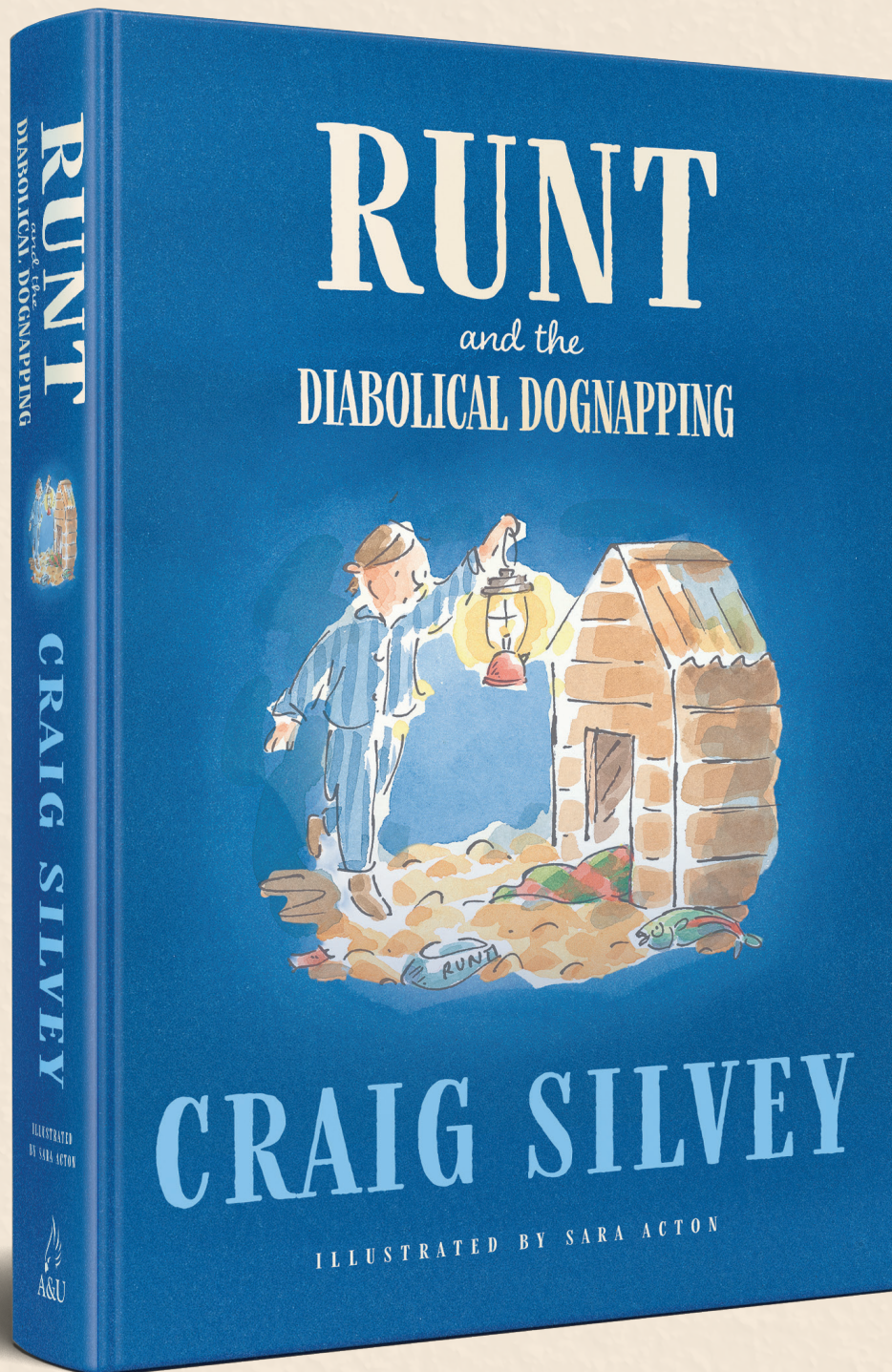


# TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR: AGES 8-12 YEARS OLD,  
YEARS 5, 6 & 7

**THEMES:** Love, family and friendship, truth and honesty, identity and belonging, selflessness, kindness and care, community and rural Australia, dance and the arts.



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# CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English: Literature, Literacy and Language (Years 5-6 and Year 7)
  - HASS (Years 5-6) Geography (Year 7)
  - HPE (Years 5-6)
- The Arts: Dance, Drama and Music (Years 5-6)

## INTRODUCTION

*Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* is the hotly anticipated sequel to the heart-warming novel *Runt*, which has also been turned into a successful movie. Its engaging characters, clever and unpredictable plot and rich language will appeal to middle and upper grade Primary students and lower Secondary students.

In English, the novel would support close studies of characterisation, plot and narrative structure, and the use of rich and varied language and literary devices used to build description and engage readers.

In other subjects, the novel could be used to explore Geography in HASS, with a focus on the interaction between people and places, and the liveability of places. The rich characterisation leads to studies of key characters and their emotional development in terms of Personal, Social and Community Health in the Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Finally, the novel features dancing as a way for Annie to express her emotions, leading to authentic connections with studies of Dance as part of The Arts curriculum.





# PLOT SUMMARY

After their unlikely success at the Krumpets Dog Show, Annie and Runt have helped to turn around the fortunes of Upson Downs. Optimism, people and money are flowing back into the town, and the local mayor wants to capitalise on the success by hosting a 'Tournament of Champions' dog show, where the best of the best dogs and owners from all over the world compete against each other.

As part of the town's reversed fortunes, flamboyant reporter Rupert Broadsheet has arrived to revive the town's newspaper, along with his shy daughter Verity. However, just as Rupert begins his coverage of the upcoming tournament, tragedy strikes: Runt disappears. The only traces of Runt consist of his rumpled dog blanket, a filthy square of fabric in the dirt, a fresh fish lying on the ground, and Bryan's memory of a strange noise he heard in the night. The mystery deepens when Annie finds a note on the town's noticeboard revealing that Runt has been dognapped. Annie and her family leap into action to try to trace Runt, not at all helped by the hopeless local policeman, Sergeant Duncan Bayleaf, who promptly arrests the infamous Fergus Fink on suspicion of the crime. Annie visits Fink, feeding him her father's special 'dinkumberries' that are meant to work like a truth serum. Fink professes his innocence and Annie believes him, even desperately agreeing to join forces with him to solve the mystery.

