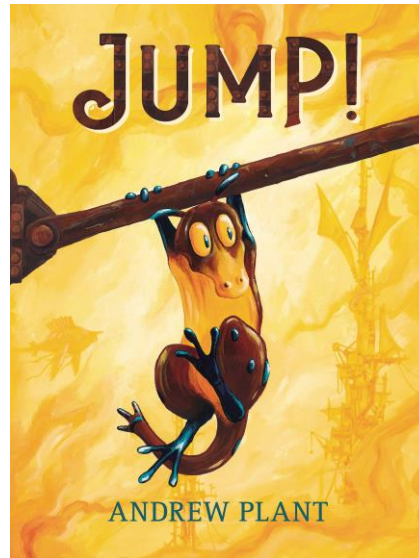


Teacher's Notes

Jump! by Andrew Plant



Synopsis

Stumpy the Quig is a strange little creature who hatches high in a Sky Tower in an alien city. Unlike the other Quigs, who are amazing acrobats, Stumpy is afraid of heights and lacks the tails and fins that make the others such superb aerialists. Bullied and mocked, Stumpy pushes himself to practice jumping around the Tower, until he over-reaches one day and falls. That's when he discovers an ability none of the other Quigs has, and he learns to love being different.

Core Issues

- **Self-esteem:** Stumpy's inability to do what his siblings can makes him feel marginalised and depressed.
- **Bullying:** The other Quigs continually mock and disparage Stumpy, labelling him a coward.
- **Acceptance of disabilities:** Stumpy is, in his world, disabled, having only a short tail and flimsy fins, which prevent him from joining his siblings in their activities.
- **Determination and resilience:** Rather than giving up, the bullying that Stumpy experiences encourages him to try harder. Crucially, after discovering his abilities, Stumpy does not seek acceptance from his tormentors, but lives his life on his own terms.

Background to *Jump!*

Jump! had a very unusual birth. It was initially a story about a tree fern frond too scared to unwind. I had been on a forest walk in the Otway Ranges and got the idea from all the fronds slowly uncurling from the tops of the tree ferns. On one fern, all the fronds were out but one, like it was too uptight to open. The story was actually called 'Uptight'. Other forest animals tried to encourage it to open, describing the sunshine and breezes while all it thought of was storms and rain. Obviously, a story about being too scared to take a chance, to go outside and smell the roses, that sort of thing.

My publisher at Ford Street, Paul Collins, said that it was nice, and that he knew I'd do lovely paintings of the forest, but that it was rather pedestrian, yet another 'Be brave, kids!' story in a very safe environment. Had I ever thought of doing something more dystopian?

Had I what! I'm a Steampunk lover – all that rust and steam and glorious filtered light, dense colour, and imaginative design. I decided that post-apocalyptic was probably a little too much for primary kids, so I went friendly alien in an extraordinary city. Too-afraid-to-open became too-afraid-to-jump, and quite accidentally, after I'd written it, I also realised that it was about bullying. I introduced the nastiness of the other characters just as a way of pushing Stumpy into taking action more quickly, a more dynamic storyline than his just coming to a decision via some sort of inner self-realisation or self-help program! Re-reading and editing it, it was quite a surprise to see how the bullying had elbowed its way into the story. Very appropriate.

The Illustrations

The art in *Jump!* is acrylic paint on Arches watercolour paper, with a mixture of ordinary and watercolour pencils for detail and highlights. The original pencil sketches were enlarged on a photocopier, if necessary, and then the images were traced onto the Arches paper. I don't have a light board, so I trace by holding the sheets up against my studio window!

Story Structure and Related Activities

Books created by an author/illustrator (what I like to call *authorstrators!*) are often fundamentally different to those with a separate author and illustrator. Authors naturally write with words. But when I write, I also write visually. That is, I see the text of a page as pictures as well as words. Then I decide if the words are actually necessary. Often, they're not. More than a quarter of the spreads in *Jump!* are wordless. Seven pages are essentially graphic novel storyboards, where the narrative action is told just by pictures, instead of a picture just being used to illustrate the words.

Jump! gives students the opportunity to extend and extrapolate the story. They can write their own text, describe the action with an emphasis on descriptive adjectives, or describe how they feel, or how the character feels. For upper primary students, they can rewrite the story as a chapter book without any pictures. Encourage students to talk about how they interpret the pictures, and compare and contrast their different responses. Remember, there are no wrong answers.

Language and Literacy:

- In the first sentence, the Quigs and the Cloud Tower are introduced without any explanation about what they are. Is this effective? Why do you think the author did this? Where do you get the information that you need from?
- What does the name 'Quig' make you feel? Does it suit the creatures?
- Why do you think the author had the Quigs 'roll' out of their eggs, instead of just hatching?
- Why do you think the Quigs have 'sticky fingers'?
- Why are the Quigs' tails 'clever'?
- Why is Stumpy 'breathing hard, his fingers gripping tight' before his big jump?

Activities:

- Find synonyms and antonyms for the following words: scampering, whooped, jeered, bolder, snarled, whirling, spiralling. If you are unfamiliar with any of the words, can you deduce their meaning from their context?

