



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA
READING GUIDES

Awesome Stuff by Richard Tulloch

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Reading Level: Independent Readers 9+ (9-14)

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SYNOPSIS

Brian Hobble has discovered something totally awesome – he’s a brilliant creative genius. Through his amazing, inventive, imaginative writing, he has the power to tell brilliant lies and write love poems to girls.

Brian has been dragged into D.A.G.S. (Drama at Garunga School) by Cassie, the undeclared love of his life, but is worried that it will be embarrassing because he’ll be the only boy there. Luckily, all the boys are asking Brian to write one of his brilliant excuse notes for them, and as payment he’s able to make them all come to D.A.G.S. too.

When he finds out that a new play is being written specially for D.A.G.S by Brian’s favourite author, Lancelot Cummins, Brian decides maybe D.A.G.S will be okay after all. The play, called *Cyberno*, is set in space, as in Lancelot’s book *Escape from Planet Zog*. Brian is excited to be cast in the title role of Cyberno, a swashbuckling StarFleet guard who fights battles and writes great poetry. And the really cool thing is, a stuntman will be coming to work with the boys on choreographing the laser-lance fight sequences!

Meanwhile, Mr Quale has a new climbing wall in the gym, and now rockclimbing will be introduced as a P.E. activity. Brian is hopeless at heights, but when he freezes on the wall and can’t climb further, his super imagination comes to the rescue again. He convincingly mimes finding a poisonous spider

hiding in a crack in the wall, and Mr Quale is forced to declare the climbing wall closed.

The great thing is, Brian's ridiculously elaborate excuses seem to have amazing success. The problem is, Brian is sure that his nose is growing. Could this possibly have something to do with the stories he's been telling?

He can't stop writing taking writing commissions, though, including a love poem for Sean Peters, who won't say who it's for, but Brian suspects Sean fancies sporty Jodi Helmsen.

Finally Brian discovers the awful truth about his character in the play ... Cyberno is not only a soldier and a poet but, like Cyrano de Bergerac, on whom he is based, he has a big nose. Cyberno is so ugly that he knows Rocket Annie (played by Cassie) will never love him, and instead he uses his writing to make her fall in love with Chris (played by Sean). So Cyberno doesn't even get the girl!

Brian decides he'll have to get out of this play, but after causing it to be almost cancelled, he feels dreadful because the actors and the director Elly are so unhappy. He realises he'll have to save the play, even though it means his nose will be exposed to public ridicule.

Can Brian convince the school principal, Mrs Davenport, to let the play go on, even when he finds out she knows he wrote all the excuse notes? How can he go on stage with his giant proboscis? And what will happen when he finds out that Sean's letters are going to Cassie, not Jody?

Awesome Stuff is the third book in this series about Brian Hobbie and his bizarre adventures. Look out for the earlier books, *Weird Stuff* and *Freaky Stuff*.

WRITING/ILLUSTRATING STYLE

Awesome Stuff is written in the first-person, from the perspective of Brian Hobbie. Brian used to think he was a normal, average kid, but then amazing things started to happen to him – in this book he discovers he can tell lies and everyone believes him, and he discovers that he can do rock climbing and act. There's always something incredible happening in the 'Stuff' books, and it's not always based on reality, but the series is imbued with a very strong sense of making your own success, and finding your own hidden talents and skills.

Richard Tulloch says:

'I've deliberately avoided telling the reader how old Brian is, or what class he's in at school. This is because I hope the book will appeal to both older primary and younger high school readers.

'I've also tried to skirt around any obvious references to Australia. Garunga District School sounds Australian, and they call the sport "soccer" not "football", but I wanted the story to be easily understood by an international audience. Since I now spend a lot of time teaching in English-speaking

schools in Europe, and have been reading bits of the book to my students, I wanted to avoid having to stop every few lines to explain some local Australian reference.

'The book is intended to be first and foremost an entertaining story, but I often use it as an introduction to my classes on writing technique. The book contains a fair amount of reflection on the writing and publishing process, as well as writing tips from my invented "visiting children's author" Lancelot Cummins.

'I always advise young writers to 'write what they know', and in *Awesome Stuff* I've drawn heavily on what I know about drama teaching and putting on plays'.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author biography

Richard Tulloch is one of Australia's most popular writers of books, plays, film and television for young audiences.

His television series, which include 150 episodes of the phenomenal *Bananas in Pyjamas*, as well as episodes of *The Magic Mountain*, *Playschool*, and the animated series *Petals and Gloria's House*, have reached an audience of hundreds of millions around the world.

In 1998 he won his third Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE award for his play *Body and Soul* and was also nominated in America for the prestigious Hollywood 'Annie' award for his screenplay for the animated feature film *FernGully II: The Magical Rescue*.

Of his 40 children's books, many of them published in a number of languages, *Danny in the Toybox*, *Being Bad for the Babysitter*, *Cocky Colin* and the *Barry the Burglar* series were nominated by children for KOALA awards as their all-time favourite books.

He has written more than 50 plays for young audiences, which have been performed in many countries. They include *Year 9 are Animals*, *The Cocky of Bungaree* and stage adaptations of *Midnite*, *Hating Alison Ashley*, *Space Demons* and Paul Jennings' stories in *Unbeatable!*

He is a qualified teacher (B.A., LL.B., Dip. Ed.), and has taught numerous creative writing classes for children and for adults at the Centre Europeen d'Ecriture Audiovisuelle in Paris, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, the University of New South Wales, Thammasat University in Bangkok and Unitec in New Zealand.

During part of each year he is based in Amsterdam, and works as a storyteller and writing teacher in schools all over the planet.

Author motivation

This is what Richard has to say about writing this series:

'While I regard myself as a full time writer, I spend about a quarter of my time as a roving writing teacher, working in schools, telling stories and helping students develop their own writing.

'It has often struck me that the single factor which stops people becoming better writers is fear. While young children can make up stories as naturally as they can play games, older children's and adults' writing is often inhibited by the fear of failing, fear of writing something inadequate or fear of putting on paper something embarrassing or too revealing. [In Brian Hobble] I invented an insecure character who is desperate to belong and be 'cool', but constantly failing in the attempt. Writing becomes his metier, although he would rather be successful at sport. Brian is amazed that people value his writing, and congratulate him, but feels a bit fraudulent because the work seems to have come by magic.'

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION / IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES

- The play that Lancelot Cummins writes, *Cyberno*, is based on a real play, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897). What books have you read that you could turn into a play? What would you change?
- A drama class could try the miming activity that D.A.G.S. tries on pages 21-25.

There are lots of ideas for creative writing assignments in *Awesome Stuff*. For example:

- One of the funniest moments in *Awesome Stuff* is when Brian writes a love poem that begins with the very silly line, 'Shall I compare thee to a Macho Burger?' Write your own silly love poem, comparing a person to something else you really like.
- Try writing some ridiculous excuse notes to get yourself out of doing your homework.
- Each chapter in *Awesome Stuff* starts with a made-up dictionary definition. Can you think of a word that you could make up your own definition for?
- Shane Nagle's illustrations show tips and lessons for rock climbers. What other tips would you give rock climbers?
- There's a newspaper article on page 150 telling readers that the play is 'causing a stink' in the community. Pretend you're the reporter from the *Garunga Morning Messenger* and write a review of *Cyberno* based on what you've read about the play and the actors in the book.