



Time Machine & other stories

What happens when you sleep with a crocodile tooth under your pillow, or the mess under your bed turns into something terrifying? How can a football be a passport, and what does it mean when the contraption in the basement starts to hum and glow?

You can be sure the answers will never be boring and almost always take you on an unexpected adventure.

About the author

Melinda Szymanik writes picture books, stories and novels for children, with several named as Storylines Notable Books. *Fuzzy Doodle* and *A Winter's Day in 1939* were finalists in the New Zealand Children's Book Awards and *The Were-Nana* was a Children's Choice winner. *A Winter's Day in 1939* also won Librarian's Choice at the LIANZA Awards and *Fuzzy Doodle* was selected by the International Youth Library in Munich as one of its White Raven books.

When she is not writing, Melinda likes reading, baking (especially with chocolate), going to the movies and travelling with her family. She has three grown-up children, a cat and a husband, and lives in Mt Eden in a house with a view of the mountain.

Inspiration

Story ideas don't emerge out of nothing. They are most often a chemical reaction between some old thoughts and experiences tumbling around in our brains and something new that we suddenly see or hear. Or sometimes it's about seeing something familiar in a completely new way. Our curiosity takes over – how would it look, where is it going and why and what might happen as a result, and then our imagination fills in the details. Each teaching note includes a short summary of how the story came about.

Now's Good

This story is based on my own experiences. When I was young my family lived at the bottom of a big steep hill and my father made us a billy cart. I had enough scars on my knees from crashing out running down that hill that I was a little afraid of trying the cart. I only tried it a few times and usually from over halfway down the hill. I think I tried it once from the top. And I can't remember which ride it was, but I did crash and have a lovely scar under my chin to show for it. It was fun to look at all those feelings – fear, excitement, bravery and a strong sense of self-preservation — and write something about them all.

SUMMARY

Kit is finally realising his ambition to build a billy-cart and race down the big hill that flattens out just outside the family driveway. However he can't drive the cart on his own and enlists the help of his sister, Fi, to be brake person. Fi is reluctant to join him but is lured in by the offer of some rewards. When the time comes to test the billy-cart, Fi is unable to hear Kit's braking instructions because of all the safety gear she is wearing. As they careen down the hill she is unable to hear his repeated command to brake *now*, and they inevitably crash.

THEMES

Risk, courage, family, safety, teamwork

QUESTIONS

Why does Kit need Fi's help to control the billy-cart?

Control of the billy-cart relies on teamwork. What happens when a team doesn't work together?

How does Kit entice Fi to join him? [The possibility of chocolate, putting her in charge of safety gear.]

Name all the safety items Fi has on when she climbs in the cart. Do they work? [Yes!]

DISCUSSION

Kit is excited to build the cart and ride it down the steep hill. Fi is reluctant to join him. Who do you think is the braver of the two? [There's no right answer – it depends on your perspective/outlook.]



Rush

When my kids were in primary school, there were some children who preferred to run and swing from the jungle gym rather than sit still at a desk during class, and I knew their teachers often looked for good ways to balance the two needs – sometimes successfully and sometimes not. I was also obsessed with myths and legends growing up, so it was lovely to get in a little bit about Hermes, the messenger of the gods.

SUMMARY

Jason James (JJ) runs everywhere because it's what he loves to do. He struggles with school work so he makes a deal with his teacher: if she lets him run messages, he'll do his best to focus on the tasks she sets him in class. In class they talk about the Olympics. When Jason gets some proper running shoes his heart is full of happiness, as he realises maybe running is his thing. Perhaps training for the Olympics is what he is meant to do with his life.

THEMES

Purpose, talent, finding joy, learning difficulties

QUESTIONS

Why won't Jason's father let him mow the lawn anymore?

Why does the coach joke that he might put JJ in goal for his football team?

What is the deal between Mrs White and JJ? Why do you think they made it?

Why has Jason been in trouble with other teachers?

Who is Mercury? Why does Jason feel like Mercury?

Why is the running important? Why does Mrs White let him?

Drawing Horses

This is another story based on my childhood experiences. The main character is very much me! I did get to have a ride on the horse owned by my sister's friend Diane, and I still have the artist's pad with my horse drawings.

SUMMARY

A young girl, unable to afford a horse of her own, likes to draw them and read horse-themed novels instead. Finally, with her sister's help, she has the chance to meet a real horse and go for a ride. But real horses prove to be rather different to how she imagined them. Bounce, her sister's friend's horse, is stubborn and unfriendly, and the girl realises she isn't so keen on horses after all.

