

## AT MY DOOR

Deb Fitzpatrick

ISBN (PB): 9781925162707

Themes: childhood, family, mystery, friendship

Year level: Y3–6

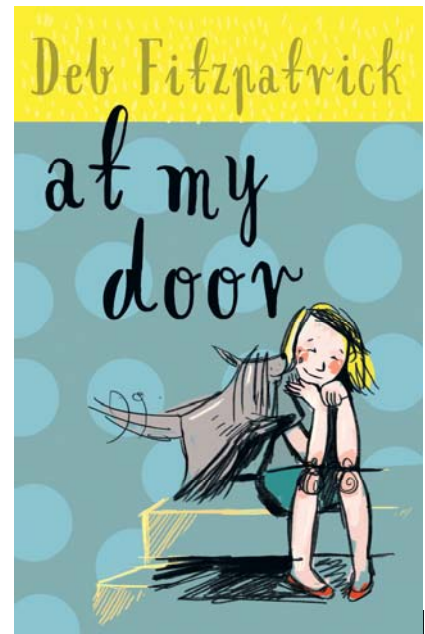
### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Deliveries usually come in a van. Deliveries are often heavy boxes or oddly shaped padded bags. Deliveries do not come late on a school night. They don't come in a speeding car. And they don't cry.*

When Poppy Campbell's dad opens the front door to find a small, very distressed child clinging to a green blanket, the family try their hardest to do the right thing. They make the little girl comfortable, call the police, and look after her while the authorities search for her family. Why has this happened? The cops are called in, nappies bought, old toys dug out, and friendships made.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deb Fitzpatrick lives and works in Fremantle as a freelance editor and writer. Deb wrote *90 packets of instant noodles* while living in a shack in the cloud forest of Costa Rica, and *Have you seen Ally Queen?* while backpacking through South America. She wrote *The Amazing Spencer Gray* at a cafe in South Fremantle; it will soon be published in the US. In 2014 Deb's book about the south-western surf coast of WA, *The Break*, was published. Deb has a Master of Arts (Creative Writing) from UWA and occasionally teaches professional writing and editing at Curtin University.



### STUDY NOTES

#### LITERACY: COMPREHENDING TEXTS THROUGH LISTENING, READING AND VIEWING

##### Predicting

1. Explore the front cover as a class – what images has illustrator Tracey Gibbs used? What clues does she provide about the story? What hints do we get from the title?
2. Have students read the blurb aloud to a partner. Does it make them want to read the story? Why/why not?
3. Based on the exercises above, create a class prediction chart detailing what students think will happen. Keep this chart to look over after reading the text – how many predictions were true/false?

##### Reading plan

*At My Door* can be used for several different sessions including:

- Modelled reading as a whole class
- Guided reading in small groups
- Shared reading in student pairs
- Independent reading

##### Comprehension strategies to practise for Y3–6

- Sounding out words aloud (not only in your head)
- Phonics (blending and segmenting)
- Slowing reading rate for comprehension
- Predicting words by recognising familiar letter patterns
- Identifying key ideas/themes
- Inferring

- Drawing conclusions

## Discussion questions

The following may be used as discussion prompts while reading, or adapted for written comprehension (have students write three-sentence answers).

4. *Deliveries are often heavy boxes (Mum's wine), cardboard envelopes (books – sometimes for us), or oddly shaped padded bags (filters for Dad's wastewater system).* (p. 5)
  - a. Do any deliveries come to your house? What are they?
  - b. Have you ever personally received a delivery? What was it? Tell a partner.
5. How is the character Poppy introduced in the opening chapters? How would you describe her personality? Use two adjectives.
6. How is the character Harry introduced in the opening chapters? How would you describe his personality? Use two adjectives.
7. *I do the special knock on the wall I share with Harry. It means I want him to buzz me. Because, of course, I can't buzz him.* (p. 10)
  - a. How would you describe the relationship between Poppy and Harry?
  - b. Do you have an older brother or sister? How would you describe your relationship with them? Is it similar to Harry and Poppy's? In what ways?
8. *A little kid, bawling its eyes out. Not a baby, but not a proper child, either. It has black wispy hair and looks like a chubby elf.* (p. 11)

