



TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary
(ages 7–11; years 3 to 6)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Communicate through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing
- Use language to shape and make meaning according to purpose, audience and context
- Think in ways that are imaginative, creative, interpretive and critical

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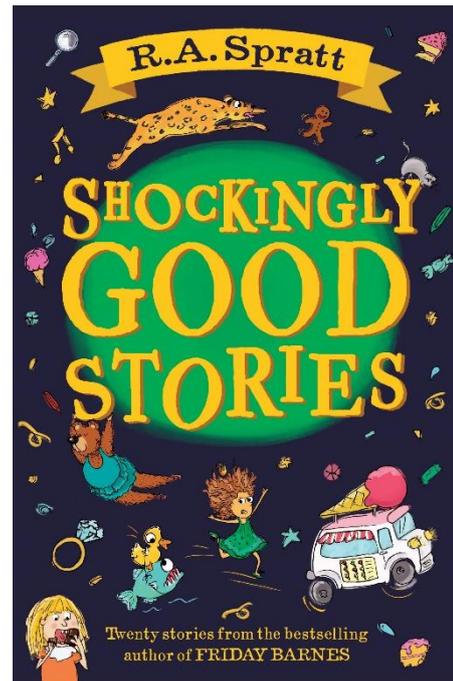
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Shockingly Good Stories

R.A. Spratt

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Piranhas on the run, stolen sandwiches, chocolate waterfalls and so much more!

From R.A. Spratt, bestselling author of Friday Barnes, comes this collection of twenty short stories perfect for fans of Roald Dahl, David Walliams and Paul Jennings.

Featuring fractured fairytales told by none other than Nanny Piggins, previously unpublished Friday Barnes mysteries and a bunch of other hilarious and highly original tall tales.

This book will delight kids from seven to seventy, whether they're after a bedtime story, entertainment for a long car ride or distraction in the doctor's waiting room!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R.A. Spratt is the author of *Friday Barnes*, *The Peski Kids* and *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins*. When she isn't writing stories she is telling them on her podcast 'Bedtime Stories with R.A. Spratt'.

R.A. lives in Bowral, NSW, where she has three chickens, five goldfish, many tadpoles and a desperately needy dog called Henry. She also has a husband and two daughters.

ABOUT THE PODCAST

Many of the stories in this book were originally written for R.A. Spratt's podcast, 'Bedtime Stories with R.A. Spratt'. It's a weekly podcast of funny stories including fractured fairytales and short stories from *Shockingly Good Stories* and entirely new tales too.

The stories are perfect for bedtime, long car rides or even if you're just stuck waiting a really long time at the doctor's office. They're written for 7-11 year olds, but the silliness is ageless.

R.A. Spratt says: 'I hope you enjoy listening to this as much as I enjoy recording it. After years of being a children's author, typing away in my office with only my goldfish for company, I was bursting to tell my stories out-loud and with lots of silly voices! So please - sit back, get comfy and enjoy some amazing, some silly and some just plain ludicrous tales direct from my imagination to you.'

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

R.A. Spratt says:

'When I wrote the short stories that became *Shockingly Good Stories*, they were originally for my podcast. I had no idea they would become a book back then. Just after the podcast launched, the COVID pandemic hit. All around the world there were lots of children doing home school or in lockdown. People were scared. There was lots of sad news on the TV. So I wrote these stories for my audience to give them something cheerful and silly to enjoy. I was unsure if anyone would want to listen – or if it was a sensible way for me to be spending my time. But my friend Tony Flowers (the illustrator who did the cover art for the podcast) told me to go for it, to spread some smiles and laughter. Tony is generally wiser and better at being a grown-up than me so I did as I was told. I went for it.

'Now, thanks to online statistics, I know exactly who makes up my audience. 25,000 kids download the podcast every month. Half of them are in Australia, but a lot are in America and Europe, and there are a growing number in India and other parts of Asia.

