

Mystery at Riddle Gully

Jen Banyard

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Themes: Humour, Adventure, Friendships, School, Family and Home Stories, Environment

Year Levels: Y4, Y5, Y6, Y7, Y8 • Cross Curriculum: Ol.Sustainability

The Story

Pollo di Nozi, reporter-in-training, has a nose for news. Strange things are happening in Riddle Gully and Pollo smells a major scoop. With Shorn Connery, her sheepish sidekick, Pollo is determined to track down the Graffiti Kid. But is Will, the new boy in town, conspiring with the pushy mayor and a strange Transylvanian to send her sniffing up the wrong trail?

Pollo is desperate. She needs a story and will do just about anything to get it. Her reluctant offsider, Will, has moved in with his mum and new stepfather and is up to his ears in trouble. Together, Pollo and Will make a pretty good, if misguided, team ... for a while.

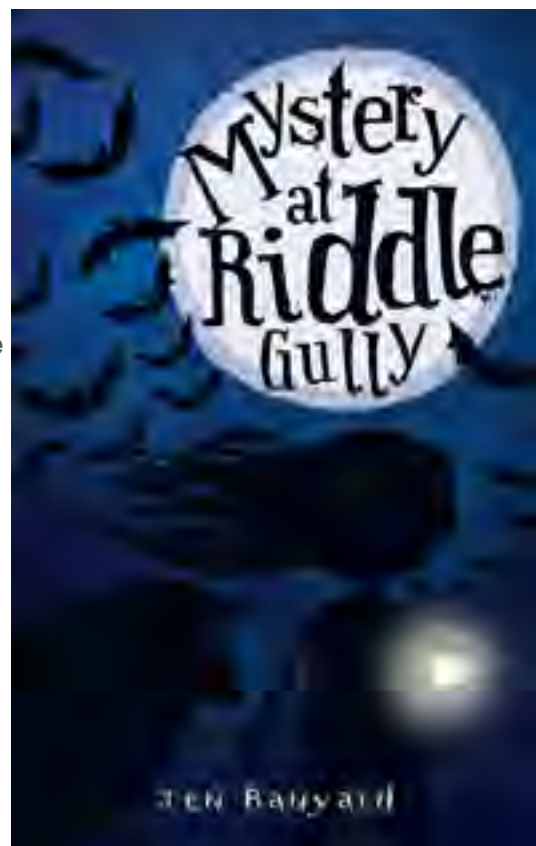
This fast-paced, multi-layered story is packed with humour, adventure, mystery, false leads and bats!

The Author

Jen Banyard grew up by (largely in) the Canning River in Perth, Western Australia, the youngest of four. These days, she lives near the Indian Ocean and Bold Park bushland, her two daughters and husband quietly anchoring her life.

Mystery at Riddle Gully is Jen's second novel. Her first, *Spider Lies*, was published by Fremantle Press in 2009. She is currently pegging away at a PhD, tutoring and working on her next book.

She has never met a vampire... as far as she knows.



Suggested activities and Australian curriculum links

Mystery at Riddle Gully is not just another mystery story. It is a literary novel full of humour, figurative language, rich characterisations, interweaving sub-plots and important themes. As such, the novel provides an engaging context for teaching and learning about English Language, Literature and Literacy. It can also be used as a springboard for discussion about family relationships, endangered animals, journalism, vampires, local government, the understanding that people are not always as they might first appear and the notion that people's perceptions can be swayed by emotional factors.

