

RIDDLE GULLY SECRETS

JEN BANYARD

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YEAR LEVEL: Y4–8

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

Just when famed youth reporter Pollo di Nozi thinks she'll never find another news story, she stumbles upon not one but two very surprising secrets. With hidden treasure, cunning crooks, mistaken identities and mysterious disappearances, unravelling them may be Pollo's greatest challenge yet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Banyard writes fun mystery and adventure for young readers. In her writing, she aims first to entertain, but also to stretch her readers with ethical dilemmas. She has a doctorate in Creative Writing from the University of Western Australia. Her youth was largely spent grubby, weary and happy by the Canning River, in nearby bushland or on Rottnest Island – something she'd love for every child.

THEMES

- Nature
- Friendship
- Curiosity
- Self-reliance
- Initiative
- Bravery
- Active citizenship
- Family
- Greed

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y4–8 English

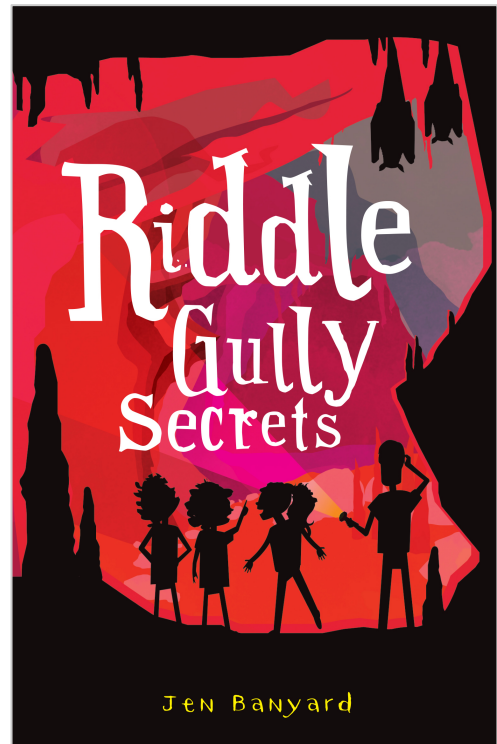
Y4–8 Biological sciences

Y4–8 Earth and space sciences

Y4–8 Humanities and social sciences (civics and citizenship)

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: www.jenbanyard.com



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

- Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast the characters Will and Pollo.
 - How are they similar/different?
 - Why do you think they make such a good team? Do they complement each other in any way?
- Create a definition for the terms 'protagonist' and 'antagonist'. Which characters in *Riddle Gully Secrets* would you place under each label? Why?
- Twig and Ash both share a special bond with the natural world: *'I think this place draws our feelings from here – Scarecrow-man thumped his chest with his fist, – and brings them up here.'* He tapped the side of his head. (p. 37) What do you think Twig means?
- Do you have a place where you feel especially close to nature?
- Create a free verse poem or watercolour painting about your place, endeavouring to capture the emotions you experience when you are there.
- Why is it important to protect and conserve our natural world?
- Ash stopped. 'I know you've been telling lies and hiding things from your father, when many people would give anything to live as you do.'* (p. 60) Would you like to live like Dan and Twig? Why/why not?
- Why do you think Twig chooses to give up his inheritance? How do his values compare to Mayor Bullock's? If you were in Twig's position, would you have given up the inheritance? Why/Why not?
- Pollo declares *'Good news is strictly a last resort.'* (p. 8)
 - Do you agree?
 - Why are there mainly negative events reported on the news?
 - What makes something newsworthy in your opinion?
- Twig spends a lot of time contemplating humankind's place in the universe. What are your thoughts on this topic?
 - Create a definition of the term 'spirituality'. Would you describe Twig or any of the other characters as 'spiritual' individuals?
 - What does spirituality mean for you personally?
- Create a definition of the term 'ethics'. What are 'ethical choices'?
 - Find three examples of ethical choices made throughout the story.
 - When have you had to make an ethical choice?
 - How are ethics influenced by one's values and attitudes? Are ethical standards different in different world cultures?

Creative writing

- Detective fiction!** Provide several magnifying glasses and take students on a walk around the school to observe various settings and objects (insects, plants, footprints, etc.). They should carry a notebook with them to record their observations. Using these notes, they should then create a mystery story set at your school.
- Journalism:** Explain that people who write articles for newspapers are called journalists, and that journalism articles should be based on facts.
 - Fact or opinion?** Play a game to help students distinguish between fact and opinion, using a series of statements about *Riddle Gully Secrets* (such as 'Will is greedy' and 'Ash is related to Dan'). Why is it important for journalists to stick to the facts?
 - The Coast:** Pollo is a youth reporter for the *Coast* newspaper. Write the article you think she will create about her latest adventure with the hidden chest. Include the five Ws and one H (who, where, when, what, why, how) and come up with an engaging headline.
 - The interview process:** Interviews are a great way to gather information for a story. Prepare a set of interview questions to ask someone you admire in your local community, then write a newspaper article about their work and why you feel it is important. Publish your article in your school newspaper or class blog.
- Role-play:** In groups of 4–6, choose your favourite scene from *Riddle Gully Secrets* to transform into a script to perform for your class.
- Book review:** Write a critical book review of *Riddle Gully Secrets* to publish through your school newspaper or class blog. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the book? To whom will you recommend this book and why?






5. **Short mystery stories:** Choose one of the writing prompts below to plan and draft a short story, then swap with a partner to edit.
 - a. *'Only fools believe in curses!'* (p. 187)
 - b. *'We can get much closer once it's dark.'*
'And whatever's out there watching us can get much closer too.' (p. 34)
 - c. *'A portal! A doorway to another world.'* (p. 47)
 - d. *A piece of the past with stories and secrets more than a century old sat right in front of them.* (p. 136)
6. **Continue the story:** Write about the next week in the life of one of the members of the newly reunited family (Ash, Dan, Twig or Ellie). How might they be feeling? What new things will they have to get used to?

Spies and detectives activities

1. **Wanted poster:** Design a wanted poster for either Pooky or Curly.
2. **Riddle Gully map:** *'I'm putting landmarks into a song to help us find our way out,' said Dan. [...] 'Wallaby Cave, Stinky Tunnel, Whale Mouth, Spike Ladder and Bushrangers' Kitchen.'* (p. 94) Using an A3 piece of paper, create a map of the children's journey.
3. **X marks the spot:** Teach children to read coordinates by providing them with a map of your school oval. Hide a mysterious object and divide children into pairs. Who will find the treasure first?
4. **Identity cards:** Using a stamp pad and cardboard, have children create their own identity cards. These should include their full name, date of birth, a 'mug shot' and their fingerprints. Laminate and display.
5. **Write with invisible ink:** Using a paintbrush and lemon juice, have children write an 'invisible' message to a friend. To read the messages, they will need to hold the paper close to a heat source such as a light bulb or read them in direct sunlight.
6. **Morse code jewellery:** Research the history of Morse code and provide children with a copy of the Morse code alphabet. Have them make a necklace spelling their name in Morse code. They can use beads for dots and short pieces of a straw for dashes, threading them onto string.
7. **What is missing?** Set several objects on a table and allow students twenty seconds to observe them. Cover the objects with a blanket and remove one object. Can students identify the missing object?

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