

BITS OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY I MAY NOT WRITE

PRE-READING

- 1 What is an autobiography?
What is the role of a publisher?
What is the role of an editor?
What is irony?
What is slapstick comedy?
What is naive comedy?
What is absurdity?
- 2 Keywords: meditation upholstery
 pleadingly manuscript
 wilfully glared
 slumped lubricate

REMEMBERING

- 1 Do you recall what happened in the following situations?
 - a) Why was he finally able to build furniture?
 - b) What did he do that made the judge angry?
 - c) Why did he have his head in the fridge?
 - d) Why was he wearing gumboots?
 - e) What happened to the cat?
 - f) Why did he get sheep?
 - g) What happened to the computer?
- 2 There are seven recommendations made about things to include in his books. How many can you remember?
- 3 What is wrong with the piece of furniture he made? Draw an illustration of the finished product as he made it and label the different components.
- 4 What did he do when his children began school? What makes the children refer to this moment in their lives?

UNDERSTANDING

- 1 From their behaviour, what can you assume about the personalities of the children and their father?
- 2 Finish this statement: Gleitzman's kids think their dad is ... Find words, phrases and examples that indicate to you how the children felt about their dad.
- 3 What do you think Gleitzman thinks about:
 - a) himself?
 - b) his children?Explain your answers.
- 4 In pairs, select one of the 'bits of autobiography' that particularly appeals to you. One takes the role of the narrator (Gleitzman) and the other, the role of the children. Present a recitation of your selected selection, with a particular emphasis on reading with expression.

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APPLYING

- 1 Write a journal entry from one of the kids in which you explore the advantages and disadvantages of having an author for a dad.
- 2 What other jobs might parents do that make their children feel as these kids do about their dad? In *Round the Bend*, Ned has a problem with his father's job. Is it for the same reason as these kids?
- 3 Being a father is an important job in itself.
 - a) As a child, write a series of questions you would pose to anyone contemplating becoming a father to establish whether or not they have what it takes.
 - b) What answers do you think Gleitzman would give to your questions?
- 4 The relationships between fathers and their children is central to this story. Make a list of the other ideas that are explored. Compare your list with others in the class. Are they similar? Are there any ideas you identified that they do not think are central ideas? Justify your choices using evidence from the text.
- 5 Imagine you are the kids when they find their dad with his head in the fridge. Draw a picture to show the expression they would have had on their faces.

ANALYSING

- 1 In *To Switch or Not To Switch?* the comedy is drawn from the everyday nature of the event, so we can all relate to it. In this story, the events are anything but everyday. So what makes these scenes funny?
 - Some are slapstick
 - Some are playing with words
 - Some use irony
 - Some are naive
 - Some use absurdity
 - a) Create a Venn diagram to indicate which scene belongs to which comedy type.
 - b) Are there any that belong in more than one section?
 - c) Which comedy type is more prevalent than others?
 - d) Which appeals to you more?
 - e) Do you think this would have worked if only one or two comedy types were used?
 - f) Select one scene and rewrite it either without that comic element or use another type. Compare it with the original. What is the effect of the changes you have made?
- 2 Gleitzman titled this story *Bits of an Autobiography I May Not Write*. How does the structure of this story match the title?
- 3 Your task is to consider what parts of the story you can reliably consider to have happened and those that are probably fictional.
 - a) Draw up a two-field chart such as the one below.

Factual	Fictional
He writes stories and receives letters with recommendations.	He wrote a story about a grandparent who ran after a motorbike carrying a fish tank across the Great Sandy Desert.

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- What do you think are the benefits of including the degree of fictionalisation that Gleitzman has?
 - How does that element of the story support or contradict the title? Do you think it is appropriate? Why?
- 4 If this was a sample of the type of autobiography Gleitzman would write, do you think he should go ahead and write it? Write him a letter in which you outline your opinion and your reasons for it.