Suggested activities and Australian curriculum links	
Activities	Australian curriculum
<p>Journalism word sleuth Complete the word sleuth to find vocabulary about journalism used in the novel. Consult dictionaries and conduct online searches to find the meaning of the words. Use a thesaurus to discover similar words and phrases.</p>	<p>English: Language: Expressing and developing ideas Vocabulary The meaning of words including everyday and specialist meanings and how words take their meaning from the context of the text</p>
<p>Backwards crossword Complete the backwards crossword before and after reading the novel and discuss how words take their meaning from the context of the text. Write clues for the across words in Crossword A. Work with a partner who has written clues for the down words in Crossword B to complete the puzzle.</p>	
<p>Riddle Gully crossword Complete this crossword after reading <i>Mystery at Riddle Gully</i>.</p>	
<p>What is the mystery at Riddle Gully? Record ideas before, during and after reading and justify your thinking with evidence from the novel. Think of a time in your life when you thought someone was up to no good. Write the title you might use in a mystery story about it.</p>	<p>English: Literature: Responding to literature Personal responses to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in texts An individual response to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in literary texts, including relating texts to their own experiences</p>
<p>Discussing family relationships In the novel Will reflected that Pollo didn't have enough parents and he had too many. Discuss ways in which the family relationships of the two main characters influence events in the novel (eg Pollo's relationship with her late mother and Will's relationship with his father and his step-father). Reflect on a time when your relationship with a parent impacted on your actions.</p>	

<p>Character profile <i>Record key words and phrases to describe a character from Mystery at Riddle Gully.</i> <i>Underline the features that make the character amusing. Share your character profile with others and discuss ways in which the author has created humorous characters in the novel.</i></p>	
<p>Discussing cover ups <i>'Oh what a wicked web we weave when first we practise to deceive.'</i> William Shakespeare <i>Reflect on what happened when Will tried to cover up having graffitied the school. Have you ever done something bad and tried to hide it? How did you feel? Did things get better or worse? Maybe you still feel a bit guilty about it. If it happened again would you confess or try to cover it up?</i></p>	
<p>Plan for a mystery or suspense story <i>Discuss features of a mystery or suspense story. Record key words and phrases in a narrative plan. Write the story with reference to the hints for writing a mystery or suspense story.</i></p>	<p>English: Literature: Creating literature Creating literary texts <i>Creating their own literary texts based on the ideas, features and structures of texts experienced</i></p>
<p>Simile or metaphor? <i>In the novel the author uses figurative language to create images. Similes use the words 'like' or 'as' to compare one thing with another (eg 'Well, don't stand there like a letter box!') while metaphors imply that one thing is actually another (eg 'The nasty thought crawled up her neck and under her beanie.')</i> Read examples of figurative language from the novel and indicate whether they are similes or metaphors.</p>	<p>English: Literature: Examining literature Language devices in literary texts including figurative language <i>The language devices that authors use and how these create certain meanings and effects in literary texts, especially devices in poetry</i></p>
<p>Slapstick cartoon <i>Mystery at Riddle Gully contains elements of slapstick humour in which Will endures a number of disastrous experiences (eg chapter 3 - making his mother's birthday breakfast, chapter 9 - burning his mother's dress and wig in the back yard, chapter 13 - trying to make a hole in the fence). Create a cartoon of a slapstick event from the story.</i></p>	<p>English: Literature: Creating literature Experimentation and adaptation <i>Creating a variety of texts, including multimodal texts, adapting ideas and devices from literary texts</i></p>
<p>Play script <i>Select a scene with dialogue from the novel (eg the meeting in the Town Hall; when Pollo and Will accost Viktor in the clearing; Hoppy's confession) and adapt it into a play script to perform as Readers' Theatre.</i></p>	