- The Quigs ‘roll’ out of their eggs. What other verbs could you use to describe this, without using ‘hatch’?
- Alien writing appears in some of the pictures. Based on where it is located, what might the writing say?
- What is the effect of the ‘dropping text’ on page 10, ‘into the shadowy streets . . . far below’? Why do you think the author placed the text this way? When you read it out aloud, does it change the way it sounds compared to the words being in ordinary lines?
- The Cloud Tower is just one of many towers in the city. The author named some of them while he painted the illustrations – the Sky Tower, the Sail Tower, the Sharp Tower, the Moon Tower. Which ones do you think they may be, and make up names for the others. Use adjectives that suggest their great height.
- Write texts for the silent sequences in the story, firstly when he summons his courage and begins practicing, and secondly when he tries to jump too far and falls.
- (For older students.) Rewrite *Jump!* as a chapter book with no illustrations. You will need to describe everything: the look of the creatures, the towers, the city, and how the characters feel about each other and themselves.
- Pick one of the creatures from the story who is not a Quig and write your own story about them.

Visual Literacy:

- Before reading the story, look at the front and back cover. What clues can you get from the illustrations that suggest what the story might be about?
- What can you tell about Stumpy’s character from the front cover illustration?
- How do the endpapers establish where the story is going to take place? What did you expect from the story when you saw the endpapers?
- How did you respond to the first view of the city towers shrouded in smoke? Is it welcoming, scary, intriguing?
- The first view of the baby Quigs shows most of them being excited by what they see. Can you pick which one is Stumpy? Why do you think so?
- The most important part of Stumpy’s story – where he decides to face his fear of heights and prove to himself that he can jump – is told without any words. Why do you think the author chose to use only pictures? How does this affect the way you ‘read’ the story? Would you prefer that there were words?
- How does the author show Stumpy’s fear when he realises that he has lost his grip, just before he falls? Do you think any words would have made it more exciting or scary?
- The illustrations have what is called a ‘limited palette’. This means that only a few colours are used, mainly reds, browns and yellows. There are no large areas of blue or green, which are the most common landscape colours on Earth. Why do you think the author used these limited colours? What effect does it have on the look of the book?

Activities:

- The eyes of characters can say a lot about how they feel without using words. Draw pairs of eyes or even a Quig face and try to show these expressions on them: happiness, anger, fear, confusion, sadness. Do more if you can.
- All the different creatures have their own personalities. Using any clues you can find in the illustrations, describe what you think their personalities and jobs may be. Are there

managers, engineers, doctors, manual labourers? What might the huge floating 'sky-whales' do?

- Draw what you think the Quigs' eggs look like – be imaginative, and remember that they are on a very high tower!

The World of *Jump!*

The Quigs exist in a completely imaginary world of a vast city shrouded in smoke and gas. Numerous different species of other creatures also live there, working together despite their differences in shape and size. Each of them has certain jobs to do that keeps their society functioning safely and peacefully.

Activities:

- Apart from the Quigs, only the enormous Poringo is named. Make up names for the other creatures.
- Create a Bestiary – an encyclopedia of animals – of the other creatures in the story. Work out how some are related to each other, by the number of legs, or how they move. Don't rely on size. (Think of a whale and a mouse – they are both mammals.)
- Some of the flying creatures flap like birds, others float like balloons. Decide if they are related to each other, or to other creatures in the story. (Remember, both birds and bats can fly, but are not related.)
- We tend to think of gas and smoke as pollution. But this is an alien world and we must be careful of assuming that what applies on Earth, applies on other planets. Are there any clues that indicate that on this world, the smoke may not be pollution?
- Draw a map of what you imagine the city may look like. Where is it? Is it on a shore, or inland, or floating? What sort of planet is it on?
- What do you think the Quigs actually do? Do they have a job in the towers? What do they feed on?

Emotional Responses:

- How did you feel when Stumpy is first introduced as 'the littlest Quig'?
- What did you feel when you were shown that Stumpy has a disability – he looks quite different to the other Quigs.
- What did you think of the other Quigs when they made fun of Stumpy? Why do you think they did it?
- Have you seen other children make fun of someone? How did you feel? How do you think the victim felt?
- Why do you think that the author had 'the biggest of the Quigs' as the meanest? Do you think that it has anything to do with the other Quigs following his lead?
- Once Stumpy discovers his flying ability, he does not show off to the other Quigs, or try to be accepted into their group. Why do you think he did this? Why do you think he did not want to be part of the group?
- How would you react in a similar situation at school if you were being bullied? Would you want to join bullies to avoid being bullied yourself?
- In the second-last picture, Stumpy can be seen smiling down at another Quig who is not jumping with the others. What is different about her? What do you think Stumpy might do?

- How did you feel when Stumpy discovered his amazing ability? How do you think Stumpy felt?

Activities:

- Stumpy tries and tries again as he practices his jumps, even though he nearly falls. Think about a situation where you have needed to persevere with a difficult task. Perhaps it was a tricky piece of music, a gymnastics move on the beam, a basketball shot, or a dance routine. Remember how it felt to have to go over it again and again. Write a short story called 'Resilience' about what you did, how it felt, what you thought you were doing wrong. Did you finally get it right, or are you still working on it? A story doesn't need to end with you 'winning'.
- Using your story 'Resilience', create a wordless graphic novel/cartoon about your experience. Use the wordless sequences in *Jump!* as a guide. Use close-ups, long views, repeated movements, moments of stillness, all the sorts of things a filmmaker would use when story-boarding a movie. It doesn't have to be brilliant artwork – simpler is often better!