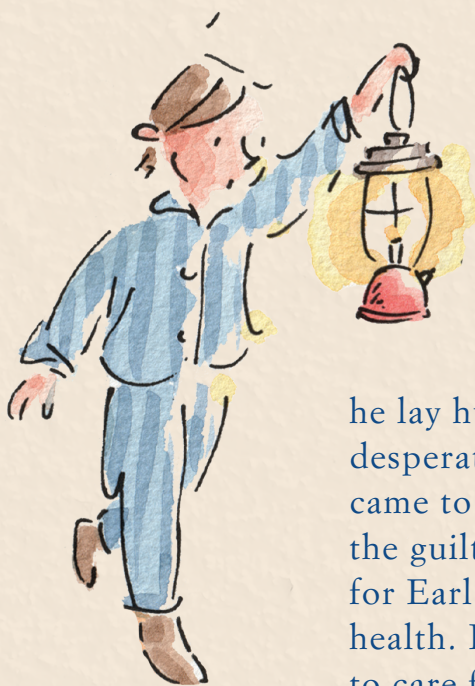
Annie's confident and innovative brother Max joins the Broadsheets at the local newspaper and promptly starts trying to find Runt's dognapper. Following a disastrous night-time stakeout of the local noticeboard, Annie, Max and Verity are left with a shadowy photograph and a second note, signed by Fergus Fink, that challenges Annie to win the upcoming Tournament of Champions. Annie's only option to win without her beloved Runt is to try to train up Little Annie, her grandmother's dog, who has been left with the family when her grandmother goes on a road trip. Annie dons her old toolbelt and sets up her agility course in the paddock next to her house. Little Annie, who is pining for her missing owner, steadfastly refuses to take any interest in the course and Annie feels defeated. However, Annie's dad, Bryan, comes to the rescue by recognising that Little Annie is not an agility dog, but a dancing dog. With the unlikely help of Fergus Fink, who finds a loophole in the Official Canine Code rule book, Annie realises she can enter Little Annie into the Dancing Dog category. However, there is one catch; Annie needs to dance too, and she cannot. Every time she hears the music, she freezes.



Fink once again comes to the rescue, suggesting that Annie visit Cha Cha Galore, a once world-famous but now washed-up dancer, and owner of the Confidence Academy. Cha Cha helps Annie find her inner music and, once she finds a way to connect to Little Annie through their shared sense of sadness and loss, the two finally form a dancing pair.

Meanwhile, Max has been trying to find the owner of the filthy rag that was found on the ground when Runt disappeared, which he suspects will lead him to the dognapper. After Susie cleans the rag up, they realise that it is made of rare red silk with the initials BB on it. Max begins a long hunt for the owner and eventually strikes gold when he realises it belonged to once famous variety star Bonzer Bill.

The day of the tournament arrives, and Annie and Little Annie take to the stage to perform. As they whirl and dance around the arena, to the joy of the crowd, their performance is suddenly stopped by the arrival of a bedraggled old man who is carrying a limp and barely alive Runt in his arms. Despite being led to believe that this man is Bonzer Bill, a backstory recount reveals that although



he was once homeless and lived with Runt in the city, Bill has since died. Annie realises that the old man is actually Earl Robert-Barren, who was missing, presumed dead, after his dam (which was withholding water from the town) broke and washed him away.

A further backstory reveals that Earl was washed a long way away into a wood, where he lay hurt and starving, close to death. His final desperate howl at the moon was heard by Runt, who came to Earl's aid. Motivated by love and kindness, and the guilt of not saving his previous owner, Runt cares for Earl, bringing him food and nursing him back to health. However, in caring for Earl, Runt forgets to care for himself. Just as Earl is beginning to get better, Runt collapses. Earl, as his first ever selfless act, pushes himself to the brink of exhaustion to carry Runt back to his estate, which has been repurposed for the tournament. In a dramatic finale, Annie and Runt are reunited, but Runt is barely alive and unresponsive.



After Runt's return, the mystery surrounding his disappearance is resolved. He was never dognapped; instead he had voluntarily left to care for Earl. Runt himself buried the red silk scarf in memory of his previous owner, Bonzer Bill, whom he still mourned. The town's embattled and ineffective mayor, Barry Casserole, admits that he wrote the ransom note to force Annie to participate in the tournament as he was worried the town would lose its lucrative sponsorship from MUSH Canine Cuisine. It is later revealed that Verity wrote the first note as a way of drawing Max, whom she had long admired from his YouTube channel, into working with her and her father on the paper. The fish turns out to be a literal and figurative red herring, dropped from the sky by an eagle.

As a result of Runt's loving care and kindness, Earl is reborn as a philanthropist, opening his doors to the people who come from far and wide to pay tribute to Runt. Earl even turns his house into a dog's home. Meanwhile, Runt still lays unresponsive, with Annie by his side. Max comes to visit, bringing with him the red scarf that Runt used to wear around his neck when he was with Bonzer Bill. Upon smelling the scarf, Runt finally wakes up, and he and Annie are reunited.





# AN INTERVIEW WITH CRAIG SILVEY

**Q: What inspired you to return to the world of Runt?**

The response to *Runt* has been truly extraordinary. I have received so many kind messages from readers who have connected resoundingly with the book – who have invariably inquired about the prospect for further adventures. So, I knew there was a strong appetite for a second helping.



While we were filming the screen adaptation, I struck upon the perfect idea to continue the journey of Annie and Runt. Suddenly, the notion of embarking upon a sequel seemed irresistible.

I have such warm affection for the Shearer family and the world of Upson Downs, and being in the company of these beautiful characters is always personally nourishing and uplifting.

*Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* is the most rewarding, enjoyable book I have ever written. And ultimately, I have the generosity of readers to thank for it. A writer isn't blessed with the conditions to pen a sequel without the passionate belief of an audience, and I hope this novel honours their support and kindness.

**Q: What, in your opinion, is it that makes Annie, Runt and the township of Upson Downs so endearing and unforgettable to readers of all ages?**

I can't speak for all readers, but to me, *Runt* has been a source of light and hope. There is something about the spirit and determination of Annie Shearer that is deeply admirable and infectious. And likewise, the unconditional care and love and support exhibited by the Shearer family is comforting and inspiring.