And my silly stories are having very personal impacts on people's lives in these distant corners of the globe. A mum in the USA wrote to tell me how she had to take her daughter to work at her office because the schools were closed. Every Wednesday her daughter would listen to my podcast and that was when this mum knew she could make 20 minutes' worth of work phone calls uninterrupted because she knew her daughter was happily occupied by the giggling coming from the other side of the room.

'The stories in this book are very silly little tales. But sometimes silly little things are what people need. The ability to take someone away to a land of wonder within their own imagination is a powerful thing.'

WRITING STYLE

Short story format

Shockingly Good Stories is a collection of short stories. Like all stories, short stories have a beginning, a middle and an end, but short stories are often told using only a handful of pages.

Other important elements of a story include the setting where your story takes place and the characters of your story.

1. Pick one of the short stories in the book. Can you identify the main events of the story? What events are part of the beginning? What about the middle and end?
2. Good stories are driven by characters. For example, in 'Hansel and Gretel', the piglets only find the witch's house because they got lost in the woods, because they ran away from home. And in 'The Emperor's New Clothes', little of the story would have happened if Bramwell hadn't chosen to spend all his money on chocolate and then lie. Pick one of Nanny Piggins' fairytales and make a list of every time a character does something that influences the story.
3. The Nanny Piggins and Friday Barnes feature in full-length novels as well as the short stories in this collection. Read either *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins* or *Friday Barnes: Girl Detective*. Compare the novel you read to the relevant short stories. What do you think the author considered when deciding the format of the novel and short stories? Which format do you prefer? Why?



Humour

Writing funny stories is one of the hardest forms of the craft. You may have a great sense of humour, but capturing that in your writing takes skill and practice. Here are some of the techniques the author employs that you may want to use in your own writing.

Irony: The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect. A simple way of putting it is that irony usually signals a difference between the appearance of things and reality.

Hyperbole: Exaggeration used to evoke strong feelings or create an impression which is not meant to be taken literally. Often involves a surprise or unexpected event or consequence.

Parody: The opportunity to imitate the style of an individual, place, object or institution with a nonsensical approach.

1. List the five moments in a story from the book that you consider to be the funniest. Then pair up with the person next to you and narrow your lists down to the top three moments. Next, determine which humour technique the author used.
2. Write about a short humorous event that has happened to you at school or at home using the three types of humour listed above. Next, rewrite the story using only *one* type of humour. Is it as effective?
3. Choose a paragraph from the book and consider which technique (e.g. irony, hyperbole, parody) could be used to make this paragraph even funnier. Then rewrite the paragraph using this technique.

Characterisation

Shockingly Good Stories features short stories told about three different sets of characters – Nanny Piggins and the Green children, Tammy and Mum, and Friday Barnes and her friends.

1. How does the author make each of these characters feel unique? Consider the use of voice and stereotypes.
2. Which characters in the stories were your favourites? Why?
3. Close your eyes and listen to your teacher read a section of dialogue aloud. Can you tell which character it is? How did you know?
4. Pick a character from one of the stories and choose a voice that you think brings that character to life. Create a short speech that that character might give and then present it to the class.

Could they guess which character you were from your speech and the voice you used?

5. Nanny Piggins' fairytales often feature her relatives, who are interesting characters in their own right. Think about the differences between Bramwell and Gwyneth Piggins. How do you think things would have turned out differently in 'The Pied Pig of Hamlin' if the rats had gone to Bramwell for help? Can you think of other examples of how different characters might have drastically changed the story?
6. Many of the characters in the Friday Barnes stories are relatively one-dimensional, which the author has used as a literary technique to add humour to the story. Examine the characters in one of the Friday Barnes stories. What are the main things you know about them from the way they're portrayed in the text? Why do you think this method of characterisation is effective in a short story format?

Writers use a multitude of characters to tell stories. These include main characters (called protagonists), supporting characters and people who act against the main characters, called antagonists. For example, in 'Friday Barnes and the Case Where Binky Cheated, the protagonist is Friday, and Melanie and Binky Pelly are supporting characters. Mr Breznev, who doesn't want to give Friday a chance to prove Binky's innocence, is an antagonist.

