

# Superheroes For a Day

AUTHOR

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ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Three Autistic friends try to save their school from never-ending maths in this fast and fun story, told from a rarely seen perspective. *Superheroes for a Day* tells the engaging story of Max, Daniel, and Natalie's mission to save their school from endless maths lessons when the key to the sports shed is lost. Using their unique abilities like heightened memory and attention to detail, they turn their differences into strengths. While managing their individual traits, they find the courage to become heroes, at least for a day, in the eyes of their schoolmates.

The book seeks to normalise the experiences of Autistic kids who are often seen as uncool because of their quirks. By making them the heroes, the story offers insight into their personal experiences and perspectives in a fun and engaging manner, resonating with readers in mainstream classrooms.

Filled with delightful illustrations, *Superheroes for a Day* is an empowering tale of friendship, bravery, and the remarkable abilities that often go unnoticed in those who are different.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Craig Cormick OAM is the author of over 30 books for adults and children, several of them winning awards. He is a member of the Children's Book Council of Australia. Dr Cormick has a son on the Autism Spectrum who has been a very close collaborator on this book.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Lauren Mullinder has had a passion for drawing ever since she was able to hold a pencil and loves to create illustrations that capture and delight the imagination. With a degree in Visual Communication and a background in marketing and design, Lauren spends her days drawing stories, creating characters and teaching others how to do the same. Lauren lives in Adelaide, with her husband and dog, Charlie, and loves spending time in nature.

## THEMES

- Friendship
- Teamwork
- Bravery
- Empowerment of autistic kids
- Celebrating differences

- Mathematics
- School

## STUDY NOTES

### BEFORE READING

- Discuss the term ‘Superheroes’. What kinds of values, attributes or references come to mind? Create a mind map or brainstorming web around the term ‘superheroes’
  - Students might like to create a short skit with a partner or small group that highlights the most important aspect of being a ‘superhero’ in their eyes.
- Look at the cover of *Superheroes for a Day*. Ask, what do you notice? What does it make you wonder? What might this adventure be about? Does the cover entice you to find out? Why or why not?
- Considering the title, what might this tell us about these characters? How do you know?
- Read the blurb. Discuss.

### WHILE READING

#### Chapter One

- Discuss and write down the meanings of the following vocabulary terms: ‘affectionately’ and ‘mangled’. Write them in your own sentences.

#### Literary Technique—Hyperbole

- Hyperbole is an exaggerated statement, not meant to be literal, and used in emotive/emphasised situations or dialogue.
- Highlight the parts of the following quote that are not meant to be taken literally or are used as an emotive, exaggerated statement.

“It was a disaster! It was a catastrophe! It was the worst thing that had ever happened at the school!” (p 2).

How does this language create a greater impact on the reader? Re-write this sentence using less emotive terms and compare its effectiveness. For example, ‘A bad thing happened at the school.’

- Is the PE teacher’s losing of the key to the sports equipment shed really ‘a catastrophe’, and the ‘worst thing’ ever? List some things that might actually be a disaster or catastrophe.

#### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What does Daniel describe as the worst thing that had ever happened at school? Why might he, and the other students, feel this way?
- Do you think they are exaggerating or overreacting? Why or why not?
- What solutions do they come up with to solve the problem? What other ideas can you think of?
- What kind of superpowers do you think Max is talking about?

#### Chapter Two

##### Vocabulary

- Write down the definitions of these terms: ‘autism’, ‘obsessive’, ‘cite’ and ‘overwhelming’. Then, write each word in a sentence that relates to the behaviours and descriptions of the three friends.

##### Literary Technique—Idioms

- An idiom is a phrase or expression that usually presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase.
  - What are some examples of common idioms you know?

#### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What did you learn about Daniel, Max and Natalie?
- What are your thoughts on ‘being different’? What does Daniel mean when he says being different is relative to who you were with?
- Why might kids like Daniel, Max and Natalie get bullied? What is your opinion on this?
- Do you have any further clues as to what their superpowers might be, and what they will use them for?

#### Chapter Three

##### Vocabulary

- Write down the definitions of the following adjectives: ‘talkative’, ‘disconcerting’ and ‘confident’. Then, use each one in a sentence to describe a particular personality trait or characteristic of a character or object.

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What more did you learn about Daniel, Max and Natalie in this chapter?
- Write a character profile report on Max or Natalie including details such as, superhero name, appearance, behaviours, personality, interests, skills, etc.
- How do you think their ‘superpowers’ will be useful in solving their problem?
- Do you think it is important for the characters to work as a team? Why or why not?
- What is meant by the phrase by Julius Caesar, ‘Without confidence, you lack knowledge and without knowledge, you lack victory.’?

