

SPECKY MAGEE AND THE SEASON OF CHAMPIONS

By Felice Arena and Garry Lyon

Teachers' Notes written by Roger watts

INTRODUCTION

This is the third in the *Specky Magee* series, which continues the sporting and social adventures of the characters that were so successful in *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*. Those already familiar with the series will know what to expect – plenty of football action, some thoughtful social interaction, some footy coaching tips, and a Grand Final finish!

The book is an excellent addition to any wide reading list in the upper primary-lower secondary classroom. It can be used to open up a whole range of exciting learning activities. The activities included here would suit an upper primary-lower secondary classroom. They are integrated, but are drawn from English, Art, Health and Physical Education, and Studies of Society and the Environment. A number of Values Clarification activities are derived from the scenarios presented by the novel. Teachers should note the classroom requirements for activities such as these.
(See p.11 of these notes)

The book belongs in that genre that goes back to the sporting and adventure stories that appeared in comics like 'Lion' and 'Tiger' in England during the fifties and sixties, and even further back to 'Adventure' which appeared in 1921. Such stories have been the staple reading matter of boys for years. In Australia, boys would have read of characters such as Silver Starr, the Lone Avenger, Devil Doone, The Scorpion, Jo and Captain Atom. Nowadays they have probably been replaced by cartoon comic books such as The Panther, or Japanese Manga.

Narrative

Specky faces continued rivalry from Derek 'Screamer' Johnson, both on the football field and in his relationship with Chrissie. This is further complicated by the arrival of 'Tiger Girl' Samantha Shepherd, who inspires Specky to deal with the problems that arise when he is unable to play for seven weeks as a result of injured knees caused by his growth spurt. Will Specky be able to follow the advice of his doctor and rest, or will he be unable to resist the challenge of the impending football finals and the chance to try out for a sporting scholarship at a prestigious school?

Themes

The story raises a number of interesting issues that confront young people today:

1. Relationships with parents
2. Boyfriends/Girlfriends
3. Dealing with sickness
4. Bullying
5. Dealing with injury
6. What is a Champion?

- See also Teachers Notes for *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*.

Activities

1. Getting into the text – Reader’s Theatre
2. Caricatures
3. Narrative Structure
4. Comic Strips
5. Giving a talk
 - a. Visiting Speaker
 - b. Sporting Commentary – making a radio broadcast
 - c. Dealing with injury
6. Drugs
 - d. What is a drug?
 - e. Good and bad drugs
 - f. Using drugs
7. Who would you tell?
 - a. Confiding in parents and friends
 - b. Keeping a secret
 - c. Telling the truth
8. Bullying – conflict resolution

Themes

1. Parents

- ✓ Describe Specky’s relationship with his parents.
 - Are they supportive of his playing football?
 - Are they too cautious in their treatment of his injury?
 - Are they too strict in banning him from football?
- ✓ Compare Specky’s relationship with Mr Magee to Screamer’s relationship with his father.
- ✓ Examine Tiger Girl’s relationship with her mother.
 - Does Tiger Girl want to go on a trip when she gets better?
 - Does her mother overreact by calling the police when Tiger Girl disappears from hospital?

2. Boy/Girl friends

- Specky faces an awkward confrontation between Chrissie and Tiger Girl at the MCG.
- Should the girls be jealous?
- Compare Specky’s friendships with the two girls. How are they different?
- Do you approve of Tiger Girl’s provocative behaviour?
- Does Specky treat Tiger Girl differently because she’s sick?
- Did Specky do the right thing by not talking to Chrissie after Screamer has warned him off?

3. Dealing with Sickness

- ✓ Tiger Girl has a serious illness.
- Why do you think she keeps this a secret?
- How does Tiger Girl react when Specky first visits her in hospital?
- How does her behaviour change? Why?
- Do you think Specky did the right thing taking her to the MCG?
- At the end of the book, Tiger Girl is described as a real champion. Why is this?

4. Bullying

- See Teachers' Notes for *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*.

http://www.penguin.com.au/PUFFIN/NOTES/f_notes.cfm

- See Activity 9

5. Dealing with Injury

- How honest is Specky with himself and others about his injury?
- See pp.35, 47, 60
- What motivates Specky to play against the Sharks, and Gosmore Grammar?
- How does Screamer's dad react when Screamer is injured at the end of the final game against the Sharks? See p.204

6. Champions

Tiger Girl ends her letter 'Bye for now...you champion'. But as Specky folds up the letter he realises, 'If anyone's a champion, it's you'.

