

Runt

AUTHOR

CRAIG SILVEY

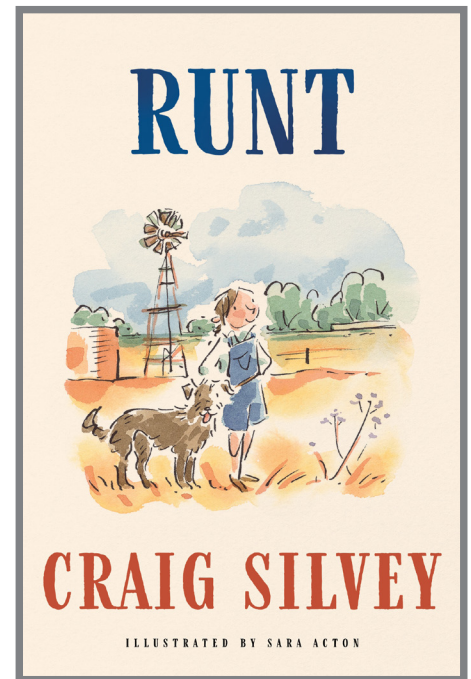
ILLUSTRATOR

SARA ACTON

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

Annie Shearer lives in the country town of Upson Downs with her best friend, an adopted stray dog called Runt. The two share a very special bond.

After years evading capture, Runt is remarkably fast and agile, perfect for herding runaway sheep. But when a greedy local landowner puts her family's home at risk, Annie directs Runt's extraordinary talents towards a different pursuit—winning the Agility Course Grand Championship at the lucrative Krumpets Dog Show in London.

However, there is a curious catch: Runt will only obey Annie's commands if nobody else is watching.

With all eyes on them, Annie and Runt must beat the odds and the fastest dogs in the world to save her farm.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Craig Silvey is an author and screenwriter from Fremantle, Western Australia. His critically acclaimed debut novel, *Rhubarb*, was published in 2004. His bestselling novel, *Jasper Jones*, was released in 2009 and is considered a modern Australian classic. Published in over a dozen territories, *Jasper Jones* has won plaudits in three continents, including an International Dublin Literary Award shortlisting, a Michael J. Printz Award Honor, and a Miles Franklin Literary Award shortlisting. *Jasper Jones* was the Australian Book Industry Awards Book of the Year for 2010. Craig's third novel *Honeybee* was published in 2019 and won Best Fiction for the Indie Book Awards 2021 and Dymock's Book of the Year 2020.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sara Acton is an award-winning author and illustrator. Sara grew up in the Cotswolds in England and always loved drawing, especially people and other strange creatures. She studied BA Hons Fine Art and trained as an Art Teacher in London. After teaching and practicing art in England and New Zealand Sara moved with her family to Australia. Her first picture book *Ben and Duck* won the 2012 Children's Book Council of Australia Crichton Award for new illustrators.

STUDY NOTES

- What does the word 'runt' mean? Who is the 'runt' in the story? Could the term describe more than one character in the story? How did Annie and Runt prove that neither were, in fact, 'runts' by the end of the story?
- 'Heroes and Villains' is a common theme in books. Who are the heroes in this story? Who are the 'unexpected' heroes? Who are the villains? How did the interaction between the heroes and villains move the plot forward?
- The author, Craig Silvey, is adept at using animals to describe his characters: Max is a honey badger; Susie a bird of

paradise; Bryan a panda; Bernadette a pangolin; Fergus a peacock.

- How do these similes help the reader imagine and understand the character?
- Which animal is Annie compared to, and what does that animal say about her character?
- Which animal would best describe you?
- The names of the dogs (and indeed the people) in the story often carry 'hidden' meanings. What do the names Runt and Chariot suggest about each animal? Build on this concept by exploring the names Robert-Barren (both the adjective barren and the term robber baron) and Fink. How do the names relate to the villainous actions of each character?
- Do you think Fergus Fink sees himself as a villain? How might the story change if he was telling it from his point of view?
- Come up with an 'origin' story to explain why Fergus has become such a fink.
- Earl Robert-Barren's many possessions give him little pleasure and he appears to be a very unhappy and unsatisfied man. How do other characters in the book end up happy and satisfied? Is their satisfaction linked to their possessions or relationships, or both? Do you think that the search for happiness and satisfaction is a moral in the story? If so, what is the moral?
- What do you think was the significance of Annie taking off her toolbelt at the end of the story? In your answer consider why she might have wanted to wear it before the events of the story and how her character changed because of the events.
- Elements of the writing style, characterisation and plot in *Runt* echo those of some stories from Roald Dahl. List familiar Roald Dahl stories as a class and identify key elements of his writing (such as use of humour, strong characterisation, strong fantasy themes). Complete a Venn diagram to compare these with *Runt*. How and why might you argue that this book might be written by the 'Roald Dahl of the 21st century'?
- Study the illustrations throughout the story. What is the purpose of including them in the text? How do they provide additional insight and meaning to the plot, characters or setting?
- Write a book review for *Runt*. Include a summary of the plot, a brief description of the main characters, a personal comment about how much you enjoyed reading the story and a rating out of five.
- Should endings always be happy and predictable? In what way was this story's ending unpredictable?
- What might happen in a sequel to *Runt*?