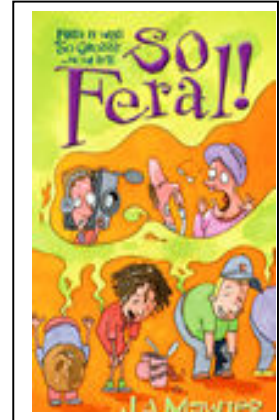


Gross!

0207197334

J.A. Mawter



So Feral!

0207198373

- Teacher's Notes - by Jeni Mawter -

Quote from *Matilda* by Roald Dahl:

'Do you think that all children's books ought to have funny bits?' Miss Honey asked.

'I do,' Matilda said. 'Children are not so serious as grown-ups and they love to laugh.'

Often humorous books are seen as lightweight - not dealing with the big issues in life. In fact, they can be quite the opposite. It is through humour that darker issues can be explored. In these two books many issues have been flagged for classroom discussion.

Themes:

So Gross!:

- 1) Emerging sexuality (*Pucker Up*)
- 2) Sibling rivalry (*The Best Boogie Collection in All the World*)
- 3) Competitiveness (*With a Milkshake*)
- 4) Bullying (the teacher in *What's in the Box?*)
- 5) Cultural stereotyping of body shape (Ian in *You Dirty Rat*)
- 6) Feeling powerless (Sam in *Pucker Up*)

So Feral!:

- 1) Fear (*Baby in a Bottle*)
- 2) Attention-seeking (Cordelia in *Death-Breath and the Lie-Detectors*)
- 3) Setting and achieving goals (Arthur in *The Work of Art*)
- 4) Dealing with authority (*How's it Hangin'?*)
- 5) Differing sibling relationships (*Unwelcome Visitors versus How Do You Spell It?*)

Suggestions for classroom exploration

1. What is humour? How does it differ from jokes?
2. In the stories, is the humour based on serious matters or issues?
3. Discuss if humour makes the impossible, possible. If so, give examples.
4. Humour is short lived. It relies on surprise. Discuss.
Give examples from the stories.
Have students read one sad and one happy story.
Does the sadness linger? Does the humour linger?
5. Discuss how one person can find a situation hysterically funny and another will find it boring.
Tally the stories that make your students laugh. Tally the stories that they did not find funny - is there a consensus?
6. Humour can arise from word-play - such as puns, funny names, made-up words, understatement.
Find examples in the stories.
Think up some funny names for characters.

Humour can come from the subject matter (bodily functions), the situation (baked bean competition) or the character who says, thinks, does or plans funny things. Compare the narrator/character from *What's in a Name?* to the narrator/character from *Death-Breath and the Lie-Detectors*.

Humour is linked to the developmental interests of the reader. Categorise the stories under the following headings.

- I) The Human Body and How it Functions;
- II) Sexuality (Kissing, Dressing/Undressing):
- III) Food (Gluttony).

Children like adults to be the 'butt' of humour. They like to see them opposed and/or made to look incompetent. Why?

Other suggestions

- Write a book review
- Write an article on the books for a kid's magazine.
- Write a story: 'The grossest thing I've done...'
- Write a story: 'The funniest thing that has happened to me...'
- How many words can you think of that mean the same as *gross*?
- Do girls and boys laugh at different things?
Write a list of ten things that make you laugh.
Interview someone of the opposite sex to see what makes them laugh.
- Choose a scene from one of the stories where there is a lot of dialogue and role-play it. Choose one person to be the narrator.
- Mime a scene e.g. when Macca has too much milkshake in *With a Milkshake (So Gross!)*
- Choose one of the stories and re-write the ending so that it finishes in a completely different way.
- Re-write a story from a different point of view:
Plunger's in *The Krypton Crystal Caper (So Gross!)*
Tom in *What's in a Name? (So Gross!)*
Caterina in *How Do You Spell It? (So Feral!)*
James in *Unwelcome Visitors (So Feral!)*.
- Write a funny poem about something that's happened to you.
- Limericks are often funny. Why? Write a funny limerick.
- Watch an old comedy film e.g. The Three Stooges, Charlie Chaplin, Abbot and Costello. Are they still funny today? If not, why not? If so, why so?
- Make your own comedy film but without recording sound! What is visually funny?
- Design a new book cover. How gross can you go?
- Write a brief synopsis of each story.

---0o0o0o0---