

Teachers' Notes
Written by Jean Yates



Specky Magee and the Battle of the Young Guns

By Felice Arena and Garry Lyon

SUMMARY

This is the seventh book in the *Specky Magee* series. In this book, Specky has been selected as a member of the Victorian State team, which allows him to compete at dizzying heights, especially when they are to compete in the Finals at the MCG as the warm-up match on the day of the AFL Grand Final.

With spectators and commentators all talking about his performance, Specky's star and future career prospects certainly seem to be on the rise. But with new opportunities come new challenges.

At home, things are a little crazy. His one-month old baby brother, Jack, has his parents exhausted. And his Grandpa Ken has arrived unexpectedly after not having been in touch with the family for ten years. There is clearly some sort of tension between his father and grandfather, but neither man is prepared to talk to Specky about it – or at least not until it is almost too late.

To make matters worse, Specky and his friends are all experiencing difficulties in their love lives. Specky's sister, Alice, is having problems with the Great McCarthy. Specky himself has ended his relationship with Christina thanks to the difficulties of maintaining a long distance relationship while she is in Sydney. Danny is feeling suffocated by Maria and Robbo feels that he and TG lack that special click. Specky is horrified when he stops thinking of TG as one of the boys and begins to see her as a girl – a girl for whom he is developing definite feelings. When Coach Pate announced her resignation, Mr Rutherford, the new Maths teacher takes over the team. His no-nonsense attitude and his determination that study takes precedent over sport cause some problems for the team and almost jeopardize Specky's future.

When the school's Final and the State Grand Final matches fall on consecutive weekends, Specky is forced to question his loyalty. Whilst he feels great commitment to his school and his mates, can he risk jeopardizing his future to play with them? Especially when he is warned that national selectors will be at

the Final to select members for the All-Australian Squad to tour Ireland. His friend Johnny Cockatoo tells him to follow his heart and, although matters are taken out of his hands, Specky's ultimate inability to play for his school reveals the surprising depths of loyalty his mates have for him.

In the background, two men are taking a particular interest in Specky's performance. One is Brad Dobson, a talent manager who showers Specky with gifts, but whose real interests are somewhat questionable. Then there is also the mysterious bald man who ultimately makes Specky a very unexpected offer that could have far-reaching consequences for his future.

This book would work best for students in upper primary or lower secondary classes. Whilst it would certainly work well with reluctant boys, its appeal is by no means restricted to them. The story contains a number of issues that are relevant to both boys and girls and that have significance well beyond the football field.

The suggested activities and areas for discussion could be used in classes of English, Lifeskills, Ethics and Health and Physical Education. These notes contain both Chapter Questions for comprehension and Points for Discussion, designed to generate class discussions on a range of different topics that arise from the novel.

Whilst reading the other Specky Magee books would be beneficial this certainly works well as a stand-alone novel.


CHARACTERS

Specky Magee

Specky is a rising football star now making his mark at State level. His Victorian team has made it to the Grand Finals of the State Championships and he is looking at National selection.

But, like all boys, Specky experiences his share of problems. His loyalty to his mates and his school football team is tested by his state responsibilities and he has to make significant decisions regarding his career and his future. When his schoolwork starts to suffer it looks as if his whole playing future may be in jeopardy.

Like most teens he is experiencing problems with his relationships. He has called off his relationship with Christina because of the difficulties with him being in Melbourne and her in Sydney. Then he finds himself falling for TG, the just-ex-girlfriend of one of his best mates, Robbo. He is cautious about dating her, fearing that it could ultimately lose him her friendship, or that of Robbo. He also finds himself caught in the middle of a feud between his father and grandfather that is causing great tension in the household.



In all of this, Specky displays great maturity and a level headed approach to all aspects of his life. His friendships are realistic and natural and bring great humour to the story. His loyalty and compassion for others are evident throughout the book and as such he presents an excellent role model for young boys.