How old do you think Mei might be?
9. *The policeman looks at the note again and reads it out loud, 'Please look after ... Hmmm, how do you pronounce this: M-E-I?' (p. 12)*

Using a basic names database such as <http://www.behindthename.com>, find out the following:

  - a. What is the origin of the name Mei? What does it mean?
  - b. What is the origin of your own name? What does it mean? Are there other ways to spell your name?
10. *Mei cries so hard it hurts to watch.* (p. 14)
  - a. How would you feel if you were Mei?
  - b. How would you feel if you were Poppy and a child suddenly appeared on your doorstep?
11. What is the Department of Family Services (p. 13)? What is their job?
12. *The policeman says, 'It might be completely random. Or, it might be that they've had their eye on you for a while – if it's been planned, that is.'* (p. 24)
  - a. Do you think that Mei's arrival was random or planned? Why? Discuss with a partner.
  - b. Why do you think someone would plan such a thing?
13. *'... sometimes families in trouble do desperate things,' the policewoman says. 'Maybe they felt that Mei was safer with another family.'* (p. 25)
  - a. Create a definition for the word 'desperate'.
  - b. What kinds of circumstances might make someone feel desperate?
  - c. Have you ever felt desperate before? What caused you to feel this way?
14. *'There could be financial difficulties,' the policeman says. 'Or a physical threat. Abuse, perhaps. Or some sort of criminal activity that put the child in danger.'* (p. 25)

Using an appropriate dictionary or internet dictionary, create definitions for the following:

  - a. financial difficulties
  - b. physical threat
  - c. abuse
  - d. criminal activity
15. *Pink Kitten. She was my absolute fave soft toy.* (p. 43) What was your favourite toy when you were little? Why did you like it best? Tell a partner.
16. *'I think I might see if little Mei would like some porridge. Porridge is always good when you're sad.'* (p. 53) What makes you feel better when you are sad? Do you have a special place you like to go? Or a friend, a family member, a pet or a toy that comforts you? Discuss with a partner.
17. *Mum flicks over to ABC1 just in time for the headlines. 'Off you go, kids, this isn't appropriate for you two,' she says. 'You know we don't like you watching the news. They only ever show the bad stuff.'* (p. 55)

As a class, discuss the following:

  - a. Do you agree that news programs 'only ever show the bad stuff'?
  - b. Do you think children should be allowed to watch the news? Why/why not?

- c. Do you think it is important for Australians to be informed about what is happening across their country? Across the rest of the world? Why?
- d. Create a definition for the term 'bias' – does bias impact the reliability of news broadcasts or the selection of the stories that go to air? In what ways?
18. 'We've *been so lucky – we've found a foster family. We're hoping it will be a very short stay.*' (p. 80)
  - a. Create a definition of the term 'foster family'.
  - b. Are there any students in your class who live with a foster family? Are there any students whose family hosts a foster-child or foster-children?
  - c. What do you think might be some of the positives of growing up as a foster-child? What do you think might be some of the challenges?
19. 'For whatever reason, Mei's mum was having trouble coping. She might have had depression, or some other health problem.' (p. 85)
  - a. Create a class definition of the term 'depression'.
  - b. What resources are available to help people who suffer from depression? Visit the youth section of the website *Beyond Blue*: <https://www.youthbeyondblue.com>
20. *Walking home with Pixie in time for dinner, I can see our house [...] And I realise: it looks like a happy house, the kind of place where Mei – or any kid – could be safe and happy. Maybe that's why Mei's mum chose it.* (p. 92)

In your opinion, what makes a house safe? And what makes a happy house?
21. *Goodnight, Mei, wherever you are.* (p. 92)

Where do you think Mei is? Do you think she has returned home with her mother? Do you think her mother has taken her to a new home? Do you think she is still in foster care? Discuss with a partner.