THEMES

Dreams versus reality, obsessions, horse ownership

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION

Why do you think the main character is obsessed with horses?

Why does the main character only draw outlines of horses?



Why is 'out west' a perfect place for a horse to be?

Why do you think the author called the horse Bounce?

Why does the main character say that 'It's a different world where they live. But I live in *this* world...'??

ACTIVITIES

Draw a picture of the things in your life that you are most interested in. Make two pictures: one with just an outline, and one with all the details added. Which one shows your interest better?

Draw a picture of your favourite animal.

Holding my Breath

Being able to swim is an important skill, especially in a country like New Zealand that has such a vast coastline. While watching my children's swimming lessons one afternoon I told one of them that even though they could swim the length of the pool holding their breath, it would be better if they learnt the breathing technique that meant they could swim a lot further. And then I wrote a story to help me prove my point!

SUMMARY

Although the main character can swim, he's never learned how to do the proper breathing, so he can't swim too far in deep water. On holiday with two of his mates, Ziggy and Brendon, and Brendon's dad, Rod, the main character is alone on the beach when Rod has an accident, slipping on the raft out in deep water in the bay, hitting his head and knocking himself unconscious. Our main character can't go for help without leaving the unconscious man alone, and knows he can't swim as far as the raft while holding his breath. He decides to try, putting his own life at risk as well as Rod's. Luckily Ziggy and Brendon can swim properly and come to the rescue.

THEMES

Water safety, swimming, friendship, rescue, what to do in an emergency

QUESTIONS

Why do you think the main character hadn't learned how to do the proper breathing actions?

It might have been helpful to have some kind of specialty swimming gear, safety equipment or other things our main character could have used to help Rod. What sort of things would have been useful?

DISCUSSION

Is there anything else the main character could have done instead of deciding to swim out to the raft? Would the risks have been different if he'd gone to find Ziggy and Brendon?

ACTIVITIES

Take a survey of your classmates. Ask how many can swim, how many can swim and do the proper breathing actions, and how far they can swim (one length, two lengths, three lengths etc).



Smart Soup

I can't remember where the idea for this story came from at all, but I think I was wanting to show that the best magic spells are the ones that get us to help ourselves, rather than handing us what we want on a silver platter.

SUMMARY

Amelia is worried when the teacher announces a maths test will take place in a few weeks' time. She struggles to understand the subject and doesn't think she can learn what she needs to in time for the test. That night a fairy appears in her bedroom and gives her a recipe for smart soup. If she can make and eat the soup, Amelia will pass the test. Day after day Amelia attempts to make the soup, but every day it disappears as soon as she has finished. Every day she studies the recipe and tries to see where she has gone wrong. Finally, on the night before the test, Amelia succeeds in correctly preparing and cooking the soup, and has it for dinner with her family. In the test the following day she finds all the calculations used to make the soup help her to answer the questions, and when the test is handed back she finds she has passed.

THEMES

Mathematics, study, self belief, confidence, cooking skills, applying maths in real life

QUESTIONS

If you cut an onion into six equal segments, how many segments would you need to cut up to chop two-thirds of an onion? [4]

In grams, what is three-fifths of 50% of 100 grams? [30 grams]

What is half of one-and-a-half hours? [45 minutes]

How many minutes would you have to wait before stirring the soup for the first time, if you were stirring it at equal intervals, six times during the half of the one-and-a-half hours cooking time? [7 minutes and 30 seconds]

DISCUSSION

Maths is clearly something we use in a number of different ways when cooking. What are other examples of practical applications of maths at home? What jobs require knowledge of maths?

ACTIVITY

Provide a recipe that can be made in class, with maths questions assigned to determine the amount for each ingredient. Calculate the answers as a class before cooking.

Alternatively get the students to do this in groups (a different recipe for each group), making up calculations for ingredient amounts, and then swapping recipes with other groups and getting them to work out the amounts required. No cooking is required!



Time Machine

In 2015 I was invited to visit MTG Hawke's Bay Tai Ahuriri (museum, theatre and art gallery) and write a story inspired by items in their collections. The story would be published and displayed in the museum, along with the items that inspired it. It had been an annual event and I felt very lucky to take part. Sadly the project was cancelled, but I was delighted this story – inspired by the wooden letter opener made of teak from the HMS Snapdragon that I saw when I visited the museum – got to be published after all. Thanks to James Domine (Collection Assistant Photography) for the photo below.



