

# TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

## Space Gum

a novel

TANIA ROXBOROUGH

**Carl** just doesn't get it – he's always in Mum's bad books. If only she could see the funny side to the practical jokes he and Dad play on one another. From eggs to toilet seats, nothing's sacred when they're dreaming up pranks.

But Carl's world is turned upside down when his father introduces him to an ex-NASA scientist – one who gives Carl a secret gift. What has Carl been given that could possibly be so valuable? And where have the two strangers taken Dad in the black van? Is he safe? Carl will need to be incredibly inventive to unravel this mystery!

A lively and funny novel that puts one boy's problem-solving skills to the test.

#### POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Popular children's author with her own loyal following
- Written by an experienced teacher
- A light, appealing, humorous story
- Author available to talk to groups
- A great story for young boys – teachers are crying out for books targeting boys in this age group
- Theme based on scientific fact

#### RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- characters and comprehension questions
  - creative responses
  - research and discussion topics
- vocabulary quiz and word search game

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#### SPECIFICATIONS:

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TANIA ROXBOROUGH is the author of over twenty published works across a range of genres: novels for teenagers and children, plays for the classroom, Shakespearean texts, English grammar books, and adult non-fiction. She was Writer in Residence at the Dunedin College of Education in 2006. Tania teaches English at a Dunedin secondary school, writes at every opportunity and, with her husband, runs around after two daughters and two border collies.

#### AUTHOR STATEMENT:

People often ask me how I fit writing novels and books into my already packed life and I guess I'm surprised at the question: I look around and see people who play golf or rugby, go fishing or fix motorbikes. These people are also like me: they have full-time jobs, are parents, are involved in their community. So, my answer usually is: because it's my passion. Reading and writing are two of the things I like doing best. Because of this fact, I make time in my life to ensure that I read lots of books and I write as often as I can.

The other reason why (and how) I write is that stories, like this one, come into my head, usually through a conversation or something I read in the paper, and then begin brewing and developing. The characters come alive; the action is vivid and often I just have to write it down to get it out of my head.

Years ago, I was working with a technology teacher who told me about NASA and their creation of the chewing gum. I thought that was a pretty cool fact and I stored it away in my mind but kept thinking: what if someone stole the formula or somehow got it out into the public domain? What might happen?

One evening at a friend's place for dinner, someone asked me where I got my stories from. I told them about the chewing gum from NASA and then began telling a story using the kids in the room, and their dog. At each point, I asked the children what they thought might happen next and, using their suggestions, I continued. It was a bit like 'choose a plot'. When I got home I wrote down an outline of that story, because everyone seemed to like it, and called it *Space Gum*.

In 2006, when I was the Dunedin College of Education Children's Writer in Residence, I began to work on *Space Gum* again. Early one morning, I heard Carl's mother's voice in my head (just as it is at the start of the novel) and I thought, uh-oh, what could Carl possibly have done to get his mother so cross? It was only then that I came to know Carl was a prankster. This meant I needed to talk to quite a few people (men, mostly) to get ideas about practical jokes. My favourite one is the 'bike tyre tube on the car exhaust' trick. It really is very, very funny.

*Tania Roxborough* AUGUST 2008

## Characters & Comprehension

1. Carl's sister Jenny likes to tease him (p.9). What do you think are the advantages and/or disadvantages of having brothers and sisters?
2. Carl has a dog called Coca (p.9). Tell the class about any pet or animals you have at home or would like to have at home. Describe them, explain what you feed them and how you care for them.
3. Carl's mum likes Monty Python (p.17). What are the Monty Python films? Why do you think some people find Monty Python funny?
4. Carl mentions some of the TV programmes his dad likes (p.17). Which of these programmes do you watch? What others do you think are good programmes? Why?
5. Briefly describe Carl's parents' jobs (p.11 & p.18).
  - What do your parents do?
  - Ask your parents what they like and dislike about their jobs.
  - When they have a bad day at work, how do you feel about it?
6. Carl wonders if Prof Charles '...thinks the daleks are out to get him' (p.21). What are daleks?
7. One of Carl's hobbies is making models (p.23). What are your hobbies?
8. Carl lists the superhero powers he wishes he could have (p.31). If you were a superhero what would your super powers be? Briefly write about how you came to have them.
9. Carl and his dad love practical jokes. List any practical jokes you have heard of or been part of.
10. List all of the practical jokes that are mentioned in the book. Which is your favourite and why?
11. What two rules must Carl always obey in relation to his sister (p.36)? As a class, decide on a set of rules about things you must never do to your classmates.
12. Carl's great-granddad fought in the war (p.40). Which war was this? What other wars could your relations have fought in?

13. The astronauts chose strawberry for the flavour of space gum (p.112). Take a class survey or vote and see which flavour your class would choose.

## Creative Responses

1. Carl wears a bike helmet (p.9). Design a poster or pamphlet about bike safety.
2. Carl describes Prof Charles (p.22). Draw or paint a picture of him based on this description.
3. Carl lists what was in his room before his mum clears it out (p.25). Draw a plan of Carl's bedroom before it has been cleared out and after.
4. Draw a picture to illustrate the following words:
  - 'mind-numbingly' (p.28)
  - 'bright spark' (p.47)
  - 'half-hearted' (p.86)
  - 'half-baked' (p.126)
5. Carl draws a flip animation of a skateboarder (p.29). Choose a sport you like and create a flip animation book of a sports person doing an activity from your chosen sport.
6. Mum and Jenny play a practical joke by baking chocolate and caramel biscuits with toothpaste inside (pp.57–59). Write out your favourite biscuit recipe and then decide what you would add to turn them into a gross-tasting practical joke food.
7. Chapter 14 is entitled 'Crying Wolf' (p.77). What story is this saying from and how does it relate to Carl's behaviour in the novel?
8. Carl packs his backpack for going into the bush (p.88). Write out a list of what Carl takes. Would you take anything different? Design a pamphlet about bush safety for trampers.
9. Carl's dad took him into the bush the first time to teach him about trees and environmental issues (p.89). Draw and label an illustration of different native trees you can find in the New Zealand bush.

