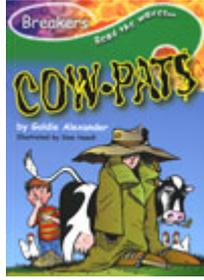


TEACHERS' NOTES FOR COWPAT\$

BREAKER 3 SERIES. [MacMillan Education Australia](#) 2003



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

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OUTLINE

12 year old Red has two major loves: milk-cow Daisy, and developing his artistic skills. However Geribilt Farm is going downhill and Red has no money to buy painting equipment. Also, the bank is about to foreclose on Geribilt Farm, his dad needs an expensive operation, and neither brother Luke nor sister Tara can find jobs. Then out of the blue a mysterious Stranger offers Red hundreds of dollars in exchange for Daisy's cow-pats.

RATIONALE: *MAGIC REALISM.*

In magic realism, the trend is that it

- starts with the premise 'in a familiar situation, what if something extraordinary happens'?
- describes someone or something that is probably not possible
- has some kind of weird internal logic
- can contain unusual but sustained characters with whom the reader can identify.

See: [Killer Virus: An Anthology of Short Stories](#) by Goldie Alexander. This selection includes a number of stories with magic realism as their theme.

TALKING POINTS:

1. What kind of farm does Red live on? What does GERIBILT mean? What can you find out about his family?
2. The Stranger only turns up when the sun is in Red's eyes. The Stranger wears clothes that cover him from top to toe. Then he speaks in a foreign tongue. We never know his name. WHY?
3. Imagine you are the Stranger. Why are you here? Give a number of possible reasons not mentioned in this story. How might an alien describe Geribilt Farm?
4. Red's passion is art. He wants to become a famous painter. What two paintings does he admire? Why?
5. How does he raise the money to buy paper and paints?
6. Red's teacher Gruff, does his best to encourage Red. How?
7. What about Red's family? His friends? Do they help or hinder Red's business efforts?
8. Consider the story's end. Do we ever find out why the Stranger is so interested in cowpats?
9. Why is this story called COWPAT\$? (note the dollar sign instead of an S)
10. This story is not as simple as it might appear on first reading. There are several messages or themes. They include comments on 'the way we view art' and 'running a successful small business'. You might like to give the class some of your views on these subjects.

ACTIVITIES:

- Make a story-board or collage to convey 'THE STRANGER' or some other unexpected situation.
- Mock up an interview with The Stranger with you as the interviewer. Ask a friend to be the interviewer.
- Then change roles with him or her.
- Illustrate a cover for this story.
- What might happen after this story ends?
- Translate what the Stranger says.

WRITING EXERCISES:

1. Design your own Stranger. What does it look like? What personality would you like it to have?
2. Write a story called "A STRANGER HAS COME TO OUR SCHOOL".
3. Sketch a cover for your story.

4. You are an alien visiting Earth. What do you like about Earth? What do you dislike? What do you decide to change?

DEBATE:

1. "Very few small businesses are successful."
2. "One person's art is another person's trash!"

WHAT INSPIRED THIS STORY?

This story was inspired by my frequenting many art galleries. I always eavesdrop on comments made by other visitors. People rarely like the same paintings or sculptures. It occurred to me that creating a 'being' who admired cowpats enough to frame and display them was funny enough to turn into a story.

As for having your own business: the contrast between rundown Geribilt Farm and poor Red trying to run an efficient small business, also made me laugh. Hope you laugh, too.