### Chapter Four

- Write the definitions for the following vocabulary terms: ‘suggesting’, ‘scowled’, ‘suspected’ and ‘considered’. Brainstorm and list synonyms and shades of meaning for these verbs.

### Literary Technique—Show, Don’t Tell

- ‘Natalie sat down on the ground and folded her arms’ (p 29). How does the language used ‘show’ the reader how the character is feeling, rather than simply ‘telling’ us? What words show how Natalie is taking a stance? How is this more effective than writing, ‘Natalie didn’t want to go to the office’?
- Write another sentence ‘showing’ a character being stubborn or resistant to doing something they don’t want to do.

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What, or who, is it that Natalie and Daniel don’t like about the front office?
- How does the author describe Mrs Pinchback? What words are used to show what she’s like? What might her name suggest?
- Brainstorm some creative reasons you might come up with if you were interrogated at the front office.

### Chapter Five

### Literary Technique—Similes

- A simile is a figure of speech comparing one thing with another of a different kind, using words such as ‘like’, ‘so’, ‘as’ and ‘than’.
- Thinking about the following similes, write your own to show what these actions might have felt like for Max.  
‘Max was standing there like a rabbit caught in a car’s headlights at night.’ (p 36).  
‘The Bogan Boys were kryptonite to all of Max’s superpowers.’ (p 37).

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What did you learn about The Bogan Boys?
- What do you think about Max’s reaction to their bullying? What would you do in this situation? Do you think Natalie responded well?
- What comparisons can you make between bullying behaviour and friendly behaviour? Complete a Venn Diagram to compare the similarities and differences.
- How do the illustrations show the characters’ thoughts and emotions through body language and facial expressions?
- Do you think Daniel is correct in thinking that the hero always wins the quest? What might happen if they don’t succeed? What might happen next?

### Chapter Six

### Vocabulary

- Discuss the definitions of the following terms: ‘shy’, ‘nervous’ and ‘flapping’. Find more in the chapter or add your own vocabulary terms that relate to the feelings and behaviours of the characters.

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What kinds of characteristics did you learn about people with autism? Are they all the same? Do you have a better understanding of different thought processes?
- Can you relate in your own way?
- What do you think the friends might have noticed about the key in the picture?

### Chapter Seven

- What are the meanings of the below idioms, despite Max taking them literally.
  - “‘Are you trying to get my goat?’ Mrs Pinchback asked, leaning forward over the counter even further.’ (p 53-4).
  - ‘There’s no use crying over spilled milk’ (p 54).
  - ‘You’re going to get a taste of your own medicine.’ (p 55).
  - “‘Don’t play the fool with me, young man!’” (p 55). “‘I’m going to give you a piece of my mind.’” (p 56).
- What are some other idioms you know about making someone cross or frustrated, or getting their comeuppance?
- Make your own meme with your favourite saying and an image to match/contrast.

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- Do you find this chapter amusing? How has the author used situational language to create a comedic scene?
- Why do you think Max doesn’t understand the figurative meanings of Mrs Pinchback’s sayings? Do you think Daniel and Natalie do?
- Do you believe that Max was being rude to Mrs Pinchback? Do you think there could be another way that Mrs Pinchback could have reacted?

### Chapter Eight

#### Vocabulary

- Use each of the following adjectives in a sentence or two to describe the scene of the friends in the hall: ‘sarcastic’, ‘special’, ‘indomitable’, ‘invisible’, and ‘bored’.

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What kinds of mischief do the Bogan Boys often get up to?
- Who is Mahatma Ghandi, and what is meant by his statement, ‘Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.’ (p 62).
- How would this philosophy help the friends in their situation?
- What happened to Max’s confidence?

### Chapters Nine and Ten

#### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- How did the friends show confidence in this chapter?
- How did your own expectations about certain characters change when you read this chapter? What does this tell you about making judgements about people? How were Jen and the Bogan Boys different to what you had expected?
- What strategies/problem solving skills have the friends learnt?
- List some emotive words to describe how each of the characters felt at different points in Chapter Ten.
- How does the author’s use of language and pace help readers to keep with the action and emotion?
- What else have you learned about people with autism? What else do you wonder, and has your thinking changed?

### Chapter Eleven

#### Vocabulary

- Homophones are words that share the same pronunciation but have different spelling and meanings, for example, ‘there’, ‘their’ and ‘they’re’. Can you find the matching homophones for the following words: ‘pairs’, ‘allowed’, and ‘brakes’?
  - Can you find more homophones in the text, or add your own to a list?