1. Nanny Piggins and Mum use lots of supporting characters when telling stories, like Nanny Piggins' relatives, or the bagpiper in Mum's tall tale. Pick three stories from Nanny Piggins' fairytales and Mum's tall tales and create a list of characters. Which are protagonists, antagonists or supporting characters?
2. Advanced: Nanny Piggins' fairytales and Mum's tall tales feature stories within stories. Can you identify the main and supporting characters within the stories told by Nanny Piggins and Mum?

TV-writing axioms

R.A. Spratt's writing style is influenced by her experience writing for television. Behind your favourite TV show is usually a whole team of writers who are frantically writing the next episode, with your entertainment at the front of mind. Here R.A. shares her top writing tips, as learned from writing for TV:

- **Paint Your Drainpipes Red.** This means if something is going to be pivotal to the plot later on, make sure you put it in and make it noticeable so the audience won't miss it.



- **Kill Your Darlings.** When you write for TV it's really important to be concise. Every line of dialogue should either progress the plot or develop a character, preferably both. If it doesn't, you cut it. It doesn't matter how good or clever the line is: everything in the script needs to be functional.
- **Show, Don't Tell.** When you're introducing a character, try not to describe them. Show what they are like through their actions. For example, don't say 'Boris was a very sensitive bear', instead show Boris interrupting Nanny Piggins mid-story by bursting into tears and giving her a bone-crushing hug because a story about a troll who had never eaten cake is the worst thing he has ever heard.
- **Think visually.** It sounds strange to talk about what things 'look like' when you're writing a book. But you want your reader to imagine a picture in their mind, and you want that image to be as powerful or as emotional or as cool as possible. Take your audience with you to look at the coolest thing you can imagine.
- **Write for your audience.** Storytelling is a form of communication to another person, or a group of people: those people should always be in your mind. You're writing to entertain them. If you were telling your story to a friend would they get bored, would they be offended, would they hate your characters? Think about your audience – even if it is just your teacher marking your assignment – and write for them.

Take one of the short stories you've written for one of the other activities in this study guide and examine it with these writing tips in mind. Can you spot places where you can make important things more noticeable, cut down on words, show your reader details instead of telling them, make your writing more visual or better entertain your audience?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

There are three sets of stories in *Shockingly Good Stories*, each featuring their own set of main characters and type of story: the Nanny Piggins fairytales, the Tammy and Mum tall tales and the Friday Barnes mysteries.

Nanny Piggins

Nanny Piggins tells a great many fairytales, but she rarely does so in ways that the Green children expect. Fairytales that have been rewritten to include surprising new elements are called fractured fairytales.

In the olden days, fairytales were passed on orally, instead of being written down. Because of this, there are many different versions of each fairytale.

Fairytales can also differ between cultures. For example, many different parts of the world tell stories similar to Cinderella, but few are the version most of us know.

1. What do you think makes a fractured fairytale fractured and not just a different version of the same story?
2. Consider one of Nanny Piggins' fairytales against the version you know. What are the main differences between Nanny Piggins' tale and the original? All fairytales had a moral or taught a lesson – has that lesson changed in the tale Nanny Piggins tells? How many of the events in the story are the same, and how many have changed? How are the characters different?
3. Pick your own favourite fairytale, and consider its main events and the lesson it teaches. Brainstorm ways you might alter the events of the story – while still ensuring the story is familiar enough that readers could recognise it. Now do the same with the lesson taught. Write your story!

Tall Tales

Tammy and Mum make up absurdly tall tales by rooting their stories in everyday things and real facts that lend a lot of credibility, like bagpipers having excellent lung capacity or that ducks eat bread. Mum explains each story point and move onto the next using logic and reasoning.

1. Consider one of Tammy and Mum's tall tales and note each time Mum uses facts or logic to justify the things she's saying. Does each individual point make sense? Fact-check some of the points she makes.

These are stories that snowball. When you roll a snowball down a hill, more and more snow sticks to it until you end up with a huge, out-of-control boulder of snow crushing everything in its path. That's what you want to do when you write this type of story. Only instead of using snow, you're using ideas.

