



Diary Detectives

ISBN 978-1-78849-022-1
eBook ISBN 978-1-78849-061-0

Erika McGann

Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

Cass leads Nicholas and Lex on a detective adventure to identify a mystery bully from the past. She had discovered evidence of a mean plot to humiliate the school drama group in an old school diary in a box of old books that she was selling at a car boot sale. However, the diary is retrieved by the owner before Cass can investigate properly and now they must search for clues to identify the bully.

A charming comic story that has the gang casting a suspicious eye on every adult in the street to unmask the culprit.

The themes include:

- Friendship
- Bullying
- Prejudice
- Confidence
- Insecurity
- Sharing information
- Secrets
- Fairness
- Taking responsibility

SUMMARY

Ms Lee starts to ruffle feathers when she sets up a Residents' Association and begins to introduce a lot of rules designed to control the behaviour of the children playing on the street.

During one of her initiatives, a car boot sale, Cass is asked to man a book stall. Browsing through some of the old books, she is shocked to read a series of mean comments scrawled inside an old school diary.

Recognizing the name of the school as their local school, Cass realizes that the diary must have belonged to one of the adults in their street.

Distracted by a customer, Cass quickly hides the book before searching for and assembling the other members of the Bubble Street Gang.

When they return to investigate, the diary has gone and they are left with no alternative but to turn detective and follow the clues to identify the culprit.

Following their suspicions, they deploy their full range of detective skills until they finally unmask the culprit discovering a secret from the past that shocks them all.

APPROACH

This is a very entertaining read. Although the plot is comic, it is also engaging, with many opportunities for discussion.

This guide has divided the story into three sections and the activities

offer suggestions on developing the themes.

Section 1 Car Boot Treasures Pages 9- 66

SUMMARY

Cass Okara, the founder member of the Bubble Street Gang, is incensed. Ms Lee, has established a Residents' Committee and is now controlling where the children can play and how much noise they can create.

When a list of rules for street games is released, the gang realize that the impact on fun will be devastating.

Determined to ignore the new rules, Cass and her gang organize a massive game of Relievo for the street. However, with the game underway and the noise at fever pitch, Ms Lee appears with copies of the new rules and directs them from the street to the green and deflates their excitement entirely.

The Residents' Association organize a car boot sale and Cass is volunteered to man a book stall, where browsing the books, she discovers an old school diary from the local secondary school.

Realizing that it must have belonged to one of her neighbours, she peeks inside.

Shocked at the mean comments she finds, she tries to identify the owner, but the name is illegible.

Distracted by a customer, Cass tucks the book away and then goes off to gather the gang to help her investigate.

When they return to the stall, the book has disappeared.

At last the Bubble Street Gang have an investigation worthy of their detective skills and they set off to identify the owner of the diary and expose their mean plans.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read pp 9&12**): Cass has decided that Ms Lee is her mortal enemy. If we decide that someone is an enemy, would this encourage us to behave in a certain way towards them? What other ways do we group people and how does this affect how we deal with them?
- (**Read p22**): Cass is annoyed that the Residents' Committee have decided to enforce rules to control the noise that the children make on the street. Is this unreasonable? Do adults have a right not to be disturbed by noise? How can children and adults share the same space without annoying each other?

- (**Read p29**): Ms Lee has disrupted the game and distributed a sheet of rules to each child. She expects them all to obey her. Why do adults assume that children should always obey them? Should you always follow instructions from an adult? What is the difference between a rule and an instruction? What happens when not everyone agrees with the rule?
- (**Read p49**): Car boot sales are popular and usually a success. People bring along things that they no longer need and sell these off to each other, going home afterwards with their car boots filled with someone else's clutter. Where is the attraction in buying things that someone else has used and now no longer needs?

ACTIVITIES

1. My Street (Read p9-11)

Cass and the Bubble Street Gang are proud to live in Berbel Street. They think it has many attractions.

If you were to promote the attractions of living in your street, what features would you choose that would appeal to other children?