<p>Vampire film poster <i>Read Chapter 26 and create a poster for a vampire film featuring Viktor Von Albericht and Pollo di Nozi. Include some of the weapons in Pollo's 'anti vampire arsenal'. Hold a class exhibition in a space decorated with Southern Bent-wing Bats and play Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor to add atmosphere when the exhibition is open to visitors.</i></p>	<p>English: Literacy: Creating texts Creating text <i>Creating different types of spoken, written and multimodal texts using knowledge of text structures and language features</i></p> <p>Use of software <i>Using a range of software applications to construct and edit print and multimodal texts</i></p>
<p>Map of Riddle Gully <i>Draw a map of Riddle Gully featuring places of importance in the novel (eg cemetery, meadow, forest, track behind Pollo and Will's houses, initially proposed Diamond Jack Experience Tourist Centre, the Diamond Jack Trail, ranger's hut, old railway bridge, clearing and bat cave).</i></p>	
<p>News Gazette <i>Create the front page of a class 'news' gazette. Include a banner (or name), date, cost, circulation, headline heirarchies, pictures and captions. (There are free newspaper templates available online at newspapertemplates.net).</i></p>	
<p>Development v Environment Debate <i>Plan and present affirmative and negative arguments on the topic: 'That developing the Diamond Jack Experience Tourist Centre is more important than protecting the Southern Bent-wing Bat.'</i></p>	<p>English: Literacy: Interacting with others Oral presentations <i>The formal oral presentations that students engage in including presenting recounts and information, and presenting and arguing a point of view</i></p> <p>Science: Science Understanding Biological Sciences <i>The growth and survival of living things are affected by the physical conditions of their environment</i></p>
<p>Consequences flowchart <i>In the book's acknowledgements, the author uses the quote: 'In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments; there are consequences.' Read Chapter 30 of Mystery at Riddle Gully and draw a 'consequences flow chart' that depicts or speculates on how the loss in nature of something as seemingly insignificant as a bat may ultimately have wide implications. Present and argue your point of view.</i></p>	

TEACHING NOTES

Journalism word sleuth

Name:

Pollo wanted to become an investigative journalist 'to keep the people who run things honest and help the people who can't help themselves'. Complete the word sleuth to find vocabulary about journalism used in the novel. Words may be written horizontally, vertically, diagonally and in reverse. Consult dictionaries and conduct online searches to find the meaning of the words.

CUTTING-EDGE
EDITION
EDITOR
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EVIDENCE
INVESTIGATIVE
JOURNALISM
JOURNALIST

NEWSWORTHY
PRESS
REPORTER
SCOOP

SLANT
SURVEILLANCE

I	R	J	J	F	J	Q	Q	K	F	E	P	R	E	S	S
J	C	E	J	Z	L	S	D	G	G	V	C	S	T	F	O
T	O	B	T	O	C	W	A	D	G	I	J	L	N	B	B
F	G	U	G	R	D	M	E	D	N	T	O	A	N	Z	G
G	E	F	R	V	O	G	F	E	G	A	U	N	N	P	S
S	S	I	J	N	N	P	W	J	C	G	R	T	O	L	Y
F	C	U	H	I	A	S	E	Z	G	I	N	O	I	L	I
G	C	O	T	C	W	L	K	R	Y	T	A	G	T	U	K
V	D	T	O	O	N	V	I	O	Y	S	L	Z	I	T	O
S	U	V	R	P	H	I	B	S	I	E	I	V	D	T	R
C	K	T	B	N	K	S	R	A	M	V	S	L	E	O	J
U	H	V	Y	M	Z	B	G	O	V	N	T	M	T	G	U
Y	E	C	N	E	D	I	V	E	T	I	V	I	N	B	X
O	O	L	J	F	Q	R	W	U	C	I	D	U	Y	H	R
E	W	V	N	N	G	F	T	X	I	E	D	S	D	G	D
S	U	R	V	E	I	L	L	A	N	C	E	E	C	A	U

