

The Sugarcane Kids and the Empty Cage

CHARLIE ARCHBOLD

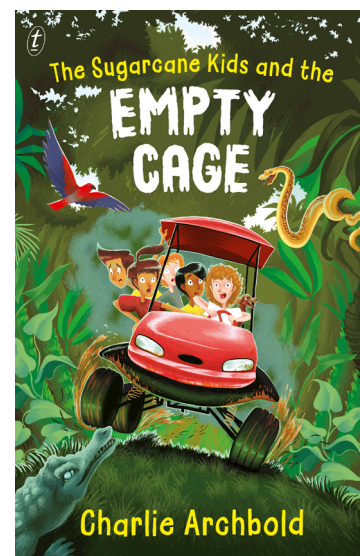
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Fiction

RECOMMENDED READING AGE: 8+

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CURRICULUM GUIDE

The following teaching guide has been designed to embrace shared curriculum values. Students are encouraged to communicate their understanding of a text through speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing and representing.

The learning activities aim to encourage students to think critically, creatively and independently, to reflect on their learning, and connect it to audience, purpose and context. They aim to encompass a range of forms and include a focus on language, literature and literacy. Where appropriate, they include the integration of ICT and life skills.



Credit: Amy Archbold

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charlie Archbold is an educator and an award-winning writer. Her first novel, *Mallee Boys*, was a CBCA older readers honour book. Her first book in the Sugarcane Kids middle-grade series, *The Sugarcane Kids and the Red-Bottomed Boat*, was shortlisted for the Text Prize and went on to win the Readings Children's Prize and the Davitt Children's Novel Award and was a CBCA notable book.

SYNOPSIS

It's the end of the wet season in far north Queensland where Andy and his friends live. When Gloria, a super smart eclectus parrot, goes missing from her cage at the animal sanctuary, Andy suspects she's been stolen for the illegal native-animal pet trade.

The Sugarcane Kids—Andy, his best mate Eli, twins Bernie and Fletcher, and Harvey—work together to track down the missing parrot. But when Anna the Australian scrub python disappears from her terrarium in the library, the Sugarcane Kids realise they are dealing with a serial animal-napper. Their prime suspects are the grumpy new canteen lady, who seems to be stealing vegetables from the school canteen, and a suspicious set of twins in lime-green tracksuits.

To solve the mystery and rescue the stolen animals, Andy, Eli and Harvey venture deep into the rainforest, where the animal-nappers are camped out on an empty farm. Not only will they have to contend with dangerous criminals, they will also have to face a thunderstorm, a bogged golf buggy, and a very unhappy snake.

The Sugarcane Kids and the Empty Cage is the second book in the Sugarcane Kids series. An exciting mystery for middle-grade readers, the book examines themes of justice, friendship and animal rights

BEFORE READING

1. Think about the front cover and the title. What kinds of things are usually kept in cages? Why might a cage be empty?
2. *The Sugarcane Kids and the Empty Cage* is the second book in the Sugarcane Kids series. If you read the first book, make a list of characters you can remember. What do you remember about the setting? What was the mystery in the first book?



3. Think about the different kinds of animals people keep as pets. As a class, discuss which animals make the best pets. It is illegal to keep certain animals as pets. Why do you think this is?

WHILE READING

1. What kind of pet is Gloria?
2. 'We have been boycotting the school canteen.' (p. 51) What does it mean to boycott something? Why are the Sugarcane Kids boycotting the canteen? Have you ever boycotted something?
3. What clue does Washington find outside Gloria's cage? Why does Sylvie think this proves Gloria was bird-napped?
4. How many animals go missing in this book? What kinds of animals are they?
5. 'Sometimes, I stare at Frankie when she is eating honey pancakes and I wonder if I was ever that sticky. When do you stop being sticky all the time?' (p. 92) Can you remember being a toddler? At what age do you think you go from being a toddler to being a kid?
6. What does Andy mean when he says 'mysteries are layered like fat sandwiches'?
7. What is a 'code red' on the golf course?
8. 'There's too much talking in the world and not enough listening.' (p. 139) What does Turtle mean when she says this? Do you agree?
9. Which Sugarcane Kid is known as Mini-Sherlock? Why?
10. 'Connoisseur means an expert. I am a bug connoisseur. Harvey is an alien connoisseur.' (p. 180) How much do you have to know about something to be a connoisseur? What kind of connoisseur are you?

AFTER READING CHARACTER

1. Make a list of animal characters and human characters in the book. Are there more animals or humans?
2. 'There's only one person I know who is even remotely as wise as Turtle and that's Dad.' (p. 66) Why does Andy think Turtle and Dad are wise? Who are some wise people that you know? What do you think makes someone wise?
3. 'Mrs Mathur drove the school bus like a pram, but the Hench drives it like a rocket.' (p. 84) There are a few interesting pairs of characters in the book that are quite different. Write a comparison list for Mrs Mathur and the Hench, Dad and Terry, and Declan Nightweasel and Mrs Cummins.