EVALUATING

- 1
- a) Create two checklists: one for parents and the other for kids, outlining their roles in relation to each other. For example, parents should keep kids safe or kids should follow their parents' instructions.
 - b) Explore the story using your checklist for the behaviours and attitudes of the father and the kids. How many of your points do they follow?
 - c) Using your completed checklist, write your response to the following statement: In this story, Gleitzman is the child and the children act as parents.
 - d) Are there any moments in your relationship with your parents that make you feel like you have switched roles? Tell your class about your experience.
- 2 In the story Gleitzman is judged. Now it's your turn.
- a) Form groups of eight. One takes the role of Gleitzman, two are the children and five form a judging panel. You are to determine whether Gleitzman is a fit parent.
 - b) The judging panel will examine the evidence in the text to formulate a series of questions they will ask in court. The children need to establish whether they would defend or accuse their father and Gleitzman must decide how he will defend himself.
 - c) In front of the class, conduct the panel session.
 - d) At the conclusion of the session, the panel considers their opinion and reaches a verdict. They present their verdict to the class with a series of recommendations for Gleitzman's future as a father.

CREATING

- 1 Create a book cover for *Bits of An Autobiography I May Not Write*.
- 2 Write another episode in the life of Morris Gleitzman that he might include in his full autobiography.
- 3 Conduct research on Morris Gleitzman. Find out what you can about his writing, why he does it, what motivates him, and where his stories come from. Create a poster that gives the class your impression of Gleitzman as an author for young people.
- 4 Turn one of these 'bits' into a short film.

TO SWITCH OR NOT TO SWITCH?

PRE-READING

- 1 What is a dilemma? Can you think of any examples of a dilemma?
- 2 Keywords: fraught hurling
 configuration scenario

REMEMBERING

- 1 Write a limerick about the experience this narrator has had in the supermarket.
- 2 Can you recall any of the details about the eight dilemmas in the story?
- 3 What is the title of the story and do you think it is appropriate for the subject of the text?
- 4 What is the narrator buying that causes him this terrible dilemma?
- 5 Who or what is the main culprit that gets in his way and slows down his movement through the checkout?

UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Describe the emotions/feelings of the character as he moves from one dilemma to the other. Which dilemma do you think would make him most annoyed out of all of them? Why do you think so? Which would drive you most crazy?
- 2 Select 20 words from the text with which you are least familiar and create a crossword using them. Swap with a partner and complete the crossword.
- 3 Have you had an experience like the ones described in the story? Share your story with the class.
- 4 What can you tell about the character in the story from his/her behaviour?

APPLYING

- 1 Does everyone act in the way that the protagonist does? How do you know this? Is this how you feel when you are in the express checkout?
- 2 Mime the section of the story that you think is the funniest.
- 3 Create a cartoon strip that has a frame for each of the dilemmas in the story.
- 4 In your own words, describe what the actual dilemma is for the character in the story and explain why it is a dilemma for them.
- 5 Working with a partner, one of you reads out the dilemma in a very neutral tone and the other reads the dilemma as if it is a stand-up comedy routine.

ANALYSING

- 1 Using one of the following moral dilemmas (or making up your own), write and perform a play or sketch about it. You should emphasise the reaction of the characters to their situation and what you think they should do.
 - You walk into a small designer boutique to find that there is only you and the salesperson in there. You just want to browse, but she pressures you into buying something.
 - The cashier gives you too much change.
 - You discover your best friend's boyfriend/girlfriend is cheating on him/her.
 - Your teacher makes an addition error on a test and gives you a higher mark than you really deserve.
 - Someone else is blamed for something you did.
 - You are on the telephone talking to a friend who has a problem, when the most attractive boy/girl in school rings you on your mobile.

TO SWITCH OR NOT TO SWITCH?

- 2 There are eight dilemmas yet the situation hasn't changed. Why do you think the author decided to break the story into these smaller parts? Do you think it is better than if it was one long story? Why do you think so?
- 3 The dilemmas are numbered 1–8. Do they work best this way? In small groups, use a computer to rearrange the order so that the story works best for your group.
- 4 Print out your order and, using a frequency chart, compare and contrast your order with:
 - a) the story as it is written
 - b) other groups' responses.Are there any similarities? How would you account for the frequency of the order of the dilemmas?
- 5 What is at the heart of this dilemma? What is the real problem for the character—in other words, what is making him behave as he does?