Maritime Artifact 'H.M.S. Snapdragon'.
Collection of Hawke's Bay Museums Trust,
Ruawhara Tā-ū-rangi, 38451

SUMMARY

Albert is not keen for the school trip to the museum as he is confident museums are boring places. However, once there he sees a wooden letter opener on display with his family name beside it. After talking about it with his mum and dad at home, they visit his grandmother, who tells Albert a story about how his great-great-grandfather survived the fighting at Gallipoli in World War I, cheated death on his way home and came to live in New Zealand afterwards, bringing a memento of his experiences, the letter opener, with him. Albert decides museums aren't boring after all.

THEMES

History, family history, war, WWI, Anzacs, survival, museums

QUESTIONS

What saves Great-Great-Grandad Bill from being killed when his evacuation ship is attacked?

What was Bill made of? [strong stuff.] What does that mean?

How long did the fight in Gallipoli last? [25 April 1915 to January 1916]

What does Anzac stand for?

ACTIVITIES

Whether your great-great-(great?)-grandparents stayed at home, or joined the fight in World War I or II, everyone has stories about what things were like for them during a time of war. Talk to your parents about their family history and write a story about what is remembered. Maybe there are some old letters or diaries you can read.

Check whether any older family members have special mementos from their past. Use one of these to inspire a piece of writing about the time or event the memento represents.

A Winter's Day in 1939

This short story is based on my father's experiences during World War II. Just twelve years old and living in Eastern Poland when war broke out in 1939, my father and his family were forced off their farm by Soviet soldiers and later deported to Siberia. This short story, which first appeared in the New South Wales Department of Education school magazine, eventually became a novel published by Scholastic in 2014.

SUMMARY

Young Polish boy, Adam, is allowed to keep the rabbit he has found even though his farmer father opposes the idea. The little rabbit, Kasia, provides the boy with comfort as winter and the threat of war approaches. When soldiers arrive it is to tell them they are being taken from their home and transported far away. They have an hour to pack and be ready. As they are about to leave, Adam runs to Kasia to give her her freedom, even as he is losing his own.

THEMES

War, freedom, farm life, WWII

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION

Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, propelling the world into its second great war. In this story, it's not the Germans but the Soviets that invade. Why does the story say that Poland is caught like piggy in the middle? (This is explored more thoroughly in the novel of the same name by the same author – *A Winter's Day in 1939*, Scholastic, 2013.)

Adam's family have to leave. Where are they going and why?

Animals have to earn their keep on a farm. Why?

LANGUAGE

Find an example of personification. [Winter is knocking, the kitchen door trembled]

Find an example of a simile [like rough boys at school, like piggy in the middle]

Write a diary entry as if you are Adam, after leaving his home and Kasia behind.

Crocodile Dreaming

This story was inspired by a line from a TV programme, Parade's End. It mentioned 'the steam on the water in the crocodile house at the zoo' and in my mind I saw the crocodile almost completely submerged and completely still, with only its eyes and nostrils above the waterline. The reptile watches patiently, its strength and power and menace invisible below the waterline, biding its time till opportunity strikes.

SUMMARY

Joe Miller isn't very popular in his school class. In fact he has been the object of bullying, especially by Harry. A class visit to the zoo sees Harry push Joe into the crocodile enclosure. Not only does the crocodile surprisingly leave Joe alone, Joe finds a crocodile tooth in the enclosure and takes it home. With the tooth under his pillow, that night Joe dreams that he is the crocodile. The following morning, empowered by his experience and his dream, Joe turns the tables on his tormentor.



THEMES

Bullying, the zoo, treatment of zoo animals, animal behaviour, empowerment, taking back power

QUESTIONS

What do Joe and the crocodile have in common? Is this why the crocodile doesn't attack him? Or is it something else?

What is Ms Terry's favourite word?

What do we learn about flamingos, llamas and crocodiles? Do they really change colour, spit and cry?

Why does Harry say, 'I didn't do anything', out of habit? What does that mean?

Why does Joe tell the crocodile, 'It'll be okay.'

LANGUAGE

'Crying crocodile tears' is a common expression used by adults. Find out what it means. See how that compares with how it is used in the story. What does Joe have to say about crocodile tears?

Why are hyenas and man 'darker things'?