*Runt* is a book for everyone. Readers of all ages and backgrounds are invited to Upson Downs, and the story takes care to celebrate difference, friendship, resilience and generosity.



*Runt* is also a story about a remarkable young person trying to save their home. And given the extent to which cost of living and housing affordability is putting Australian families under pressure, the challenges faced by the Shearers are directly relatable. However, while the book confronts various anxieties, it is always balanced by fun and whimsy and love, and with Annie Shearer as our focus, a prevailing sense of optimism and hope.

**Q: Did you find writing a sequel different to writing your other books?**

The paradox of the sequel is that it needs to feel both familiar and fresh. A sequel should play to the strengths of the original title, while also departing from it by introducing new elements and, most importantly, elevated stakes. There needs to be more on the line, a sense of amplification and expansion.

*Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* picks up where the first book left off, then quickly veers and diverts and blooms. It still centres on the journey of Annie Shearer and explores the fervid world of canine competition, but woven among it is a beguiling mystery plot and a feast of connective backstory. There's a lot happening.

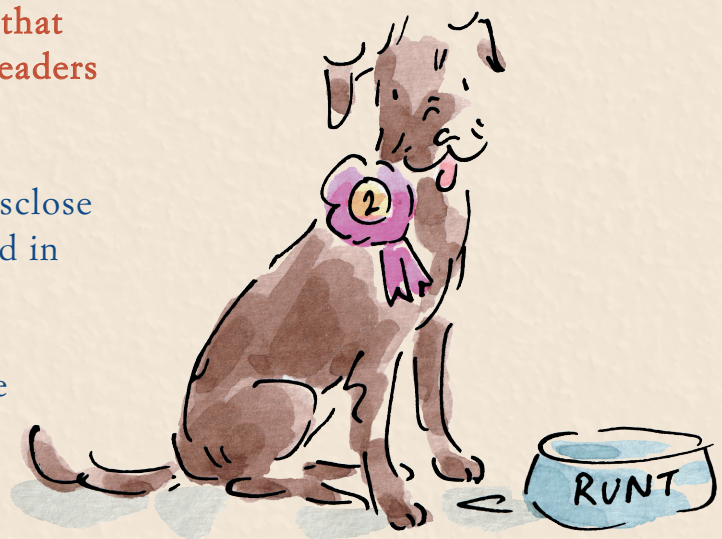
It was delicate and tricky to structure and coordinate, but I adored the challenge and I'm delighted with the novel that resulted. It runs deeper and feels bigger.

**Q: Are there any new characters that you are particularly excited for readers to meet?**

Very much so – though I can't disclose too much given they are shrouded in mystery.

I can promise that they will make you laugh and make you cry.

Some will infuriate and agitate, others will melt your heart.





**Q: What do you hope teachers take away from sharing *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* with their students?**

First and foremost, I hope *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* is a compelling, moving and satisfying literary experience.

I have been honoured with correspondence from teachers and librarians across the country who have described reading *Runt* aloud to spellbound students. I hope this sequel can inspire similarly passionate engagement, and I hope that it encourages students to keep exploring books and literature – particularly those who are reluctant readers.

Beyond that, there is so much scope for exploration in *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping*. From dinkumberries to Horrible Headlines, this book is about truth in all its forms and iterations. Adjacently, it's also about big feelings – why they're irrepressible, and how we can express the inexplicable. This book takes another look at legacy. It's also about kindness, civic responsibility, friendship, sacrifice, redemption and fairness. There's a world of depth to discover, and I think educators can use this novel as a platform to curate some enriching and fascinating discussions.





# BEFORE READING

1. To provide some background to students, either read the first novel, *Runt*, or watch the movie. If time is short, watch the **official trailer** instead.
2. To learn more about dog show competitions, students might like to explore the **Crufts website** and discuss some of the different categories and events held. To view the style of competition Annie and Runt entered in the first novel, scroll through the video of **Crufts 2025 Agility Final**. Next, scroll through the video of the **2025 Freestyle International Competition** to see what Annie and Runt would have to do this time to win the Tournament of Champions.
3. Review the meaning of the word 'runt'. What does it mean to be a runt? Does this term apply just to animals, or can it apply to humans? Why might the author have chosen to use this word for the title of the first novel?
4. The title of this new novel leads the reader to assume that the story is about a dognapping. Discuss why people might 'dognap'. What might be the motivations to take someone's precious pet? List them before reading, then come back to them during the novel.
5. Introduce the idea of a 'trope' in literature and explain it can mean a plot that follows an expected storyline. For example, in fairy tales, we often find the 'damsel in distress' trope. Ask students what a kidnapping trope might consist of. What are the key elements in this type of story? What might the reader expect in a kidnapping plot?
6. Introduce the idea of a 'red herring' in stories. Explain that it is an element of the plot that deliberately 'leads' the reader to make incorrect assumptions, so they can then surprise them with the truth later in the plot. Can students think of a story or a movie that has a 'red herring' in it? How and why was this misdirection an important part of the story?
7. Characters' names in the novel have been cleverly chosen by the author to partly foreshadow either their personalities and/or their roles in the novel. Briefly explain foreshadowing (see Literature section for more detail if needed). As a class, find out the meaning of the following words: runt, fink, barren, broadsheet, verity, bailiff, casserole, bonzer and galore. Build a word wall in the classroom to record these meanings. During reading, add notes about how the characters' actions might link to their names.



# CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

## ENGLISH

### LITERATURE

**Engaging with and responding to literature** (Year 5: AC9E5LE02; Year 6: AC9E6LE02; Year 7: AC9E7LE02, AC9E7LE03 and AC9E7LE04)

1. Students may not be familiar with the word 'diabolical'. Challenge them to look up its meaning, then discuss the etymology of the word (originally from the Latin, meaning 'devil'). If an act is described as diabolical, what does this infer? Why do students think that the novel was given this title?
2. Younger students may not know about foreshadowing as a technique in novel writing. Explain that it is a literary device where an author provides hints or clues about what will happen later in the novel. After reading the novel, ask groups of students to work together to go back and identify examples of foreshadowing. These might include: Chapter 1 and the story of Bonzer Bill and Runt; Strange Things in capital letters (pp.33-5); dinkumberries (derived from 'fair dinkum') and spilling the beans (p.63); Gloria, Norma and Frou Frou (pp.100-7); Brian's premonition (p.263); and finally, Max finds the death notice for Bonzer Bill (p.307).
3. Deep themes of identity and self-discovery run throughout the novel. Annie's toolbelt is partly symbolic of her identity because she is someone who sees herself as a 'fixer'. Discuss with students what their identity might be, e.g. leader, peace-maker, dreamer, realist, joker. Brainstorm ideas on the board, then ask students to choose one word that best describes their identity. If Annie wore a toolbelt because she was a fixer, what item/object could they choose that would be symbolic of their own identity?
4. The novel is set in the town of Upson Downs, which sounds like the phrase 'ups and downs'. What does it mean if you have 'ups and downs'. What might the ups and downs of this town involve (make connections back to the first



Runt novel if possible)? Where are the town's ups and downs in the storyline of this novel?