TEACHING NOTES

Journalism word sleuth answers

CUTTING-EDGE

EDITION

EDITOR

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EVIDENCE

INVESTIGATIVE

JOURNALISM

JOURNALIST

NEWSWORTHY

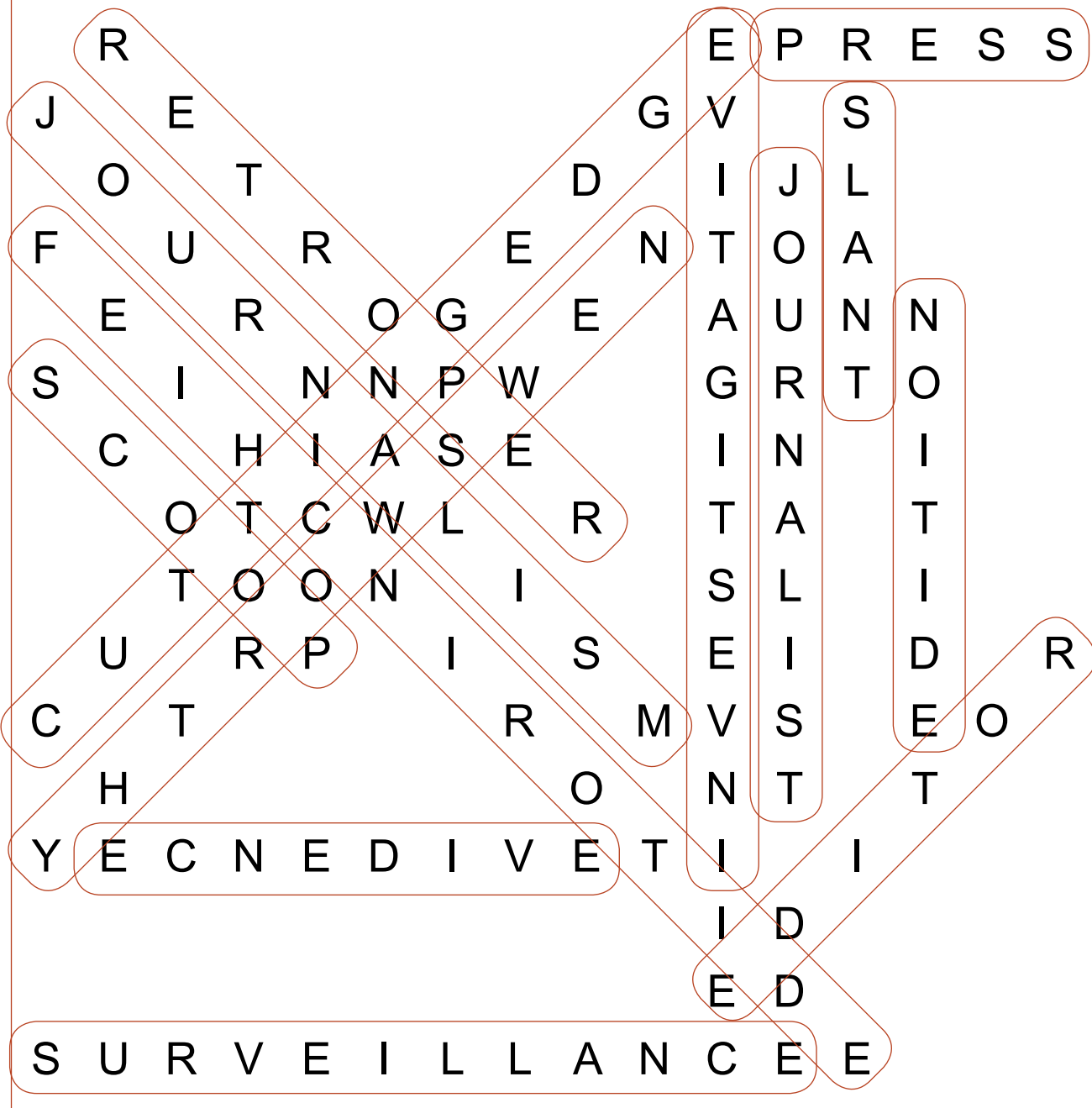
