

RECOMMENDED FOR

Mid primary
(ages 6–10; years 1–5)

CONTENTS

1. Series synopsis	1
2. About the author/illustrator	2
3. Author's/illustrator's inspiration	2
4. Themes	2
5. Writing style and language	3
6. English curriculum links	4
7. Discussion Points	4
8. Worksheets	6

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, The Arts
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Encouraging reluctant readers
- Learning about language techniques
- Learning about illustrations styles
- Discussing bullying issues
- Discussing fairytales and folklore

THEMES

- Individuality
- Bullying
- Teamwork
- Trust
- Confidence
- Friendship

PREPARED BY

Nick Falk, Tony Flowers and Random House Australia

PUBLICATION DETAILS

9780857983053 *Billy is a Dragon 1: First Bite*
(paperback); 9780857983060 (ebook)

9780857983077 *Billy is a Dragon 2: Werewolves Beware!*
(paperback); 9780857983084 (ebook)

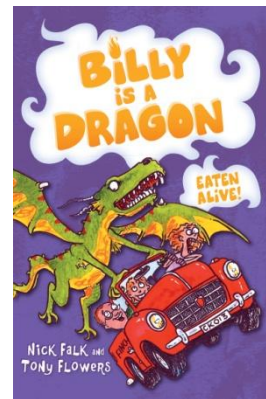
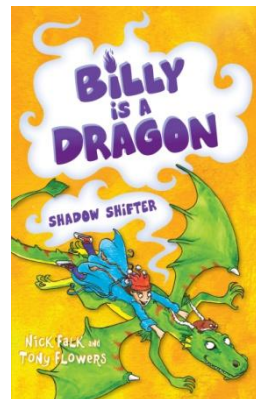
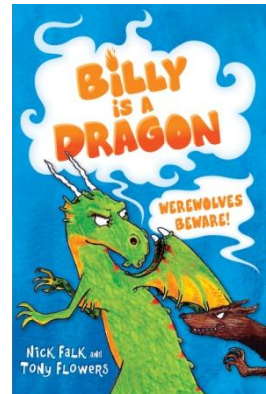
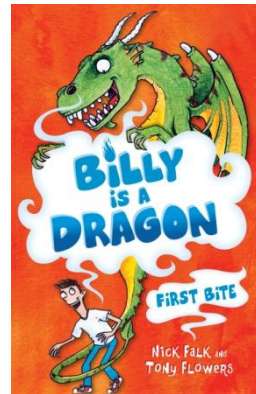
9780857983152 *Billy is a Dragon 3: Shadow Shifter*
(paperback); 9780857983169 (ebook)

9780857983176 *Billy is a Dragon 4: Eaten Alive!*
(paperback); 9780857983183 (ebook)

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Visit www.randomhouse.com.au/teachers for information on other Random House Australia teachers' resources and great books for the classroom, and to sign up for our Teachers' Newsletter.

Copyright © Random House Australia 2014



Billy is a Dragon Series

Nick Falk and Tony Flowers

SERIES SYNOPSIS

Billy Fincher is a normal nine-year old boy. Normal that is, until the day he gets bitten by a lizard at his local pet shop and strange things start to happen.

His fingernails turn into claws, his skin becomes green and he starts breathing fire. Billy can't hide it any longer – he's turning into a dragon. And being a dragon is more complicated than it sounds! Even though Billy can now fly and protect himself from bullies, he soon has a whole new set of problems; Shifters are everywhere, werewolves are out to get him, and how will he know which of his friends and family he can trust?

Billy is a Dragon is an exciting, laugh-out-loud series from the author and illustrator of *Saurus Street*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nick Falk is a practising psychologist, and lives with his wife and two young boys in Tasmania.

Originally from the UK, Nick worked and travelled in the US, India and China before finally arriving in Australia. Nick first picked up a pen at age seven, and has been writing ever since. He originally wrote stories for adults, but found his true literary love when he started making up stories for his children. Five years later, it was time to start writing some of them down!

In addition to *Troggle the Troll*, a picture book about people-munching beasties, Nick is the author of the *Saurus Street* series.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Tony Flowers loves to draw and is an internationally acclaimed illustrator and artist. His drawings are well-loved in Japan for their detail and humour and he has won an award in the US for his street chalk art.