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- Discuss the phrase as quoted from Nelson Mandela: ‘Those who are ready to join hands can overcome the greatest challenges.’ (p 84). What is meant by this phrase? Why might the author have used a famous/influential person in history and this particular quote in this situation?
- Why is it significant that Jen is not joining the friends on their quest?
- Discuss the meaning of the term, ‘stickler’. Take turns with a friend using this term in a sentence.
- Brainstorm and write down some possible consequences of what might happen if the friends try to get to the bin before the big truck comes. Create an imaginative Ripple Effect Diagram to show how one action might lead to a series of consequences.

## Chapter Twelve

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- How has the author used visual literacy to describe what's going through Max's mind before climbing into the dumpster? Can you imagine these images in your mind? Draw a picture to illustrate this scene.
- What strategies has Max learned to cope with his stress or anxiety? What physical and mental approaches does he use? Brainstorm and list more effective strategies for dealing with stress.
- What can you infer from the illustration on p 95?
- How did this chapter make you feel? Did it end the way you had expected?

## Chapters Thirteen—Fifteen

### Literary Technique—Allusion

- An allusion is an indirect reference to another figure, event, place, or work of art that exists outside the story. This chapter gives references to the famous TV show, *Doctor Who*, as well as a brand, Nintendo. Can you name some of the other popular brands/franchises/famous references that have been mentioned throughout the whole book so far?

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- What actions, or verbs, can you use to explain how the friends imagined the possible solutions to getting back into the school building?
- Create a Concept Web to show the different ways kids with autism might be effectively catered for in the school/classroom. How well do you think this is being done in your school?
- How is Natalie using her 'superpower' to find the correct key?
- Who was Eleanor Roosevelt, and why was she an inspirational woman in history?
- How did you feel whilst reading Chapter Fifteen? How did the author create suspense and emotion through the text? How might you feel in this same situation?

## Chapter Sixteen

- Write the definitions for the following words: 'superheroes', 'superpowers', and 'jigsaw'. Notice that these are compound words (a series of two or more words that collectively form a single word). Break these into two words to write an equation. For example, 'super' + 'heroes' = 'superheroes'. Write down other compound words beginning with 'super'. Find other compound words in the text.

### Discussion Questions and Comprehension

- Find the part of the text in this chapter where the author has used 'hyperbole'.
- Describe what emotions and behaviours you see in the illustration.
- How have all of the kids changed, emotionally and behaviourally, throughout the story?
- Create a Venn Diagram, this time a three-way chart showing the superhero qualities of Max, Daniel and Natalie. How are they each unique and how are they similar?
- Do you think the friends will continue to be superheroes after the book ends? Why or why not? Has the conclusion of the story left you wanting more?
- What are the main themes? What important messages does the author intend to portray?
- Who were the bullies in the story, what challenges did they create for the three friends, and how did they change by the end of the story?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

### Literary Technique—Metaphors

A metaphor is a figure of speech to represent an object or action symbolic of something else.

- The author has used the metaphor of 'superpowers' to illustrate how the three friends are special in their own ways. Although they don't have superpowers in the literal or fictional sense, what does this tell you about their characters? Are there other metaphors you can think of to describe someone having superpowers?
- Read the following quote and then answer the questions. 'Jen smiled. "I believe the professionals call it dumpster diving," she said.' (p 81). The term 'dumpster diving' could be taken literally or metaphorically, but refers to the act of searching for something valuable in the rubbish. In this case, the children will be scouring a large waste bin for the keys.

- How does this term symbolise both the literal sense and the metaphorical sense? Write an example of each.
- Can you find or invent other terms used to describe this action? For example, skip dipping, totting, trash picking, etc. Be creative with your metaphor!

### Literary Technique—Humour

- Discuss how the author uses different kinds of humour to show the characters' personalities, and to keep the reader engaged throughout the story so far.
- Create a poster of your most ideal superhero moment and write a funny caption to match.
- The author has used puns for comedic effect. Can you spot the pun in the following quote?  
“Quick, said Max. “We’ve no time to waste.”” (p 92).
  - Brainstorm more words relative to ‘waste’ and write an alternative phrase. (eg. ‘This quest is turning out to be rubbish!’ refers to the quest being unsuccessful).

### Design a Lock and Key

- Students can choose to use a medium of their choice to suit their tactile preferences, such as pencils, paint, collage or sculpture, or experiment with digital technologies, such as Paint, Photoshop, Sketchbook, Procreate, to create a visual design of a lock and key. Experiment with the use of pattern, light and shade and proportion. The shape of the key should match the keyhole in the lock.
- What art techniques and small details will add interest and variety to your image? Perhaps students will include a superhero logo to match their personality.
- Explore other artworks and graphics for inspiration.