EVALUATING

- 1 What makes something comic or funny? Some of the funniest comedy is funny because we have all had a similar experience. Many sitcoms have this idea as their core.
 - a) As a class, brainstorm all the sitcoms you can think of that have been popular over time.
 - b) In small groups, view an episode of one of these sitcoms and list the common human experiences that they have used as the basis for their comedy.
 - c) Make a judgement about what was the funniest part of the episode and explain your choice to the class.
- 2 Each of the dilemmas in the story and the ones in Analysing section have some degree of morality attached to the behaviour; for example, hanging up on the friend that needs you to talk to the gorgeous boy/girl.
 - a) As a class, create a scale to indicate approval or disapproval of a given behaviour, from absolutely right through to utterly wrong. It can use numbers, percentages, symbols or icons.
 - b) In small groups, come to an agreed position on what you would have done for each dilemma.
 - c) Read your response to the class and for each response, rank it in terms of moral correctness using your scale.
 - d) Was there general agreement on certain actions? Which ones were they? Were there any that resulted in a lot of mixed reactions? How do you explain this kind of difference?
- 3 Write a list of recommendations for the head of a large chain of supermarkets about the best way to streamline the process of checking out goods.
- 4 As the trainer of cashiers at a large supermarket, conduct a training session with a new batch of recruits about what to do about 'aisle rage' that occurs when people are kept waiting, particularly in express aisles.
- 5 One of the great urban moral dilemmas is the response one can give to a telemarketer. What do you think? Are telemarketers fair game or should they be given respect and consideration? Select one of the following activities to present your point of view:
 - a) Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper outlining the reasons for your position.
 - b) You are a telemarketer being interviewed on radio. What do you think?
 - c) As the head of the Citizens Union Against Telemarketers, write an information brochure that outlines the recommended procedures for getting rid of telemarketers for good.
 - d) Conduct research into the recruitment and training of telemarketers. What personality traits would you need to become a telemarketer?

TO SWITCH OR NOT TO SWITCH?

CREATING

- 1 Turn the subject matter of this story into a game of snakes and ladders.
- 2 Make up a 'How To' manual for avoiding the dilemmas in the story or one of the others suggested in the Analysing section.
- 3 Select one of the dilemmas in the story and create a new ending for it. When you have done so, make your dilemma into a short play or film for presentation to the class.
- 4 Design a sign that will be placed at every express aisle to make sure customers don't exceed the designated number of items.
- 5 You have been selected from a number of applicants to design a colour, light and sound scheme for Nowhere Near Right Supermarkets. NNRS has had a lot of trouble with people getting frustrated at checkouts and is keen to use your expertise to keep people calm and happy at the checkout—even if it does take a long time!
 - What colours are you going to use to soothe and calm customers and keep them happy?
 - Where are your lights going to go and what type of lighting are you going to use?
 - Select a playlist of songs that will meet the needs of this supermarket.Explain your choices.

Sample pages

EIGHT LEGS, TWO WHEELS

PRE-READING

- 1 Brainstorm what the title could be about.
- 2 What is it about spiders that makes people freak out?
- 3 Keywords: arachnophobia bullying

REMEMBERING

- 1 Arrange these events in the order in which they occur in the story.
 - a) Kylie steals Michael's bike.
 - b) Alvin comes out and scares Kylie.
 - c) Kylie turns the bike upside down.
 - d) Kylie eats Michael's lunch, spills his drink and stands on his finger painting.
 - e) Alvin comes out the first time.
 - f) Michael goes on a bike ride without the family.
 - g) Kylie lands in the river.
 - h) Michael pays \$350.00 for a new bike.
- 2 Who said the following lines?
 - a) 'My pet spider.'
 - b) 'I don't mind spiders.'
 - c) 'A person could use a bike like that.'
 - d) 'Come and look at your bike ...'
 - e) 'The wheels on the bike go round and round.'
 - f) 'Have you met Alvin yet?'
- 3 Form groups of ten. Think of a nursery rhyme that has a spider in it and, as a chorus, recite it for the class.
- 4 What happened after Kylie fell off the bike?