Create an estate agent's poster for your street that would appeal to other children.

Choose no more than 5 features and perhaps include photos. Can you use hyperbole (**exaggerated language**) in your description?

[youtube.com/watch?v=kuzWLDWm6Zs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuzWLDWm6Zs)

2. Other Explanations (Read p12)

Cass has a great imagination and excellent observation skills. She is able to create fantastic explanations from ordinary things that she sees around her.

Use your own imagination and observation skills to notice things in your class or school that might seem ordinary, but to your skillful eye could have a more exciting explanation.

Find 3 items and use evidence to create a fantastic yet credible explanation.

3. Residents' Meeting (Read pp17-18)

At the meeting, the adults decided on 3 rules to control what they think is the most annoying behaviour.

There was a lot of arguing at the meeting and not everybody agreed.

The author thought that she might include a short passage here to describe the meeting.

Can you write the passage as if Cass were describing it?

4. The Games (Read pp23-28)

Cass has organized a game of Relievo, instead of Tip the Can or Red Rover. These are popular street games, however not everyone knows the best strategies to play them.

Choose one of the games, or a game that is popular where you live, and create a simple playing guide including rules and strategies.

Make sure you add illustrations and perhaps some reviews from people who have played the game.

5. Car Boot Sale (Read p48)

It's Sunday and the great Berbel Street car boot sale is about to take place. There are posters advertising it pinned up everywhere, however all the posters are different.

Ms Lee has organized a competition for the most imaginative poster

and the winner will be chosen at the sale.

Nearly everyone, including the Bubble Street Gang, has entered.

Make a copy of the winning poster.

6. I'm Han Solo (Read p53)

Cass's dad did an embarrassing action pose of Han Solo using the pricing gun.

Using the same style as the other illustrations, create an illustration of what he looked like.

Section 2 Mr Dixon's Secret Pages 67 - 117

SUMMARY

The Bubble Street Gang are assembled and their mission to identify the author of the mean comments is identified.

Cass immediately nominates Ms Lee as the culprit, believing that her behaviour on the Residents' Committee makes her the ideal candidate

When the others point out that as Ms Lee is new to the street, she couldn't have gone to their secondary school.

Cass realizes that she will need more than dislike to convince them and decides to question her anyway using a doorstep survey to disguise her interrogation.

Deflated to discover Ms Lee's school background, Cass rules her out as the culprit.

Costumed for their game of evil mummies and ancient treasure, the gang are interrupted by Sasha Noonan, from their nemesis gang who ridicules their game and steals Nicholas's wig, escaping despite Cass's panted efforts to catch her.

Realizing from her unsuccessful chase that their detective skills might not be enough and they will also need a level of physical fitness, Cass decides to construct an obstacle course for them to train on.

Gathering the children from the street for the inaugural attempt on the course, Lex goes first and records an impressive performance. However, when Cass takes the next turn, her attempt ends in humiliation and she is unable to finish.

Abandoning the idea of assault course training, Cass focuses their attention on proving that their next suspect, grumpy Mr Dixon, is the culprit.

Since the comments were directed against the drama students, they decide to stage an abbreviated version of *Hamlet* on his porch. They hope that this will force him to incriminate himself by revealing a negative attitude towards acting.

Their plan disintegrates into farce however, when Mr. Dixon explodes at the mistakes in their production, revealing that he himself had played the lead role in *Hamlet* many times at school.

With his scolding for their mistakes still ringing in their ears, they are forced to eliminate him too from their list of suspects.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read pp68-69&78**): Cass is convinced that Ms Lee is the author of the mean comments. There is no evidence, however, she dislikes Ms Lee and believes that is enough. This is called 'prejudice', judging people on how you feel about them. How

can our treatment of people be affected by our attitudes towards them? Which groups are we more likely to judge harshly? How can this be prevented?