## **LITERACY: COMPOSING TEXTS THROUGH SPEAKING, WRITING AND CREATING**

### **Spelling: word observations (for older students)**

22. As children encounter new words while reading *At My Door*, have them complete a word observation sheet with the following prompts. This will later help them to memorise the correct spelling of new vocabulary to use in their own writing, such as: *because, delivery, definitely, policeman, stationery, permission, surprising, neighbourhood, abandoned, understand, protect* etc.
  - How many letters are in the word?
  - How many syllables?
  - Does the word contain any silent letters or double letters?
  - Is it plural or singular?
  - Does it contain any letter patterns?
  - How many vowels and consonants are there in the word?
  - Does it have a prefix or a suffix?
  - Does it have a base or root word?
23. Have students create a booklet containing the word observations they collect as they read *At My Door* for future reference.

### **Recount and sequencing activities (for younger students)**

24. Sequence pictures from *At My Door* in the correct order and write a sentence below each to describe what is happening.
25. Write a recount of the events in *At My Door*. Pay careful attention to simple punctuation (full stops and capital letters).

### **Character profiles**

26. Have students create character profiles based on a number of characteristics (name, age, I look like, I live, family members, hobbies, talents/skills). They should do this for Poppy, Harry, Mei, Mrs Campbell and Mr Campbell.
27. Using 'inference' invite them to add the following subheadings to their character profiles and attempt to fill them in:
  - aspirations / fears
  - likes / dislikes
  - strengths / weaknesses

## Narrative writing

28. Discuss the purpose of narrative writing – to engage the reader in an imaginative experience!
29. Invite students to plan and draft their own short story entitled 'At My Door' following the steps below.

Step 1: Have students create a brainstorm for a short story about a mystery package that appears on their doorstep.

Step 2: After selecting ideas from their brainstorm, invite students to use a narrative planning sheet with the following subheadings:

- characters – their name, age, physical description, likes, dislikes
- settings
- conflict/problems that will arise in the plot
- climax
- resolution

Step 3: Have students write a draft of their story and swap with a partner once complete. Partners should correct any spelling/grammatical errors and offer advice on improving the plot and making the story more engaging for the reader.

Step 4: Incorporating the feedback from their partner, have students draft the final version of their story and illustrate their work.

Step 5: Display students' stories around the classroom so that children can read one another's work during silent reading. You may even like to have students design a front cover for their story and bind it using coloured cardboard to create a book. Books can then be made available in a class reading corner or library.

## Grammatical elements to explore during short story writing:

- writing in the present tense (in the style of *At My Door*)
- descriptive language to create imagery – adjectives
- using a variety of exciting verbs to describe action
- connectives/conjunctions/joining words
- simple, compound and complex sentences (for more advanced writers)
- paragraph structure (for more advanced writers)
- figurative language

## Punctuation skills to model, practise and assess:

- capital letters
- full stops
- question marks
- speech marks (for more advanced writers)

## Dialogue

30. Create a class definition for the term 'dialogue'.
31. Below is a passage from *At My Door* (pp. 88–89) containing dialogue. The speech marks, however, have been removed from the text and need to be re-inserted.

*It's been three weeks now since Mei left. It's five o'clock. I'm doing my homework at the kitchen counter. Harry's outside, playing with Wall. Mum's staring into the fridge – she's been there so long it beeps at her to close the door.*

*Oh, for goodness sake, she says, shutting the fridge door and then reopening it. Whatever happened to giving someone time to think?*

*I finish writing my reflection about finger-knitting versus knitting with needles and slap my book shut. Mum, can I go over to the park for a bit?*

*She looks out the window. Sure, love. But be back in half an hour, okay? Apparently dinner will be soon, she says, turning back to the fridge.*

32. When children feel confident with the use of speech marks, invite them to incorporate dialogue into their own short stories.