Grandpa Ken

As well as creating tension in the Magee family and bringing the father-son relationship into question, Grandpa Ken is symbolic of the hardships and difficulties faced by players from previous generations. Whilst today's footballers are treated like royalty and are paid handsomely, he represents an era in which there was little money and players had to be able to support themselves and their families independently from the sport.

Danny and Robbo

These boys are almost caricatures, but they enable the reader to really see Specky as a true person with true friends. Their attitudes towards girls and football mirror those of many teenaged boys. Like Specky, they display great loyalty and friendship – although interspersed with a lot of friendly rivalry and teasing.

Johnny Cockatoo

Johnny and Specky became firm friends in an earlier story. Johnny's level headed advice to stay true to yourself helps Specky to see his way through a confusing dilemma.

Gobbo

Gobbo's character shows a different interest in sport and makes commentating look equally cool. All of the boys support him and admire him for his interest in commentating and are as excited by his competition as they are by the match itself. His character shows that there are many avenues in sport other than being a star player on the field.

Screamer Johnson

Screamer announces that he is leaving school soon as he has won a scholarship to the prestigious school of music. *'As his class mates congratulated Screamer, Specky couldn't help thinking about how much Screamer had changed recently. He used to be a hard-hitting bully who excelled in football and beating people up, but ever since he had focused on his other passion, playing the piano, it was almost as if he were a different kid.'* (p 45)

Screamer's character shows that there is more to most people than meets the eye, and that even the bullies have something else to offer if they can find an interest. It also shows how far their relationship has progressed throughout the series of books, given the trouble that Specky used to suffer at the hands of Screamer.

Garry Lyon



Screamer's interest in music is quite an unusual bent for a hard-hitting footballer to have. This suggests that there is more to footballers than grunt and muscle and also shows young boys that it is ok to be interested in music and cultural avenues.

Mr Rutherford

Mr Rutherford appears to be the boys' worst nightmare. But in getting to know and understand him better, Specky comes to understand that there are a number of different approaches and methods in the world and that each one has its own merits. His relationship with Mr Rutherford brings a depth of maturity and patience.

Kyle Rutherford

Kyle is against Specky and his mates from the very beginning. He makes little if any effort to join in and constantly compares them negatively with the boys from his old school.

In spite of having done little to help, when Kyle is able to kick a goal, he makes a big deal of it and runs around showing off, while not bothering to thank his teammates and accuses Specky of being '*nothing but a show-pony wimp*' (p107). He swapped Specky's Maths test with his own, thereby ensuring that Specky would not be allowed to play in the Grand Final. Ironically, in doing so he did Specky a huge favour as he was not forced to make a decision as to whether or not he should play for the school.

Although Kyle initially turns out to be the new school bully, it becomes clear that his grievance is really with his father rather than the other boys. He is suffering from being constantly uprooted and resents his father putting his career first. As such, his character is a good parallel for that of David Magee.

Coach Grub

Coach Grub is different from what many would expect in a man coaching at this level. His compassion and understanding, coupled with the respect he shows the boys make him quite different from the stereotypical 'win at all costs' style of coach you may expect. His determination to let Specky decide whether or not to play in the school's final had a significant impact upon the boy's character and provided him with good skills for the future. Whilst having the reputation of being ruthless and immovable, his relationship with Specky revealed an unexpectedly quieter, more humane side. This man clearly has the boys' best interests at heart.

Brad Dobson

Dobson is the stereotypical 'manager to the stars'. He is clearly attracted by the potential income he sees in Specky and has his own rather than the boy's interests at heart. He fails to pick up on the feelings of those around him and simply launches into his 'company spiel', showering Specky with gifts in the hope

of winning him over. Unlike coach Grub he has no respect for the boys and fails to treat them as mature adolescents capable of making their own decisions. He represents all that is bad and corrupt in the world of sport.