Imagine yourself as an animal (pick a zoo animal), and write a paragraph describing what you see and do in your natural environment, like the one in the story where Joe dreams himself to be a crocodile going into the river.

Time Machine II

After I'd sent 'Time Machine III' to the publisher, she emailed to say they liked the story very much but they'd been hoping there would be a real working time machine. So I wrote another story – this time with a machine that does actually travel through time. I'd already been thinking about this one when I wrote 'Time Machine III'. It's a sequel to 'Crocodile Dreaming' but from Harry's perspective. The ending of 'Crocodile Dreaming' is ambiguous. What does Joe do to Harry in crocodile mode? I wanted to address that, and I wanted Harry to have his own character arc and be shown the consequences of his actions.

SUMMARY

Following on from *Crocodile Dreaming*, this story switches focus to Joe's bully, Harry. The story begins with Harry hanging by his shirt from the bag hook in the school corridor, vowing revenge against the suddenly and unexpectedly powerful Joe. Once home from school at the end of the day, Harry sneaks into his father's basement laboratory and discovers a time machine. Realising this is the perfect way to stop Joe from humiliating him in front of his friends, Harry turns the machine on and takes a seat at the controls. However, when he reaches the moment that Joe hoisted him on the hook, Harry discovers he can't change the past. Accidentally sending the machine further back in time to the previous day, Harry watches as he humiliates Joe during their class visit to the zoo. He recognizes in Joe the same defeated expression he wore while on the hook, and experiences a major shift in attitude towards his classmate.

THEMES

Bullying, revenge, empathy, time travel



QUESTIONS

Harry is very angry with Joe at the beginning of the story. How does he feel about Joe by the end? Why does he feel differently?

Why does Harry's face drop when he hears his father has gone away?

Why does Harry ask his mother to make pancakes? What is the opportunity his father's absence gives him?

'Harry was forbidden to enter, but he'd never been tested before.' Does Harry pass the test? [No.]

Which button do you think Harry pushes after seeing Joe put him on the hook? [The 'Push' button] Why?

Why does Harry's mum say 'Are you all right, son'?

Why does Harry feel better at the end of the story?

DISCUSSION

Harry has a clear idea about Joe that his experience in the time machine changes. What does he mean when he thinks, 'You couldn't change the past ... but maybe, just maybe, it wasn't the past that needed changing.'? What does need changing? And what has made him want to change it?

The Monster Under My Bed

This is yet another story inspired by events in my childhood. There was a bit of a running joke about all the things I had under my bed when I was a youngster. Of course, only some of it was true ...

SUMMARY

Hiding dirty clothing she can't be bothered to put away, and throwing rubbish and uneaten sandwiches under her bed leads to big trouble for the main character when everything comes together to create a monster. The monster, Frankie, demands more and more, and afraid of him, she keeps giving. Eventually there is nothing left and the main character realises she has created this monster and she has the power to get rid of him.

THEMES

Tidiness, hygiene, self-discipline, self-management

QUESTIONS

Why does the main character say, 'Knowing it was all my stuff made me less afraid'?

In some ways, although the monster is frightening, it actually helps the main character learn some tidying up skills, and not just because the main character throws things out and put things away to get rid of Frankie. What else does she do/learn? [She goes through her wardrobe and drawers picking out things she no longer wears; she realises there is no point keeping broken things; Frankie shows her what happens to food left under her bed for a long time.]



ACTIVITY

Make a list of the things from **your** bedroom that would make a monster. Separate the list into sections of items that you think would work best to make the head, body, arms, hands, legs and feet. Draw a picture.

The Gift

I heard someone on TV worrying they were using up their quota of words because they talked too much. What would happen when their quota was all used? This got me wondering about what the consequences might be, and 'The Gift' is the result. I think the original comment also even included something about how the person would talk differently, saying things like 'please pass the cucumber sandwiches, Cyril', which I decided was too good not to keep in the story.

SUMMARY

Jasmine has a busy mind and is very talkative at home and at school. She can't help it – she has a lot to say. When her sister, Renee, is born, everyone is excited and loves the new family member very much. However, when she is old enough to learn how to talk, Renee doesn't speak at all and Jasmine feels responsible. She talks so much she is sure she's used up her own quota of words and has used up part of Renee's as well. As time passes and Renee still doesn't talk, despite medical intervention, speech therapy and prayer, Jasmine decides to take action. It is her fault and she must stop talking so Renee can speak instead. And she does. Eventually Renee decides she wants to focus on singing and Jasmine starts to speak again, but now she speaks a lot less, always careful not to use more words than she needs to.