2. Think of an absurd statement (e.g. 'the moon is made of cheese') that you can link to a fact (e.g. cheese is made from cow's milk) and write it down. Use something simple as a starting point, like a picture from the paper, something you've found or something you've overheard.

Now repeat this, linking your first idea to another idea and building off the statement and fact you've already written down. Use this as a starting point to plan out a story – let it grow until you end up with something big and crazy. Then try and tie it back to your starting point to bring the story full circle.



Friday Barnes

The Friday Barnes stories are detective stories, with many plot points that leave clues and lead up to the resolution of a crime – they all have a problem, a solution and a lot of clues in between.

1. Choose one of the Friday Barnes stories and read it, then focus on the ending, where Friday explains how she solved the case. Write down each of her key clues, then read the story again. Can you see where the author inserted these clues into the text? Notice how the clues are woven into the story to try and make them less obvious when you first see them.
2. Plan a detective story of your own. What is the mystery that is going to be solved? Now think about what your detective is going to do to solve it. What kind of clues can you plant to help them? Where will you plant these clues? It can be tricky to insert clues into a narrative in such a way that they don't stick out to the reader. How will you manage this? R.A. Spratt's top mystery-writing tip is to plot backwards. This means figuring out the solution first, and then all the clues your main character will need to find. When you write your story, include each story carefully so as not to give away too much too soon.

Podcasting exercises

1. Consider the ways in which the stories in this collection are written. Do you think they lend themselves to an auditory format? Find one of the stories in the book on the podcast. Read it, then listen to the episode. Did listening to the story versus reading it change the way you engaged with the narrative?
2. As a class, brainstorm ideas for your own podcast. What kind of stories might you tell? Would one person read them out, or would you read them like a play, with different students reading the lines of different characters?



WORKSHEET: Story Structure

All stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. Stories are also full of events, or things that happen. Choose one of the chapters in *Shockingly Good Stories* and read it carefully. Identify each event and note whether it's part of the beginning, middle or ending of the story. Remember that the middle of a story is usually where the most things happen.

Story: _____

Events that make up the beginning of the story

Events that make up the middle of the story

Events that make up the end of the story



WORKSHEET: Character Traits

Nanny Piggins is a character who jumps off the page. We know that chocolate is her favourite food, that she doesn't like rules, bullies or hypocrites and that she loves Derrick, Samantha and Michael deeply.

Using the worksheet below, think about some of the character traits that make another of the characters in the book – like Friday Barnes – larger than life. Then think about a character you might write in a story of your own. What are some traits you could give them to make them stand out? You could choose things like their general mood, what they do or don't like, how they feel about certain things and more.

Character from <i>Shockingly Good Stories</i> :	
Character trait	How R.A. Spratt shows this trait in the stories
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

My character:	
Character trait	How I'll show this trait in my story
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	



WORKSHEET: Podcasting

Planning a podcast can be a lot of hard work! Use this worksheet to help you get started.

What will the format of your podcast be? Will it be short stories, or perhaps a longer story told over multiple episodes?

Who is the ideal audience for your podcast? How old are they? What other kinds of things do they like?

How long will each episode go for? Will it always be an exact length, or is some variation okay?

Who will speak on the podcast. Will different people speak for different characters, like a play? Or will each story be read by a different person?

What will the theme of the story/stories on your podcast be? Will they be funny stories, mystery stories, fantasy stories, true stories . . . the possibilities are endless. Don't forget you can mix and match too – like a series of funny stories about crime in space!

Now all of that's sorted, it's time to start thinking about the final details! What will you call your podcast? What kind of theme music might you use? When will you start recording it? Use this space to take note of the ideas you haven't written down above!



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Shockingly Good Stories	R.A. Spratt	9781761043376	3-6	\$19.99		
Friday Barnes 1: Girl Detective	R.A. Spratt	9781760890735	4-6	\$15.99		
The Adventures Of Nanny Piggins (Book 1)	R.A. Spratt	9781742755298	3-6	\$15.99		
The Peski Kids 1: The Mystery of the Squashed Cockroach	R.A. Spratt	9780143788812	3-6	\$16.99		
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