



RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary
(ages 9+; years 5 to 8)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; critical and creative thinking
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Visual arts, creative writing, media

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Examining cultural stereotypes
- Examining different writing styles – variations in structure, use of literary allusions, language choices
- Analysing how language and writing evoke mood, humour, suspense and characterisation
- Analysing artwork and illustration as part of a text
- Encouraging critical thinking
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing

THEMES

- Media manipulation
- Australian slang
- Stereotypes
- Australian icons
- Friendship and bullying
- Self esteem
- Analysing perspectives
- Geography

PREPARED BY

Jean Yates and Penguin Random House Australia

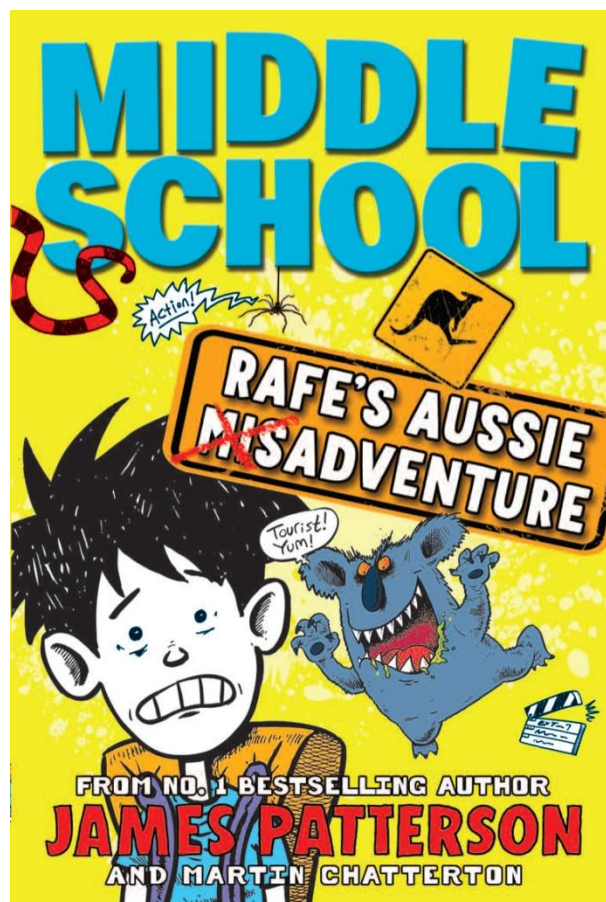
PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9780857986016 (paperback); 9780857986023 (ebook)

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Middle School: Rafe's Aussie Adventure James Patterson

PLOT SUMMARY

When a reformed Rafe Khatchadorian wins an art competition to present an exhibition in Shark Bay, Australia, he is thrilled with the prospect of adventure, an opportunity to prove his newfound responsibility and maturity to others, and to make his mother proud. But, of course, when he finally lands in Australia things are not exactly as he had hoped.

For a start, no-one seems to speak the same language as him and he struggles to know what they are saying. The Coogan twins take an instant disliking to him – possibly as a response to both Rafe and his mum throwing up all over them – not the best start to a visit. To make matters worse, Rafe struggles to fit in with their bronzed athletic friends.

Rafe prefers to spend time with The Outsiders, a group of socially rejected misfits with whom he feels he has much more in common. He is fascinated by their

interest in film making, and spending time with them enables him to use and broaden his artistic abilities.

As a foreigner, Rafe finds himself the brunt of many practical jokes and misunderstandings about Australian customs. Even Kell, the Australian geologist with a disconcerting interest in Rafe's mum, makes Rafe the victim of his humour. Desperate to get revenge, especially on the Coogan twins, Rafe teams up with Ellie and the Outsiders to create a piece of drama that he is sure will freak Brad Coogan out.

But in true Rafe style, things get somewhat out of hand and it is not only Brad but the entire community who are freaked out by the Bunyip rising from the deep. Their reactions reveal their true personalities, especially Kell, the not-so-heroic geologist, but do nothing to improve their attitude towards Rafe. Despite finding himself in trouble once again, Rafe is pleased to have the support of his mother, his new friends, the Outsiders and, most surprisingly, Frost DeAndrews, the Sydney art critic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Patterson is the internationally bestselling author of the highly praised Middle School books, *Homeroom Diaries*, and the I Funny, Treasure Hunters, Confessions, Maximum Ride, Witch & Wizard and Daniel X series.

