

Digging up Dad: And Other Hopeful (And Funny) Stories

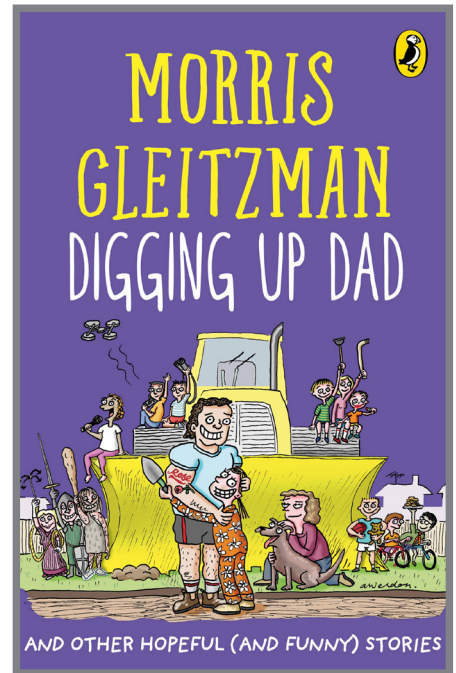
AUTHOR

MORRIS GLEITZMAN

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Another winning set of short stories from one of our best-loved authors, on a theme for our times—kids helping adults to be their best selves. Funny hopeful stories just when we need all the hope and humour we can get!

Brilliantly funny short stories for middle school readers from the ever-popular Morris Gleitzman.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morris Gleitzman grew up in England and came to Australia when he was sixteen. After university he worked for ten years as a screenwriter. Then he had a wonderful experience. He wrote a novel for young people. Now, after 43 books, he's one of Australia's most popular authors. He was appointed the Australian Children's Laureate for 2018–2019.

THEMES

- Hope
- Family issues
- Friendship
- Resilience
- Role of authority
- Courage
- Taking action
- Loss and grief

STUDY NOTES

- How does the author, Morris Gleitzman, manage to create so many different characters? How does he vary the voice so that they are distinctly different people?
- Some of these stories have strong messages. How does Gleitzman use humour to keep them entertaining?
- Why is humour an effective device when asking people to think about serious issues?
- Which of the stories in this collection is your favourite? Why?
- What did you learn from reading these stories? How does it suggest that children can help to make our world a better place?

GREAT GREAT GREAT

- Where does the narrator spend every Thursday afternoon?
- The narrator in this story is never given a name or gender. Why do you think this might be the case? Do you think it is a boy or a girl? Why?
- How does your family and ancestry shape your personal identity?
- How many greats can you trace your family back to? Complete your own family tree as far back as you can.
- What qualities does the narrator seem to have inherited from the ancestors?
- Why are stories more valuable than expensive jewels, such as diamonds and emeralds?
- How does the author, Morris Gleitzman, weave the old language and the new in the 'greats' stories? What is the impact?
- How does the story show that things (like spiders) aren't so terrifying when you encounter them?
- Why would the narrator need to be brave?
- How would it feel to visit your father in jail?
- Why does the narrator give the father a spider? How might the spider help him?
- The story uses the narrative device of foreshadowing—when the author provides hints throughout the story that all pull together and are explained right at the end. Consider what elements of foreshadowing you find in this story:
 - Courage
 - Bravery
 - Theft
 - Spiders
 - Importance of family
 - Love
 - Rescues
 - Breaking out of prisons.

Read the story a second time and see how you interpret these 'clues' differently now that you know the whole story.

FAKE NUDES

- What special connections do twins often share? Why have they often been the subjects of studies?
- Why are the twins so convinced that their neighbours are either nudists or aliens?
- Why do we make up rumours about people if we don't know the truth?
- Why is it important not to believe everything we read online?
- What are conspiracy theories and why do many people believe them? Make a list of any conspiracy theories you have heard of.
- Why is the twins' mother struggling?
- What does the story suggest about problems caused by COVID-19?
- How do the neighbours react to being spied upon? What might be surprising about this?
- What is the truth about Jock and Wil's neighbours?
- How do the twins hope to solve everyone's problems?
- What does this story suggest about the dangers of rumours and making assumptions about people?
- Make a Venn diagram comparing what the twins suspected about their neighbours and what they find out to be the truth.
- Write a short story of your own about someone who turns out not to be as dangerous as the rumours suggested.

BIG HANDS LITTLE HANDS

- Audrey can't understand why anyone would need a watch as expensive as her father's. Do you agree or disagree with her?
- For Audrey's father, it's not just about the watch itself. What does an expensive watch symbolise?
- Audrey says her father often says his work is not about the money. 'I just love helping people.' Do you believe this is

true? What evidence is there in the story that it might not be?