5. Students may or may not be aware of the idea of a sub-plot in a novel. Explain that this is a smaller plot that sits within the main story and often gives more information about supporting characters (rather than the main characters). Ask students to explain the sub-plot involving Max and Verity and their romance. Why do they think the author included this sub-plot? What did it help the reader to understand about both characters?

6. A further series of sub-plots exist in the novel, including: Brian's association with music and identity; the role of the dinkumberries and the search for inner truth; Fink's redemption story; incompetence, jobs and self-belief, as revealed through Duncan Bayleaf and Barry Casserole; the mystery of the red initialled handkerchief and symbols of belonging; Earl's story and his transformation from antagonist to hero; Bonzer Bill's history and the sad story of aging and homelessness; and Cha Cha Galore's backstory of fading stars. Ask students to identify at least one of these sub-plots, explain what happens, and then describe why they think the author included it.

7. In the first Runt novel, there was a clear division between 'baddies' (antagonists/villains) and 'goodies' (protagonists/heroes). In the sequel, this division is no longer clear. Both Fergus Fink and Earl Robert-Barren redeem themselves, and even the inept police detective and mayor learn from their mistakes. Ask students to explain why they think the author might have included these character changes.

8. The villain in this novel (the dognapper) is an invisible character who eventually is revealed not to exist. Why do students think that the author spent most of the novel hinting at a villain who doesn't exist? Can they think of another book or movie where it turns out that the villain does not exist?

9. Stories usually only have one obvious hero or heroine. It could be argued that this novel has many. Who are the heroes and heroines of this story? What makes them heroic? Draw up a character table to record these heroes and their heroic qualities.

10. On p.197, Annie 'points her magic finger' when she first starts to learn to dance: "she carves the air, parting it like a curtain, opening up a space for her to step through". This description is similar to the function of the purple crayon in *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, or the red crayon in the *Journey*



trilogy by Aaron Becker. View either the [trailer for \*Harold and the Purple Crayon\*](#), or [the trailer for the first picture book \*Journey\*](#) or read either picture book. Make connections between this novel and these texts, focusing on the concept of opening creative paths and where this can lead characters.

11. Author **Aaron Blabey** is famous for using funny descriptions and puns, similar to those of Craig Silvey. Read some of Blabey's picture books (e.g. *Pig the Pug*, *Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas* or *Busting*), then discuss how his work shares similarities to Silvey's children's books.

12. Write a review of the novel. Prompt students to briefly explain what the novel is about, introduce the main characters, explain their favourite part of the story (with reasons), identify what they learned from the novel and/or their emotional response to it, and finish with a recommendation score out of 5 stars.

**Examining literature** (Year 5: AC9E5LE03, AC9E5LE04; Year 6: AC9E6LE03, AC9E6LE04; Year 7: AC9E7LE05, AC9E7LE06)

1. Some sections of the novel are written from Runt's point of view. Closely read p.330 and ask students to identify which section of the text appears to be Runt's thoughts. Why do they think that the author has let the reader understand Runt's thoughts and feelings at this point in the novel? What does it help us to understand about Runt, even though he is a dog?

2. The author's writing style is a combination of witty and touching. Challenge students to find examples of each, e.g. amusing descriptions of characters, or thought-provoking commentary about character's feelings.

3. Rupert Broadsheet is a bold new character in the sequel to *Runt*. Prompt students to describe him in their own words (based on their understanding of the text), then use an AI image generator to develop an image of him. Prompt them to adjust their written description to build a more accurate image. Compare and contrast student images, discussing aspects of his personality that shine through in the images.

4. Annie and Little Annie are united in their sense of grief and loss for their loved ones. Symbolically, the key 'unlocks' both of their feelings. Study pp.216-17 closely, prompting students to highlight or underline all the words, phrases and sentences that show the emotional connection between the two characters.

5. The literary device of alliteration is used repeatedly throughout the novel,



most noticeably by Rupert Broadsheet, who gets all the way through the alphabet from 'A' to 'T'. Challenge pairs of students to go on an alliteration hunt and find all the examples of Rupert's alliteration.

6. The literary devices of simile and metaphor are often used by the author to build character description. Revise or teach the definitions of both, then look at the example on p.7 where Dolly describes herself bungee jumping as "dangled like a teabag" and with hip bones that are "like wet chalk". Study further examples on pp.132, 191, 193, 255, 260, 289 and 338, asking pairs of students to identify the simile or metaphor on the page and to explain what it reveals about the character to whom it is linked.

7. The extended metaphor of a 'Runt shaped hole' is repeated throughout the novel. Ask students to explain what they think this metaphor represents.

What does it tell us about Annie's feelings? How and why is it powerful as a metaphorical image?

**Creating literature** (Year 5: AC9E5LE05; Year 6: AC9E6LE05; Year 7: AC9E7LE07)

1. As previously mentioned, there are quite a few backstories in the novel (e.g. Cha Cha Galore, Bonzer Bill, Earl Robert-Barren). Discuss the function of a backstory, and how it works to fill in information about a character. Next, ask students to choose one of the following characters: Duncan Bayleaf, Barry Casserole, Camilla Crowne-Jewel or Tiffany Sprinkles and create their own one-page backstory about this character.

2. There are also lots of sub-plots taking place in the novel. One sub-plot that turns out to be a red herring (both literally and figuratively) is the fish found by Runt's doghouse when he disappeared. Challenge students to work in pairs to come up with a creative, alternative story that explains where the fish came from. They might like to turn it into a short story, or cartoon.