James Patterson has been the most borrowed author in UK libraries for the past seven years in a row, and his books have sold more than 300 million copies worldwide, making him one of the bestselling authors of all time.

WRITING STYLE

Structure

- Why does the author choose to start the story with the image of Australians going after Rafe with pitchforks, and then tell the back story? How does this give the story more impact?

'Three weeks ago I didn't know a single person in Australia, let alone a zombie, and now I had a baying mob of the undead at the front door. Not bad when you think of it that way.' (p. 3)

- Consider how each chapter ends with a statement that foreshadows what might happen in the next chapter. What does using this technique bring to the story?
- Think of another situation that could have happened to Rafe on his visit to Shark Bay. Write and illustrate this as an additional chapter.

Writing humour

- What is a 'misadventure'? How is it different from an adventure? How does this title foreshadow what happens in the story?
- What is the impact of Rafe's tendency to exaggerate (or use hyperbole) to tell his story? How would the story be different without this level of exaggeration?

'All you need to know is that at one point a bug as big as a bear flew across my face and, instead of screaming like a normal person, I was just grateful for the breeze. When we arrived at our first rest stop, I staggered down the steps. Wherever we'd stopped was hotter than Sydney. Much hotter. I was literally melting.' (p. 59)

- Choose your favourite exaggerated passage from the story and share it with the class, explaining why it appeals to you.
- How did you know what the character was feeling in this scene even though the author never told you directly? What words, phrases or illustrations helped to create this emotion?
- Choose a passage from the novel and re-write it without Rafe's sense of humour or exaggeration. How is the passage different? Which do you prefer?
- Choose five adjectives and five verbs from this passage and change their degree of modality (i.e. make strong words weaker and weak words stronger). What impact does this have on the extract?
- What other techniques does the author use to add humour to the story (e.g. puns)?

Allusion

- The author makes a number of references to other texts throughout the story. For example:
 - Keeping up with the Khatchadorians is similar to *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*
 - Rafe has a dream sequence similar to a scene from *Mission Impossible*
 - Frankenstein's monster costume
- Find other examples of allusions in the story.
- What is the effect of using references to other well-known texts? How does this help the author to convey more information to the reader?

Imagery

- How do the illustrations add to the storyline?
- The illustrations don't just show pictures of the text, they also add another dimension to the story.



How would the story be different without the illustrations?

- Choose a scene that has not been illustrated and draw an illustration. Remember to go beyond the text.
- A sound track can work in a similar way to visual images, by adding another dimension to a story. Create a sound track for a scene from the novel. Consider what mood you need to create through the music to support that part of the story.

Author's notes

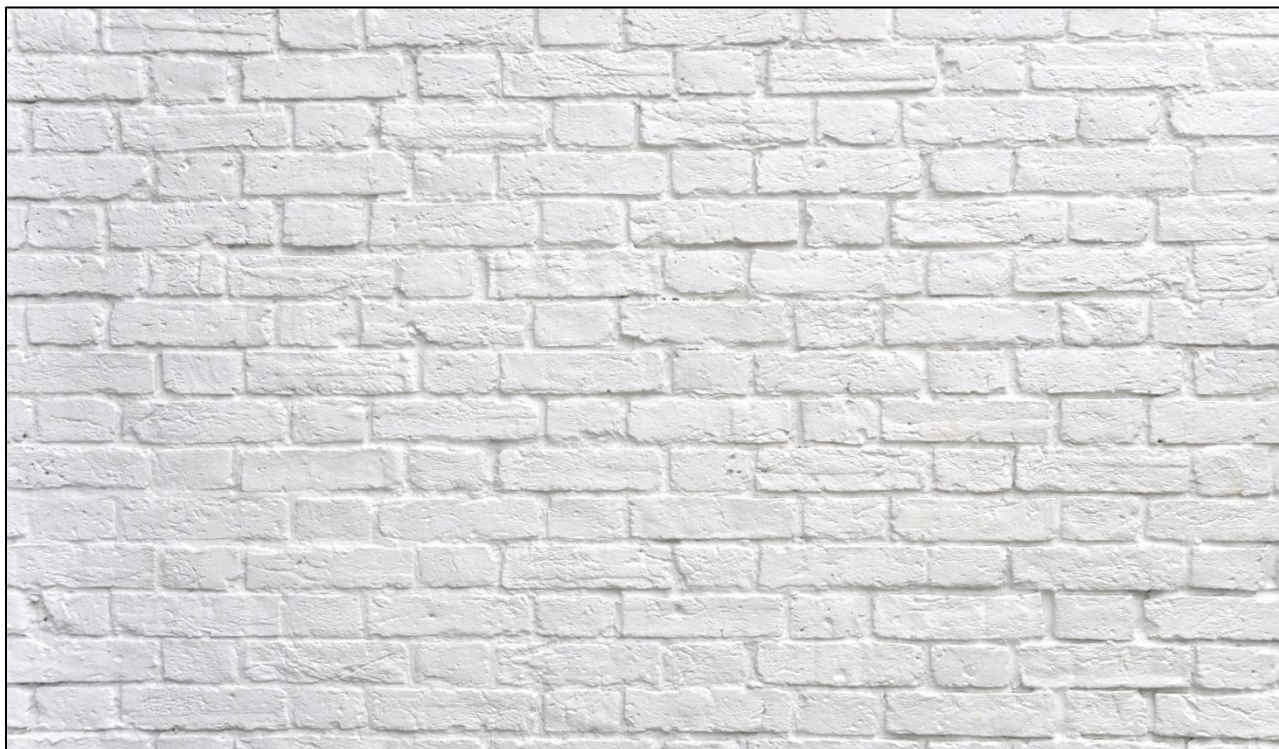
Authors will sometimes write a section at the end of the novel explaining their ideas or any other interesting information about their writing process.

