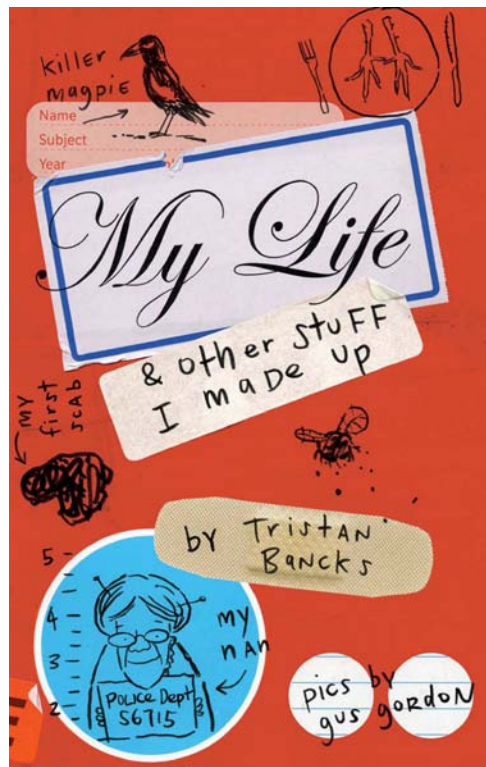


MY LIFE AND OTHER STUFF I MADE UP

By Tristan Bancks
Illustrated by Gus Gordon



TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

Written by author Tristan Bancks, this kit is a supplemental print resource with simple, step-by-step lesson plans for both group and individual work, which teachers can implement easily based on the book.

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INTRODUCTION

My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up is a collection of short stories written by Australian children's author Tristan Bancks and illustrated by Gus Gordon. Many of the stories are based on experiences from Tristan's life, while some are pure fiction.

Tristan brainstormed ideas for a number of the stories with children at schools and literature festivals in Brisbane and Sydney. He would supply a scenario and together they would come up with dozens of ideas. Tristan plans to write the second book in the series entirely in collaboration with children, sparking their imaginations and giving them an opportunity to see their own ideas in a published book with acknowledgement for their contribution.

The activities in these teaching notes are mainly creative writing exercises to encourage students to tell their own stories and mash them with fiction, just like Tom Weekly does in the book.

PRE-READING BACKGROUND NOTES

About the author

Tristan Bancks tells stories for the page and screen. He has a background as an actor and television presenter in Australia and the UK. His short films as writer and director have won a number of awards and have screened widely in international festivals and on TV. Tristan has written several books for kids and teens, including, of course, *My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up* (Random House) and the brand new *Galactic Adventures: First Kids in Space* (UQP, June 2011). He is also the author of the *Mac Slater*, *Coolhunter* books, released in Australia and the US, and the illustrated *Nit Boy* (www.nitboy.com) books, about everybody's favourite mini-beasts. *Nit Boy* is currently being developed for television. Tristan's young adult novel *it's yr life* was co-written via email between Byron Bay and L.A. with actress / author Tempamy Deckert. Tristan is saving for his ticket to space. He loves telling inspiring, fast-moving stories for young people.

Visit Tristan at: www.tristanbancks.com

About the illustrator

Gus Gordon is an author and illustrator. He writes books about motorbike riding stunt chickens and dogs that live in trees. Gus lives with his wife and three kids on the Northern beaches of Sydney where he has written and illustrated over 60 books for children. His most recent book, *Wendy*, was a 2010 Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book in the picture book category. He has visited over 300 hundred schools around Australia and loves speaking to kids about illustration, character design and the desire to control a wiggly line.

Visit Gus at: www.gusgordon.com

INSPIRATION FOR THE BOOK

Author note From Tristan Bancks

All stories are part fact and part fiction. Even history is part fact and part fiction.

Many of the stories in *My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up* sprang from things that have happened to me. I have then embellished those stories to make for a series of (hopefully) funny and surprising tales.

I grew up reading Paul Jennings books like *Unreal*, *Unbelievable* and *Quirky Tails*. I loved these books. Nobody else, at the time, was writing surprising, funny, odd tales for children quite like these. I have used my love of those stories to motivate the writing of my own stories.

As a kid I always jotted my ideas down in exercise books and notebooks. I didn't know what I would do with them but I just had to get them down. I encourage all kids to get their ideas down – ideas for stories, movies, inventions, video games, jokes, cartoon characters and just general thoughts on life. You never know when they might come in handy.

