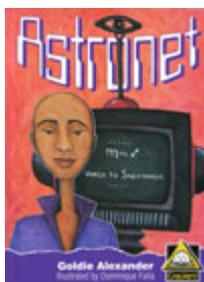


TEACHERS' NOTES FOR ASTRONET

[MacMillan Education Australia](#) 1996

Series: Crackers



Here are a range of activities which can be used to extend students' knowledge of the story, explore some basic research skills and gives students the opportunity to express their ideas.

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BRIEF OUTLINE OF STORY

Lydia Ng lives in the late 21st Century. She's shy and a bit of a loner. Then she finds some pen pals who become her good friends. When Lydia's Aunt Daisy, a scientist, disappears on a secret field trip, Lydia and her friends go to the rescue and learn lots on the way.

RATIONALE

Astronet is intended for young readers who are already enjoying 'chapter books'. This story introduces a science fiction idea into what is by now a familiar situation: the Internet pen pal. As well, it explores in a humorous way the effect computers already have on our lives. A final theme is the contrast between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' in our society.

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

In a science fiction story, the trend is that it

- starts with the premise 'what if'
- describes a society which is scientifically possible and technologically based

- future oriented
- uses other worlds
- often a quest
- has some kind of internal logic
- contains unusual but sustained characters with whom the reader can identify

Young readers are guided to books such as [6788](#) by Goldie Alexander.

Seawall By Goldie Alexander.

Using the internet: E-Mail Murder Mystery with co-writer [Hazel Edwards](#)

[Killer Virus: An Anthology of Short Stories](#) by Goldie Alexander. This selection includes a number of science fiction stories.

Advanced readers will enjoy ‘*Galax-Arena*’ by Gillian Rubinstein. Phillip Pullman. Garth Nix.

TALKING POINTS

1. How different would your life be if you were taught at home by a computer. What might you miss? Do you think you will learn more quickly? More slowly?
2. Lydia’s computer is breaking down. What gives this away? Do you think you would enjoy having a computer as your teacher?
3. Lydia swears in ‘vegetables’. Why not make up your own special language? Create your own adjectives (describing words) Like Lydia you can use objects you love and objects you hate instead of more familiar - and sometimes rude - expressions.
4. What is Astrology? Do you know your own star sign? Do you believe that Astrology can influence your personality? Or predict the future? Why do you think so many newspapers and magazines have an ‘Astrology’ column? Check them out. Do they agree with each other?
5. How do you feel about using web chat-rooms to find friends? What are some of the best things about the Internet? Some of the worst?
6. Bossy relatives and friends. What you can do about them? How might Lydia have handled Evangalene’s bossy behaviour?
7. If you are writing to a penpal, do you always tell ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’?
8. ‘Virgo’ is a very unusual boy. In what ways? What are some of his inventions?
9. Virgo and Lydia visit a number of unusual communes. Can you imagine living there? How different might your day be?
10. How does the story end? Has Lydia’s adventure changed her in any way?

ACTIVITIES

- What might happen to Lydia after this story ends?
- Mock up an advertisement for COMPUTERS or ASTROLOGY. Or a company called: PEN PALS INC.

- Create a collage to show COURAGE.
- Mock up an interview with Lydia and Virgo with you as the interviewer. Ask two friends to help out. Take turns being the characters and the interviewer.
- How old will you be in 2030? Illustrate a cover for a story called MY LIFE IN THE YEAR 2030.

WRITING EXERCISES

1. Pretend you are living in 2550. In what ways might your life be different? Plan a typical day.
2. Describe your super-duper computer. What can it do? (Don't make it too perfect)
3. What are your computer's limitations? Can it love? Hate? Feel any other emotion?
4. Write the lyrics for a song called 'SHAVED HEAD'.

WHAT INSPIRED THIS STORY?

"I have always liked reading and writing science fiction. Through science fiction, a writer can create whole worlds with its own clothes, music, language and customs.

There is some serious intent behind this plot. It seemed to the author that many middle-class children were living a very 'cut-off' life style, and the contrast between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' is unfortunately, on the increase.