

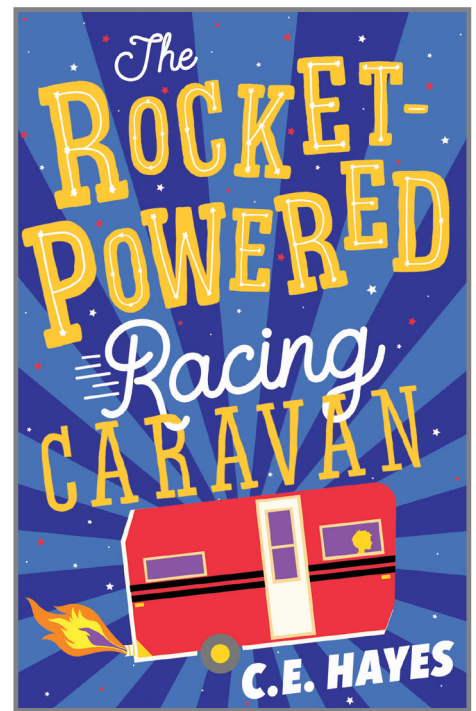
The Rocket-Powered Racing Caravan

AUTHOR
C.E. HAYES

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Earl Grey, 12, is growing up in rural Australia. He loves his family, even though his parents aren't the sharpest knives in the drawer, and his sister was once mistaken for an alpaca.

But with his best mate Bruiser by his side, Earl can navigate almost any situation. The question is: can Earl outrun his arch nemesis, Division A basketball captain Slam Dunk, before he's beaten to a pulp?

To stand a chance, Earl decides he'll need a solar-powered racing caravan with rocket boosters. When he takes a job shovelling horse poo at the racecourse for a mobster who quit the mafia to take up antiquing, Earl learns the value of good connections and finds out how far \$27 goes towards a survival plan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C.E. Hayes is a high school English teacher based in the midnorth coast of NSW. She is on a mission to make children laugh. She divides her time between high school teaching, university lecturing and writing. This is her debut novel.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think a Rocket-Powered Racing Caravan might look like?
 - Does the picture on your cover match your mental image of a rocket powered racing caravan?
 - What do you think all the smaller pictures on the back cover represent?
 - Who do you think might be the protagonist of this novel? What about the cover makes you think this?
 - What do you think might happen in the novel?
 - What genre do you think this book might be?
 - Who do you think might be the target audience of this novel?
- After reading the first three chapters of the book, write a character profile for Earl. Include all the information about him, and his family and friends, that you have learnt so far in the story.
- Why does Earl describe himself as 'assuming the qualities of tepid tea' once his mother names him Earl?
- Why do you think Earl calls Slam Dunk and Mad Max by those names? Think of some funny or interesting names that you could use for a fictional story. As a class, make a list of funny or interesting descriptive names, and then

individually, choose one of those names and write a character profile for a character with that name, and a short story featuring them. Your character profile should contain:

- Name
 - Age
 - Height
 - Build
 - Hair and hairstyle
 - Clothing Preferences
 - Notable physical features (eg. large nose, long fingers, fat feet, etc.)
 - Interests
 - Personality traits
 - Family background/friendship groups
 - Social behaviours
 - Any other quirks, oddities or traits of note.
- On p 12, Earl describes Bruiser as having 'a sandcastle's chance in a tsunami'. What is a tsunami, and how much chance would a sandcastle have of surviving one?
 - Why do you think the author chose to use this phrase instead of saying 'no chance'?
 - What mental imagery accompanies this phrase for you?
 - Can you invent a descriptive phrase or sentence of your own that clearly means 'no chance'?
 - What about a descriptive phrase that means 'guaranteed to win', or one that means 'extremely easy'?
 - Earl always hopes to find a cola flavoured ice block at the back of the freezer. What is your favourite icy pole flavour, and why? Have a class treat and make and eat different flavoured ice blocks made from juice, cordial or fizzy drink. You can use paper or plastic cups as the moulds, and when they are just starting to freeze, stand up a disposable wooden spoon into it to use as a stick. Alternatively you can tape the spoons to a ruler resting across the top of the cups to hold the spoons upright.
 - Earl's mum gets excited by cooking when she is watching competitive cooking shows. Have a class cooking competition of your own. Individual students each bring in one secret mystery ingredient from their pantry at home, if they have something available. It can be as special as a bag of marshmallows or chocolate chips, or as simple as a sandwich bag full of cornflakes or rice bubbles. At the start of the day, each student gives their ingredient to the teacher without anyone else in the class seeing what they have brought in. All ingredients are placed in a cardboard box, and if necessary, the teacher can reportion some of the larger bags of ingredients into two or more smaller bags so that there is one for each student. Students are then divided into small groups, and each student draws a bag of supplies from the cardboard box without looking. The groups are then tasked with creating an appetising and visually appealing dish from their ingredients. Another staff member—or preferably two—then act as judges for the competition, and the winners are awarded the title of Mystery Box Chefs of The Year.
 - Earl has to look up the word soporific when his little sister uses it. Do you know what it means? Look it up in a dictionary, and then use it in a sentence to show you understand it.
 - Earl talks of Year 7 camp as being a venue where they can catch Ross River fever. What is Ross River fever, how do you catch it, where are you at risk of catching it, and how can you avoid catching it if you live in an area where it is prevalent?
 - When at camp, Earl's class does some fairly unsuccessful trust falls (see p 56). What is the risk of letting someone fall during a trust fall, and why should you never let this happen intentionally? Can you think of a safer way of running this activity?
 - If you were singing karaoke campfire songs, what songs would you choose to sing? As a class, make a karaoke campfire playlist of your own, hold a class vote to discover the most popular songs, and hold a class singalong featuring the top five or ten songs on your playlist.
 - Reread p 63, and as a class, discuss the racehorse names in the story. Are these names realistic? Why do you think racehorses frequently have long, complicated, or rather odd names? Think of a name that you could give to a racehorse if you owned one, and write a short piece of fiction about someone trying to name a racehorse, and how

they might have come up with your chosen name.

- Do you think that Earl's fears of a Zombie Apocalypse are realistically likely to happen? Why/why not? Australia is, however, prone to a variety of (non-zombie) natural disasters, and Earl's belief that everyone should have a go bag available for emergencies is a very sensible one.
 - Which natural disasters are most likely to occur in your local area?
 - What would be some good things to have on hand if one of these natural disasters strikes and you have to leave in a hurry?
 - As a class, brainstorm the types of things that should be included in an emergency kit. (Hint: the NSW RFS, the Australian Red Cross and several State Government Websites all have a lot of good suggestions.)
 - Individually or in pairs, create your own personal list of items to go in an emergency kit or go bag.
 - Create a poster advertising preparedness, and illustrate it with pictures of items in your emergency kit.
- Earl's neighbour lost his chicken coop when it burnt down while toasting marshmallows. What are some safety precautions that someone should take when toasting marshmallows to ensure that this doesn't happen to them? Toast some marshmallows (safely) and see if you can identify some other risks during the activity that you can protect yourself against in the future.
- Make a comic strip of your favourite action scene from the book.
- At the Easter show Mrs Willis cheats to win the native flower display every year. Make native flowers or plants from folded paper, or draw or paint pictures of some. Host a native flower display competition of your own featuring your artwork.
- Bruiser (Tim) learns to crochet, and one of his crocheted items wins a prize at the Show. Learn to crochet, and create a useful household item. (Hotpads for holding oven trays are a useful beginner project.)
- Why do you think Slam Dunk's family might have had so many problems with their cars in Chapter Twenty-One?
- Where do you think Earl's hometown might be located? As a class discuss all the different clues in the story that give you an idea as to the rough location of his town, and see if you can identify some towns that could plausibly be his home.
- Grow some zucchini, and leave some on the vine to see how big they will grow before winter. If you live far enough north that winter is not cold enough to stop them growing, instead see how large they grow before the end of the school year.
- What happens when you mix citric acid, baking soda, and soap? (Note: if you choose to find out by experimenting rather than research, be sure to do this experiment outside in an area that can be easily hosed down without the resultant mixture washing over any plants that might be damaged.)
- Mrs Hardcastle did fifty push-ups. How many push-ups can you do? What would have happened if she had only been able to do one or two?
- Try writing a story about your experiences at school this year that is only 20 or 40 words long. As a class discuss the experience, and talk about what you found challenging when trying to write an interesting super-short story.