THEMES

Family, love, language delay, talking, siblings, a busy mind, the power of words

QUESTIONS

Twice Renee is compared to an animal. What kinds of animals and why?

Do you think Miss Watson would have been happy or sad that Jasmine stopped talking in class? Why might it make her sad?

DISCUSSION

There are ways we can stop other people talking, by speaking over them or always speaking first. We can't really use up someone else's allowance of words, however, and there are many different reasons why Renee's language might have been delayed. How might Jasmine's refusal to speak have helped Renee? [Her determination increased Renee's determination to overcome her own problems, and family love got them both through.] How might Jasmine's refusal to speak have been unhelpful? [Hearing language around them helps children learn to speak.]

What other explanations might there be for what happened to Renee and Jasmine? [No wrong answers.]

The story finishes off with Jasmine saying she's saving her words up for the important things.



And the final words – *I love you* – are some of the most important ones of all. Words have power. Is Jasmine right to use fewer words? [It is better to use the right ones than to use a lot of them. It is also better to let others have their chance to speak too, rather than always dominating the conversation]]

Rich Pickings

People don't always blow their noses into a tissue or hankie. Sometimes they pick their nose instead. And what do they do with what they've picked? It got me thinking ...

SUMMARY

The sudden incredible growth spurt of a tiny cactus takes a family by surprise. They haven't even been watering the plant. It continues to grow at an alarming rate until it is banished outside. Only one member of the family, Izzy, knows what's really going on, and she isn't saying.

THEMES

Family, houseplants, houseplant care

QUESTIONS

What is Izzy feeding the cactus?

Why does it stop growing once the family put it outside?

DISCUSSION

Why do you think Izzy doesn't say anything about what she is feeding the plant? Is it just because of what it is? Or because of her place in the family/the family dynamic? Or both? Why do you think she might feel this way?

We do use all sorts of things to 'feed' plants and help them grow. Make a list. Are any of them biological like snot?

My Mother is an Alien

I'm a mother of three, and being a mum teaches you a lot of new skills, including often knowing when your children are doing something they shouldn't. Most of the time we call it intuition, but some might call it magic, or even out of this world ...

SUMMARY

Nathan befriends a new student, Mark, at school. While hanging out at Nathan's place, Mark meets Nathan's mother who has an uncanny ability to know what's going on even when she isn't in the same room as the boys. She also has other unusual skills and abilities. Mark might have joked about his mum being an alien, but it's actually Nathan's mum that is from out of this world.

THEMES

Families, friendship, secrets, aliens



QUESTIONS

(For older students) Irony is a particular feature of this story. What is dramatic irony? What does the reader know that Mark doesn't know?

How does Nathan get on with his sister? What impresses Mark about her?

DISCUSSION

List 5 things Nathan's mother does that suggest she's not an everyday mum. Are these really alien? Or are they things a mother might actually be capable of? Is there anything your mum does that seems otherworldly?

ACTIVITIES

Draw a picture of Nate's Mum

The Man with the Dog Eye

Chatting with my dog-owning brother-in-law one day, I said 'the man with the dog eye'. I think I was talking about people who had a special way with dogs, like a dog whisperer. The phrase stuck with me – I began to turn it over in my mind and speculate on how a man with a dog eye might gain his powers and how children would perceive him.

SUMMARY

When his dog goes missing, the main character thinks the worst. He is sure the old man, Mr Bletcher – like a canine Pied Piper luring dogs away from their owners – must have him and plans to do terrible things to him. Going on a frightening mission to rescue Fang, our young protagonist discovers he has misjudged Mr Bletcher, and succeeds instead in making a new friend both for himself and for Fang.

THEMES

Rumours, judging a book by its cover, fear, bravery, old age, pet ownership, pet care

QUESTIONS

Why do you think the main character calls the fluffy white puppy Fang?

Why does our main character say, 'I could hardly believe what I saw as I turned the corner'? Why is he so shocked? [Everything is so tidy and orderly compared with the front of the house, also it's not at all what he expected/imagined.]

How does it help the story that the main character forgets to bring Fang's lead?

DISCUSSION

The main character ditches school to rescue Fang. Is the main character's behaviour justified? What else could they have done?

There could be other explanations for why Mr Bletcher is always surrounded by dogs, and why Fang ends up at his house. Brainstorm some possible ideas.