- Read pp.216-217. Consider what it means to be a champion.
- What makes each of the following characters a champion?
 - Great Footy Contest Winners
 - Bumfluff Twins
 - Danny
 - Robbo
 - The team-mates
 - Screamer
 - Tiger Girl

ACTIVITIES

1. Getting into the Text – Readers Theatre

Reader's Theatre is a kind of group storytelling that involves students in the imaginative recreation of a scene from the book.

It is a great activity for teaching to multiple intelligences that is particularly suitable for unconfident students – and unconfident teachers too!

Students adapt the text and produce their own scripts that are read to the audience. Movements are kept to minimum; costumes too, and characters are suggested.

Visit <http://www.aspa.asn.au/Projects/english/rtheatre.htm#rtpurpose> for a fuller description of the process.

A sample script based on the opening paragraphs of *Specky Magee and the Season of Champions* is provided for you below.

Divide students into small groups. Three or four is fine - anything larger can become unmanageable. Allocate scenes to the groups or better still allow students to choose their own.

Give them time to prepare their scripts. These can be kept in a folder that the student will use for the reading. The covers of these could be designed appropriately to represent or suggest the characters of the readers to the audience e.g. footy team colours.

Students need to consider the placement of characters for their reading, so that relationships can be suggested, although there will be minimal movement during the presentation. Students do not look at one another during the reading; rather they look to the audience so the focus is always on the story.

Students may have several parts during the course of the presentation. The main aim is for students to have fun in the imaginative recreation of meaning through the text.

ACTIVITY 1

Sample Readers Theatre Script for the opening of *Specky Magee and the Season of Champions*

Voice 1: Arrgghhhh!

Voice 2: Specky groaned and grabbed his knee. He buried his head under the pillow, but he still couldn't sleep.

Voice 1: Arrgghhh!

Voice 2: He sat up. He rubbed his shin.

Voice 1: Man this is killing me!

Voice 2: He bit his bottom lip. He looked at his footy shaped clock.

Voice 1: 3.25! This is crazy. I gotta sleep. I can't be late for school three times in a row!

Voice 2: He turned off the light. He tried to doze off.

Voice 1: Arrrgghhhh!

Voice 3: S.i.i.i.m.o.o.n! Are you ok?

Voice 2: It was his mother. She always called him Simon, even though everyone else called him Specky because of the SPEC-tacular marks he takes when he plays footy for the Under 14s team, the Booyong High Lions...

2. Caricatures

This novel is full of larger than life characters, all with suitable nicknames like 'Bumfluff Twins', 'Whispers', 'Screamer', 'Tiger Girl', 'Bombay Bullet', 'Smashing Sols', and of course 'Specky Magee' himself.

Names like these lend themselves to caricature – that is where individual features are exaggerated. Cartoonists have great fun with caricatures – and students can too.

- See <http://www.abc.net.au/splatt/comp/caricatures/step2.htm> for a simple set of instructions on drawing caricatures.
- Visit the AFL website at www.afl.com.au, where you can follow links to photos of all the AFL football players. Students can draw caricatures of their favourite players. Alternatively, they can provide their own photos of any celebrity.

When students get the hang of it, they can have a go at creating some of the characters from *Specky Magee and the Season of Champions*.

There are many interesting web sites to help with cartooning. Here are few suggestions.

<http://www.cartoondave.com/Tuesday.html> (with a book coming soon from Penguin!)

<http://www.abwac.org.au/ACAkidspace.htm>

<http://www.noz.com.au/stepbystep.html>

<http://members.ozemail.com.au/~denyss/indexa.htm>

3. Telling a story

A story isn't just a series of events. In order to be interesting a story needs a structure. A common structure looks like this:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. A character in a situation | character |
| 2. has a problem | problem |
| 3. which gets more complicated | rising tension |
| 4. until | evaluation * |
| 5. a crisis is reached and | climax |
| 6. the problem is resolved | resolution |

*You often find that just before the climax the character stops and reflects on his/her situation. This has the effect of building up the tension.

In the following example, the chart shows the story structure for the football element of the novel.