3. The townspeople continue Rupert Broadsheet's alliteration with the letter J on p.385. The next letter in the alphabet is K. Read the picture book *Animalia* by Graeme Base, then identify his use of alliteration related of the letter K (K is a bit too hard to ask students to do themselves!). The next letter in the alphabet is 'L'. Ask students to come up with a list of adjectives, nouns and verbs all beginning with L. They should use these to write a sentence (that makes sense!) including as many of these as possible.



4. Page 255 contains excellent descriptions of Camilla and Doreen, the commentators for the Tournament. Read these aloud as a class, then brainstorm some further amusing descriptions that could also be used to illustrate these two characters (e.g. hair, eye colour, outfits, voice, mannerisms, etc). Next, use the names of the owners and their dogs on p.257 as a starting point for students to build their own, individual, amusing descriptions. Challenge them to choose one owner and their dog and write a descriptive paragraph to introduce them, making their description as lively and witty as possible.

5. Fergus Fink, it is later revealed in the book, voluntarily stayed in jail. Discuss why he might do this. What was he thinking and feeling? Use this discussion as a jumping-off point for students to write a first-person diary entry from Fink's point of view.

6. At the end of the novel, Duncan Bayleaf resigns. Challenge students to write a short story about what happens to him. What made him resign? Where did he go after he left Upson Downs? What did he do? Who did he meet? How did he 'find himself'? Did he find peace and happiness, or something else?

7. *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* is a sequel to the original novel, *Runt*. As a class, discuss what might happen next to Runt. Brainstorm at least 10 different storylines, recording ideas on the board. Ask students to choose ONE idea and draw a plot diagram to plan the next novel (they might like to log into [Canva](#) and type in 'story plot diagram' to use an existing template).

## LITERACY

**Analysing, interpreting and evaluating** (Year 5: AC9E5LY03, AC9E5LY04, AC9E5LY05; Year 6: AC9E6LY03, AC9E6LY04, AC9E6LY05; Year 7: AC9E7LY03, AC9E7LY04, AC9E7LY05)

Use the following comprehension questions to help students understand key points in the text:

1. The first chapter is called 'Past is Prologue'. Ask if any students can explain what a prologue is and what its function is in a novel. If not, explain that a prologue occurs at the beginning of a story before the narrative starts. It helps set the stage for the events that will happen later. How might 'the past' be a prologue for the future? Can students make any references to stories or movies they know that begin with an event in the past?



2. On p.20 we first meet Rupert Broadsheet and find out about his past jobs and job titles. Task students to work in pairs to use a dictionary or AI to understand Rupert's past roles. What do these roles infer about Rupert's character?
3. What do the contrasting characterisations of Verity and her father on pp.27-8 suggest about their personalities and what is important to them?
4. On pp.34 and 35, when we first learn that Runt is missing, the words 'Strange Things' are capitalised. Why do students think the author chose to capitalise these two words?
5. Read the description of Sergeant Duncan Bayleaf on p.40. In pairs, task students to use a photocopy of the page to highlight the words and phrases that help to characterise Bayleaf as lazy and incompetent.
6. The author often uses puns and the idea of 'playing on words' to communicate meaning. Explore the *Speculator* newspaper headings on p.44 to unpack how this is accomplished. Look at synonyms for key words, rhyming words and clever puns.
7. Bryan introduces Annie and the reader to 'dinkumberries' on p.63. Depending on students' cultural heritage, they may or may not understand the Australian idiomatic phrase 'fair dinkum'. Unpack the meaning of this phrase, then lead students to infer why the author chose to call these berries 'dinkumberries'.
8. As a key antagonist in the original *Runt* novel, Fergus Fink undergoes a change in this novel. As a class, read the interaction between Fink and Annie on pp.70-4. What hints does the author provide that Fink is not quite as bad as previously thought?
9. On p.81, Max states he is trying to be 'surreptitious'. Challenge students to define this word and generate three synonyms.
10. Discuss why the author included the stories about famous dognapping incidents on pp.99-107. What do these stories prompt the reader to understand about Annie and Runt?
11. At this stage of their learning, students may or may not understand the concept of symbols in literature. On p.113, Fink states "I thought you were



the one who fixed things'. Annie touches her hips, which her tool belt once encircled". Prompt students to reflect that tools are used to fix things, so Annie's belt might represent her ability to fix things. On pp.123-4 she decides to put the toolbelt on. Does she 'fix' Little Annie's ability to complete the agility course?

12. Continuing the symbolic function of Annie's belt, on p.156 the author reflects "She doesn't know how to begin fixing the problem. It's not as straightforward as repairing a loose screw or a broken fence". Prompt students to connect with this experience by reflecting on a time when they felt they could not 'fix' a problem.

13. On p.177 Cha Cha says "I never liked boxes". What do students think he means by this? What does it mean if you are put in a box? Why might it not be helpful?

14. On p.182, Cha Cha asks Annie "What is your truth? What is your dance?" What do students think he means by this? Why might finding 'her truth' help Annie to dance?

15. When Annie is learning to dance "dread spreads through her body". Unpack how this phrase works in terms of personification, and support students to create similar personified phrases about an emotion spreading through their body.

16. A further symbol is explored in the text on pp.215-7 where Annie touches a key in her toolbelt. What does this key 'unlock' for Annie and Little Annie?

17. On p.242, Susie reminds Annie of one of Susie's sayings: "...you've got to put your insides on the outside". What do students think this means? How might this be a message for the whole novel?

18. On pp.285-8, Annie and Little Annie perform their dance of truth, love and joy. In pairs, ask students to explain what happens in the dance, and then what further story the dance narrates.

19. What do we learn about the importance of dance throughout the novel and its connection to the theme of truth? How do the different characters' dances represent their emotions, identities and relationships?



20. In the chapter titled 'Invisible Man', from p.291 onwards, Bonzer Bill's backstory, and Runt's origin story, are both revealed. What do students think about this part of the novel? What do they now understand about Runt?

21. Towards the end of the novel, Earl Robert-Barren's backstory is revealed, as is his relationship with Runt. Task students to explain how Earl's character changes throughout this experience. Create a table with the column headings 'Events' and 'How Earl Responds'. For each small event listed over the chapters, enter it into the first column, then prompt students to reflect how the Earl responds. Read vertically down the 'How Earl Responds' column to understand his character development.

22. On p.349, the narrator states "once again, her spirited friend Runt has taught them how to be better people". Ask students how Runt has prompted the town to be 'better people'. What lessons does Runt help them to learn?

