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## **Chicken Pox ... Yuck!** by Josie Montano

**Format: Novel**

**Extent: 160 pp**

### **Overview**

Vinnie is faced with making many difficult decisions in his life. He is being bullied for his lunchtime sandwiches; his mother has chickenpox; his father doesn't know how to cook or clean; and Vinnie is being blackmailed into making a date with a girl he doesn't even like. Vinnie and his friend Gaz decide upon a course of action that includes the 'Frankenstein Revenge Plan'. Along the way, Vinnie discovers that life doesn't always go to plan, and learns to face the consequences when his ideas backfire.

Josie Montano writes a hilarious tale about life, where readers discover and compare similarities and differences between the characters and their own real-life experiences.

### **Author Profile**

**Josie Montano** lives with her family in Brisbane, and works as a full-time writer. Her love of fiction writing began at age eight, when she would shelve her self-published stories in her primary school library. Josie has worked in the primary school environment as a teachers-aide, a secretary and a library aide. Her published works include the very successful *Wogaluccis*, *Stuff They Don't Teach You at School*, *Who's Wheelie the Fastest*, *Snot Fair*, *Snot Funny*, *Snot Cool* and *Pop Starlets*.

Find out more about Josie Montano on the Internet.

<http://www.users.tpg.com.au/jsanto>

<http://www.scholastic.com.au/Profiles/ProfileDisplay.asp?ProfileId=448>

### **Focus Questions**

How does Josie Montano use humour to describe Vinnie's concerns for his mum? (p 7)

What imagery does Josie Montano use to describe the 'beast'? What does she mean? (p 19)

Why is Frank Stein a bully? Where does his nickname come from? Have you faced a similar situation at school? (p 19)

Why is Vinnie enjoying Mum being sick? (p 31)

How is Grandma Annie 'cool'? (p 47)

How do you put bullies 'out of business'? Why are Vinnie's ideas dangerous? How is Gaz a positive role model for Vinnie? (pp 50-52)

How does Vinnie and Gaz's plan backfire? Should Vinnie be worried about the situation he has caused for his sister? (p 70)

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What does the author mean by 'Scab Boy, Son of Scab Woman'? Why is Vinnie embarrassed? Have you ever felt this way before? (p 78)

How does Vinnie feel about the note incident? What is 'blackmail'? Have you ever been in a similar situation?

How did you cope with it? (p 95)

What dilemmas is Vinnie facing? How would you resolve them? Predict the consequences of your actions.

Why do 'girls always work in packs'? What does the author mean by this? How do boys and girls differ when they bully someone? Or are they alike? (p 112)

How does Vinnie use humour to get rid of Alithia? (p 144)

Why is Nonno upset with Vinnie? Is it his own fault? Have you faced a similar situation? (p 138)

How would Mum's and Mrs Carter's viewpoint be different to Vinnie's regarding the parent-teacher interview?

How has Vinnie changed through facing these different problems? How has he dealt with the issues? Could he have handled them better?

### **Assessment**

**Self-assessment rubric:** As a class students brainstorm a set of criteria that they wish to assess. Criteria could include the following:

- place the series of events in chronological order
- identify the different settings used by the author
- use different forms of writing including recounts, conversations, plays, poetry, songs, job descriptions, jokes, interviews, invitations, menus, scripts, letters, emails and diaries
- identify the introduction, complications and resolutions used within the plot
- discuss the different points of view presented in the text
- identify with the characters by relating it to their own real-life experiences
- recognise the different themes and issues used by the author
- determine how characters resolve their problems
- locate and research information using different sources including learning technologies
- discuss ways the author has used language to convey feelings such as happiness, humour, suspicion and embarrassment
- compare different texts written by the same author.

**Portfolio:** Collate work samples that students feel demonstrate a high standard. Put pieces of work on display as a special parent evening/ lunchtime event.

**Opinion survey:** Students answer questions relating to the text. These could include:

- Did you like *Chicken Pox ... Yuck!?* Why/Why not?
- What do you think was the funniest part? Why?
- How does the humour used in this book differ to other books you've read?
- What was the most important part of the story for you? Why?
- What was the main event in the story? How did this affect the main character?

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- What important themes/issues did Josie Montano discuss in her book?
- What did you learn from reading the book that you didn't know about before?
- Would you like to read more humorous texts or Sue Lawson's other books? Why?
- Would you recommend this book to another person? Why? Who?

**Peer assessment on use of oral skills:** Create a class list of criteria to assess each performance. Discuss what skills are aimed for, so that students know what is expected of them. Skills could be displayed on a reporting sheet upon which peers can jot down notes about the performance. Select a specific skill to focus on during the peer assessment (this often makes it easier to begin with). Include such skills as:

- used expression in their voice
- controlled the volume of their voice
- looked directly at the audience using eye contact
- answered questions in detail
- kept on track with the talk
- used a variety of sources for their information
- used charts or props to support their talk
- used technology correctly (tape recorders, videos, video cameras).