Incident from the Book	Story Structure
Specky Magee	Character
Growth spurt injury prevents him from playing, threatens team's chances in finals, and his chance for a scholarship	Problem
He risks all and plays, but is banned for the whole season	Complication
Specky prepares to miss the grand final	Evaluation
Screamer is injured and Specky becomes a final quarter substitute	Climax
Specky finishes a memorable season in grand style	Resolution

Because this is a novel, there are a number of sub plots. Students can fill in the following table for each of the supporting characters.

ACTIVITY 4

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE CHARTS

Incident from the Book	Story Structure
Tiger Girl	Character
	Problem
	Complication
	Evaluation
	Climax
	Resolution

Incident from the Book	Story Structure
Chrissie	Character
	Problem
	Complication
	Evaluation
	Climax
	Resolution

Incident from the Book	Story Structure
Screamer Robson	Character
	Problem
	Complication
	Evaluation
	Climax
	Resolution

4. Comics

Characters like Specky Magee have entertained young people for many years. They have often appeared in comic books.

For example Roy of the Rovers has entertained readers in England since 1970.

<http://www.royoftherovers.com/stories/schooldays.htm> contains samples from some of the original comics.

http://books.littleoak.com.au/football_annuals/roy/roy_of_the_rovers.htm is an interesting site that will show how Roy has changed over the years.

- Students can either find examples of Australian comic books from the past or use their own favourite character to explore the techniques cartoonists use to tell the story.
- They can examine the ways in which comic strip artists show:
 - speech
 - Thoughts
 - movement
 - special effects eg. Explosions
 - emotions
 - character

Students can also explore the ways in which cartoons are framed, as close ups, medium shots and long shots, and how these function.

ACTIVITY 5

COMICS

Draw a comic of your own telling the story of a scene from Specky Magee e.g.

- i. Screamer and Taylor tussle in the goal square p.40
- ii. Tiger Girl kisses Specky p.62
- iii. Great MCarthy offers Specky a cigarette p.68
- iv. Specky takes a great mark p.113

v. Specky kicks a great goal p.116

- Keep your ideas very simple
- Try to tell a story in only 8 frames
- Make sure you show your knowledge of story structure
- Practise using your comic strip techniques, but this isn't a test of your drawing skill
- Photocopy and enlarge the boxes below.

6. Giving a Talk

a. Arrange a visiting Speaker

When Specky visits Tiger Girl in hospital he sees Nathan Buckley and Barry Hall visiting sick children in hospital. This is typical of the work that many AFL players do off the pitch. Clubs are involved in a number of community projects. Sometimes players are available to visit schools.

For example St. Kilda Football Club runs a S.A.I.N.T.S. prevention approach to bullying program. For details see:

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/bestprac/saints.htm>

b. Sports Commentary

'And what a sen-SA-tional game we're witnessing today folks!'

- ✓ Read Gobba's commentary on the Game against the Sharks on p.42. Gobba uses a number of techniques to make the commentary more exciting. Students can use these techniques for some writing of their own to describe a current school-sporting event. Their commentaries could be recorded and played over the school radio station if you have one, or simply played back to the class.

See Activity 6

c. Dealing with injury

When Screamer is injured his dad calls for a pain killing injection. Coach Pate won't allow it. What two reasons are given for this decision? p.206

- Two years after his retirement, Gary Hocking gave an ABC Radio National interview in which he describes the effects of 16 operations during his 274 game career, and the impact of 6 pain killing injections. You can read this interview at:

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/sportsf/stories/s855522.htm>

- You can also find out about the effects of other drugs that are commonly taken.
-
- Look at Dr. Bisdale's treatment suggestions for Specky p.30.
-
- Are students familiar with STOP HARM and RICER? Check the following fact sheet:

http://smartplay.net/fact_sheets/fact_sp_injuries.html

- Students can use these to prepare a talk for the class on an aspect of managing an injury.

ACTIVITY 6

RADIO COMMENTARY

- Read the following Radio style commentary from *Specky Magee and the Season of Champions* p.42
- Identify the language devices Gobba uses to add interest to the commentary. A number of these have been underlined for you. Complete the table below to describe their effect.

'And what a sensational game we're witnessing today folks! And the clock is ticking down. Tick-tock, tick- tock. Its now down to whoever wants to win this clash the most, and...look out! The ball is finally cleared. It looks like young Danny Castelino, the Italian stallion has broken away. A long kick from the rover and Booyong's Smashing Sols comes out to meet the ball and marks solidly on the centre wing. But no time for tea and scones, Sols handballs quickly to the Bombay Bullet, who dodges one, no two, no three of the sharks. Incredible play by the Bullet! He kicks! It's a wobbly old punt, floating towards the goal square. Screamer Johnson is under it and so is the Bumfluff kid – or, as I like to call him, BF number 1. They fly! Look at 'em soar! And its, its, its ...Screamer! Screamer has taken the grab of his life. Directly in front of goals! And can you believe it? The siren has sounded. Hooley Dooley! Booyong High has the chance to snatch victory from the sharks.'