PRESS

REPORTER

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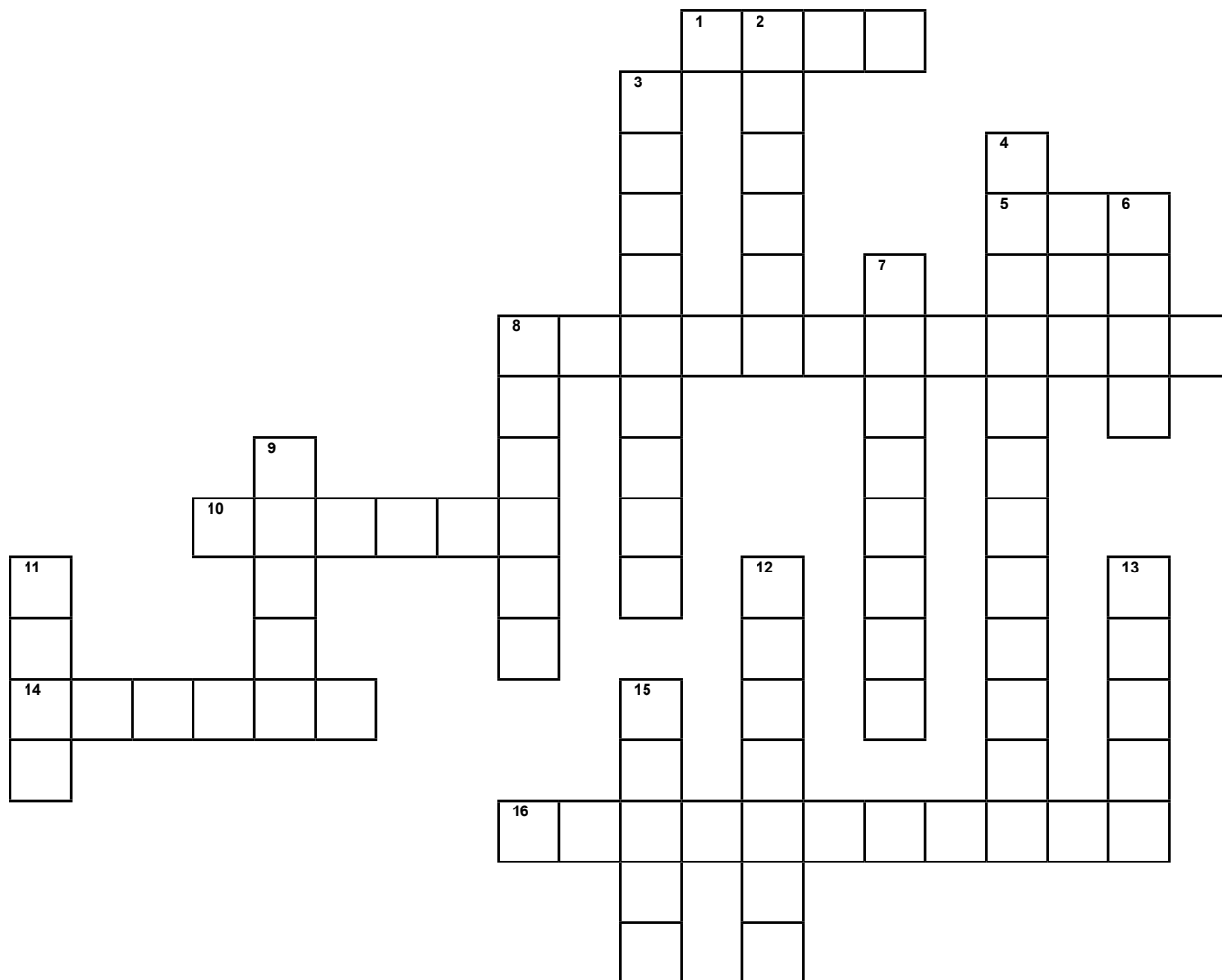


TEACHING NOTES

Mystery at Riddle Gully crossword

Name:

Complete this crossword after reading *Mystery at Riddle Gully*.