## Past vs. present tense

33. At my door is written in the *present tense*, as if it is happening in the present (e.g. *The doorbell ding-dongs, waking me up. Pixie barks. I hear a rush of tyres, and then the front door bangs.*) Why might an author choose to write in present as opposed to past tense? What is the effect?
34. Write the correct past tense form under these sentences. Underline the words you have changed to create past tense (identifying the verb group). The first one has been done for you.
- I hear crying. At least I think I do.* (p. 7)  
*I heard crying. At least I thought I did.*
  - The policeman puts his mug down on the coffee table and says to the policewoman, 'I'll call Family Services now. They'll have to arrange a place for her to stay.'* (p. 20)
  - This time I wrap my stripy dressing-gown around me, and tie the belt tight to keep it close. I'm getting cold, spending this much time out of bed. As I creep out of my room I take a look at the clock: 11.30. Holy guacamole!* (p. 23)
  - I kneel down again and show Mei Pink Kitten. 'Meow, meow,' I say, and then purr as best as I can, but, really, we need Harry here for that because he can make that r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r noise brilliantly.* (p. 46)
35. Invite students to write their short story using the present tense (in the style of *At My Door*).

## Figurative language: simile

36. Figurative language is used to conjure imagery for the reader. One type of figurative language is the simile. A simile uses 'like' or 'as' to compare one thing with another, for example:
- I scurry back to my room like a spider to its web.* (p. 22)
  - He heads out, shoelaces flicking about like little vipers as he goes.* (p. 70)
- What is the effect of these similes? Invite students to practise creating their own similes. Encourage them to incorporate these into their narratives.

## Synonyms vs. antonyms

37. Create a definition for the term 'synonym'. Explain that synonyms can be a useful resource when attempting to make your writing more varied and interesting, as opposed to constructing repetitive or dull sentences.
38. What are some synonyms for the following words used in *At My Door*?
- worried* (e.g. concerned)
  - Mum says* (e.g. Mum asks)
  - happy* (e.g. delighted)
39. Choose five words from a chapter of *At My Door* and create a list of synonyms for them.
40. Create a definition for the term 'antonym'.
41. What are some antonyms for the following words used in *At My Door*?
- worried* (e.g. carefree)
  - the policewoman smiles* (e.g. the policewoman frowns)
  - happy* (e.g. distraught)
42. Choose five words from a chapter of *At my Door* and create a list of antonyms for them.

## Book review

43. Write a critical review of *At My Door* for your school newspaper.
- In your opinion, what were the strengths and the weaknesses of the book?
  - To whom will you recommend it and why?

## Create your own blurb

44. Create an alternative blurb for *At My Door*. How will you encourage readers to feel excited about reading the book?

## Continue the story

45. Continue Mei's story – what do you think happens to her after she leaves the Campbells' house?

## Point of view

46. Rewrite *At my door* from Mei's point of view or her mother's point of view.

## Debate

47. In teams of three, have students' debate for/against the validity of Mrs Campbell's claim: 'Children should not be allowed to watch the news.'
48. Warm up: pass the topic around the circle – each student has to think of an argument *for*. Pass it the opposite way – each student has to think of an argument *against*.

## Persuasive texts

49. Based on the debate above, invite children to write a persuasive article aimed at convincing the reader of their point of view. This should include explicit instruction on...
- Modal adjectives and verbs:** words such as 'possibly', 'definitely', 'ultimately', 'rather' and 'somewhat' which offer differing degrees of certainty. They can steer the reader in the direction children wish them to take.
  - Cohesive ties appropriate to structuring persuasive texts:** *because, however, therefore, thus, such as, furthermore, on the other hand, provided that, for example, similarly, in contrast, in conclusion.*
  - Emotive language:** words and phrases designed to bring out an emotional response in the reader. This language is used to make an argument more appealing. For example, a sentence such as '*It is a good idea for children to watch the news,*' is much more effective when written as, '*It is vitally important for all children, no matter where they live, to watch the news and learn about events and cultures different to their own.*'