Tony has a Masters degree in Visual Communication. He has illustrated six books in the popular *Saurus Street* series and his most highly valued prize to date has been from the Oshima Picture Book Museum in Toyama, Japan, for his handmade pop-up book. *Gaijin Holiday*.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Nick: *Billy is a Dragon* was inspired by my own children – the flights of fancy of their own imaginations were the perfect inspiration for the real flights Billy takes throughout the series. However, the other side of this process was observing the very real struggles children go through in primary school: the fear of being different, the desire to fit in, the dreams of being more than they are. So the books are also an exploration of that. Billy undergoes a fantastical transformation in the books, but throughout the series he also undergoes a more subtle transformation – learning to accept and like himself exactly how he is (dragon or not). My hope is that children reading the series, whilst excited by the fantasy, will also learn from Billy's journey and come to the same conclusion he does – 'I'm fine as I am, warts (or scales!) and all!'

ILLUSTRATOR'S INSPIRATION

With the illustrations in *Billy is a Dragon* I wanted to draw from 3 different points of view:

1. First person point of view, that is, Billy's view of the world around him. This can be seen in the 'Anatomy' drawings, where he imaginatively analyses another character, and also in the margin

images throughout the books, where Billy reflects on a situation or phrase in the narrative.

2. Third person point of view: these are the general narrative illustrations throughout the books.
3. Third person historical documentation as seen on the 'Lore' pages, which attempt to explain and bring to life some of the mythology of Billy's Shifter world.

THEMES

The four books in the *Billy is a Dragon* series cover a wide range of issues relevant to primary school children. Some of the books' strongest themes include:

Individuality

When Billy starts to turn into a dragon, he doesn't know what to do. He thinks he is no longer 'normal'. Embarrassed about the changes in his body, Billy tries to hide them from his family and schoolmates for fear of being ridiculed – which is exactly what happens when Bludger, the resident school bully, notices his green claw:

'You're disgusting,' wheezes Bludger. He aims a kick at me, but I hold up my hand and he backs off. He doesn't want me to touch him. 'Freak,' spits out Bludger, backing away down the bus.

(Billy is a Dragon 1: First Bite, p. 42)

After a while, Billy begins to embrace his individuality and realise that being a dragon means he can do lots of things other people can't. And, once Billy realises that he can actually turn back into a human and he is not the only Shifter in the world, his initial worries about being different are no longer a concern.

'I don't need to worry about anything. After all, I'm not just Billy anymore. I'm Billy the dragon.'

(Billy is a Dragon 1: First Bite, p. 131)

Jeanie, Billy's best friend is a perfect example of individuality and self-belief. She immediately accepts Billy as a dragon, helping him to hide his transformation from other perhaps less accepting friends and family, and also helping Billy to overcome his problems along the way.

Jeanie is described as dressing a little differently from everyone else, something which does not bother her in the least.

'We're getting a few odd looks from dog-walkers. But Jeanie's not bothered. She gets odd looks everywhere she goes.'

(Billy is a Dragon 2: Werewolves Beware! p. 30)

Her confidence helps Billy to try to overcome his fears and insecurities and, at times, she influences his perspective on situations. The fact that she is a female character, and can stand up to overbearing males such as school bully Bludger, mean teacher Mr Gull and Scratchhook the Shadow Shifter, further emphasises her individuality and strength of character.

Bullying

The character of Bludger, who has been bullying Billy for years, is present in each of the books. Prior to his dragon transformation, Billy didn't have the confidence to stand up to Bludger. However, Billy soon finds that his new persona is very helpful for dealing with bullies, a lot of which has nothing to do with his dragon capabilities and everything to do with the self-assurance and self-worth that the transformation offers him. As Benny, the pet shop owner, tells Billy:

'Sometimes we're at our strongest when we're just being ourselves.'

(Billy is a Dragon 3: Shadow Shifter, p. 43)

The 'Anatomy of a Bully' illustration (*Billy is a Dragon 1: First Bite, p. 40*) playfully dissects the components of a bully, encouraging children to use humour and imagination to diminish their fears.