Mr Vernon

In contrast, George Vernon behaves in a more professional and acceptable manner. He doesn't offer Specky gifts and approaches him in his home where he can talk to his parents directly. He appears to have Specky's future and interests at heart and is genuinely interested in his ability and the possibility of him signing with Manchester United.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

Chapter 1: a closer look

- Who do you think is the mysterious bald headed man?
- How does the mystery surrounding his identity help to set up the exciting atmosphere for the rest of the story?

Chapter 2: courage

- Give some examples of the loyalty the boys show to each other.
- Why does Coach Grub swap Specky to the half-back position?
- In what ways does the term 'courage' apply to this chapter?
- How does the running commentary help to add to the excitement and the atmosphere of the game?
- Make a list of the language choices or phrases that are typical of sports commentaries.

Chapter 3: Dicky

- Why is Specky so surprised when Dicky singles him out for praise in his post-match address?
- How do you know that the other boys respect Dicky?
- Skull's response to Dicky's speech is '*Someone get a tissue for the big fella! And don't forget the violins!*' (p 17). In what ways might this be a typical response from a group of boys?
- How does Dicky's speech help Specky to really understand the significance of this experience?
- Why is it so important that the boys behave well when in uniform? Do you agree that State and National representative sportsmen should behave in a way that makes them good role models?

Chapter 4: response

- What does Specky's conversation with his sister Alice reveal about their respective love lives?
- How does his dad react when he collects Specky from the airport? Why does Specky find this surprising?

- Specky is surprised when Alice tells him that Grandpa Ken has unexpectedly arrived. Why did Specky's father not tell him this himself? What does this suggest about their relationship?
- Can you make a prediction about why his grandfather might have suddenly appeared in their lives after ten years?

Chapter 5: Grandpa Ken

- Consider the difference in the greeting Specky receives from his mother as opposed to his father. What does this suggest about his father's frame of mind?
- What indications are there that Specky's father and grandfather do not get on?
- Grandpa Ken asks Specky all about the game, which Specky loves. How would this add to the tension between him and David, Specky's dad?
- How does Specky's dad manage to put Grandpa Ken in his place?

Chapter 6: mates and girls

- What does the good natured ribbing Specky receives from his friends show about their relationships?
- What does Danny find annoying about his relationship with Maria?
- Why does Specky find himself longing for the days before they were interested in girls?
- Who is Brad Dobson and what does he offer Specky?
- What is the boys' initial reaction?
- Why does Specky feel uncomfortable about accepting the shoes?

Chapter 7: maths attack

- What does the fact that Specky supports five different teams reveal about his personality?
- In what ways is TG different from other girls?
- What does everyone congratulate Gobbo for?
- What is Screamer's news?
- What is the students' first reaction to their new Maths teacher, Mr Rutherford?
- Why does he ask Specky to identify himself?
- Why does Coach Pate call the Under-Fifteen Football Team together?
- What does she reveal about Mr Rutherford?
- How does Specky manage to get his relationship with the new boy, Kyle off to a bad start?

Chapter 8: spelling it out

- What duty does Mr Rutherford assign to Specky and Paul at his first training session?
- What does this reveal about him?
- How do the other boys react to this decision?

- Why did he do this to them?
- Why is he so adamant that the boys can't play unless they pass their Maths test?

Chapter 9: full-on tension

- What sort of mood is Specky in when he first gets home?
- How does Grandpa Ken react when he tells him he was approached by a sports management company?
- How does Specky react to Ken's criticism of Specky's father?
- How does Specky feel about Grandpa Ken inviting Brad Dobson to the house?
- How do you predict Specky's parents will react?
- There is a lot of tension at the dinner table. Each member of the family is upset for a different reason. What are their issues?
- How does David react to Brad Dobson?
- What is Brad Dobson's argument? Whose interests does he have at heart?
- Why is Mr Magee so adamant he does not want a sports manager for his son?
- How does the meeting with Mr Dobson bring things to a head between Specky's father and grandfather?
- What do you think is at the base of their hostility?
- Why do you think Grandpa Ken really came to visit?

Chapter 10: one of the boys?