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

1. Charlie Archbold uses lots of descriptive language to create the setting in this book. Read the paragraph on page 22 where she describes the view from the top of the 'volcano'. Is there a place where you live that gives you a good view of the landscape? Imagine that you are looking out over a place, and write a descriptive paragraph about it.
2. How many mysteries are there in this story? Can you list all of them? Are they connected by the end of the story?
3. A storm is brewing towards the end of the story. How does this add to the atmosphere of the book? Why do you think the author chose to include a storm at this point?

THEMES

Relationships

1. 'Constable and Washington just have to agree on something, like Harvey and I did. Then they can switch from hissing and growling at each other to purring and sniffing.' (p. 5) Do you have to agree on everything to be friends with someone? What are some of the things Andy and Harvey don't agree on? What are some things they do agree on? Can you think of some things you and your friends do and don't agree on?
2. 'Mum reminded us that being a twin was like being at each end of a piece of string. Even though things like this will come up more and more we can pull tight and bounce them away.' (p. 229) As Bernie and Fletch grow up and develop their own interests, their relationship changes. Fletch feels left out when Bernie is playing basketball, and Bernie feels jealous when Fletch acts like Harvey. What does their mum mean when she says they can 'pull tight' to bounce difficult things away? Do you ever feel like this with a sibling or friend? What can you do to 'pull tight' when these things happen?
3. Andy's dad says that if Gloria isn't found then Old Jean will leave town. 'Too much sorrow for her here.' (p. 178) Why are pets so important to us? What are some other important human-animal relationships in this book? What are the differences and similarities between the relationships between humans and animals, and humans and other humans.

Justice

1. 'Dec shrugs. He ignores us and walks out. Mrs Cummins would never do that. She'd hear our side of the story for sure. I hate it when things are unfair.' (p. 21) Why is it important to hear everyone's side of the story in a dispute like the



one that the Sugarcane Kids have with the Hench at the canteen? How would you have dealt with this situation if you were the teacher?

2. The phrase 'just desserts' means getting the punishment you deserve. What kind of punishment do you think Dec, the monkey man, and the twins deserve? Have you ever been punished for something? Do you think your punishment was justified? What is the purpose of punishment?
3. 'We are just a group of kids trying to do the right thing.' (p. 224) The Sugarcane Kids have faced some dangerous situations in the name of justice. Is it okay to put yourself and your friends in danger in order to do the right thing? How far should we go to help other people or animals?

Freedom

1. *The Sugarcane Kids and the Empty Cage* discusses the illegal native animal pet trade. Do some research on the illegal pet trade in Australia and in other parts of the world. What effects is this trade having on individual animals, whole species, and the wider environment? Why do some people want to buy animals illegally? What is being done to stop the illegal trade of animals?
2. 'You can't take an animal from its home. It's wrong.' (p. 80) Is it ever okay to remove an animal from its natural habitat?
3. Do animals have the same rights as humans? Do wild animals have the same rights as pets or farm animals? As a class, discuss how different kinds of animals are treated by humans.
4. Andy's stepmum Sylvie is a vegan, which means she doesn't eat animals or animal products, such as eggs or milk. Why do some people choose to follow a vegan diet? Is it possible to love and respect animals and still eat them?

RESPONDING

1. Eli's family come from Bali in Indonesia. What did you learn about Indonesia from reading *The Sugarcane Kids and the Empty Cage*? Do some more research and create a poster or presentation about Indonesia. Include information about important days (like Nyepi Day), wildlife, and food. You might also like to include a map of Indonesia, and a list of Indonesian words (like *terima kasih*).
2. At school, the Sugarcane Kids do a research project on different animals. What animal does each kid choose? Choose your own animal to research and create a project about. Include

information about whether or not your animal is part of the illegal animal trade. Alternatively, you could create a 'missing-animal' poster for one of the animals that is stolen in the book.

3. There are a lot of different settings in *The Sugarcane Kids and the Empty Cage*, like the golf club, the caravan park, the school, the rainforest, Andy's dad's house, the skate park, the animal sanctuary. Make a list of different settings and choose one to draw.
4. What clues are there in this story that help the Sugarcane Kids figure out the mystery? Create a mystery of your own and write a list of clues you could leave to help the characters (and the readers!) solve your mystery.

EXTRA ACTIVITIES

1. Create a mosaic of an animal, like Sylvie's friends do for Gloria in Chapter 7. You could use coloured tiles, stones, beads, buttons, or cut up squares of paper.
2. Design your own Operation, like Operation Lamb Trap in Chapter 7 or Operation Decoy in Chapter 10. What will you name your operation? What is its objective? What tools are needed to carry it out? Who will be involved?
3. Design a new bike trick, like Spike Chain.
4. Create a comic strip story about Lyndell Hench and her guinea-pig sanctuary, Pigs of Gold.
5. Charlie Archbold uses sound to describe the rainforest. Read the paragraph on pages 106 and 107. Can you write a sound description of the place where you live, or a place you've visited.