10. Carl mentions the movie series *Spy Kids* (p.91). Watch one of the movies and write a plot and character summary.
11. Prof Charles makes the quotation mark signs with his fingers (p.102). Imagine you have to make up signs for the following punctuation marks. What would they be?
  - question mark
  - full stop
  - comma
  - semi-colon
  - exclamation mark
  - ellipsis
  - brackets

Create an illustrated dictionary for your signs and/or demonstrate them for the class.

12. Imagine you are a police officer who has to write a report on the break-in of Carl's room or the 'kidnapping' of Carl's dad (p.52 & p.75). Write a report of 150–200 words.
13. Carl knows the reward from the toothpaste company is genuine because of the letterhead (p.133). Design a letterhead for your class, school, town or city.
14. Design a missing person poster for Carl after he 'disappears' into the bush.
15. Design a wrapper and a television advertisement for a space gum packet.
16. Design your own version of a cover for the book.
17. Re-write the 'blurb' of the book.
18. Imagine the novel is going to be turned into a stage play. Design the costumes for each character and one or two stage sets.
19. Imagine the novel is going to be turned into a film. Look at other movie posters. Notice the pictures and the words. Design a movie poster to advertise it.
20. Get into groups of two or three. Choose a scene from the novel. Write a script and act it out in front of the class.
21. Without speaking, act out a character doing something from the book. See how quickly the class can guess who you are and what you are doing.
22. Imagine you are a character from the book – such as, Carl, Jenny, Mum, Prof Charles, Dad, Max or even Coca! Write a diary entry about one of the events that happen in the novel from your point of view.

## Research

1. Using the library or the Internet find out about NASA.
2. Carl's dad's branch of science is chemistry (p.19). What other types of science are there?
3. List the ingredients that Carl's dad says are in the formula for space gum (p.33).
4. Investigate how the oil in Carl's hands could affect the bone that he tries to touch at the museum (p.42).
5. Ernest Reilly is a Curator in Human History at the museum (p.43). What does a curator do?
6. Using a search engine, find out where the sayings 'caught red-handed' and 'the stakes are pretty high' come from (p.59 & p.113)?
7. How do police take fingerprints at a crime scene and how do they interpret them (p.61)?
8. Coca pants and her tongue hangs out when she is hot (p.89). Why do dogs do this?
9. Carl doesn't fill his water bottle from the stream in the bush because his dad has warned him about the water quality (p.91). Find out what sorts of bugs and diseases can be found in untreated water.
10. The first time they went into the bush Carl and his dad thought they would have to make a 'bivouac' (p.92). What is this? Research and design two different kinds of bivouac you could use in the bush in New Zealand.
11. Carl stays in a cabin in the bush (p.92). Find on a map of New Zealand which National Park is closest to where you live. How many DOC cabins or huts are in the Park and where are they located?

12. Carl thinks Prof Charles might be a ghost or a vampire (p.99). Research the history of vampires. What stories or legends have been told about them?
13. What is the difference between 'sales' and 'profits' (p.100)?
14. Write a list of the major brands of toothpaste available in New Zealand (p.100).
15. Carl asks Prof Charles about the witness protection programme (p.101). What can you find out about this?
16. Locate 'Paihia' on a map of New Zealand (p.101).
17. Carl's mum mentions Carl has done his 'civic duty' (p.123). Find out what this means.
18. Max says that he is a Buddhist (p.129). Research Buddhism and present your findings to the class.
19. Carl gets a free trip to the Stennis Space Center in South Mississippi (p.132). Locate Mississippi and the Center on a map of America. Find out details about the Center and investigate whether or not there are other space centres in America and/or around the world.
20. When they train, NASA astronauts experience zero gravity (p.140). How does NASA achieve this?

## Discussion Topics

1. Ernest wants to sell the space gum formula for hundreds of thousands, or maybe even millions, of dollars (p.125). What do you think is more important – taking care of the planet earth or making lots of money? Is it possible to do both?
2. Divide the class into two teams and debate the pros and cons of having space gum instead of toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss (pp.104–108).
3. Do you believe that we all have a duty to do something about littering and pollution? Discuss in groups the best things we could do to help. Compare your findings and ideas with the other class groups.

## Vocabulary

### DEFINITIONS:

These are all words from the book. Conduct a quiz to see if students know the meaning of each word and how to spell it.

- constructive (p.20)
- aerodynamics (p.23)
- supersonic (p.26)
- equations (p.30)
- relative (list more than one meaning for this word) (p.34)
- penance (p.36)
- brandishing (p.36)
- efficient (p.48)
- agitated (p.46)
- dilemma (p.105)
- corporation (p.111)
- extricate (p.115)
- harassed (p.122)
- sarcastically (p.132)

### WORD SEARCH:

Make as many words as you can by using letters from the words below.

#### **museum curator**

Score a point for each word and 10 bonus points for words of 5 or more letters. Good luck!