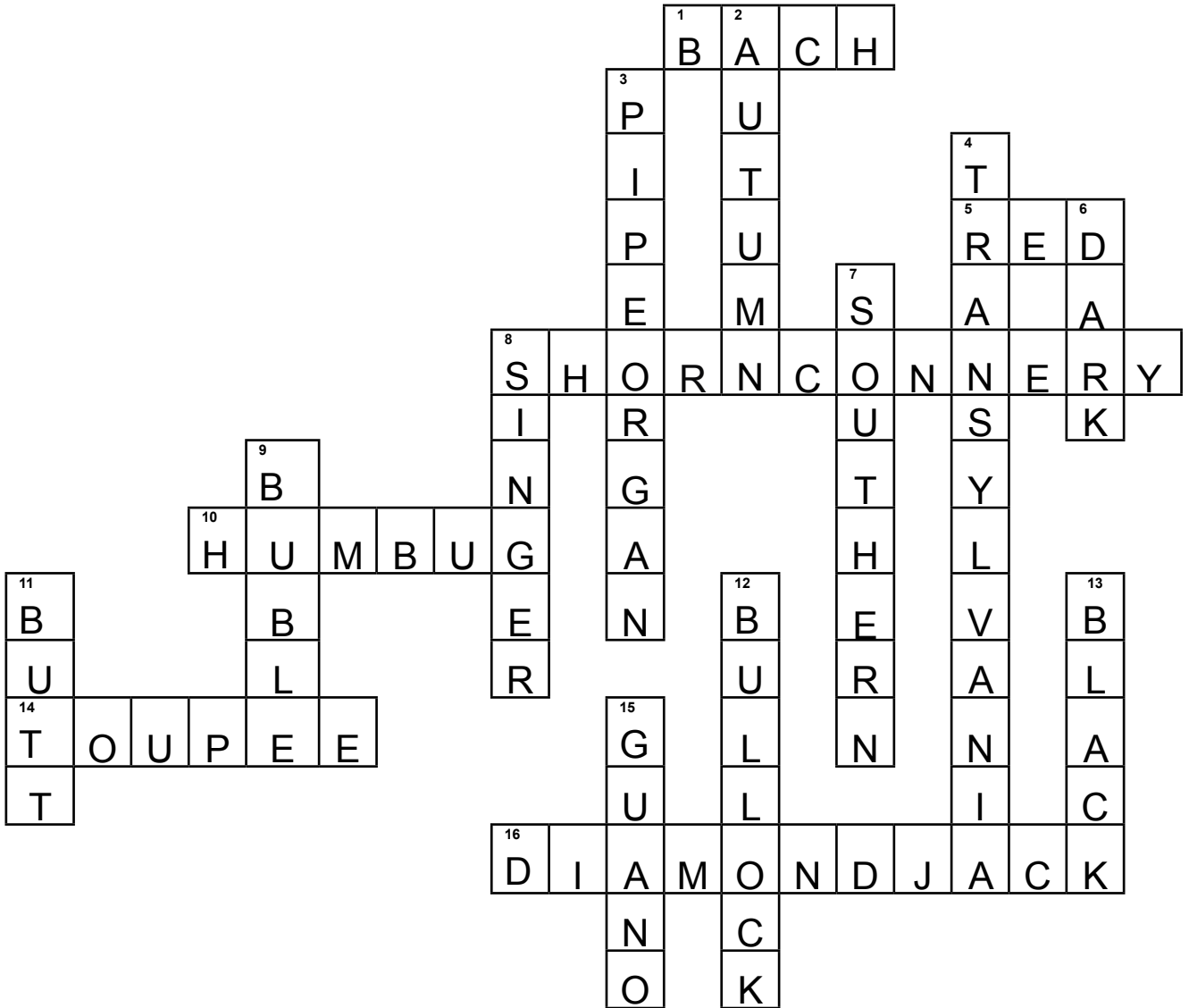
ACROSS

- 1. A famous composer of pipe organ music (4)
- 5. The colour paint Will used (3)
- 8. The name of Pollo's faithful assistant (5-7)
- 10. The mayor's favourite lolly (6)
- 14. What the mayor wears on his head (6)
- 16. Riddle Gully's famous bushranger (7-4)