Dog's Best Friend

Some years ago I read an item in the newspaper about a dog that dragged its injured mate off the road and onto the median strip. I loved this story of canine friendship and straight away a picture formed in my mind of how it all happened.

SUMMARY

A stray dog ventures across a busy highway/motorway one grey evening, and is hit by a car. A second stray dog sees the dog is in trouble, and ventures out into traffic herself, successfully dragging the first dog to the safety of the median strip. This story is based on a news report out of Chile in 2009 about a stray dog rescuing its mate.

THEMES

Loyalty, bravery, friendship, dogs, self sacrifice

QUESTIONS

How do we know the dogs are strays? [They are collarless; no obvious owners around.]

How do we know the first dog is still alive? [The rise and fall of his chest indicates breathing.]

'The light is the watery kind of twilight of a changing season.' What season do you think it might be? [Watery light and the cold is suggestive of autumn.]

ACTIVITY

Write a follow up paragraph saying what you think happens to the two dogs next.

A Passport to Friends

This story was also inspired by a newspaper article. This one was about a book – Teach Your Granny to Text and Other Ways to Change the World – in which children's ideas about improving the world are shared. Eleven-year-old Omar Bynon's idea to 'speak football' as a way of encouraging international understanding caught my eye and I had to write about it.

'Me and my family went on holiday to Tanzania,' said Omar, 'and I saw some boys outside our hotel kicking a sponge wrapped in plastic. I had a football with me, so I took it down so that we could all kick it round. Every day the boys were waiting for me to play football. With a ball you can make new friends, even though they don't speak the same language.'

New Zealand Herald, Monday 13 October 2008

SUMMARY

Remy has a rare opportunity to holiday with his Mum and his always-busy and often-travelling Dad, but it turns out his father is still working and Remy must entertain himself. Lucky for Remy he packed his football, and he discovers this is a terrific way to have fun and make new friends, whether they can speak the same language or not.

QUESTIONS

What country do you think Remy and his parents might have travelled to? What are the clues?

Why do the children use something wrapped in plastic instead of a ball?



DISCUSSION

Discuss other ways you could find to have fun with people who speak a different language. Would they all be sporty or are there other things you could do/share?

ACTIVITY

Try playing football with a plastic wrapped sponge, bundle of rags or similar. What is it like?

Last Summer

When my aunt and uncle visited us from the UK when I was a child, we went on a family holiday to Matapouri and Whale Bay up north. This story is loosely based on that holiday.

SUMMARY

A family drives to the beach house for the holidays, but the weather proves too hot. There is sand in the sheets, mosquitoes, noisy cicadas, sleeplessness and sunburn to contend with. It gets more and more oppressive and the family go a little stir crazy until finally there is a break in the weather and the rain pours down. Then, it is time to pack up and go back home.

THEMES

Summer, holidays, families, global warming

QUESTIONS

Who is the main character? What do we know about them? [Very little. They are an older sibling and they get car sick, but there is very little other information provided, including whether they are a boy or a girl].

Why do you think the author has not described the main character? [They are not the main focus of the story. 'That summer' is the focus. This approach could make it easier for you to imagine.]

ACTIVITIES

List five things the author mentions that represent a holiday at the beach. [Sand between the sheets, sunburn, mosquitoes, sand in the sandwiches, tank water, cicadas, cicada skins, brown grass, hot tar on the road, etc.]

List five things that make you think of summer holidays. Write a story that includes these five things and gives the reader a sense of your holiday memories, just like 'Last Summer' does. Include what you felt and thought about those things (whether good or bad) and why they stick in your memory or are important to you.

LANGUAGE

List some language techniques and their examples e.g. metaphor – 'long lines of cars snaking along the windy roads', 'ripe bodies'; personification – 'the trees were shushing at each other'; simile – 'there was a huge sound like a couch being scraped over a wooden floor'. See what other techniques you can find.



Time Machine III

The publisher liked the title I'd suggested for the book but didn't think the original story inspired the right sort of illustration for the cover. Could I please write another story about a time machine? And this is what I came up with. It built on the central idea of the first time machine story, which saw museums as time machines taking us into the past and showing us how our own relatives lived. This time, stories are the time machines taking us forward or backward in time, to different countries, and to share the experiences of others.