- When Specky surprises TG in her room, how does she react?
- What makes him feel uncomfortable about being in her room?
- How does he react when Robbo arrives? Why does he feel this way?

Chapter 11: splitsville

- How does Danny feel about breaking up with Maria?
- What does Robbo reveal about how it was done?
- What does Robbo tell Specky about him and TG?
- How does Specky react to his suggestion that he has more of a connection with her than Robbo?
- Does his hesitation have anything to do with Christina as his mates suggest?
- What happens to Grandpa Ken?
- How does Specky's father react?

Chapter 12: lions vs magpies

- Why is Specky unsure as to whether or not he should play for the Booyong High Lions in the Qualifying Final?
- What advice does Johnny Cockatoo give him?
- What does Specky think of Mr Rutherford after his pre-match talk?
- Why does Specky not miss Christina at this game?

- What happens between Kyle and Specky during the game?
- How does Kyle react?
- Why is Specky surprised by Mr Rutherford's reaction?
- How does Kyle react when Specky puts in a 'short step'?
- How do the other boys react to him?
- How does Specky feel about what he did?
- What advice do Mr Rutherford and Coach Pate give him?
- How does Coach Pate's farewell to Specky surprise him?
- How does Kyle show bad sportsmanship in the last minutes of the game?
- How does Specky injure himself?

Chapter 13: cork

- How does Specky deal with his injury?
- What solution does Grandpa Ken provide?
- How does Grandpa Ken react when Specky tries to talk to him about his relationship with David?
- Coach Grub '*had an uncompromising reputation and was not known to be overly sympathetic*' yet he does not ban Specky from playing in the school's Grand Final. What does this reveal about his attitude to his players?
- What does he tell Specky about the National Final?
- What advice does he give Specky that is the same as what Johnny Cockatoo told him?
- Who does Specky see at training?

Chapter 14: the test

- Why has Specky not told his parents about having to re-sit his Maths test?
- Why is Specky so reluctant to ask TG out?
- What is surprising about Danny's first encounter with Maria following their break-up?
- What is the result of Specky's second Maths test? What is Mr Rutherford's reaction?

Chapter 15: fragile

- How do Specky's parents react to the news that he failed his Maths test – twice?
- How do David and Grandpa Ken differ in their reactions?
- What is wrong with Grandpa Ken?
- Why is Specky able to talk with TG about his grandpa when he hasn't told anyone else?
- How does Mr Rutherford react when Specky asks to look over his test paper?
- How does he react when Specky tries to explain that this paper was not his?

Chapter 16: reality check

- Who do you think may have swapped the test papers to prevent Specky from playing in the finals?
- Specky returns home determined to try to talk his father into allowing him to play. What changes his mind?
- In what way did whoever swap the Maths tests do Specky a favour?
- Why does Gobbo pretend to have a broken arm?
- What does this reveal about the boys and their loyalty?
- When Specky confesses to his mates that even without failing the Maths test he wouldn't be able to play with them, he is surprised by their reaction. What does Robbo tell him?
- What does he mean by this?

Chapter 17: booyong's big day

- Why does Mr Rutherford ask Specky to help him on the bench with the team board?
- How does Mr Rutherford react to Gobbo's commentary?
- What does Specky say to Gobbo to cheer him up?
- How does Specky's talk to the boys at half time help them to improve their game?
- Why does Mr Rutherford encourage him to continue?
- How does Mr Rutherford gain a new understanding of the team?
- Why is his request for Gobbo to commentate so significant?
- What is the final result of the game?

Chapter 18: raw nerve

- How does Grandpa Ken react when Specky visits him in the hospital?
- Why do you think he cries when Specky tells him about the possibility of being selected for the All-Australian side and traveling to Ireland?
- What does David tell his son about the reason for the feud between him and Grandpa Ken?
- What advice does Specky give his father?