The character of Mr Gull, Billy's teacher at school, also plays the role of a bully at times. In the 'Anatomy of Mr Gull' illustration (*Billy is a Dragon 2: Werewolves Beware! p. 40*) it is even mentioned that bad teachers often start out as bullies, demonstrating the importance of changing bullying behaviours.

Again, humour is used to give Mr Gull his comeuppance at various points. And, as such, this diffuses the situation in a way that challenges readers to rethink their original perceptions of bullies or how they can overcome these fears.

Teamwork

One of the most positive things to come from Billy's transformation into a dragon is the new friends that he meets. These friends, along with Jeanie, his best friend, and Bertha, his pet dog (who turns out to be a were-beast), form a team to help Billy fight off the threat of werewolves, Shifters and Shadow Shifters.

At first Billy thinks that because he is a dragon, he doesn't need help from others and rushes into dangerous situations alone. In doing so, he hurts some of his most valuable friendships.

"I don't need backup," I growl. "I'm a dragon. I can rescue Becky on my own."

(Billy is a Dragon 3: Shadow Shifter, p. 31)

Soon, however, Billy realises his mistake and embraces the help of his new friends. And although they are an unlikely bunch of heroes, together they manage to use their various strengths and skills to defeat a series of enemies. In the end, it is the thought of losing his newfound friends that makes Billy courageous, both as a dragon and as a boy.

'I've got to do something. After all, it's because of me that this happened... I'm the one who's put my friends in danger – including Becky.'

(Billy is a Dragon 3: Shadow Shifter, p. 105)

WRITING STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The Billy is a Dragon series is written in first-person and uses numerous writing and illustrative techniques, which can be explored by students. Some of these are noted below.

The most obvious feature of the text is the use of **eye-catching** fonts, which reflect and enhance the meaning of important verbs and adjectives. Very often the language is **onomatopoeic**, with words such as pop, screech and click highlighted in the accented fonts. Both the distinctive fonts and choice of onomatopoeic language help to create a sense of movement on the page, and heighten the often **humorous** situations.

The stories feature **short, sharp sentences and fragments**, written in **first person narrative**, to indicate ten-year-old Billy's point of view. This style of writing also gives the books a breathless, fast pace, which serves to increase the tension in the scene. For example:

'I look into the mirror. My mouth's turning into a snout. My teeth are enormous. They make Bertha's gnashers look like baby teeth. And my eyes have changed colour. They've turned bright red.'

(Billy is a Dragon 1: First Bite, p. 52)

Interspersed with the short, active sentences are longer **descriptive passages**, which contribute to the highly **imaginative nature** of the text and provide **humorous imagery**, which the many drawings expand on.

'I'm keeping a close eye on Mrs Webster, the science teacher. I've always thought she was a bit weird. Mrs Webster's got wonky eyes and a nose so sharp it could cut cheese.'

(Billy is a Dragon 2: Werewolves Beware! p. 38–39)

The **colloquial language** in the book is exemplified by the many **similes**, which are always within Billy's experience and vocabulary:

'I took the whole packet of Maxi-Shift jellies. I can feel them swirling around in my tummy like miniature jellicopters.'

(*Billy is a Dragon 4: Eaten Alive!* p. 80)

The **interplay between the images and the text** is a major feature of the story. Illustrations such as the Lore and Anatomy of pages are **highly detailed** and provide a glimpse into Billy's imagination. These pages also **reference** historical ads and medical and technical drawings, and have been adapted to appeal to the book's audience using **humorous images** and text.

ENGLISH CURRICULUM LINKS

Language

Expressing and developing ideas: Through the interplay between the text and illustrations, different aspects of the story are revealed. As a result, students are able to gain insight into Billy's world and his imagination. While the illustrations contain detailed information, it is still of a highly fictional nature, which enables the exploration of different words and images, and their subsequent contribution to the overall meaning of the story.

Text structure and organisation: The internal structure and page layout of the books are quite different to most novels, with equal focus given to both text and illustrations. The illustrations, along with the special fonts that have been used, break up the body of the text and enhance the mood and message of the story. These books, in comparison with more structured and text-dominant novels, allow students to understand that texts can take many forms and have many different purposes.