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## Activities

### READING

#### Small-group activities

1. Make a diorama of one of the humorous scenes: Joe's Deli (pp 132–9), the parent–teacher interview (p 144), discovering Mum in bed with the chickenpox (pp 10–11).
2. Compile a plot profile of the main events of the novel.
3. Role-play the scene where the bullies steal Vinnie's lunch box. (pp 20–1)
4. Act out the parent–teacher interview scene between Nonna (aka Vinnie), Mrs Carter and Mum. (p 144)
5. Create a graph of the exciting or humorous events in the book. Also look at the low events such as bullying

(pp 20–1), Alithia's letter being discovered (pp 95–6) and Nonno playing his accordion at the date (p 133).

6. Discuss what the author means by 'Scab creature from the green chickenpox infected swamp'? (p 53)

### **Whole-class activities**

1. Play charades. Students try to guess which character is being copied from the book.
2. Why do 'children love weekends'? Survey students in the class for their feedback on the positives and negatives of weekends. Draw conclusions from the data collected. Do you agree/disagree with the findings? (p 118)
3. Make a glossary of the key words such as: contagious (p 53), convertible (p 3), stranded (p 47), cockpit (p47), maintenance (p 47), ricocheted (p 7), cyclonic (p 17), humungous (p 55), suffocate (p 22), ingested (p73). Use a dictionary to locate meanings and write a sentence explaining each word.
4. How has the author used humour in the novel?
5. Discuss the use of nicknames, funny characters, escapades and family events.
6. Debate whether Vinnie was right to forge the letter from his mum to his teacher. Would it have 'ruined his life'? Why do you agree/disagree with Vinnie? (pp 108–10)
7. Debate whether you would/wouldn't go on a date with Alithia? List the positives/negatives. (p 102)

### **Individual activities**

1. Create character profiles for Vinnie, Gaz, Alithia, Frank, Nazzie, Mum, Nonna/Nonno, Kiara, Gardenia and Bianca. Include physical characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.
2. Construct a cartoon strip, using speech bubbles to retell one of the funny scenes from the book (for example, Alithia's letter, grapes up the nose, the date with Alithia or the parent-teacher interview).
3. Design a chart to show the positives and negatives of the different 'revenge' plans Vinnie puts forward to Gaz (pp 50–1). Create your own positive Frankstein Revenge Plan (FRP). Rank in order of importance the funniest moments in the book. Why did you find it funny? What techniques did the author use to create humour?
4. Illustrate a timeline of the main events that happen to Vinnie in the book. Label each scene from the timeline. Create your own timeline of important events in your life so far. How do they compare?
5. Design a mask for Mum to wear to disguise her chickenpox.

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## **WRITING**

### **Small-group activities**

1. Write a different ending to the story. What might have happened to Vinnie?
2. Create a Venn diagram to show what Vinnie and Gaz have/don't have in common within their great friendship.
3. Construct a sociogram by writing down the names of the different characters and showing how they are linked together. What can you learn from the diagram?
4. Invent a new board game such as Snakes and Ladders or Trivial Pursuit utilising the main events, settings and characters.

### **Whole-class activities**

1. Write 'Who am I?' quiz questions for the main characters/scenes from the story.
2. Discover what your name means from different baby names books or on the Internet, just like Vinnie 'Conqueror' and Garvin 'Spear-friend'. Compare your name's meaning with other classmates or character names. Construct a class chart of names.
3. As a class, write the procedure for making a chickenpox sandwich. Then write your own version, including ingredients and the method for making it. Focus on using simple present tense terms ('mix', 'pour', 'place', 'turn') at the beginning of the steps; time words ('first' and 'next'); and clearly sequenced steps. (pp 56-7)
4. Create a chart listing the problems Vinnie faced. How did he solve these situations and what were the consequences? Discuss how you may have faced similar bullying situations and how you resolved this problem.

### **Individual activities**

1. Write a new blurb for the book, using highlights from the story to encourage readers to read it.
2. Create an acrostic poem, describing the different characters, scenes and funny events from the book.
3. Imagining you are Vinnie, write a diary entry for each day. Write how you felt about the events that took place.  
Describe your feelings.
4. Research the disease chickenpox. What symptoms, causes, treatment and prevention can you discover from medical books, encyclopedias and websites? (Visit <http://www.kidshealth.org> and <http://www.yahooligans.com>)
5. Research how chickenpox got its name.
6. Write your own telephone conversation with Grandma Annie, using fighter pilot 'lingo'. Tape it onto a cassette to share. (p 47)