Chapter 19: throat tonic

- What news does Specky receive about his grandfather?
- What is wrong with Gobbo?
- Specky goes to ask TG something, but is interrupted by his mates. What is he going to ask? Do you think she knows? What does the fact that she tells him to ask her later reveal about her own feelings?
- What does Specky immediately assume when Mr Rutherford asks to speak with him?

Chapter 20: another blessing

- Who does Specky think is following him in the car on the way home from the shop?

- What does it say about Mr Rutherford that he not only apologized to Specky for the mix-up over the Maths test, but that he did so in front of Specky's parents?
- What does he reveal about Kyle?
- What is ironic about his comments regarding fathers and sons?
- How does Specky's attitude towards his new coach change?
- What is the news about Grandpa Ken?

Chapter 21: national final

- Why did Specky's mum invite everyone to join them for breakfast?
- Why is Specky so thrilled about his father and grandfather watching the game together?
- How does Specky feel as he enters the change rooms?
- What does Specky think when he can't see his name on the list of team positions on the whiteboard?
- Why is he so thrilled when he learns that Coach Grub has compared him to Matthew Richardson?
- How does Specky feel as the game begins?
- How does Specky feel when Grub singles him out for a pep talk?
- Why does Grub tell the boys that they are winners, even though they lost the game?
- How does Specky react to winning the Robert Harvey medal?

Chapter 22: the unexpected

- What has mended the rift in the relationship between David and Grandpa Ken?
- What 'medals' does Specky show his grandfather?
- Why is Danny back together with Maria?
- What is Gobbo's news?
- What surprise visitor does Specky get?
- How do you feel as Specky opens the door to reveal the bald man?

Chapter 23: worldwide

- Who is the bald man and why has he been watching Specky?
- How would Specky feel about being asked to play with the most famous football club in the world?
- Would his attitude be different once he realizes that by 'football' Mr Vernon means soccer?

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Families

We sort of assume that family members will like each other and get along, but often that is not the case.

- What sorts of issues can cause a big rift in a family?

- Is there any way that they can be resolved? What does it take for major family issues to be resolved?

Students may be prepared to share family experiences of issues that have caused a rift between family members. Depending on how comfortable they (and the teacher) feel, these issues could be explored. Possible conflict-resolution scenarios could be discussed or acted out.

From the beginning it is clear that there is unexplained and unresolved tension between Specky's father, David and his grandfather, Ken.

- He just showed up at the door and asked if he could stay for a couple of weeks. (p25) How would this add tension to a family?
- How would your family react if a person you had not seen for ten years suddenly showed up on your doorstep?

Unlike his father, *'Grandpa Ken hung off every word and bombarded him with a ton of questions...'* (p29).

'Grandpa Ken really knew his football, and Specky felt as if he could've talked to him all night long.' (p30)

- In what ways are Grandpa Ken and Specky's father shown to be different from each other?
- Specky would enjoy talking to his grandfather about football, but this could simply fuel the fire between Grandpa Ken and his father. How would he feel when talking to his grandfather?
- Specky is surprised that his father calls his grandpa by his first name, Ken. What does this reveal about their relationship?

Loyalty

In this book, Specky plays for both his school team, the Booyong Lions and for the Victorian State Team. He feels great loyalty to both teams and his loyalty is sorely tested when he has to decide whether or not to play in the school's Grand Final and risk not being fit enough to play in the Nationals. *'Playing for the Vics was great, but he really loved playing with his mates from Booyong High and he wished he hadn't had to choose between the two.'* (p35)

In spite of the fact that the State team was formed only six weeks earlier these boys have a very close bond and work well together as a team.

- Find some instances in the book that illustrate the loyalty Specky and his team mates have for each other.
- How do boys tend to show loyalty?

Specky's best friends, Robbo and Danny are also good footballers, but they are not at Specky's level. However there is no jealousy in their relationship. *'There was never any competition or jealousy about the success that had come Specky's way.'* (p33)

Robbo tells Specky, *'There's no way we're gonna get in your way. We want you to do this.... not just for you, for us.'* (p150)

- Why would the boys feel this way about Specky's potential football career? In this way, these boys provide very positive role models for young people.