23. On p.351, Fergus Fink admits that he could have left his jail cell ages ago, however he stayed to reflect. How has his character changed throughout the novel? How does his choice to stay reflect this change?

24. On p.362, the author compares trust to a 'house of cards'. Discuss what this simile means. Re-read pp.364-7, where Mayor Barry Casserole reveals what he has been doing. How do his actions undermine the people of Upson Downs' trust in him as the mayor, and also the rule of law? Why are they 'a house of cards'?

25. Earl reflects on his life learnings and how he has changed on p.370. What does Earl now understand is one of the most important things in life?

26. Further revelations occur on pp.374-7 when Verity reveals the truth about her actions and those of her father. Why do students think that Verity's revelations about her own behaviour might be more shocking than those of her father?

27. What does the story teach us about the idea of 'second chances'?

28. In the final pages of the book, a literal (and figurative) 'red herring' falls out of the sky. Explain to students how a 'red herring' functions in the story and support them to understand how and why this twist is a funny inclusion in the final pages of the story.



**Creating texts** (Year 5: AC9E5LY06, AC9E5LY07; Year 6: AC9E6LY06, AC9E6LY07; Year 7: AC9E7LY06, AC9E7LY07)

1. Create a newspaper article about the dognapping. Explore some of the previous newspaper heading puns in the novel, then support students to create their own. Explain that a newspaper article needs to have an attention-grabbing first paragraph, then explain what happened, to who, when and where. The final paragraph could be a reflection or commentary on why the event occurred.
2. As a class, watch some examples of commentary from horse racing and soccer. Then, watch a dog agility commentary (e.g. Crufts). What is similar and different about these forms of commentary? How do the commentators add excitement and interest? Choose a suitable short clip of a dog agility show, which students have not already watched, and play it without sound a few times. In pairs, students can practise commentating the clip, modulating their voice at certain points to build excitement.
3. On p.254, we learn that Basil Peppercorn, famous dog show commentator, was too scared to come to Australia. Challenge students to make an accurate (but also humorous) list of all the reasons why tourists may not want to come to Australia. If they have time, they can research deadly animals and plants from Australia to support the creation of their list.
4. Slam poetry is a form of spoken word poetry that aims to tell personal truth to a live audience. Watch some examples of slam poetry (search for the Out Loud poetry competition videos on YouTube as a good place to start). Support students to brainstorm ideas for a slam poem that ‘puts your insides on the outside’. If they are stuck, challenge them to think about difficult situations they have been through at home or at school. What happened? How did they respond? What did they learn? Use these questions as a rough structure for the poems. Perform live, in class, or record the poems.
5. The story of Frou Frou is a great example of a ‘story within a story’. There are also numerous backstories in the novel. Ask students to pick a supporting character from the novel who is not mentioned very often and write a backstory about them. The story should outline their origins (where they came from), a key event that shaped them, and then how they arrived in Upson Downs.
6. Max creates a YouTube tribute movie for Bonzer Bill. Ask students to generate a list of people who inspire them; they might be friends, family, people



in their community, or even famous sports players. Ask students to list their chosen person's life story, then explain why they are inspirational. Students should use this information to create a video clip about their chosen person. Depending on their age and ability, students could either sequence images with a voice over, conduct a live interview or use images and prompting to get an AI platform to generate a video.

**Phonic and word knowledge** (Year 5: AC9E5LY08, AC9E5LY09, AC9E5LY10; Year 6: AC9E6LY08, AC9E6LY09; Year 7: AC9E7LY08)

1. Many of the characters' names in the story hint at their personality or behaviours. For example, the name 'Verity' comes from the Latin word *veritas*, meaning truth. Ultimately, it is her destiny to tell the truth. In groups, ask students to list as many first name and surnames as they can find in the novel. Students should create a table to record the names, with the column headings 'Firstname', 'Firstname meaning', 'Surname', 'Surname meaning', and finally 'How does the name connect to the character?'. Students should use an online dictionary to find the word meanings, then infer how they connect to the character.

2. Many places and people in the book are based on puns or plays on words. For example, Upson Downs, the location for the novel, sounds like the phrase 'ups and downs', which refers to the fact that life is often full of good times and bad times. Can students find other examples of puns in the novel, and link them to sayings or special meanings?

3. Depending on your school's approach to spelling, link learning about morphology to the novel by focusing on specific prefixes or suffixes that fit into your scope and sequence. Challenge students to go on a prefix or suffix hunt in a chapter of your choice.

4. If students have already completed the activities on alliteration in the Literature section of these notes, provide further practice by asking them to alliterate vocabulary based on an unused letter (e.g. M and beyond).





## LANGUAGE

**Text structure and organisation** (Year 5: AC9E5LA03, AC9E5LA04; Year 6: AC9E6LA03, AC9E6LA04; Year 7: AC9E7LA03, AC9E7LA04)

1. The author uses chapter names as a device to preface what is going to happen in the chapter, but also as a way of including amusing puns. Depending on students' background knowledge, cultural context and how widely read they are, they may or may not pick up on these puns. Start by asking pairs of students to browse through the chapter titles and see if any titles sound like a word or saying they know. If they don't, ask them to use an AI tool of their choice to explain how the following chapters might be a play on words: 'Smooth Sailing on the Straight and Narrow', 'Pinboards and Needles', 'The Zip-Line Crash-Tackle Stakeout-Takeout' and 'Bigfoot'. Once students understand how to complete the task, challenge them to find five more chapter headings and explain a) the link between the heading and the events in the chapter, and b) the play on words, if there is one.
2. Each chapter either starts in a new location or with new action, and many of the chapters are of a similar length. Ask students if they can explain what the 'rules' for starting a new chapter might be (try to elicit either a change in setting, or plot development). Students should write down clear instructions or 'rules' to follow for a new author so that they can understand how and why to start a new chapter.
3. Depending on their age and experience, students may not know what a 'flashback' is in literature. If they are not sure, explain that a flashback is a literary device where the author goes back in time to tell a story that helps reveal information about a character or key event. Ask students to identify the flashbacks in the novel. For each flashback, explain what triggers it (e.g. what event or character), what the flashback reveals and how it helps to reveal the storyline.
4. A linear plot is one where the story is told in chronological order and has a clear beginning, middle and end. Ask students if they think that *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* has a linear plot. Why, or why not? Ask students to identify the sections of the novel that are non-linear (e.g. that jump back in time, tell the story from a different perspective or that include a 'side story', which can be used to illustrate characters or events. Why do they think that the author chose a non-linear plot for this novel? How and why is it effective in terms of keeping the reader engaged and involved in the novel?