Literature

Literature and context: Students are likely to relate to the everyday school setting and family dynamic that is depicted in the series, which will allow them to share feelings and thoughts about their own experiences in these settings. The bullying that Billy faces may also give a platform for students to discuss their own experiences regarding this issue. In contrast, other parts of the story, in particular Billy's transformation and his resulting adventures, are obviously imaginative. This juxtaposition of the everyday and the extraordinary allows students to recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences, which may be similar or different to students' own experiences.

Literacy

Interacting with others: The use of multiple characters, large sections of dialogue and expressive fonts and language make the books perfect for reading

aloud – individually or in a group setting. This gives students a chance to use interaction skills, including listening while others speak, using appropriate voice levels, articulation and body language, gestures and eye contact.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Mythical creatures

When Billy Shifts, he turns into a were-dragon – a legendary creature that features in the myths of many cultures. Another mythical creature portrayed in the books is a werewolf – a human with the ability to shape shift into a wolf.

Questions:

1. What does the word 'mythical' mean?
2. Can you think of some other mythical creatures?
3. Can you think of any other stories that feature mythical creatures?
4. If you were a Shifter, which animal or mythical creature would you want to be?

Onomatopoeia

In the *Billy is a Dragon* series, onomatopoeic words are used extensively. Onomatopoeia is when a word mimics the sound of the object or action it is referring to. Some examples of onomatopoeia include: *buzz*, *hiss* and *growl*. In *Billy is a Dragon*, these words are emphasised by using different fonts, which also graphically resonate with the meaning of the word.

Questions:

1. Can you think of any other words that sound like their action?
2. What do you think the special fonts used in the books do? (Do they add humour, action, excitement etc.?)

Illustrations

There is a large number of illustrations in *Billy is a Dragon*. However, unlike many other books, the illustrations aren't separate from the text – they are part of the text: sometimes they're positioned in the middle or in the margin and, more often than not, the text actually flows around the shape of the illustration. There are also varying styles of illustrations, as described by Tony Flowers earlier in the notes.

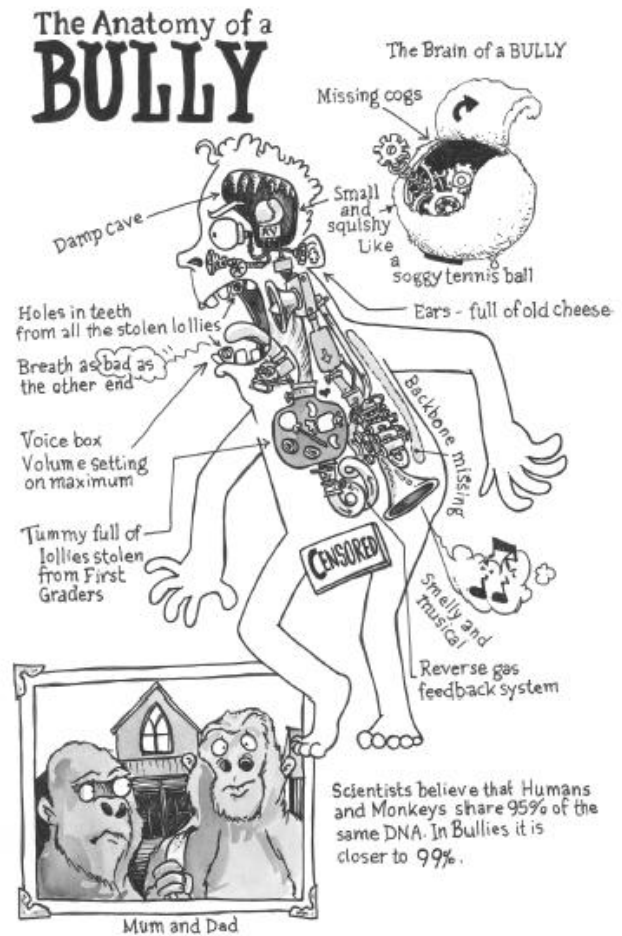
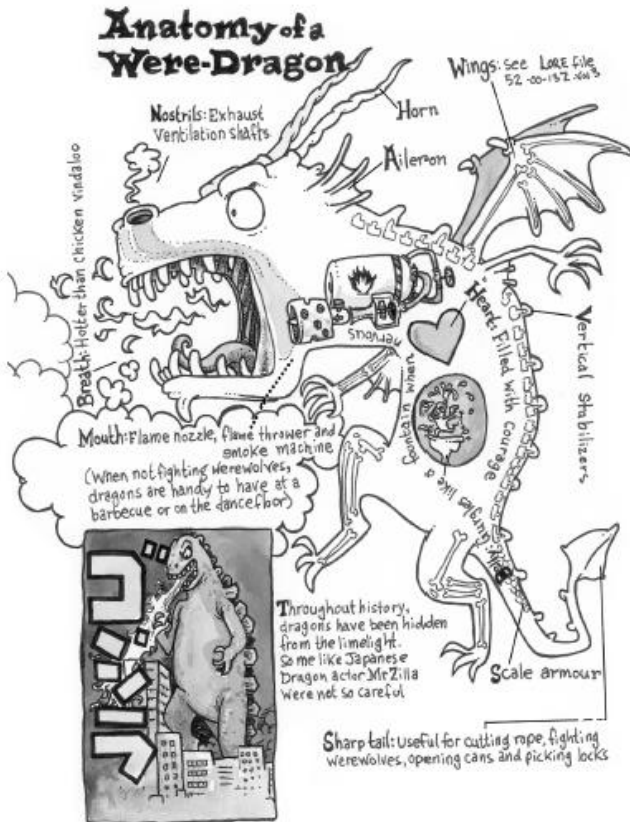
1. Can you identify some of the different types of illustration pages that feature in the books? (E.g. 'Anatomy of' pages.)

