

Rita's Revenge

AUTHOR

LIAN TANNER

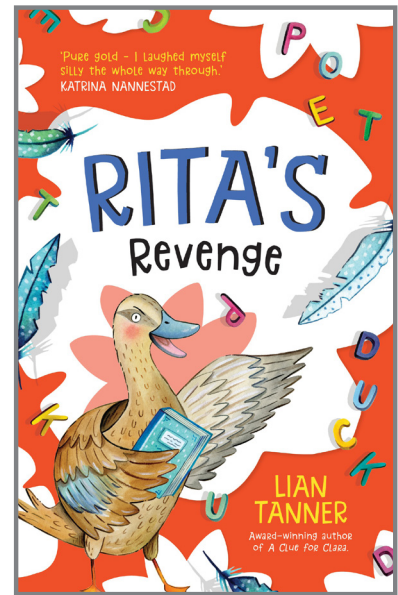
ILLUSTRATOR

CHERYL ORSINI

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SYNOPSIS

The ducks of Little Dismal are angry. A scruffy chicken called Clara has been telling lies about them. They need revenge.

Enter Rita—a duck with the soul of a poet. After an embarrassing talent night, Rita sees revenge on Clara as a chance to restore her reputation.

But Rita finds more than revenge on her mission. She uncovers a dastardly plan to chook-nap the clever chicken that will take them both a long way from home.

Luckily, it's Rita's unlikely friendship with a small human and the help of some street-smart birds that just might save the day and inspire an epic poem!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lian Tanner has worked as a teacher, a tourist bus driver, a freelance journalist, a juggler, an editor and a professional actor. She has been dynamited while scuba diving and arrested while busking. She once spent a week in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, searching for a Japanese soldier left over from the Second World War. It took her a while to realise that all this was preparation for becoming a writer. Nowadays, Lian lives by the sea in southern Tasmania.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Cheryl Orsini taught herself to draw as a little girl. She grew a little taller, studied Visual Communications at UTS and finally, when she could grow no more, she started illustrating children's books, magazines and decorating a great many peg dolls!

Her books include *Lucy's Book*, *Caravan*, *The Fairy Dancers* and *Pom Pom, Where Are You?*. Cheryl's work also regularly appears in magazines and exhibitions.

Cheryl created the current exterior design and illustrations for *Russ the Story Bus*.

STUDY NOTES

- As class, discuss the following topic after reading *Rita's Revenge*. Peer pressure—in the form of the ducks ostracising Rita for her poetry and Jubilee telling Tracy how to think and behave—can be toxic. True friendship, on the other hand—like Rita and Tracy helping each other—can be positive. What are the good and bad aspects of peer pressure faced by young people today?

HUMOUR

'To my surprise there are several armies gathered here. In one room they appear to be drawing up battle plans on large sheets of paper. In another, they are experimenting with strange weapons...I expect she is describing our first meeting and the thrill of being chosen by a duck.' (pp 34–35)

- Why is it funny when Rita mistakes things in the human world?
- Can you find other funny examples from the story where she misunderstands what is really happening?
- Can you think of funny examples from the story where she only half understands what an object is for or how it works?
- Do you think the idea of a duck being a poet or ruthless warrior is funny? Why/why not?

EPISTOLARY STORYTELLING

- What is the name for stories being told through letters written by one character to another?
- How is epistolary different to third-person storytelling?
- What did you learn about Tracy in her letters to Jubilee?
- What did you learn about Jubilee in the same letters?
- Why do you think Tracy uses so many names in her letters to Jubilee?
- Sometimes things that are omitted or crossed out by a writer tell the reader a lot. Why do you think Tracy crossed out the P.S., P.P.S and P.P.P.S on pp 56–57?
- How does the tone of Tracy's letters change as the story progresses?
- What is the significance of Tracy writing letters to her mother rather than Jubilee as the story progresses?

CHARACTERISATION

- Make a list of words or phrases to describe Rita, Clara and Tracy. Find scenes from the book that made you think this about each of them. For instance, you might say that Rita wants to fit in with the other ducks although she is different, Clara is analytical because she looks for evidence to solve problems, and Tracy is angry with everyone because Jubilee encouraged her to see the worst in people.
- Match each duck—Rita, Great-Aunt Myrtle and Vera—with a human from the story and explain why you think the pair are similar. (Hint: Rita is like Tracy because they are ostracised at the beginning of the story, Vera is like Jubilee because they are mean, and Great-Aunt Myrtle is like Delphine because they encourage the young in their care to behave badly.)

POETRY

- Read the poem called *Kindness* by Naomi Shihab Nye and explain why you think Mrs Savage slipped it into Tracy's hand in class.
- What does Tracy's acrostic poem using the word FRIEND on p 38 tell you about her at this point of the story?
 - Create your own acrostic poem for the word REVENGE.
- Write a poem from the point of view of an animal other than a duck. What sort of poem would a dog write? Or a cockatoo?
- Do you agree with Rita that *What I Eat* (p 44) and *Why are Chooks Wrong* (p 47) are lists and not poems? Why/why not?
- 'Remember me as a duck / who flew too close / to the sun—' (p 312) What is the name of the literary device Rita uses here in *Rita's Last Poem*?

- Who was Emily Dickinson? When and where did she live and what did she write about in her poems?
- What is an epic poem and why do the city ducks think Rita should make her story into one?

VOCABULARY

- 'One of General Ya's most famous sayings is, "Avoid what is strong and strike at what is weak.'" (p 27) Rita hilariously thinks of herself as a military genius and uses words and phrases we might associate with a soldier. What do each of the following mean?
 - Stealth mode
 - Subterfuge
 - Block
 - Pivot
 - Kick
 - Pincer movement.

COMPREHENSION

- Answer the following comprehension questions after reading Chapter One:
 - Name two things that show Rita really doesn't know how to keep a diary.
 - Why is Great-Aunt Myrtle the most important duck in Little Dismal?
 - Why are cows, pigs and horses laughing at the ducks in Little Dismal?
 - Name three words that will get a duck's immediate attention.
 - Why is Rita so keen to punish Clara?
 - Why isn't a duck allowed to be a poet?
 - Name three approved activities for ducks.
 - Why does Great-Aunt Myrtle prefer Vera to Rita?
 - Would you describe the ducks of Little Dismal as 'kind' creatures? Why/why not?
- Answer the following comprehension questions after reading Chapter Two:
 - What does Rita do to make herself look like an 'arrow of revenge'?
 - Do you agree that ducks are very patient? Why/why not?
 - Whose teachings did Rita study as a duckling?
 - What name do humans give a 'two-wheel'?
 - How does Clara communicate with Olive and the other children?
 - What three subjects do ducks learn as ducklings?
 - Why does Rita decide she needs her own human army?
 - What does Rita want her army to do?
 - What do humans hear when Rita is talking to them?
 - What is the name for the dreadful noise at school that sounds like goats attacking?