- **(Read pp102-103&120)**: Cass feels humiliated by her performance on the obstacle course. Would she have felt differently if no-one had been watching? What effect does an audience have when we are doing something? Would it make a difference if the audience were strangers? How can sports people prevent this affecting their performance?
- **(Read p113)**: Cass and the gang have decided to perform a Shakespearian play in Mr. Dixon's porch. Many people are not really interested in acting. Do you think that the Arts is something that everyone should have an interest in? What activities would you include as the Arts? What benefits do people get from being involved with the Arts?

ACTIVITIES

1. It's Personal (Read pp 73-75)

Ms Lee reveals a lot of personal information to Cass when she is questioned.

Is it wise to share a lot of your personal details? What are the dangers for you if people know a lot of your personal information

What type of information should you be careful about sharing?

Work in small groups to list the type of details you would be happy to share and with whom.

A lot of people share information about themselves online. Can you make a list of the details you should never share online?

www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-safety-online-a-practical-guide-for-parents-and-carers

www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/e-safety-schools/

2. It's Called Bullying (Read pp83-84)

Sasha's mocking comments leave Nicholas feeling embarrassed.

This was bullying him in a nasty way.

Make a chart with examples of the different types of bullying you can recognize. Include the different feelings they can cause and any strategies you know for dealing with them.

www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/bullystoppers/Pages/parentchild.aspx

www.stopbullying.gov/kids/facts/index.html

www.ncab.org.au/bullying-advice/bullying-for-parents/types-of-bullying/

3. Detective Skills (Read p88)

Cass is convinced that the Bubble Street Gang's detective skills need to be developed.

Can you help by drawing up a profile of a detective for them?

What skills and personal qualities would a good detective need?

Make a poster with an illustration of your ideal detective and write the skills and qualities on the poster using adjectives and adverbs.

4. It's Hard to Admit (Read p88)

Cass knows that she isn't good at running and finds this hard to admit.

Admitting weakness is a difficult thing to do.

Work in small groups and decide what are the three most difficult things for anyone to admit that they can't do very well.

Can you explain why people are reluctant to admit to these particular weaknesses?

5. The Obstacle Course (Read pp90-93)

Cass and the gang have designed an impressive obstacle course in Lex's back garden.

Could you build a better one? What type of activities would you include and which skills would you hope to develop?

Draw up a plan of your course with illustrations and short explanations to describe each of the activities.

6. Hamlet Indeed (Read pp113-116)

Slamming the door, Mr. Dixon stomps into the kitchen muttering angrily to himself.

When Bless, his cat comes in through the cat flap, he begins an angry tirade against the Bubble Street gang and their clumsy attempt at Shakespeare.

Describe what he said in the style that Cass would have reported it?

Section 3 Revealed Pages 118 - 191

SUMMARY

Cass returns secretly to try the obstacle course again, but despite several attempts, she is unable to master it. Lex spots her from the bedroom window and rescues her with an invitation to come inside for popcorn and sympathy.

Later, still disheartened, she meets Lex's granny who cheers her up and points her towards Mrs Leadbetter as a promising lead for their investigation.

Realizing that they know very little about her, they decide to monitor her movements for anything suspicious.

Unable to observe her without being seen, they build a 'hide', disguised as a bin and position it opposite her house.

However, when Mrs Leadbetter's sister Miriam calls to visit, her dog takes an unwelcome interest in their hide. His barking forces them to scuttle away, maintaining their disguise, prompting Miriam to believe that she is witnessing a paranormal event. Their withdrawal ending in a grumpy tumble into Nicholas's drive.

Undeterred, they continue their surveillance and that evening they follow her as she makes an unexpected visit to their friend Martyn's house. When she repeats the visit the next night, they enlist his help to eavesdrop, discovering that she is taking secret baking lessons from Martyn's father in an attempt to win the local community baking competition.

Determined to prove their suspicions, the gang attempt a mumbled interview with her on her doorstep.

Invited inside to help carry books to her attic, they discover evidence in her old school diary which eliminates her as a suspect.

