



# RITA'S Revenge

LIAN TANNER

ILLUSTRATED BY CHERYL ORSINI

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Recommended for: 8–12 years

Themes: Animals, mystery, humour, friendship, family, rural life, farms, identity, kidnapping, poetry

Applicable to learning areas: English language, literacy and literature, visual literacy

## Summary

The ducks of Little Dismal are angry. A scruffy chicken called Clara has been telling lies about them. They need revenge.

Enter Rita – a duck with the soul of a poet. After an embarrassing talent night, Rita seeks revenge on Clara as a chance to restore her reputation.

But Rita finds more than revenge on her mission. She uncovers a dastardly plan to chook-nap the clever chicken that will take them both a long way from home.

Luckily, it's Rita's unlikely friendship with a small human and the help of some street-smart birds that just might save the day and inspire an epic poem!

'Jealousy, revenge, crime, adventure, duck poetry and laugh-out-loud comedy – *Rita's Revenge* has it all! I adore this book.' Katrina Nannestad, author of *The Girl, the Dog, and the Writer in Rome*

## About the Author

Lian Tanner has worked as a teacher, a tourist bus driver, a freelance journalist, a juggler, an editor and a professional actor. She has been dynamited while scuba diving and arrested while busking. She once spent a week in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, searching for a Japanese soldier left over from the Second World War. It took her a while to realise that all this was preparation for becoming a writer. Nowadays Lian lives by the sea in southern Tasmania.

# Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

## Comprehension questions

### **Pages 1-14**

- Name two things that show Rita really doesn't know how to keep a diary.
- Why is Great-Aunt Myrtle the most important duck in Little Dismal?
- Why are cows, pigs and horses laughing at the ducks in Little Dismal?
- Name three words that will get a duck's immediate attention.
- Why is Rita so keen to punish Clara?
- Why isn't a duck allowed to be a poet?
- Name three approved activities for ducks.
- Why does Great-Aunt Myrtle prefer Vera to Rita?
- Why do the ducks decide to send Rita?
- Would you describe the ducks of Little Dismal as 'kind' creatures? Why/why not?

### **Pages 15-25**

- What does Rita do to make herself look like an 'arrow of vengeance'?
- Do you agree that ducks are very patient? Why/why not?
- Whose teachings did Rita study as a duckling?
- What name do humans give a 'two-wheel'?
- How does Clara communicate with Olive and the other children?
- What three subjects do ducks learn as ducklings?
- Why does Rita decide she needs her own human army?
- What does Rita want her army to do?
- What do humans hear when Rita is talking to them?
- What is the name for the dreadful noise at school that sounds like goats attacking?

## Humour

- Consider this extract and answer the questions that follow:

*To my surprise there are several armies gathered here. In one room they appear to be drawing up battle plans on large sheets of paper. In another, they are experimenting with strange weapons... (page 33-34)*

*I expect she is describing our first meeting and the thrill of being chosen by a duck. (page 35)*

- Why is it funny when Rita mistakes things in the human world?
- Can you find other funny examples from the story where she misunderstands what is really happening?
- Can you think of funny examples from the story where she only half understands what an object is for or how it works?
- Do you think the idea of a duck being a poet or ruthless warrior is funny? Why/why not?

## Epistolary storytelling

- What is the name for stories being told through letters written by one character to another?
- How is epistolary different to third-person storytelling?
- What did you learn about Tracy in her letters to Jubilee?
- What did you learn about Jubilee in the same letters?
- Why do you think Tracy uses so many names in her letters to Jubilee?
- Sometimes things that are omitted or crossed out by a writer tell the reader a lot. Why do you think Tracy crossed out the P.S., P.P.S. and P.P.P.S. on pages 56-57?
- How does the tone of Tracy's letters change as the story progresses?
- What is the significance of Tracy writing letters to her mother rather than Jubilee as the story progresses?

## Characterisation

- Make a list of words or phrases to describe Rita, Clara and Tracy.
- Find scenes from the book that made you think this about each of them. For instance, you might say that Rita wants to fit in with the other ducks although she is different, Clara is analytical because she looks for evidence to solve problems, and Tracy is angry with everyone because Jubilee encouraged her to see the worst in people.
- Match each duck – Rita, Great-Aunt Myrtle and Vera – with a human from the story and explain why you think the pair are similar. [Hint: Rita is like Tracy because they are ostracised at the beginning of the story, Vera is like Jubilee because they are mean, and Great-Aunt Myrtle is like Delphine because they encourage the young in their care to behave badly.]

## Poetry

- Read the poem called *Kindness* by Naomi Shihab Nye and explain why you think Mrs Savage slipped it into Tracy's hand in class.
- What does Tracy's acrostic poem using the word FRIEND on page 38 tell you about her at this point of the story?
- Create your own acrostic poem for the word REVENGE.
- Write a poem from the point of view of an animal other than a duck. What sort of poem would a dog write? Or a cockatoo?
- Do you agree with Rita that *What I Eat* (page 44) and *Why are Chooks Wrong* (page 47) are lists and not poems? Why/why not?
- What is the name of the literary device Rita uses here in *Rita's Last Poem*? (HINT: euphemism):

*Remember me as a duck  
who flew too close  
to the sun— (page 312)*

- Who was Emily Dickinson? When and where did she live and what did she write about in her poems?
- What is an epic poem and why do the city ducks think Rita should make her story into one?

## Vocabulary

- Consider this extract and answer the question that follows:

*One of General Ya's most famous sayings is, 'Avoid what is strong and strike at what is weak.'* (page 27)

Rita hilariously thinks of herself as a military genius and uses words and phrases we might associate with a soldier. What do each of the following mean?

- Stealth mode
- Subterfuge
- Block, pivot, kick
- Pincer movement

## Class discussion: Peer pressure

- Peer pressure is shown in the form of the ducks ostracising Rita for her poetry and Jubilee telling Tracy how to think and behave. This can be toxic. True friendship, on the other hand – like Rita and Tracy helping each other, can be positive. What are the good and bad aspects of peer pressure faced by young people today?

## A Word from the Author

'Near where I live in Lauderdale, Tasmania, there's a canal which is home to a wide variety of ducks. They're fascinating to watch, with their arguments and their flirting and the way they swim and walk and fly. They can be really fierce, too. Sometimes gangs of them wander round the neighbourhood checking out everyone's house and garden for snails. I was sitting on my front step one morning when a line of ducks marched in my front gate, straight past me and around the side of the house. They looked at me as if I was the intruder and they were just going about their proper business.

'I had introduced the idea of "ducks are mad" in *A Clue for Clara*. So, it was only a small step to the idea that the ducks of Little Dismal weren't going to be very happy about this sort of insult. And perhaps they would want to take revenge.



'Plus, I LOVE stories about misfits so I started wondering what would happen if a duck wanted to be a poet, but it wasn't allowed...'

– Lian Tanner