

THE MAD GOAT MYSTERY

Jonathan Harlen

Illustrated by Shane Collinge

Teachers' Notes by Kevin Steinberger

The Mad Goat Mystery takes readers into old familiar but fraught territory – trying to fathom animal behaviour. Animals are very different creatures from humans; why, they are even said to possess a sixth sense, a notion that drives a comical battle of wits to a very surprising conclusion in Jonathan Harlen's novel.

Greenhorns from the city, the Wilkinsons buy a goat for their beachside acreage. When it begins to behave very strangely and aggressively they think they have been duped. But, being humans without animal sense, how could they know that Dandruff would soon solve a mystery that had lingered over five generations?

Discussion

- Why is the supposed difference between country folk and city folk important to the story?
- Authors often resort to stereotypes to characterize 'baddies'. How do the author and illustrator depict Hugo Crumb?
- Why does Hugo Crumb resent the Wilkinsons?
- The enjoyment of mystery stories lies in trying to predict the nature, cause and solution of the mystery. What clues does the author write into the text to help the reader?
- Was Dandruff really possessed? What might readers presume from the final page?
- Could ***The Mad Goat Mystery*** be classed as a ghost story?

Extension Activities

- In his strange behaviour, Dandruff was displaying that famous special sense of animals – the ability to instinctively perceive phenomena that are not apparent to humans. Few dead animals were found in the aftermath of the great Asian tsunami; the animals sensed its imminent occurrence and escaped to safe higher ground. Find out what you can about this animal instinct through research from *Amazing Animal Senses* at www.faculty.washington.edu/chudler/amaze
- How might Dandruff have got his name? Investigate pet names: conduct a poll in your school to ascertain the most popular pet names; graph your results. What are some famous pets in history? Check the Internet for famous pets and the twenty most popular pet dog and cat names.
- To promote sales of a new book, publishers issue a press release to newspapers, magazines and radio and television stations giving an outline of the plot, bibliographic details of the book and biographical information about the author and illustrator. Create a Microsoft Word document press release for *The Mad Goat Mystery*.
- The Oxford English Dictionary suggests a ‘generation’ is a period of 30 years. The farmer said Jasper Moloney was lynched when his ‘great-grandfather was just a lad’, five generations ago. Calculate when it occurred. From the farmer’s child today, trace the family back five generations in a diagram.
- Dandruff would have been of a dairy goat breed. Write a research report of the various dairy breeds farmed in Australia. An excellent source is the website of The Dairy Goat Society of Australia: www.home.vicnet.net.au/~goats/dgsavictoria
- Write a story about your own pet centrally involved in an adventure. It could be a recount of an actual incident or an imagined adventure.
- Jonathan Harlen uses a lot of interesting verbs to create a great sense of action and suspense, eg. *hurtling* (p.17), *pumping* (p.19), *thrashed* (p.23). Skim through the text to compile a list of his more interesting, effective verbs.
- What is ‘forensic science’? When and where is it used? What are some of its methods? Conduct a library catalogue and/or Internet search for basic information.
- Dialogue is an excellent method to reveal character types, such as the conversation between the city Wilkinsons and the local farmer. Imagine Hugo Crumb moves to the city; write a dialogue between him and an old student at his new school.

THE MAD GOAT MYSTERY ACTIVITY 2 COUNTRY KIDS, CITY KIDS

Hugo Crumb dislikes Danny because he is a 'spoilt city kid'. Even the farmer distinguishes the Wilkinsons from 'us local folks'.

From the feelings and behaviour of the characters in the novel, and from your own perceptions, list how the two main characters might see each other.

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HUGO CRUMB'S OPINION OF CITY KIDS

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- _____

DANNY WILKINSON'S OBSERVATIONS OF COUNTRY FOLK

THE MAD GOAT MYSTERY ACTIVITY 3 CONSIDER THE EVIDENCE

When the remains of Jasper Moloney were found a forensic team was called in to make a positive identification and also to ascertain the circumstances of his death. (pp.64-66)

Sketch and label the various items that the team unearthed. Beside each item write how it might contribute to the knowledge of the bushranger's death; what facts the scientists could deduce from the item.


1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____



5. _____



6. _____



7. _____



8. _____