SUMMARY

Kiri is constructing something in her bedroom and her little brother, Tane, is keen to find out what it is. The plans she's drawn up say 'Time Machine' and Tane is excited to go with her when she time travels. In order to avoid telling her mother exactly what she's up to, Kiri agrees to take Tane with her once the machine is ready. As soon as it's finished Kiri calls her brother, they climb in and an audio book begins to play. Tane feels cheated but Kiri tells him that stories can take you places, and they settle in to be transported.

THEMES

Sibling relationships, time travel, reading, family

QUESTIONS

Why does Kiri feel like a 'just-fed Labrador'?

The story says 'something was missing' twice, and then finally near the end, 'Now there was nothing missing'. What was it that was missing the first two times? [Someone to share the experience with, Tane.]

Why does Kiri say, 'It's why I won the science fair'?

If you have read all of the stories in this book, this story (about how stories can transport you to other places) makes reference to some of the other stories in the collection. See how many you can spot. ['The Man with the Dog Eye', 'A Winter's Day in 1939', 'Time Machine II', 'My Mother is an Alien', 'Drawing Horses', 'Pirate Eye', 'Smart Soup', 'Time Machine', 'Crocodile Dreaming', 'The Monster under my Bed', 'Now's Good']

DISCUSSION

Why are stories like a time machine?



Pirate Eye: A Novella

I have lived in Mt Eden for many years. Some time back, when my children were at kindergarten, I got to know a friend of my sister who also lived in Mt Eden and whose children went to the same kindergarten. One day we were talking about her middle child (also called Louie) who had started wearing an eye patch to correct a lazy eye, and about all the challenges that presented, including how much he disliked wearing the patch. It got me thinking ... especially about how sometimes life's challenges can lead to unexpected opportunities.

SUMMARY

Louie has a lazy eye and reluctantly must wear an eyepatch over his good eye in order to strengthen his weak one. It provokes others to pick on him, and school becomes a never-ending source of unhappiness. Then Mr Cleverly, the new teacher, tells Louie he had to wear a patch when he was young too. A dress up parade is organised by the school, and Mr Cleverly encourages Louie to dress as a pirate. This leads to real pirates kidnapping Louie, thinking he is their long-lost captain. They whisk him off to their hideaway and preparations are made for their upcoming pirate voyage. Louie comes to learn that none of the pirates really want to go to sea and it is up to him, as their captain, to take charge and help them make new lives for themselves.

THEMES

Bullying, disability, pirates, leadership, talent

QUESTIONS

Louie has two brothers, Harry and Benny. Where does Louie sit in the family order? [In the middle.] How old do you think Harry and Benny are? How can we tell? [Benny is a baby, Harry is harder to gauge, but is likely a year or two older than Louie, who is around 9.]

How does Louie's mum stop him cheating with the eyepatch? [Stick on patch.]

What colour is Muffin the cat? [Ginger (p. 132).]

Tess, Hairy, Shorty and Sticky all have a reason they don't want to go to sea. Name the reason for each pirate.

Why do all pirates have *Mother* tattooed on their arms according to Sticky? [See p. 153]

We can use our talents to help us earn a living when we grow up. What does each pirate end up doing for a job back on land?

DISCUSSION

Reading a book/story is a way we can escape from reality, and a way we can find people (characters in a book) just like us who help us not feel so alone. How is Louie's experience with the pirates just like this? [Being a pirate is an experience/adventure Louie can escape into, away from his tormentors and his own unhappiness at school. Louie's time with the pirates enables him to forget the challenges he's been facing and discover his strengths. With his eyepatch he fits in to the pirate community and fitting in can be very important.]



Having a disability changes the way people look at you and talk to you. What do the bullies at school call Louie? How does Louie's family respond? Compare the comments. How do the pirates treat him and his eyepatch? [They celebrate/embrace it.] How should we talk to people with disabilities?

ACTIVITIES

Create your own Captain's Rule Book. No more than five rules allowed. What would you include? What would your captain name be?

Write a diary entry about a day in the life of a pirate. You may need to research what life on sailing ships was like. [*Monkey Boy* by Donovan Bixley (Scholastic, 2014) would be a good resource/book to read to the class.]

LANGUAGE

There are pirate expressions and references throughout the story, e.g. 'Mum cocked her head on one side, like a parrot ...' (p. 132) or 'pieces of eight' (p. 134), 'Ribbons and shiny buttons lay scattered like treasure...' (p. 146), 'This coat is worth its weight in doubloons' (p. 159) and 'cutlasses' (p. 164). Collect as many as you can and compare your list with the rest of the class.