## Classroom newspaper

50. Read the newspaper article on p. 73. How do newspaper articles differ to fictional narratives (i.e. they are factual and aim to be objective)?
51. How are they structured? Provide students with a planning framework to guide them in writing a newspaper article. Include the following subheadings:
- Headline
  - Opening paragraph – draws the reader in and makes them want to keep reading!
  - The five Ws (who, where, when, what, why)
  - 2-4 further, less important facts/details
  - a final sentence that encourages the reader to continue thinking about the topic the article describes
52. Invite students to read a range of sample newspapers. Ask them what they notice about the format that is different from other texts (e.g., black and white ink, column format, graphics, headline,).
53. Have students adopt the roles of reporters and editors to create and publish their own classroom newspaper. They will need to consider
- News topics at their school
  - News topics in their local community
  - Reporting tips: fact checking, considering the target audience, writing interview questions in advance
  - The different parts of a newspaper: title, headlines, pictures, graphics, captions, date, subtitles, table of contents/index, travel section, advertisements, sports, etc.
  - Layout and design techniques/options
54. Extension activity: classroom news channel
- Invite children to record a school news program, allocating the following roles:
    - Directors
    - camera operators
    - news anchors
    - writers
    - runners
    - editors
  - News reports can then be screened as a class.

## The writing sequence

The following can be adapted for any of the writing activities previously listed:

- *Modelled writing* (teacher only) – the teacher ‘thinks aloud’ as he/she writes on the whiteboard while the class watch.
- *Shared writing* – the teacher has the pen and continues to ‘think aloud’, but also asks for children’s input and ideas. Children are invited to come and help write/make corrections on the whiteboard.
- *Guided writing* – children can plan their writing in pairs by brainstorming and/or using a planning template.
- *Independent writing* – children write their own piece and engage in editing and redrafting.
- *Presentation to audience* – children share their work with one another in small groups.

## CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

### Visual Arts

55. In groups of four, have students examine the book’s illustrations in detail.
  - a. What style has the illustrator used to draw Pixie and Poppy – realistic, cartoon, abstract, fantasy?
  - b. What medium have they used – collage, black and white, watercolour etc.? What effect does this create?
  - c. What do the illustrations add to the story?
56. Create your own illustration of your favourite scene from *At My Door*.

### Science

57. Mrs Campbell says that she gave most of Poppy’s childhood clothing and toys to a charity organisation called ‘the Salvos’ (the Salvation Army).
  - a. Create a class definition for the term ‘recycling’.
  - b. What are some of the environmental benefits of recycling?
  - c. Create a list of common items in your classroom and your home that can be recycled.
58. Research other ways in which students can contribute to sustainable living. For ‘change the way you live’ links visit [http://www.wwf.org.au/get\\_involved/change\\_the\\_way\\_you\\_live](http://www.wwf.org.au/get_involved/change_the_way_you_live).  
Create a poster or pamphlet advertising this information to your school community. Suggested topics:
  - Sustainable shopping
  - Transport – car and air travel and offsetting
  - Saving water
  - Reducing energy consumption
  - Green building design
  - Ethical and responsible investment

### Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

59. Create a book trailer for *At My Door* using iMovie/Windows Movie Maker.
  - Source copyright-free images at <http://www.imagebase.net>.
  - Source creative commons licensed music at <https://creativecommons.org/legalmusicforvideos>.

### Health and Physical Education

60. How does physical exercise help people to be fit and maintain a healthy weight?
61. Create a definition for the term ‘martial arts’. Why might people choose to learn a martial art?
62. Poppy is passionate about karate (p. 76). Research the history of this sport.
  - When and where did it originate?
  - What skills does it involve?
  - Does it require any special clothing or equipment?
  - Name some famous athletes belonging to this sport.
63. Incursion: invite a karate instructor to conduct a one-hour workshop with your class.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit the author’s website: [www.debfitzpatrick.com.au](http://www.debfitzpatrick.com.au)



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