**Language for expressing and developing ideas** (Year 5: AC9E5LA05, AC9E5LA06, AC9E5LA07, AC9E5LA08, AC9E5LA09; Year 6: AC9E6LA05, AC9E6LA06, AC9E6LA07, AC9E6LA08, AC9E6LA09; Year 7: AC9E7LA05, AC9E7LA06, AC9E7LA07, AC9E7LA08, AC9E7LA09)

1. Review the three types of sentences with students (simple, compound and complex) and ask them to generate an example of each that could describe the character of Annie Shearer. Explain that authors often mix the types of sentences they use to build interest, build tension and adjust pace (how quickly it feels like events are happening in the novel). Ask students to re-read the chapter 'The Moment of Truth' where Annie and Little Annie are going to perform their dance. What types of sentences does the author use at the beginning of this chapter (short, simple sentences)? Why are simple sentences effective here? Support students to understand that this is the beginning of the climax of the novel and, as such, sentences should be fast paced. Prompt them to find other key parts of the novel and analyse the types of sentences used, linking these to the plot.

2. Page 40 contains an excellent description of Sergeant Duncan Bayleaf. Photocopy the description and prompt students to find all the nouns in the passage. Next, look at the adjectives that come before the noun, and post-modifiers (often adjectival phrases) that come after the noun and help form a noun group. Identify the noun groups the author has used to build description. Prompt students to write their own character description of another character in the novel, using similar, amusing, noun groups.

3. The chapter 'Breaking' contains some great action sequences that could be studied for verb groups. As a class, identify key action verbs that describe either Verity's or Max's actions. What other information comes before or after the verb to add more information? Explain that adverbial phrases give the reader more information about where, when, why, how and in what manner. Task students to find at least 3 examples of verb groups in the chapter.

4. The novel is full of idiomatic Australian references and expressions. Find examples of these and create a word wall to show each expression and its meaning.

5. On p.79, the names of Grubb's Grub and Curl Up and Dye are mentioned. These are clever plays on words or puns. As a class, list the types of business you might expect to see in a small town (e.g. hardware store, café, post office, bank, grocers, etc). Challenge students to create their own 'pun' names for the stores.



## ENGLISH ASSESSMENT IDEAS:

- If students have read both novels, carry out a character study of key antagonists in both novels. Characters such as Fergus Fink and Earl Robert-Barren from the original *Runt* undergo changes in *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping* that involve their characters showing vulnerability and contrition. Depending on the age of students, either task them to compare and contrast one of these characters using a Venn diagram (younger students) or (for older students) scaffold them to write a paragraph (using two quotations) that analyses character development. For example, they might select a quote from the original novel that demonstrates Fink's lack of care and sympathy (explaining how and why the quote shows this), then select another quote from the second novel that demonstrates the change (again, with the same analysis).
- Select a key passage from the novel (such as where Annie begins to find her 'magic' in dance). Ask students to underline and annotate examples of literary devices in the passage that help to build description and connect the audience to Annie's experiences. Younger students might identify and name devices such as similes, metaphors, alliteration and imagery, and older students might explain how these literacy devices work to add description and help the reader to understand what Annie is thinking and feeling at this moment.
- Ask students to identify and explain key stages of the plot of *Runt and the Diabolical Dognapping*. They might do this by creating and annotating a plot graph, or developing their own visual version of the plot that contains sentences describing stages such as the complication (Runt goes missing), rising tension (clues are uncovered and revealed) or the climax (Annie and Little Annie perform their dance then Runt appears on stage being carried by a bedraggled old man).





# ADDITIONAL LEARNING AREAS:

## HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES – YEARS 5, 6 & 7

**Knowledge and Understanding (Geography)** (Year 5: AC9HS5K04, AC9HS5K05, AC9HS5K07; Year 7: AC9HG7K05, AC9HG7K06, AC9HG7K07 (n.b. there are no relevant Year 6 content descriptors in this section))

1. In comparison to the original novel, the town of Upson Downs is thriving in the sequel. As a class, list the facilities and services that students think a town might need to survive. What else makes a place ‘liveable’? How might the people who live in a place help to shape the culture and environment of it?
2. Older students could research global ‘liveability’ scores such as those on the **Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)** website. The factors used to score the ‘liveability’ of a place include stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure. What else do students think should be scored when considering the liveability of a place?
3. Many towns in Australia suffer economically and socially when they are in drought or they lose a regular water supply. When Upson Downs was in drought in the first novel, the town was struggling; however, after the water supply was returned, the town began to thrive again (as shown in this novel). Identify the importance of water supply to key Australian towns along the Murray–Darling River system (or a more state-based, local river system). How does water supply determine the economic and social health of a town?
4. The community of Upson Downs is brought together by the hosting of the Tournament of Champions, which functions as a civic goal. However, the disappearance of Runt and the behaviour of key figures in the town begins to spread resentment and disaffection. Identify and explain how a civic goal might bring a community together, but also how it might split a community apart if some people don’t support it.

**Skills** (Year 5: AC9HS5S01 through to AC9HS5S07; Year 6: AC9HS6S01 through to AC9HS6S07; Year 7: AC9HS7S01 through to AC9HS7S06)

1. Develop a question to investigate related to the liveability of either a local town or anywhere in Australia that students are studying (e.g. ‘What is the effect on the closure of the local copper mine on the town of ...’ Or ‘How has the introduction of a new hospital helped the community of ...’).



2. Investigate and compare data sets on the liveability of two key capitals or major towns in Australia. Write an analysis explaining what the data shows across the key liveability markers (stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure).

3. Explore the local liveability index for your nearest town or capital city and compare it to at least one previous liveability data set (e.g. the year before, or 5 or 10 years before). What conclusions can be drawn about key trends over time? Is your local town becoming more or less liveable? What factors might be contributing to this change?