	Language Device	Effect
tick-tock, tick- tock		
look out!		
But no time for tea and scones		

one, no two, no three		
They fly! Look at 'em soar!		
And		
its, its, its		
Hooley Dooley!		

7. Drugs

a. What is A Drug?

Specky refuses a cigarette from the Great Mcarthy, and Coach Pate refuses a pain killing injection for Screamer. In both cases they are worried about the side effects of using a drug. Students can investigate their notions of what is a drug by completing Activity 7 and then write one sentence to answer the question: What is a drug?

Answer: The World Health Organisation describes a drug as any substance (with the exception of food and water) which, when taken into the body alters its function physically and/or psychologically.

Students can share their responses in pairs first and then report back to the class as whole.

b. Are drugs good or bad?

Using an agreed definition, students can compile a list of drugs. This list can then be divided into two lists, good and bad. Students should justify their answers and share them with the class.

Note to teachers: Values Education provides a process where students learn the skills of deciding what they value and consequently how to make decisions. Successful Values Education requires an appropriate classroom atmosphere that encourages open discussion without put-downs. Some teachers may not be comfortable with a less formal classroom atmosphere. For a fuller discussion of appropriate classroom structures see:

<http://www.sdep.wa.edu.au/curric/phase2/sect05.pdf>

Resources

<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/wellbeing/druged/resource.htm> is the Victorian Department of Education and Training (SOFWEB) site for student wellbeing. It contains numerous links to resources.

<http://www.sdep.wa.edu.au/curric/frame.htm> is an excellent site containing comprehensive teaching notes, downloadable as .pdf files, linked to the West Australian Curriculum. Highly recommended.

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Caffeine_is_a_drug

Excellent series of fact sheets to help you answer questions 1, 2 and 3.

[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/\(Pages\)/Alcohol_is_a_drug](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/(Pages)/Alcohol_is_a_drug)

[http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/\(Pages\)/Cannabis_or_marijuana_is_a_common_illegal_drug](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcArticles.nsf/(Pages)/Cannabis_or_marijuana_is_a_common_illegal_drug)

<http://www.drugsafe.org/html/teachers.html> contains primary and secondary worksheets

<http://www.makeanoise.ysp.org.au/schoolarticle.asp?ArticleNo=70> NSW Site – links to drugs resources

<http://www.adf.org.au/> Australian Drug Foundation

http://www.ancd.org.au/publications/index.htm#research_papers
Australian National Council on Drugs research papers

c. Using Drugs

At one extreme, Tiger girl needs chemotherapy to save her life, but at the other, there are many drugs in family medicine cupboards.

- Do students really understand what these medicines do?

Note to teachers: This activity should be undertaken in conjunction with parents.

Students should ask their parent/s what medicines are kept at home for common ailments like headache, stomach-ache etc. With parental permission, they can bring the packet and instruction leaflet – not the contents – to school. Carefully read the label.

- What do the medicines contain?
- What restrictions on use are described?
- Is there a use by date?

Conduct research to find out about possible side effects from using the medicine. Students can report findings to the class either by designing a poster about the medicine, or by giving a talk, or a PowerPoint demonstration.

ACTIVITY 7

WHAT IS A DRUG?

Complete the following table.

Is it a Drug?

SUBSTANCE	YES	NO
A cup of coffee		
Orange Juice		
A flavoured milkshake		
A headache tablet		
A cup of hot chocolate		
Red cordial		
A glass of wine		
A cigarette		
Herbal tea		
Anti-inflammatory cream for a twisted ankle		
Marijuana		
A can of Coca Cola		
An energy drink		

Share your answers with a partner and report your findings back to the class.

8. Who Would You Tell?

Things work out well for Specky.

‘Eventually the party ended, and Specky knew it would be some time before he’d come down from the incredible high he was on. Especially since his parents had decided to tell him, in the middle of the celebration, that he was still allowed to go to New York the following weekend. Specky had an enormous grin smeared across his face.’

How differently things could have turned out!

a. What if?

