

Riz Chester: The Counterfeit Bust

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary

SYNOPSIS

Riz sometimes notices weird stuff. She can pick the twins apart, notices when people grow, and challenges the lunch staff when they change the cheese brand. Most people think it is odd, so she keeps her observations to herself.

But when Riz notices something different about her mum's cash, she speaks up only to get questioned by the police!

With her observations and a little help from some tech-savvy friends Riz leads the counterfeit bust. But can her team follow the right clues, or will it land them all in trouble?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rochelle Stephens is the Director of Wombat Books and Rhiza Press. With qualifications in teaching, counselling, editing and publishing, Rochelle brings expertise and knowledge to her work in publishing and editing. Since pioneering Wombat Books, Rochelle has been actively involved in every aspect of story development and book production.

Rochelle has written for science textbooks and other educational texts and is passionate about making science and maths real for children. While Rochelle loves genres like fantasy, she believes that when it comes to science and maths there is an amazing beauty in both without any fantasy needed and that when explored there is so much to appreciate. In her experience there is fun to being observant and planning out how to approach a curious query—such as using cash to solve a mystery. But she also feels that kids should be kids and explore things safely!

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Em Hammond is an Autistic Artist and Illustrator from the Hunter region, NSW. She is also a busy mum to three young kids, and a Speech Pathologist specialising in neurodiversity-affirming practice.

Em loves spending her spare time creating images and stories that spark imagination and whimsy. She grew up reading the magic that was Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton, and knew that she wanted to create magic between pages someday. She definitely spent a lot of time drawing in the margins of her schoolbooks when she should have been learning about mathematical concepts.

Em dreams of one day writing and illustrating picture books and middle grade fiction that shine a bright light onto Neurodivergent characters and experiences. Books are a special kind of magic and she hopes to make big, beautiful change in the world with her words and pictures.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Problem solving
- Confidence
- Mystery
- Science

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Show the cover to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about.
- Read the back cover blurb. Does this give them more of an idea of what the book could be about?
- Ask students if they can recognise the setting of this story from the cover image.

AFTER READING

- Ask students if Riz or her friends remind them of anyone they know: a friend, a sibling, themselves perhaps.
- What is their first impression of Riz?
- How does Riz change over the course of the story? Do any other characters change? See if you can use descriptive words to explain the change, eg. confident, enthusiastic, self-assured.
- Ask students how they perceive Riz's situation. Does she overcome the challenges in the end?

Discussion Questions

General

- Which character do you relate to most: Riz, Lachie A or Lochie C, Sabrina or Jenny? Do you find that you have any interest in science or technology or music? Did it help you to understand the story when you saw it from one of the children's perspective?
- If this story was going to be from anyone else's point of view who do you think it should be and why? What skills and ideas does that character bring to the team?
- Do you think something like this story could truly happen? Why or why not?
- Are you very observant? Name something that you've noticed before that other people haven't noticed.
- What area of science are you most interested in? Forensics as a science combines different areas together, using a range of biology, chemistry and physics! So while these are often seen as separate to each other they're all connected when it comes to solving mysteries.
- What did you think of the strategy to use a table to plan out the visits to the shops? Have you ever used a table to plan anything? Why do you think it would be helpful?
- Take five to ten minutes to research forensics and find out something about it that excites you and maybe your friends don't know. Take it in turns as a class or in a small group of friends to share what you've discovered.
- **Neurodivergent is a word to describe the way people's brains can be different. It is a type of biodiversity (living creatures being different in lots of ways). People who are neurodiverse might have autism, ADHD, tourettes, dyspraxia, dyscalculia or dyslexia. 30 to 40 percent of Australians are neurodiverse! (According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics)**

Riz exhibits some neurodivergent traits—she observes things others don't, she picks up on extra sensory feelings and other 'weird stuff' she keeps in her log. Name a time when you have found something weird. Did anyone else pick up on it too? Why was it weird to you?

- Which things Riz notices and puts in her log did you find odd and which did you go, 'no that's something I would think too.?'

Friendship

- Before the story begins Riz used to do things with all of her friends—she used to time the school bells with Lochie and Lachie and she used to play with Sabrina and Jenny. Do you remember why she chose these friends to solve a mystery with? Why do you think she chose them? Do you think she made the right choice? If you were going to solve a mystery, who would you choose to do it with and why?

- If you're exploring new things like science and solving puzzles why is it important to have good friends with you? How does having a good friend help you? Maybe they make you feel supported and encouraged, maybe they have good ideas, or maybe it's good to be able to share something with someone you like?
- How does Riz's friendship with the other children change over the story? And why do you think it changes?
- Sabrina and Jenny are very close, they're identical twins! But even so, Riz can see differences between them, in looks, expression and personality. How important is it for your friend to notice things about you and how you can be different from other people? How might that help you?

Problem Solving

- When you're faced with a problem what steps do you take to work out how to solve it? Does that change if it's a big problem or a small problem? Are you more like Riz and come up with a plan, maybe even write things down, or do you make it up as you go? What are the benefits of making lists and planning things?
- In what ways is a team stronger than an individual? Are teams better at tackling problems? Is it easier when more people work on a problem or is it harder? What are the benefits to having a team?
- When Riz didn't have a clear answer as to who the counterfeiters were, what did she do? Did she give up or adjust her plan? Sometimes when we're trying to solve a problem we need to be flexible and readjust. Is this easy or hard to do? In what ways can it be hard and how might you handle that?

Confidence

- Do you think you're a very confident person? Why or why not? Are you more confident in some places than others? Why might that be?
- Create a tracker on a poster board with thirty days down the side. Write down something every day for thirty days that you think is great about yourself. It might be that you're good at math, or you scored a point in your favourite sport, or you're a really good friend. At the end of thirty days read all the notes and see if you're feeling more confident. If one of your classmates or friends are struggling to come up with something during the thirty days, tell them what *you* think is great about them!
- Riz remarks they need to get better at acting and being more confident during their investigation. But at the end of the book they already seem to be getting more confident and at ease being detectives. Why do you think this happened? Do you think it had anything to do with helping find the counterfeiters and feeling accomplished?

Mystery

- Design a poster for a mystery book or movie that you would want to write—what's the mystery? Can you leave any clues in the poster? How would you solve it? Would you use any science like fingerprints, facial recognition or handwriting analysis? Present your posters and mysteries in small groups and discuss solving them.
- Try to write an alternative scene if the group hadn't been picked up by security and come back again. How might that go?
- Think about some of your favourite detective and mystery stories—Friday Barnes, Enola Holmes, Ruby Redfort, A Series of Unfortunate Events, Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, The Butter O'Bryan Mysteries, Alex Rider, The Fowl Twins, or even Scooby Doo. What do you like about these mysteries? What are some examples of the fantasy of mystery versus the realistic and scientific detective work?
- Forensics is a blend of a few different types of science, it uses biology, chemistry and physics. Consider some forensics, such as facial recognition or counterfeiting, and discuss how it uses different types of science to analyse it.
- What are some other types of science that help detectives solve crimes? Can you think of any? How might those things help? Like tracing dirt from tracks to work out where they came from or creating computer programs that can detect facial recognition.
- As a class, take the fingerprints of every student onto a posterboard with their names, underneath. See how everyone has individual fingerprints. Not even identical twins have the same fingerprints because they aren't genetic! Biology tells us that some things get passed down from parent to child, like hair colour and eye colour, but things like fingerprints are formed from how you move and grow when your mom is pregnant with you.
- Do some research on different currencies and what they do to prevent counterfeiting. Do they use plastic like Australia? Do they also use 'feel, look, tilt'? Do they use things we don't use, and should we start?