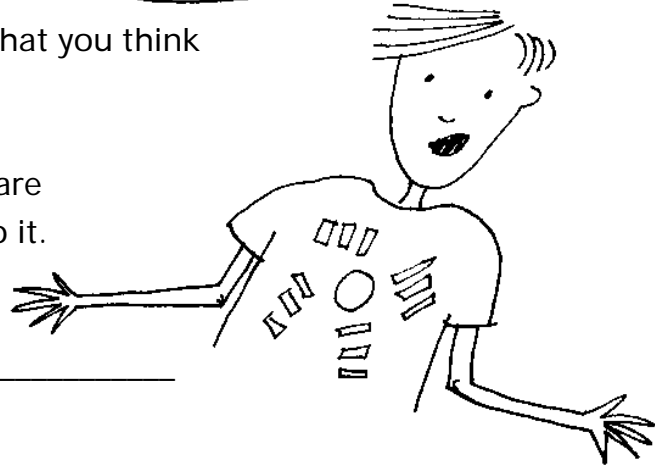
Choose two characters and write the conversation that you think happened between them.

Think about:

- ☞ the kind of people your chosen characters are
- ☞ the situation and their possible reactions to it.

Draft your dialogue here.

Characters _____ and _____



DIALOGUE

(Character's name)

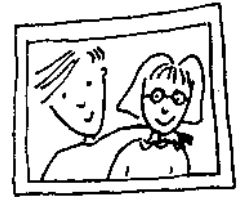
(Opening words of dialogue)

(Character's name)

(Answer)



Structure



Cut up the sentences from **BLM 10** and put them into the part of the structure where you think they fit.

Setting

Complication or problem

Series of events

Resolution

Coda or ending statement

Structure

The characters are introduced. We know that Rex is bullied by his brother and also bullies others when he is playing with Tony.

His cousin, Natalie, does not like the dress Aunt Jane is making for her.

Both are accused of destroying the Principal's rose garden.

Natalie decides to help him find the real culprit.

Natalie is a powerful character who leads a group of classmates.

A netball match supported by the teacher shows some changes in the relationships of the characters.

Natalie and Rex save Peter McNeill from intimidation by Tony.

Rex no longer suffers Kerrod's bullying.

Natalie goes to Lucy's party as Alice in Wonderland.