2. Did you find out anything more about the characters or story from the illustrations that you couldn't in the text?
3. What was your favourite illustration and why?

WORKSHEET: ANATOMY OF...

Throughout the books there are various 'Anatomy of' drawings. For example 'Anatomy of a Bully' shows, in an imaginative way, what a bully might look like on the inside.

Using the 'Anatomy of' illustrations in the book as examples, try to draw yourself in this way. Think about what characteristics you have, what makes you different from other people. Maybe even show some of your fears or insecurities in the drawing.



WORKSHEET: BREAKOUT TEXT

A feature of the Billy is a Dragon series is the use of breakout or feature text. Particular fonts have been used to convey the sentiment of a word or a sense of movement.

For example:

Puppies are too **bouncy**

BLOCKING my way,

Mum's **nervous**

Write three sentences, each with one of the below words in breakout text:

HURRY

SMASH

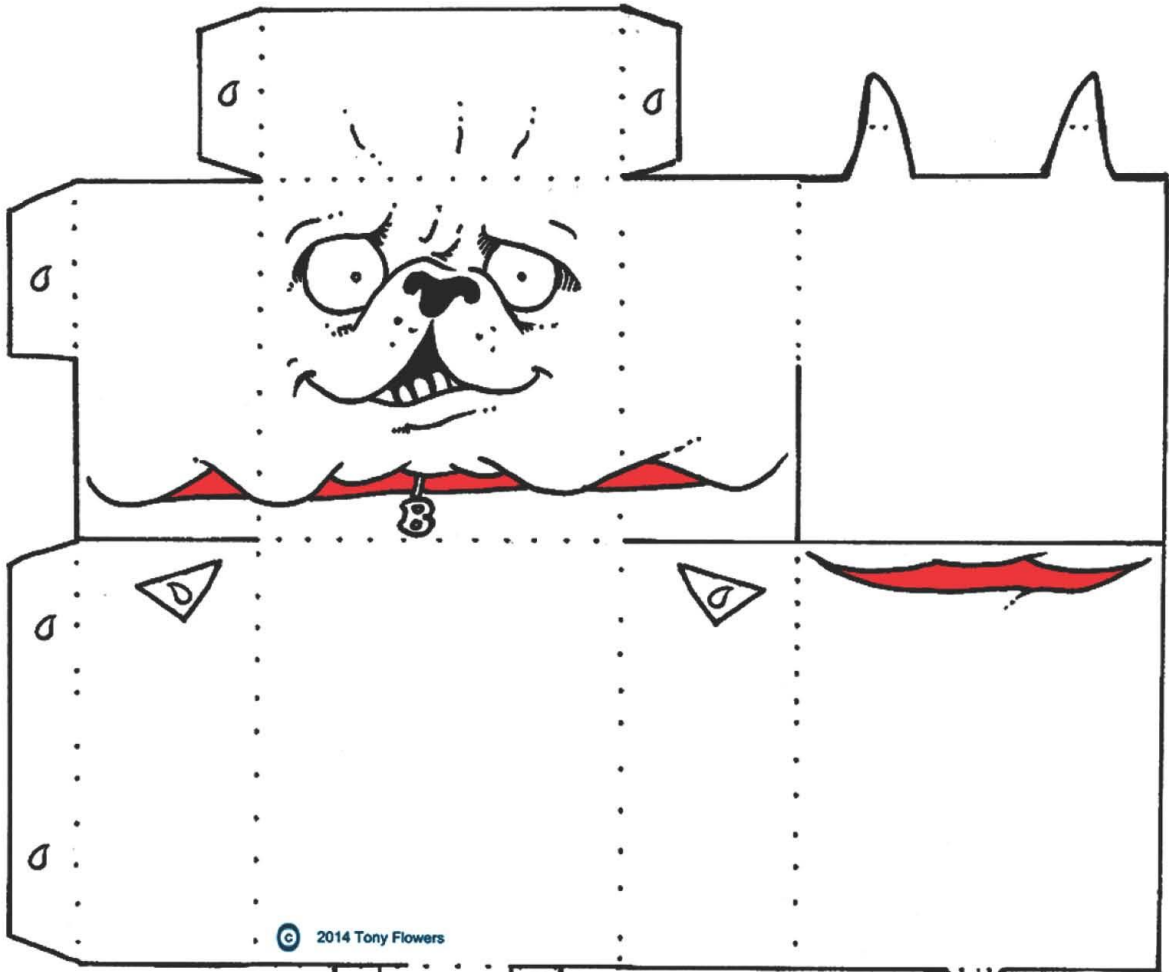
WOBBLY

1.

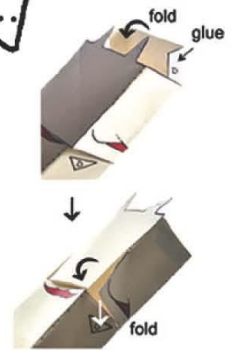
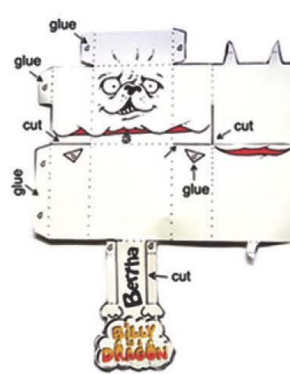
2.

