

Stumpy's Secret

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illustrated by David Elliot



Book Summary

Joe relates a story about his “stash” that is missing from his uncle’s scrapyard. He blames a local character called Stumpy, but as the story unfolds, the real thief is discovered.

Features of the Book

- First person narrative with direct communication to the reader
- The use of flashbacks to inform the reader
- The use of similes – *shine out of that guy’s face like a beacon; standing around in their pyjamas like a bunch of escaped hospital patients*
- The alliteration in the title and chapter headings – *Stumpy’s Secret, Gigantic Guilt, Sticks and Stones*
- The use of descriptive language – *echoed around the yard like Christmas gone mad; It was like those finger bones jumped down my throat and stuck there; my heart tried to burst out through my ribs*

Purpose

Stumpy’s Secret can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- S** predicting probable actions and outcomes;
- S** understanding the use of chapter headings;
- S** investigating the narrator’s way of communicating with the reader;
- S** interpreting and analysing characters’ relationships and feelings;
- S** exploring the use of simile.

The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Predicting probable actions and outcomes
- S** Understanding the use of chapter headings
- S** Investigating the narrator’s way of communicating with the reader

Introducing the text

Discuss the students’ own experiences of situations to help them make sense of the text and motivate them to read it.

Ask the students the following questions about secrets and situations involving secrets.

- *Have you ever been told a secret? Did you keep it?*
- *Was it hard?*
- *Did you ever ask someone to keep a secret but they told? How did you feel?*

Study the cover of the book.

- *Who do you think this person is?*
- *What do you think might be in the bag?*

Look at this character. List some adjectives to describe him. Think of physical characteristics as well as mood. Keep this list to refer to when the students have read the book.

Look at the title of the book.

- *Do you think Stumpy is the person’s real name?*
- *What is a nickname?*

Ask the children if any of them want to share their nicknames. Discuss how some nicknames are nice and some are unkind. Discuss how Stumpy may have got his nickname.

- *What do you think Stumpy’s Secret might be?*

Reading and discussing the text

Ask the students to read chapter 1 which sets the scene for the story. Explain that the narrator, Joe, is one of the main characters in the story.

- *As you read, try to build up a picture of the scrapyard and of the narrator.*

Discuss the images the students have of the scrapyard.

- *What words or phrases make you think that?*
- *What sounds and smells would you associate with the scrapyard?*
- *Would you like to work there? Why/why not?*

Ask the students to read chapter 2 to find out more about the character the narrator calls Stumpy. Then ask the following questions:

- *Do you think Stumpy stole the stash? Why/why not?*
- *What do you think Joe could do to find out who the thief is?*

Make a note of the students' predictions for later discussion.

The students could now read the rest of the book independently. As they read, they could think about one or more of the following questions:

- *What can you tell about each chapter from its heading?*
- *At which point in the story did Joe realise he'd made a mistake about Stumpy?*
- *Did you feel the same way about Stumpy as Joe did? Why/why not?*

Discuss the predictions made at the start of each chapter.

- *Which predictions were correct?*
- *Was your description of Stumpy on the cover accurate? Why/why not?*

Ask open-ended questions to promote further discussion:

- *Has anything that happened in the book happened to you?*
- *Over what period of time did the story happen?*

Revisiting the Text

The suggested activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson if appropriate or could be taken as a mini-lesson at a later time.

S Interpreting and analysing characters' relationships and feelings

Joe's character develops throughout the story. The way he communicates directly with the reader gives insights into what he is thinking. Ask the students to scan the text to find examples of where this happens, for example:


"... you can work it out for yourself, OK?"
"not that I minded that, you know ..."
"but to get back to my story ..."

Discuss Joe's character before and after Stumpy's accident. Ask the students to find places in the text that show what Joe is thinking.

- *Do you think Joe was too harsh on Stumpy?*
- *What evidence did he have that Stumpy was the thief? Was it enough?*
- *What does Joe have in common with Stumpy?*

Find the part in the story to support this.

- *What are the positive outcomes of Stumpy's accident?*

 Joe experiences many emotions in the story. Ask the students to construct an emotion map to show how Joe's feelings (angry, scared, frustrated, guilty, sad, ashamed) change. They could add a sentence to explain why he is feeling the way he is. They can use the blackline master on page 75 to record this information.

- *Be prepared to discuss your chart and support it with statements from the text.*

S Exploring the use of simile

Review what a simile is and how it can paint a picture in the reader's mind. Ask the students to scan the text for examples, such as:

- *face like a beacon*
- *like a giant snake.*

Discuss why similes are effective. The students could then choose several situations, objects, or actions from the text to create their own similes. Encourage them to share these with the group and discuss whether they are effective.