### HASS ASSESSMENT IDEAS:

- Develop a liveability score for the town of Upson Downs in the key areas studied (stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education and infrastructure). For each score, explain why the score has been given based on evidence from the novel. Ask students to conclude if they would like to live in Upson Downs themselves, based on this liveability score.
- Draw a map of the town of Upson Downs, labelling key geographical and urban features.
- Use the liveability index to score a nearby suburb or town that does not have an existing index. Use the same scoring system as that used globally. For each score, explain why that score was given.

### HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION – YEARS 5-6 & 7-8

**Personal, social and community health** (Years 5-6: AC9HP6PO1, AC9HP6P04, AC9HP6P05, AC9HP6P06; Years 7-8: AC9HP8PO1, AC9HP8P04, AC9HP8P05, AC9HP8P06)

1. Runt helped to shape Annie's positive self-identity as someone who 'fixes' things. When he disappears, he leaves a 'Runt shaped hole' in her life. How does Annie try to learn to reshape her identity without Runt? What does she learn about who she is and how she connects with others?

2. Much of the novel is about 'big feelings' and processing these. Identify the strategies that Annie and those around her use to recognise and process their emotions. What tips could students give the characters to help them process their emotions?



3. One of the key characters in the novel is Bonzer Bill, who highlights the plight of homeless people. Ask students to research levels of homelessness in their local town or city. What are some of the causes of homelessness? What strategies are local towns trying to implement that promote diversity in their community, especially in terms of support and inclusion for homeless individuals?

4. Annie begins to understand herself more when she faces her fear of dancing and learns to express her emotions through dance. List the emotions that Annie experiences in the novel, identify her emotional responses and suggest how she might be able to manage these more effectively.

## HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT IDEAS:

- Create a poster or infographic on handling ‘big feelings’. What are ‘big feelings’? What effects might they have on a person’s attitudes and behaviours? What tips could be provided to manage these emotions?
- Using the idea of homelessness as a starting point, list other societal groups who may experience discrimination or disaffection in local communities. What actions can local communities take to value diversity and promote inclusion? Ask students to identify at least one excluded group of people, then list 2-4 actions that could be taken to make this group feel more included.

## DANCE – YEARS 5-6 & 7-8

**Exploring and responding, Developing practices and skills, Creating and making, and Presenting and performing** (Years 5-6: AC9ADA6E01, AC9ADA6D01, AC9ADA6C01, AC9ADA6P01; Years 7-8: AC9ADA8E01, AC9ADA8D01, AC9ADA8C01, AC9ADA8P01)

1. Read the sequence that describes Annie and Little Annie’s dance in the final competition, identifying key ideas, perspectives and meaning in the dance description. Then view a video of a dog dancing freestyle routine (such as those for ‘Heelwork to Music – Freestyle’ on the [Crufts website](#)) to also analyse key ideas, perspectives and meaning. How was Annie’s dance similar or different to the video viewed?

2. While it would be difficult for students to dance with a real-life dog, it might be possible for students to pair up and for one to take a human role and one to



take a 'dog' role. What simple dance steps, related to time, space, dynamics and relationships, could be developed that would be achievable for a dog and a human?

3. Choreograph a simple dance that could be completed by a human and a dog. Prompt students to start by choosing an emotion or story that they would like to tell by the dance. Select appropriate music, then choreograph the steps. Challenge students to think about the dynamics between human and dog. What moves could be mirrored, or how could the dog and human interact to add meaning?

4. View a different 'Heelwork to Music – Freestyle' human / dog dance and adapt it into a performance that could be done by two humans.

### **DANCE ASSESSMENT IDEAS:**

- Develop a dance that tells a story about a personal journey (such as the dance that Annie tells when she talks about her loss and sadness).
- Develop a partner dance that is based on the concept of the partnership between a human and an animal (or spirit). The dance should be based on an emotion and express the development of that emotion.





# ABOUT CRAIG SILVEY

Craig Silvey is an author and screenwriter from Fremantle, Western Australia. His critically acclaimed debut novel, *Rhubarb*, was published in 2004. His bestselling novel, *Jasper Jones*, was released in 2009 and is considered a modern Australian classic. Published in over a dozen territories, *Jasper Jones* has won plaudits in three continents, including an International Dublin Literary Award shortlisting, a Michael J. Printz Award Honor, and a Miles Franklin Literary Award shortlisting. *Jasper Jones* was the Australian Book Industry Awards Book of the Year for 2010. Craig's third novel *Honeybee* was published in 2019 and won Best Fiction for the Indie Book Awards 2021 and Dymocks Book of the Year 2020. His much-loved family favourite *Runt* was published in 2022 and has won multiple awards including Dymocks Book of the Year for Younger Readers 2022, Best Children's Book and Book of the Year at the Indie Book Awards 2023, Book of the Year: Younger Readers at the CBCA Awards 2023, Children's Book of the Year at the BookPeople Book of the Year Awards 2023, and Book of the Year for Younger Children at the Australian Book Industry Awards 2023. *Runt* was adapted into a critically and commercially successful film in 2024.

# ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Sophie Honeybourne is a teacher and educational writer with a passion for children's literature. After studying English Literature at university in the UK, dabbling in a diverse series of jobs and engaging in some globe-trotting, she finally settled upon a career in teaching, completing a Master of Teaching at Sydney University. She held teaching and leadership positions at schools across Sydney before moving to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, where she has worked as a Primary teacher and, more recently, as a Secondary school teacher.

Sophie has written numerous educational literature units for the Primary English Teaching Association of Australia, as well as producing materials for Educational Services Australia and the NSW School Magazine.

In her spare time Sophie loves to spend time with her two children and long-suffering husband, to philosophise with her book club, sail, ocean swim, cook, garden and sleep.



# CORRESPONDING LITERATURE

- *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson
- *Journey* by Aaron Becker
- *Pig the Pug, Busting* and other picture books by Aaron Blabey

## ONLINE LINKS IN FULL (in order of appearance in the notes)

- *Runt* the movie official trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7i49WaZC40>
- Crufts website: <https://www.crufts.org.uk/>
- Video of Crufts 2025 Agility Final: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Khy67enIFxE>
- Video of the Crufts Heelwork to Music – Freestyle competition:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjpX-jrcz9s>
- Trailer for *Harold and the Purple Crayon* movie:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WojIv-PVYm8>
- Trailer for the picture book *Journey*, by Aaron Becker:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxUs41jB4Ts>
- Aaron Blabey author website: <https://www.aaronblabey.com/>
- Canva website: [www.canva.com](https://www.canva.com)