Relationships

If the class and the teacher are comfortable, the book provides a springboard for some excellent discussions about relationships.

Specky breaks up with Christina because of the difficulties in maintaining a long distance relationship.

- What are the inherent difficulties?
- Can a long distance relationship work?

Both Robbo and Danny complain about being placed under the thumbs of their respective girlfriends.

- In what ways do they feel constrained?
- Does this tend to be a common complaint between girls and boys?
- How do girls and boys approach relationships differently?

'Specky found himself wishing for the days when girls hadn't even gotten a look in with him and his mates. Nowadays, it seemed that's all that occupied their minds.' (p38)

- Is this a common feeling amongst teenaged boys – or girls?
- In what ways do relationships with the opposite sex change our relationships with our friends?
- What sorts of tensions might this cause?
- What are some ways to cater for these issues to ensure that they don't cause problems within the group?

When Specky finds himself attracted to TG he is confused and embarrassed by his feelings, especially as she is the girlfriend of one of his best mates.

- Even after TG and Robbo break up, why does he hesitate to ask her out?
- How might it change his relationship with TG and with Robbo?
- In previous books, TG has clearly been interested in Specky, but she never acted on her feelings because of Christina. What does this reveal about her character?
- Specky is quite surprised when both Robbo and TG tell him that there was no 'click' between them, as there is between TG and Specky. What indications are there that he and TG are well suited?
- Is it acceptable to date your mate's ex-girlfriend or your friend's ex-boyfriend?

Danny wants to break up with the Gladiator (Maria) on her MySpace page, but changes his mind and emails her instead.

- Is this an appropriate way to end a relationship? Have you ever done anything like this? What are the problems with using email, MySpace, Facebook, texting etc as your main means of communication?

Fathers and Sons

This is another topic that could provide the platform for good personal discussions.

Perhaps for boys the most significant relationship they will have in their lives is the one they have with their father.

- The relationship between Grandpa Ken and Specky's father obviously had an enormous impact on all of their lives. David felt that he was never good enough for his father, that his father resented his very existence, and that he could never live up to his expectations.
- In previous books, Specky and his father had a tumultuous relationship.
- This was also the basis for much of Screamer's anti-social behaviour.
- Again, a father and son relationship is highlighted with Kyle and Mr Rutherford. Kyle is angry with his father for constantly uprooting the family to further his career and takes his frustrations out on Specky rather than on the person with whom he is angry.
- Why is the relationship between a father and son so significant?
- What do boys learn from their fathers?
- What do boys expect in a good father?
- What does it take to be a good son?
- What are the dangers involved in having a bad father-son relationship?

Grandpa Ken is determined to call Mr Dobson straight away without discussing it with David first. *'He'll probably over-think it as he does everything, and before you know it you've missed the boat.'* (p67).

Specky can see the truth in what he said, but doesn't like Grandpa Ken putting his father down like that.

- Why are boys often happy to criticize their own fathers, but become defensive when others do it?
- What might this reveal about their relationship?

In the novel, David Magee and his father have clearly clashed all of David's life.

- Do you think, as David does, that Ken really resented his children because he had to give up his sporting dreams?
- Why would he have tried to force his sons into sport?
- Would his relationship with them have been different had they been sporty?
- Why do you think the authors might have chosen to make Specky's father, David an art dealer?

Being True to Yourself

Johnny Cockatoo advises Specky *'You do what you gotta do, Speck. As long as it feels right. Just be sure you don't go against what your heart tells you to do.'* (p96)

- In what ways is this good advice for the dilemmas Specky faces during the course of this story?

- Do you think Specky remains true to himself throughout the story?
- What evidence is there from the other characters that this is good advice?
- Is this a good motto to adopt in life?
- Both Johnny and Coach Grub tell Specky, *'If you go into a game of football with doubts, you'll come out of it with pain'* (p97). Is this statement also applicable to real life? In what way?