UNDERSTANDING

- 1 In small groups, design a set of five questions you would like to ask Alvin about what he's doing (if, of course, he could talk).
- 2 How would you explain Kylie's continuing to return to primary school when she's 13 and in secondary school? Why do you think she chooses to pick on Michael?
- 3 Summarise Michael's reasons for feeling 'king of the bike path'.
- 4 Compare Michael's and Kylie's responses to 'meeting' Alvin. What differences can you note? If you were to meet Alvin in the same way, what do you think your response would be?

APPLYING

- 1 Pretend you are both Michael and Kylie. Write a journal or diary entry for that night from both points of view. The entry will tell of the adventures of the day and your feelings about it.
- 2 For whom do you think Carole Wilkinson wrote this story? Why do you think so?
- 3 As a class, discuss the common features of a children's picture book including the content, design and format. Once you have decided on a common list of features, work with either a partner or in a small group to turn this story into a children's picture book.
- 4 Create a digital photostory of the significant moments in the text. The photostory is a series of digital images that you generate yourself and then put together as a sequence for presentation. Include between six and eight story moments.

EIGHT LEGS, TWO WHEELS

ANALYSING

- 1 This text might be considered quite predictable. What makes a text predictable? In both film and written texts, there are clues planted early in the text that establish what will happen in the end. There are three elements in this text that lead you to assume the outcome. What are those elements? Was the outcome predictable? How could you create a new story ending that still has those three elements but offers the reader something they didn't expect—perhaps a twist?
- 2 Design a questionnaire to find out how many people are scared of spiders and the extent to which they are afraid. For example, would it be enough to make them fall off their bike, just stop and get off, or quite happily ride along with a spider on their bike? What are the results?
- 3 What can you guess or assume Kylie's problem to be? What is it about Michael that makes him such a good target for Kylie's attention?
- 4 When you go to a new school you are often asked to give a brief history of yourself and what you are like. Write Kylie's little speech about herself when she went into secondary school.
- 5 What do you think the long-term future is for Michael and Alvin?
- 6 Compare your picture book with the story in its original form. What is common to both of them? Did you need to alter the written text significantly or just shorten it? Does that suggest anything about the readership you identified in the Applying section?

EVALUATING

- 1 You are a television director. This story has been selected to be made into a short film and you need to cast it. You have chosen the two leads, but you need an Alvin. Find at least ten different pictures of spiders and select the spider most appropriate for Alvin. Briefly explain your choice.
- 2 Discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages of having a text that is predictable. For example, in most television series the outcome is almost always predictable, yet viewers watch them.
- 3 Carole Wilkinson says the idea for the spider was from a personal experience of a spider in a car she had bought. Do you think it is necessary to have an experience to write about it? Why or why not? Why do you think Wilkinson chose to change the story from a car to a bike? Do you think it was a worthwhile change?
- 4 There is a common perception that bullies are simply frightened people who disguise their fear with violence. Do you think Kylie fits that description? What do you think she might be afraid of?

CREATING

- 1 Create two illustrations of moments in this text. Can a partner guess where your illustrations belong in the text?
- 2 Research the Greek myth of Arachne. Create a report of the story of Arachne and whether or not it explains why spiders are so frightening.
- 3 Working in pairs or small groups, invent a product known as the 'Personal spider detector/protector' and annotate a diagram of it. The results of your questionnaire in the Analysing section would indicate the most likely purchasers of such a product. Design an advertisement aimed at that audience to sell your product.
- 4 How do young people develop a fear of something? Working with a partner, relate to each other a fear you have and how you think it came about. Write your partner's biography in a story format and illustrate it with images that support the main ideas of the story. If you don't have an actual fear or cannot recall how it came into being, invent it.

EIGHT LEGS, TWO WHEELS

- 5 Create a webpage for your school about bullying. Include hyperlinks to sections that discuss important aspects of bullying, including:
- what a bully is
 - what a bully does
 - what a victim is
 - how a victim usually behaves
 - what a victim can do if they are bullied
 - what you think your school's policy about bullying should be.
- 6 What makes a story appropriate for a certain readership? Some of these stories are more complicated in language and content than others. Does that mean they are written for a different type of readership? What makes a story age-specific to you?

Sample pages