- Explore what could have happened to Specky if his injury had got worse.

b. Who would you tell?

- Many of Specky’s problems occurred because he did not share his problems with a trusted adult or responsible friend.
- Students make a list of trusted and responsible adults or friends.
- At the top of the list put the person with whom they’d share their deepest, most personal secret.
- Further down the list put the names of people they know less well, and with whom they’d share less personal information.

- Students complete Activity 8 by entering the name of the person with whom they'd share the following problems or secrets. A space has been left at the bottom for them to add their own ideas to share with the class. While the activities should remain private, students may wish to discuss the scenarios based on *Specky Magee and the Season of Champions*.

ACTIVITY 8

WHO WOULD YOU TELL?

PROBLEM	TRUSTED /RESPONSIBLE PERSON
You're being bullied at school.	
You're attracted to your best friend's girl/boy friend, and think they like you.	
An adult friend of the family makes you feel uncomfortable.	
Your friendship group at school is encouraging you to do riskier things. You're not sure its ok, but you don't want to be left out.	
You think something you said got a friend in trouble. You want to help them, but you don't want to be blamed.	
Your Doctor has prescribed a medicine, but you think it is making you feel worse.	
You and your best friend play the same position at sport. Only one of you can be chosen for the team.	
You are worried about the safety of your brother or sister, but don't want to do.	
A good friend is unwell. Because of this they get picked on at school. You want to help them, but you don't want to be treated the same.	
Your parents are mad keen for you to be a sport champion and take you to training every day, but you want to play the piano.	
You are in trouble with the police.	
Your own imaginary scenario	

c. Keeping a secret

Both Specky and his sister Alice proved to be unreliable when it came to keeping secrets.
p.54

For discussion:

- Should Specky have revealed that Alice had a boyfriend in Year 11?
- Should Alice have revealed that Specky had played football?

d. Making a decision

i. Specky is offered a scholarship at Gosmore Grammar, but that means he has to play football, and defy the doctor and his parents. Read pp.58–60

'I don't want to upset Dad again...but this is a chance of a lifetime for me. He'd understand that I had to do it once he found out I'd been accepted into a great college and wouldn't have to pay a thing. And how would he find out anyway? The game will be during school hours'

Examine Specky's thinking.

- Is there any one he could have talked to?

Specky does share his dilemma – with Tiger Girl. Read pp.100–101

- How helpful is her reply?
- How honest is Specky being with himself, with others?
- What is his motivation?
- Are there any other ways he could have tackled the problem?
- Write a conversation between Specky and Coach Pate in which he tells the truth and provide an alternative ending to this sequence.

ii. The police at the MCG chase Specky.

'I can't give myself up, not now. Mum and dad would go nuts', thought Specky, desperately trying to figure a way out of this predicament. p.163

- Could this have been avoided if Specky had been more open with his thoughts?

9. Bullying

a. Screamer, who bullies him, complicates Specky's relationship with Christina.

- Should Specky have kept away from Christina as Screamer demanded?

Use Activity 9 – Conflict Resolution to brainstorm a solution to Specky's problem.

b. Read pp.154–155

'Well, he made me promise not to tell anyone, but lets just say he has other talents apart from footy...he has a tough time with his dad, you know?'

- How far does this explain Screamer's behaviour?

A wealth of resources is available on bullying.

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/reslinks.htm>

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/bestprac/saints.htm>

<http://www.bullyingnoway.com.au/who/about.html#use>

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying/video.shtml>

- See Teachers' Notes for *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*.

http://www.penguin.com.au/PUFFIN/NOTES/f_notes.cfm

ACTIVITY 9

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Level of Seriousness

Not sure	Minor		Serious		Extremely serious
0	1	2	3	4	5

Conflict Resolution:

Say what the problem is

Brainstorm ways of solving the problem by listing options

Choose the best option that is a win-win for everyone

Check how well you went in solving the problem.

Eduweb provides this worksheet. Other scenarios are available at:

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/stuzone/scenprim.htm>

<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/bullying/stuzone/scensec.htm>

Further Reading

More Than A Game by Peter McFarlane
Boy Overboard by Morris Gleitzman
The Worst Team Ever by Phillip Gwynne
On the Team by Rachel Flynn

See also a comprehensive listing under the teachers' notes for *Specky Magee and the Great Footy Contest*.

http://www.penguin.com.au/PUFFIN/NOTES/f_notes.cfm