Death

Grandpa Ken has a brain tumour and only a short time left to live, which is why he came to visit his family.

As Specky says to his father, *'Maybe when you get a look at death head-on, the past isn't important anymore...'* (p171)

- How does Specky's statement help to heal the rift between his father and grandfather?
- How can the knowledge of death change your life and your attitudes? What would you change or try to fix if you knew that you didn't have much longer to live?
- *'football was finally bringing Grandpa Ken and his dad together, instead of driving them apart..'* (p193). What is the irony in this statement?

Dealing with Injury

Specky's *'corking'* injury was the result of a pure accident.

- Do you think he is responsible in the way he deals with it given that he knows that playing in the schools Grand Final could result in further injury and destroy his chances of playing in the State match and potential future selection?

Fortunately for him, the decision as to whether or not to play is taken out of his hands as he is banned from playing as punishment for failing his maths test.

- Do you think that Specky would have played if he had not been banned from doing so?
- Would he have risked further injury for the sake of his school team and his teammates?
- Why do so many top sportspeople risk serious injury for the sake of competing in an important game?

Activity

Imagine that Specky had a conversation with someone to help him make the decision. Consider the relationships he has with each of the characters in the story.

- Who would he have chosen to confide in?
- Write the conversation they may have had.

Life after Football

'If your schoolwork is not up to scratch, you don't play football...' (p60).

'You attend this school to acquire an education, first and foremost, not to enhance your football careers, regardless of how talented you may be' (p61).

- Why did Mr Rutherford insist that all the boys had to pass Maths in order to be allowed to play football?
- Specky's parents agree with this sentiment: *'maybe we have to review your football commitments and what it means to your overall education'* (p136).
- Do you agree that even with the ability to become a top rate football star, Specky needs to concentrate on his school work?
- Is it important to have a formal education behind you?

This could become the topic of a class debate.

- Research a range of well known, successful celebrities. How many of them have a formal education and how many are self taught?

Commercialism in Sport

The presence of Brad Dobson's character raises a number of ethical issues with regards to sport.

- What is the role of a sports manager? Why do top sportsmen and women need a manager? Or indeed, do they need one at all?
- Are they a necessity or just a means for others to make money off an athlete's ability?
- How does Brad Dobson try to win Specky over? Do you think he approaches Specky in a professional manner? What should he have done?
- *'Without missing a beat, Brad Dobson launched into his company spiel.'* (p 73) Whose interests does Dobson really have at heart?
- *'Even though he wasn't sure he liked the look of Brad Dobson, it was hard not to be flattered into believing everything he said.'* (pp73 -74) What methods does Dobson use to try to win Specky over? Is this behaviour ethical?
- Specky *'felt strange about being given a gift. Somehow it just didn't feel right.'* (p40) Why does Specky feel this way?
- Why is Grandpa Ken so keen to sign Specky up with a manager?
- Should he have contacted Brad Dobson without discussing it with Specky's parents first?
- When Specky's father tells him about Ken's shattered dreams, does this explain this reaction better and make you see his actions in a different light?
- At the end of the novel, Specky is approached by George Vernon. In what way is his approach to Specky different from that of Brad Dobson?

Money in Sport

Grandpa Ken was forced to give up his interest in sport when he had to support a wife and child. In his day, there was no money to be made from sport and even the highest caliber of sportsmen and women had to be able to support themselves financially. Now, a professional sporting career is one of the most lucrative possible.

- What sorts of salaries are drawn by sporting heroes today?

- How has this changed over the years?
- When did sports people start to be paid good money for playing sport?
- Why do you think we pay our sporting heroes these sorts of salaries?
- Do you think they should be paid at this level?
- Does it attract the right sort of people into sport for the right reasons?

A Different Type of Football

Specky is taken aback when he is approached by George Vernon, a talent scout for the Manchester United Football (Soccer) Squad.

We tend to think of the different codes as being quite different sports and whilst we sometimes hear of players moving from one football code to another, they rarely switch to soccer.