- What does it mean that salespeople tell people ‘what they want to hear’? Why might they do this?
- Why do Audrey’s parents go quiet when she talks about Gina?
- Why is Audrey upset by how much money her father spent on the watch?
- How would you describe the real estate agents that Dad invites home for drinks?
- Do expensive clothing, jewellery and other possessions make you a better person? Why/why not?
- Consider the gift Gina leaves behind. What does it symbolise?
- Why does Audrey take all of the watches to the hospice?
- Why might adults be more likely to lose sight of what is important than children are? How do her parents react?
- How do the other estate agents react?
- Why does Audrey give her father Gina’s watch? What message will it remind him of?
- What important ‘timepiece’ is Audrey referring to at the end of the story?
- Research five of the richest people in the world and see what they spend their money on. Create a poster to convince people with money to donate it to those who really need it.

BURGER BUNS BEHAVING BADLY

- Ludo gives himself time each Sunday morning to feel sad about his Mum and to worry about his Dad. What does this suggest about his personality?
- Politicians are elected to represent and serve the people. Who do they often end up looking after?
- What are the different parties in our government? How might being a member of a specific party influence the decisions you make and the way you behave?
- Ludo asks ‘How could MPs hope to get good things done if people didn’t know they were tragically work damaged and just thought they were embarrassing and ridiculous?’. Why might politicians appear to be embarrassing and ridiculous? In what way are these politicians ‘work damaged’?
- Why do politicians ‘tell lies in public’ and ‘try to make people scared of stuff they don’t have to be scared of’?
- In what way does Henry suggest politicians are like burger buns?
- Why does Miss MacTavish suggest that being a schoolteacher is not much different from looking after politicians?
- What rules or values are enforced in school that need to be remembered by our politicians?
- Why did the teachers create a club for those who have taught students who have gone on to become politicians? Why are they disappointed in them?
- How do you think the teachers managed to change the behaviour of their former students at the luncheon?
- What do you think Merl said to Alice’s dad? Write their dialogue.
- Why does Ludo like the score 9/10?

DIGGING UP DAD

- Why is Rosie upset when her mum tells her they have to move out of their rental property?
- How does Rosie try to convince her landlords to let them stay?
- Consider the description of Rosie visiting her landlords’ house at the beginning of this story. How are they shown to be different? Do you think there is any way they would understand Rosie’s situation and allow her to stay in the house?
- Have you ever moved house? If yes, what was the hardest part of moving?
- What sort of life do you think Rosie and her mum have had? What evidence can you find to support your answer?
- Why does Rosie like having her dad around her? What sort of relationship do they have?
- Why did Rosie’s Mum tell her that her father had died? Do you think a parent should lie to a child like this?
- Consider the relationship Rosie might have had with her father. How would she feel about him if:
 - he had been around, like Alyssa’s father
 - she had been told the truth that he had abandoned her and her mother out of fear.
- These sorts of lies are often called white lies. We tell them in order to protect the other person’s feelings. Do you think it is ever appropriate to tell white lies?

- Where is Coober Pedy? Why would there be a lot of excavators there?
- What sort of person do you think Rosie's dad might be living and working in Coober Pedy?
- Why do you think Rosie's dad answered her request?
- How would Rosie feel about finally meeting her dad?
- Imagine that you are:
 - Rosie
 - her mum
 - her dad.

Write a diary entry for the night Rosie's dad arrives. How would you be feeling? What would be good or bad about the situation? What might you hope for now?

I LOVE BOOF

- Is it OK for children who are 11 or older to still hang onto their childhood toys? Do parents have the right to determine when they need to get rid of them?
- What does Boof offer Nate that his parents can't provide?
- Why does Nate like the fact that Boof never tells him not to worry or that things will sort themselves out?
- What sort of concerns does Nate have? How does this suggest that he is far more mature than his parents fear he is?
- Why are all the parents meeting at Gareth's place?
- "We're working our guts out," said Harley. "Not being scared. Keeping our nerve. Trying to get ready for the future. And we're lucky cause we've all got loved ones who listen and trust us...Loved ones," she said, "who don't try to protect us too much. And who don't tell us what to do and how to think." Who is Harley referring to in this quote? When Nate and the other children talk to their toys, the toys can't answer back. What does this force the children to do?
- Imagine that at their meeting, the children decided to write a training guide to help parents understand what their children need for them. Write the guide.
- Why did the police officer ask for a spare toy for the Divisional Commander? What does this suggest about support toys? Are they just for babies?
- How could all of their parents benefit from having their own special toys?

BIGGIES BEHAVING BETTER

- How has Grandpa's behaviour changed recently? List any evidence provided by the children, Nanna and Barry.
- Why does Rueben fear that his grandpa's pipes are all blocked?
- Why are mental worries harder to cure than physical illnesses?
- Why do you think Grandpa won't talk about what is upsetting him—even to Nanna?
- What is ironic in Grandpa being grumpy about the idea that people won't remember him fondly when he dies? How do the children help remind their grandpa that he will be remembered?
- Why has Grandpa cut himself off from all of his friends?
- Grandpa says that he has become grumpy because of the state of the world. Make a list of the things that might be making him upset.
 - Choose one of the things in our world that Grandpa might be worried about. Create a campaign to encourage people to do something to make a difference.
- Draw a picture of the statue that Barry builds for Grandpa. How does each element symbolise a different gift that Grandpa gave everyone?