This book looks and feels a bit like one of my notepads as a kid, with pictures and weird, funny, gross stories and things that would make me laugh. A book like this is a space for a child to make their own, to come back to, and to feel safe to explore. I encourage children and young people, as soon as they can write, to have a book like this where they can be bold and adventurous without needing to be 'right' or having to prove anything to anybody.

Illustrator note From Gus Gordon

Tom Weekly reminded me very much of my 12-year-old self. It wasn't too difficult a task to channel the random thoughts of that younger, fantastically naïve, enthusiastic, imaginative boy as it is pretty much how I am today. I still, like Tom, daydream about incredible situations and still have the propensity to think in a random, fractured manner, jumping from thought to thought with no real segue as if I am picking my thoughts out of a hat. Drawing for me was the most efficient way of communicating these unorganised ideas. Off-kilter illustrations and pointless list writing were a speciality of mine. I drew in every class, in every margin on everything and anything I had in front of me. This kind of fervour – the need to express myself through drawing – was how I approached the illustrations, or more specifically, how I saw Tom drawing them – a natural extension of his rambling imagination.

The subjects (awkward encounters, gross bodily functions, eating, girls) were also all too familiar to me. Whether it was a panicked list about an operation, escaping false teeth or a drawing of a floating poo, it all felt disturbingly normal. Obviously it was the same for Tom!

ACTIVITIES ON EACH STORY IN THE BOOK

The Dog Kisser

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I used to run into a dog kisser whenever I walked my dog to the beach. I was totally grossed out at the thought of having a dog lick me. I wrote this story thinking that others would relate to this and understand. They don't. My research in the field suggests that at least 65% of any given group of people are dog kissers. Unlike Tom Weekly, I have not crossed the line. I am still firmly in the un-Dog Kisser camp. Call me crazy.'



Activity

a) Spend five minutes freewriting a list of memories from your childhood. They can be significant or mundane events. The goal is to write as many memories as possible in five minutes rather than just come up with your 'best' memory. See BLM 1 attached.

Once you have a list, some students should read out their work.

b) Each choose one of your memories from the exercise above and, in a five-minute freewrite, tell that story in greater detail. But, this time, add one detail that isn't true. Tell us the true story but just add something false. When the work is read out, see if other students can pick which of the details you made up.

This exercise encourages students to use their own experience in their stories but to not be afraid to meld those experiences with fiction. First-hand experience gives detail and authenticity to a fictionalised story.

Hot Dog Eat

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I heard about the annual Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Competition held at Coney Island, New York, and I was fascinated by the concept of "professional eating". I am an enormous fan of Stephen King's fantastic story *The Body*, made into the film *Stand By Me*. In that story there is an unforgettable "pie-eat" scene. This is my homage to it.'

Activity

Food, glorious food. What is your favourite or least favourite food? Tell a story about it. The story can celebrate the beauty of food or, like *Hot Dog Eat*, it can be a little bit gross. See BLM 2 attached.

Resources

Google 'Nathan's Hot Dog Eat' and click on a video of the famous Dog Eat that inspired the story.

Teleporter

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'This story seemed to almost write itself. It came very easily to me. I spent a lot of time with my cousins as a child playing make-believe and I remember a time between primary and high school when I realised that it no longer seemed okay to pretend like this anymore. I was devastated, so I continued to play by pursuing acting and filmmaking and writing throughout high school and into adult life. I am still playing.'

'I also have strong memories of indoor ball games at home that often required superglue at some point.'

Activity

If you could invent an amazing machine like a teleporter, what would it be? Draw your machine.

Now see if you can tell a story about your machine.

If you could choose anyone in your class to play the characters in your story, who would you choose? Can you put together a short skit based on your story using items around the classroom for props?



My Nan's Tougher

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I have no idea where this story sprang from. One of those ideas that struck me while walking down the street or when I was trying to sleep, I imagine. I threw the scenario at a group of kids during a school visit and we had lots of fun brainstorming it and I went away and wrote the story. I subsequently had fun brainstorming the story with lots of other school groups and their ideas helped shape the story and make it much funnier.'

Activity

Brainstorm!

As a class, see if you can brainstorm items that two grandmothers might use if they were involved in a back-alley brawl. Write all of the ideas up on the board. Now, can you write your own *My Nan's Tougher* story, using the items that have been written on the board?

Toe

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I remember my sister telling me that I had to eat Vegemite off her toe or she would tell my mother about something bad that I had done. She denies it but I'm sure that it happened. I like to think that I refused. This story is my way of working through the long-term scarring inflicted by this dark episode in my childhood. By the way, I didn't really bite her toe off. And the dog didn't eat it.'