- What are the similarities between Football and Soccer? (You may need to research the two games to answer this).
- What skills would Specky have that may make him appealing to the club?
- What famous sporting personalities have played for Manchester United?

Prediction Activity

- What do you think Specky is likely to do? Will he stay with Football or will he change sports and try out for the Manchester United Football Club as a soccer goalie? Why?
- Specky himself does not have a favourite team that he follows. It had always been the love of the game for him and not just the love of one particular team. (p43) Given this sentiment, is he likely to change to a different sport?

Finding out More about AFL

During the course of the novel, a number of famous AFL players are mentioned. Research each of these players and the contribution they made to the sport.

- Nick Del Santo
- Gary Ablett
- Chris Judd
- Ron Barassi
- Jonathan Brown
- Brendan Fevola
- Luke Hodge
- Andrew Mcleod
- Brett Kirk
- Matthew Pavlich
- Chad Cornes
- Nick Riewoldt
- Matthew Richardson

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Narrative Structure

A traditional narrative has the structure of orientation, complication, climax and resolution. In this story, there are a number of internal stories or sub-plots operating.

- Divide the novel into its main plot and its subplots. For each one, create a graph that charts the orientation, complication, climax and resolution of that particular issue.

The story is told mainly through the eyes of the main character, Specky Magee.

- Choose one incident in the story and re-write this scene from the point of view of another character in the scene. Consider how this changes the reader's view of the story.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing occurs when a minor event in a story mirrors a main event. In this situation, the first incident is said to 'foreshadow' the second, giving the reader a warning as to what will ultimately happen.

- In what way does the Booyong Lions losing their Grand Final mirror the Victorians' loss in the State Grand Final?

The Language of the Commentator

'The ball's been punched forward and Morgan gathers it cleanly and shoots out a handball to Bayless. With the clock ticking down, Bayless swings onto his left foot in the direction of centre-half forward, but - oh no! - the South Australian ruckman, Harry Zatsaris has positioned himself there perfectly. But, wait... MAAAAGGGEEEEEE! Simon Magee has come from nowhere and perched himself on top of the shoulders of Zatsaris to take one of the greatest marks you're ever likely to see. Have a listen to this crowd, Jim.' (pp213-214)

- Make a list of the words or phrases that clearly identify this passage as a piece of sports commentary.
- Listen to a range of sports commentators commentating different sports. Are there any similarities in style, tone or vocabulary used across the range of presenters and sports?

Activities

Practice reading this extract or another commentary passage out aloud. Get as much expression into your voice as possible.

- Re-read the description of the Qualifying Finals game on pages 100-106. Re-write this passage as a piece of commentary and perform it in front of the class.
- Stage a mock, slow motion sporting activity – it could be football, horse racing, volleyball, netball or even chess.
- Have some class members act out the scene while one or two provide a running commentary on the action. Try to capture the tone, style and excitement of a commentator.

- Re-write one of the games described in the novel as a newspaper report. Consider how the language may need to change for this different genre.

Nicknames

Almost every character in the novel is given a nickname. For example:

- Simon 'Specky' Magee
- Lenny 'Skull' Morgan
- Dieter 'the Great McCarthy' McCarthy
- Ben Higgins – Gobbo
- Danny the Italian Stallion
- Samantha Sheperd - Tiger Girl or TG

Make a note of how each nickname you come across in the story and how each of these characters acquired their nicknames.

Australians are well known for giving their mates nicknames. The use of them often indicates a sense of companionship or friendship.

There are a number of ways these are formed. They may be based upon a person's appearance (e.g. 'Blue' for a redhead, or 'shorty' for a tall person); an embarrassing incident; a personal habit or trait they have etc. Many times, these nicknames are laced with humour or sarcasm.

Make a list of some of the nicknames you use for your friends, or those of people you may have come across in reading or general knowledge.

- Can you remember or work out how the nickname was devised?

*Felice Arena &
Garry Lyon*