DOES MY MUM LOOK BIG IN THIS?

- How does Millie describe Bogley's swimming pool at the beginning of this story?
- The writing technique used in this story is called hyperbole—when images are exaggerated for effect. Can you find an example of hyperbole in this story?

- What is the swimming pool like in Millie's town? Why has it been upgraded?
- Mum explains to Millie that they need to leave the Bogley pool as it is "'Tradition,'" says Mum. "Bogley's swimming pool is a precious crucible of rural tradition. It's a living piece of history. A national treasure.'" What does this actually mean? In what way does this sound like the sort of excuse that politicians often use to justify their behaviour? What impact does language like this have on people?
- Why can't politicians just provide equipment for the towns that need it the most? Is this a fair way to govern?
- Should politics be about popularity?
- Millie's mother tells her, 'Sometimes I get to do good things. And sometimes I have to do bad things.' In what ways might politicians have to do bad things?
- 'We have to look after the people who are important to us.' Which people are seen as being 'important'?
- After their initial shock, why are Millie's parents not mad at her for transferring the money?
- Why does Mum write a cheque for a swimming pool in Bogey? What is the difference between how she can behave as a mum and how she can behave as a politician?
- Why does Mum finally get into the pool with Millie? What does this symbolise?
- How are the ideas in this story linked to those in 'Burger Buns Behaving Badly'? What does this suggest about the link between local and federal politics?
- The title of this story is a pun or a play on words. What is the original phrase? How is this version appropriate for this story?

AMAZING THINGS

- What is surprising about Bernard's reaction to cars?
- Why is the speeding man so cranky?
- Many of the characters in this story are household items that have been sent to the dump. Think of another item that may have been thrown away. Give them a name and personality as Gleitzman has done with his characters.
- Why did the man and his wife take all of the toys to the dump?
- Is it fair to blame the toys for what happened?
- Why do we blame others for our own mistakes? Write an example of an incident when you blamed someone for something you did wrong.
- How does the daughter feel about her brand new, huge TV?
- The toys and other objects want revenge for being thrown out. Would this make their behaviour any better than the father's?
- How do the characters all work together to help each other?
- Why were the parents happy to have all of the toys back?
- What is Bernard's new job? Why is he needed in this job? What role do speedbumps play?
- What does this story suggest about who is important in our lives? Is it people or 'things'?
- Imagine if all of your belongings could think, talk and move. What aspects of their lives might they like and not like?
 - Write an adventure some of these objects could have.

BABYSITTERS BEHAVING BRILLIANTLY

- Why do you think Aunty Erica really needs to have a good birthday dinner?
- Why do Shona and Gabe find babysitting the twins so hard?
- In what way might twins be harder to look after than children of different ages?
- Make a list of all the disasters that have occurred while Shona has been babysitting other children. Then, make a list of all the things that go wrong on the night that Shona and Gabe are babysitting.
- Did Shona and Gabe make the right decisions? What could they have done differently to handle the situation better?
- What evidence is there that this was always going to be a difficult evening?
- Was Shona right to take the car in order to find Daisy? Did she have any alternative option?
- Why is Aunty Erica so happy when she arrives home?

- Should Shona and Gabe have told the true story about what happened? Why?
- What is ironic about this absolute disaster being the thing that helps her feel better?
- There are many examples of irony in this story. Make a list of anything you find ironic.
- Think of another problem that the twins might have created that night and write an extra scene for the story.
- Imagine that you are Shona and Gabe. Write a 'Babysitter's Guide Book' to help other babysitters know how to deal with potentially difficult situations.

A SORRY SPECTACLE

- What act were Kaz and her group supposed to perform in the concert? Why did Kaz decide to do an interpretation of the hygiene issue instead?
- Why do you think the other students went along with her idea? What does that suggest about Kaz as a character?
- How does the audience react to the performance? How does Ms Domenico react to the performance? How would the other children have felt about this reaction?
- How does Kaz use their act to inform her audience?
- Why does Ms Domenico insist that Kaz makes a formal apology to the audience?
- What does Mum mean when she says 'An apology is a gift that's worth more than it costs.'?
- Why do people find Kaz's apology funny?
- Why does Mrs Domenico not get angry at Kaz for this apology?
- Look at the pun in the title of this story. What do we usually mean by the phrase 'a sorry spectacle'? What does it mean in this instance?
- Do you believe that apologies always achieve what they are meant to achieve?