DOWN

- 2. The season when bats come to Riddle Gully (6)
- 3. The favourite instrument of *The Undead* (4-5)
- 4. Where Viktor is from (12)
- 6. Pollo is afraid of the (4)
- 7. Viktor is after the Bent-wing Bat (8)
- 8. Sherri was a cruise ship (6)
- 9. Sherri's budgerigar (5)
- 11. Sergeant who a Riddle Gully? (4)
- 12. Mayor who? (7)
- 13. Favourite colour of Pollo and Viktor (5)
- 15. Smelly stuff on the floor of the bat cave (5)

Mystery at Riddle Gully crossword answers



TEACHING NOTES

What is the mystery at Riddle Gully?

Name:

Record ideas before, during and after reading and justify your thinking with evidence from the novel. Think of a time in your life when you thought someone was up to no good. Write the title you might use in a mystery story about it.

Before reading	Evidence from the novel
During reading	Evidence from the novel
After reading	Evidence from the novel
My mystery story title	

TEACHING NOTES

Character profile

Name:

Record key words and phrases to describe a character from *Mystery at Riddle Gully*.

Name of character	
Appearance	
Personality (include strengths and weaknesses)	
Actions	
Motives	

Underline the features that make the character amusing. Share your character profile with others and discuss ways in which the author has created humorous characters in the novel.

TEACHING NOTES

Plan for a mystery or suspense story

Mystery at Riddle Gully is part mystery and part adventure. What trail will your story take?

Name:

Some hints for writing a mystery or suspense story

- Create characters who are interesting or intriguing, each in their own way.
- Set your story where surroundings can add to a scary mood. Isolated places work well.
- Drop hints that something strange or dangerous might happen. (In a 'who-dunnit', something bad will have already happened – but often it might happen again.)
- Get the reader wondering about more than one possibility; throw suspicion on more than one character.
- At tense moments, use vocabulary such as 'tip-toed' or 'stalked' for walked, 'creepy' for unusual, or 'slithered' for glided.
- At tense moments, use short sentences to create a sense of urgency or breathlessness.
- Use a 'race against time' to heighten tension.
- Give readers enough clues to work out the mystery for themselves – but disguise clues and throw in red herrings so that they probably won't! But the clues must be there, recognisable in hindsight.

Title	
Characters	
Setting	
Initiating event	
Complication(s)	
Events in time order	
Resolution	
Ending	

TEACHING NOTES

Simile or metaphor?

Name:

The author uses figurative language to create word pictures or images. Read these examples from the novel, underline the figurative words or phrases and indicate whether they are similes or metaphors by writing S or M in the boxes. Similes use the words 'like' or 'as' to compare one thing with another while metaphors imply that one thing is actually another.

S or M	Examples of figurative language in the novel
	<i>'Well, don't stand there like a letter box!'</i>
	<i>Around her, twilight was settling in, the shadows draped between the graves beginning to dissolve ...</i>
	<i>A nasty thought crawled up her neck and under her beanie.</i>
	<i>Moving only her eyes, her pencil twitching expectantly, she tracked the man in the grey light.</i>
	<i>Thoughts tumbled in his head like socks in a dryer.</i>
	<i>Of all the mornings to be needed at her dad's clinic — when the story that could change her life was out there on the loose.</i>
	<i>The thin beam shone shyly for a moment, faded, flickered ... and died.</i>
	<i>The log was starting to get uncomfortable, and a tribe of red ants seemed to think he was on their property.</i>
	<i>Nan and Pop had come around to watch Will and take turns to mutter about their daughter's 'petrol temper'. 'One spark and she turns into a ruddy bonfire!' Pop had kept saying ...</i>
	<i>And it sure beat hanging around like a sack of spuds waiting for his dad to ring!</i>
	<i>Inside Pollo, relief and anger jostled to be first in line. Anger won.</i>
	<i>Will leaned on his spade and watched in awe as flames licked the things into life, turning them into crackling, writhing creatures.</i>
	<i>He turned around to see a second fire growing fast, its tentacles hungrily snaking through the mounds of dry straw.</i>
	<i>Now, happily rocking on the back legs of his chair, the mayor's announcement hit him like a left hook.</i>

