



## OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Junior Fiction
Title	Not Bog Standard and Other Peculiar Stories
Author	Mark Pardoe
Extent	240 pp
Age	10+
ISBN	978 1 86291 863 4

# Teachers' Notes

## Not Bog Standard and Other Peculiar Stories

Written by  
Mark Pardoe

Teachers' notes by Madeline Holmes

### Contents

Introduction.....	2
About the Author.....	2
Before Reading the Text.....	2
Reading the Text.....	3
After Reading the Text.....	6

Teachers' Notes may be reproduced for use in school activities. They may not be redistributed for commercial sale or posted to other networks.

## Introduction

---

Mark Pardoe's collection of short stories is sure to tickle the funnybone of any young reader. A celebration of the weird and wacky, these fast-paced and easy-to-read tales are a cautionary reminder that those who behave badly should expect to be treated badly in return. Boasting an eccentric cast of characters, these very funny stories are guaranteed to be a mind-boggling read.

## About the Author

---

Mark Pardoe was born in England but moved to Melbourne in 1996, when he finally accepted that he had no chance of making it as either a soccer star or a racing driver in his country of birth. After foolishly working in some serious jobs like banking and telecommunications, he eventually retrained as a primary school teacher in 2006. Mark currently lives in Perth with his wife, Melissa, daughter, Sally, and dog, Jazz, as well as several small unnamed geckos that seem to like it in their house.

## Before Reading the Text

---

Before you read the text have a class discussion about the title 'Not Bog Standard'. You may not know that 'bog standard' means ordinary, plain or unremarkable. See if you can use it in a sentence. Have a look at the titles of the other stories to see if any are familiar.

Have a class discussion about short stories. What do you think of this format? Does it appeal to you? Do you have certain expectations of short stories?

# Reading the Text

---

## Part One

*Class discussion: Not Bog Standard, Catty Gory, A Bird in the Hand, Dunny Log*

Read the first four stories together as a class. What do you make of the type of stories? Is there a trend? What kind of characters have you encountered? Consider what makes a good short story.

- 1) In *Not Bog Standard*, the narrator has become conditioned to go to the toilet at exactly the same time every night. Talk about how you can become conditioned to do certain things and how easily your body can learn to repeat an action.
- 2) *Catty Gory* begins with the idea of wanting something you can't have. Have a discussion about how people covet certain things and how possession and happiness have become synonymous.
- 3) The parrot in *A Bird in the Hand* is a threatened species. Discuss the impact of humans on wildlife and how we can protect native animals.
- 4) Consider the story in *Dunny Log*. Discuss whether or not you would, or should, change the future if you knew how.

## *Research task*

All four stories are about weird subject matter. If you think about what you see on television, read in the paper or see in the news, you'll recall a fascination with strange events. Choose a subject matter that's weird or quirky that really interests you and that you think would appeal to a large audience. Your role is to pretend to be an investigative journalist. Research your chosen topic and from the information you find, compose a short script suitable for a segment on a television or radio news program. Once you've completed your script, record your performance in your chosen format.

*Literary component: response blog*

Create a blog about your reading experiences. If you like, you can use this to write about all the books you read this year. Make sure to interact online with your classmates. Ask each other questions and comment on other students' posts. Make sure to pay careful attention to the presentation as you're displaying your work for others to see.

**Part Two**

*Class discussion: Kick the Bucket, Message in a Bottle, Get Lost, Clairvoyant Canine*

- 1) Misunderstandings are often used as narrative devices. Why do you think this is the case? What are other common story premises?
- 2) Have a discussion about the theme of *Message in a Bottle*. How did you interpret the story?
- 3) Consider why people have a fascination with the possibility of magic. What is it about magic that is so enticing?
- 4) There are many variations of humour and not all of them are kind. Discuss the examples found in *Clairvoyant Canine*.

*Research component*

The idea that people can foretell future events has been prevalent throughout human history. Think about why being able to predict the future has become so important to us. Look at our everyday lives – many of us routinely check the weather forecast to see what the day holds in store. Some cultures have myths and legends about prophecies and people who could foretell the future. Choose one and gather all the information you can on the topic. Write a short summary that would provide a comprehensive introduction for someone unfamiliar with your topic.

### *Literacy component*

'Why do people want to live in old houses, when you can buy new ones?' (pg 59)

Write a response to this question. If you think about it carefully, there are many different approaches you could take. Be as creative as you like! Perhaps you could argue that old houses can be haunted.

### **Part Three**

*Class discussion: A Dog's Life, Flu Past, Fish Out of Water, Santa's Super Shine*

- 1) Talk about why we keep secrets from people. What do we gain? What do we lose?
- 2) 'Too much cheese will make you dream'. How do you think sayings like this originate? What other sayings do people know?
- 3) The story of *Fish Out of Water* is very bizarre. Talk about where you draw story ideas from and the power of imagination.
- 4) Discuss the idea of embarrassment. At one point or another, everyone finds themselves in an embarrassing situation. Why are we so influenced by what others think?

### *Research task*

Over the course of human history, deadly outbreaks of disease, such as the Spanish flu, have killed millions of people. There have been significant advances in medicine to eradicate certain diseases and protect people from succumbing to them. Choose a medical invention and research it and its creator. Present your findings on your blog.

### *Literary component*

- 1) Write a short story using the premise of *Fish out of Water*: when something is removed from its natural environment, the world is altered in a negative way.
- 2) Write a list of instructions of Christmas traditions for a person who has never heard of Christmas before.

## After Reading the Text

---

### *Class discussion: final thoughts*

Have a discussion about your final impressions of the collection of stories. Here are some guiding questions:

- Was it a satisfying reading experience?
- Do you have a favourite story? If so, what was it about that particular tale that so appealed to you?
- Would you seek out other short story collections?
- Now that you are familiar with short stories, do you have a preference for this form or do you prefer reading novels?
- What are the strengths and limitations of short stories?
- What do you think are the themes of the stories? Are there reoccurring themes?
- Is this your type of humour?
- Is humour important?

### *Literacy component*

Write a book review suitable for publication in your local paper or a literary magazine. Once you've chosen your intended publication, read a variety of reviews from the past year to get a feel for the tone, style and voice of the reviewers. This will help guide your own review and provide you with a framework of what elements you should include. Use your blog responses and what you've learnt from the class discussions to inform your piece. If you like, you may wish to submit your review to the publication when you've finished or you could post it on your blog for others to read.

### *Extension Activities*

- 1) Imagine you are a minor character in one of the stories and rewrite the narrative from your chosen character's point of view.

- 2) Think about what you find funny about these stories – perhaps there were even moments when you laughed out loud. In a few paragraphs, write a summary of what humorous things people respond to, why we like laughing and why you believe it's important we have a dose of humour in our lives.
- 3) Compose a pictorial response to one of the stories.
- 4) In groups turn one of the stories into a play and film it with your phone or school recording equipment. If there are enough students, each group could be assigned a story and the results could be compiled at the end of filming.
- 5) Come up with a soundtrack to accompany a story. Be clever with your choices and choose music that heightens or reflects the themes, action and characters.
- 6) Write a script for a book talk show that discusses Mark Pardoe's collection of short stories.