Activity

Has anything funny ever happened between you and your brothers or sisters? If you don't have any, perhaps you could choose something that happened with a friend or a cousin. Write that story down. Just take five minutes and, remember, don't stop writing. Just get it down.

When you're finished, the class can read out some of the stories.

Now, can you look at the funny story and see how you could make it even funnier? How could the funny thing that happened be even more hilarious, crazy or ridiculous? Now rewrite the story with your new, crazy ideas, pushing the story as far as it can go. Which version of the story do you like best?

Scab

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I really did have my appendix removed in order to avoid detention with a member of staff at my primary school. I pretended to be sick and was sent to hospital with acute appendicitis and they removed my appendix. I can wholeheartedly recommend that all children attend detention if requested in order to avoid having a body part removed.'

Activity

Stories based on your own life are a powerful 'way in' to storytelling and a great place to look for inspiration. The best way to inspire and nurture young writers is to have them write in a book or journal every single day, even if it is just for five minutes. The only rule should be that their pen or pencil does not stop moving across the page for the entire five minutes. They will discover their own unique voice and overcome any fear of putting words onto the page. There is no right or wrong in this kind of book and ideas are more important than neat writing and perfect spelling. All students should have a safe place to share their stories, just like Tom Weekly. Start today!

Swoop

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'All Australians understand magpie fear. I wrote this story a few years ago to vent my frustration with the magpies living near my house. When I came to write the book I searched for the story but could not find it. So I rewrote the story from



memory. I set myself the simple challenge of getting Tom to the bus stop without being swooped or humiliated. Then I threw everything I could at him to stop him getting there.'

Activity

Picture search: One of the tools that Tristan uses in his writing is to gather pictures that feel like the story he is creating. Can you use magazines, newspapers and sites like Google Images and Flickr to gather pictures that feel like the story, *Swoop*?

Or can you write your own story about a dangerous animal and gather together pictures for inspiration that might help you to write that story?

Tooth Job

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: '*Tooth Job* was inspired by a story told to me by an old friend when we were discussing the worst jobs that we had ever had.'

Activity

What do you think would be the worst job in the whole world? Is it grubby or embarrassing or dangerous? As a class you could brainstorm a big list of 'Worst Jobs' and then everyone could choose one of the jobs and write 'A day in the life of a ...'

In the TV series *Dirty Jobs* they feature a worm dung farmer, a snake wrangler and an owl vomit collector.

Resources

A list of episodes from the TV series *Dirty Jobs*:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Dirty_Jobs_episodes

Hover Everything

The story behind the story

Tristan Bancks: 'I once woke to find everything in my house hovering. No, I didn't really. This story springs from the many school visits that I have done as an author. When brainstorming invention ideas with students for a new book in my *Mac Slater* series, at least one third of all invention ideas were hover-somethings. I began to wonder what it might be like to wake and find that *everything* hovered. Would it be as cool as it sounds? Or might that dream become a nightmare? I was also inspired by the book, *Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs*, which I was reading to my children at the time.'

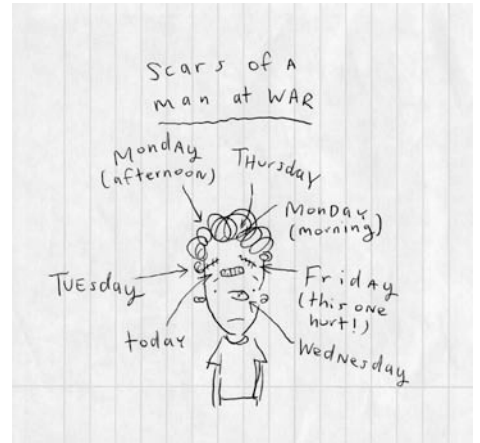
Activity

Storyboard: Filmmakers use storyboards to plot out scenes. Create a storyboard or comic strip for *Hover Everything*, showing everything that happens in the story.

See BLM 3 attached.

FREEWRITING EXERCISE

Spend five minutes freewriting a list of memories from your childhood. They can be significant or mundane events. The goal is to write as many memories as possible in five minutes rather than just come up with your 'best' memory.



1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____



Food, glorious food!

What is your favourite or least favourite food? Write a story about it. The story can celebrate the beauty of food or, like *Hot Dog Eat*, it can be a little bit gross.

oink!



Storyboard

Filmmakers use storyboards to plot out scenes. Create a storyboard or comic strip for the story *Hover Everything*, showing what happens in the story.