TEACHING NOTES

	<i>His eyes turned to slits and his face reddened like a boiling crab.</i>
	<i>He looked at Pollo like a castaway watching a ship about to sail on by.</i>
	<i>Shoving its way through the hole in the fence was a springy grey mop between two big twitching ears.</i>
	<i>Will was beginning to feel like an insect skewered to a corkboard.</i>
	<i>She sucked in a deep breath and, before she could change her mind, ran through the gate into the dying afternoon.</i>
	<i>Viktor held up his palm, from which dark blood oozed like sap.</i>
	<i>Murmurs of support buzzed around the hall.</i>
	<i>He slathered a broad smile onto his pink face.</i>
	<i>Mayor Bullock resumed his seat, his beneficent beam already slipping.</i>
	<i>When his vision returned, he was on his knees, the backyard sloshing from side to side.</i>
	<i>His big toe screamed at him, 'Give up! Cry like a baby! Confess!'</i>
<i>Write a simile of your own.</i>	
<i>Write a metaphor of your own.</i>	

TEACHING NOTES

Slapstick cartoon

Name:

Mystery at Riddle Gully contains elements of slapstick humour in which Will endures a number of disastrous experiences (eg making his mother's birthday breakfast in Chapter 3, burning his mother's dress and wig in the back yard in Chapter 9 and trying to make a hole in the fence in Chapter 13). Create a cartoon of a slapstick event from the story.

TEACHING NOTES

Plan for a vampire film poster

Name:

Read chapter 24 of *Mystery at Riddle Gully* and create a poster for a vampire film featuring Viktor Von Albericht and Pollo di Nozi.

Features	Notes
Title of film	
Actors' names and characters	
Props (eg <i>anti-vampire arsenal</i>)	
Design	

Flying bat template

Photocopy and cut out this bat template in different sizes. Suspend the bats near the vampire posters to create an eerie exhibition space.



TEACHING NOTES

Plan for a debate

Names:

Read Chapters 22, 30, 31 and 32 and prepare an affirmative or negative argument on the topic: 'That developing the Diamond Jack Experience Tourist Centre is more important than protecting the Southern Bent-wing Bat.'

Team (Affirmative or negative)	
1st speaker	
2nd speaker	
3rd speaker	

Notes and Guidelines for Further Study

As a starting point for further research on all sorts of things, but especially nature, the Australian Museum Online is terrific. Go to <http://australianmuseum.net.au> and click the 'Animals' tab.

- The website of the Australian Government's Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPC) contains the 'Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999' (the EPBC Act) lists of Threatened Fauna and Threatened Flora. At the time of going to print, there are 444 species of threatened or extinct Australian fauna and 1341 species of flora listed. Extinctions are still occurring. The tiny insect eating bat, the Christmas Island Pipistrelle, for instance, is within a hair's breadth of extinction and may well have passed from the planet by the time this is read. As one leading bat researcher said: 'I reckon it's a goner.'

A visit to the DSEWPC website will throw light on the many different threatened species, the different levels of endangerment, the criteria by which categorisations are made and proposed action plans. Threatened animal species are listed at

<http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/publicthreatenedlist.pl>

- Sue Churchill's book, 'Australian Bats' (Jacana Books/Allen & Unwin 2008) is a particularly helpful reference for the study of Australian bats. Please note that this second edition uses the scientific name, not formally adopted at present, of *Miniopterus orianae bassanii*, not *schreibersii* for the Southern Bent-wing Bat. In keeping with the EPBC Act list, the author has used the term *schreibersii* and the hyphenated 'Bent-wing' throughout the book.

- Did you know that 2011/12 is the United Nations 'Year' of the Bat? For more information go to www.yearofthebat.org

These teachers' notes were devised by Ms Gail Spiers.

For more on the author, visit www.jenbanyard.com