3.

WORKSHEET: CUT, FOLD AND GLUE BERTHA



© 2014 Tony Flowers



— cut
· · · · fold
○ glue

RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA
randomhouse.com.au/kids



Designed by Tony Flowers, the illustrator of Billy is a Dragon

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
Billy is a Dragon 1: First Bite	Nick Falk and Tony Flowers	9780857983053		\$12.99		
Billy is a Dragon 2: Werewolves Beware!	Nick Falk and Tony Flowers	9780857983077		\$12.99		
Billy is a Dragon 3: Shadow Shifter	Nick Falk and Tony Flowers	9780857983152		\$12.99		
Billy is a Dragon 4: Eaten Alive!	Nick Falk and Tony Flowers	9780857983176		\$12.99		
TOTAL						

PLEASE NOTE THAT PRICES ARE RECOMMENDED RETAIL ONLY AND MAY HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE TIME OF PRINTING. PRICES ARE GST INCLUSIVE.

<p>NAME: _____</p> <p>SCHOOL: _____</p> <p>ADDRESS: _____</p> <p>STATE: _____</p> <p>POSTCODE: _____</p> <p>TEL: _____</p> <p>EMAIL: _____</p> <p>ACCOUNT NO.: _____</p> <p>PURCHASE ORDER NO.: _____</p>	<p>PLEASE SEND ORDER FORMS TO YOUR LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPLIER.</p>
---	--