However, when they see an unkind comment scrawled across an old photograph, Nicholas becomes upset and dashes from the house. He has recognized the handwriting as belonging to his father.

At Nicholas's house, Cass and Lex witness the confrontation as his

dad confesses explaining that he had always wanted to act, but was afraid of what his friends might say and this had prompted his comments towards the drama group.

Reconciled, the Bubble Street gang maintain their record for solving mysteries and are able to source an acting opportunity for Nicholas' dad, much to his delight.

Cass even gets the opportunity demonstrate her leadership skills when she calls to Sasha to recover Nicholas' wig.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read pp124-125):** Cass is able to accept that Lex's granny and her friends climb trees and have their own clubhouse. How should we expect older people to behave? Is it fair that people should behave in a particular way just because we expect them to?
- **(Read p152):** Nicholas comments that Mrs Leadbetter is trying to obtain an unfair advantage by taking secret baking lessons. Was he right? What do you think prompted her? Was it cheating to try to improve her skill in order to win a competition?
- **(Read pp158-159):** Cass is annoyed when Nicholas takes the headlamp and Lex takes the torch. The loft was illuminated, so why was she annoyed? Why did she want it be in charge of one of the lights? What status did she think it gave her? What other props do people use to give them status or authority?
- **(Read p174):** Nicholas's dad admits that fear of not being accepted made him behave the way he did. His behaviour was controlled by what he thought others might say. How can we recognize when fear and insecurity is controlling our behaviour and what can we do to change it?

www.yourlifecounts.org/blog/20-ways-avoid-peer-pressure

ACTIVITIES

1. Under my Bed (Read pp118-119)

Cass uses her imagination to scare herself to sleep by creating images of monsters under her bed.

This is something that everyone has done at some time.

Write an exciting acrostic poem about the monsters that are lurking under your bed.

www.kidzone.ws/poetry/acrostic.htm

2. Stars and Wishes (Read pp120-123)

Cass has to accept that she is not very good at physical activity. This is difficult for her to do because we all want to be the best at whatever we do.

Think carefully about the things that you enjoy and can do well and then the things that you wish you were better at doing.

Draw an outline of both your hands on a large sheet of paper. On the fingers of the 'star' hand write the five things you enjoy most and are good at.

On the palm of the 'wish' hand write only one thing that you would like to be better at.

3. Guess What (Read pp131-132)

Cass and the gang realize that they know little about Mrs Leadbetter. Sometimes we can be surprised to discover unusual things about people we thought that we knew well.

Think carefully about yourself and decide on something about you

that your friends might not know.

In a large group write this information anonymously on a smaller piece of paper and put them all into a tub.

As each piece of information is drawn out can you use your detective skills to identify the person who wrote the statement?

4. The Hide (Read p142)

As the hide rolls down the drive and crashes, Cass and the gang are spilled out.

Create an illustration to include with the description?

5. The Next Page (Read 175-176)

Cass didn't read the full diary entry. The next page explains what happened and gives the reason Nicholas' dad changed his behaviour.

When Cass reads it, she realizes why he is the kind and gentle man she recognizes as Nicholas' father.

Write the missing page.

6. The Obstacle Course (Read pp190-191)

Cass has her suspicions about what happened to the obstacle course.

The author decided to include a short paragraph at the end of the story to explain what happened, who was responsible and why they did it.

She thought she might write this as a short dialogue between the culprits.

Can you write it for her?

Class activity

Deliver in 2038

Ask the children to create a page from their diary to be delivered to themselves in 2038.

The content should be positive, reflecting in detail an event that they have enjoyed doing.

Their work can then be sealed, addressed and held as appropriate.

CASS AND THE BUBBLE STREET GANG

Cass and her best friends, Lex and Nicholas, are the Bubble Street Gang! They investigate crimes, solve mysteries and have brilliant adventures.

They've even got their own secret clubhouse.

Read the whole series!