Imagine that you are the author, James Patterson, and write the author's note for this book. In your response consider:

- What challenges did you face?
- How did you overcome these challenges?
- Which scenes were the hardest to write?
- Which scenes were the most fun to write?

Graffiti wall

Graffiti this wall with words, phrases or illustrations that sum up the key ideas in the story.



MEDIA MANIPULATION

Discussion questions and activities

- What do you think foreigners know about Australia?

AUSTRALIA

- Create a poster of Australian images, icons and animals. Use Rafe's drawing style in your illustrations.
- Compare posters around the class. Consider what was included and what wasn't.
- What ideas would tourists have of Australia based on these posters?



- Watch a number of tourism advertisements promoting Australia. What images would people gain from these?
- Rafe knows about Australian animals from watching National Geographic programs. What animals are usually featured in these programs? Why would documentary makers choose to focus on the dangerous animals rather than the cute and cuddly variety?
- Having watched these types of programs, what expectations might people have when they travel to this country?

"Man," I muttered, "that is one scary place!" As far as I could tell, Australia was basically an island full of monsters. They had birds that could kill you. Creature after creature rolled onscreen, each of them even more fearsome, bloodthirsty or plain screwy than the last. Crocodiles as big as school buses, Tasmanian devils (don't ask), goannas (basically dinosaurs), vampire bats (of course), stone fish (deadly fish sneakily disguised as stones), poisonous blue-ringed octopus (a cute little octopus that is possibly the most poisonous creature on the planet), venomous snakes by the bucket load, black widow spiders, scorpions, stick insects (so big they should be called log insects), killer caterpillars (caterpillars!), toadfish with teeth shaped like a parrot's beak that can take off your toe... and sharks.' (p. 29-30)

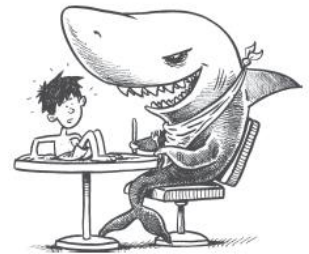
- What does this suggest about the way the media manipulates our view of the world?
- Make a list of what you know about other countries from watching documentaries, advertisements etc. If you have access to people from these countries, show them your list and see how realistic it is.



PROGRAM	IMAGES SHOWN	INTERPRETATION	REALITY

- Consider what Rafe expects in Australia and how realistic his expectations will be.

What Rafe knows about Australia and expects to see:



Prediction about what he will really see:



AUSTRALIAN SLANG

Discussion questions and activities

- Re-read Mayor Coogan's speech about Australia. What does he actually say?

"G'day, Hills Valley!" Mayor Coogan boomed into the microphone. "Fair dinkum it's a bonzer arvo for you and yer coppers to put on the old budgie smugglers and take the planks down the beacho to catch a couple of goofy breaks out back!" (p. 16)

- What other Australian slang can you find in the book? Write out the expressions and their meanings.
- Make a list or chart of other Australian expressions that foreigners may struggle to understand (e.g. fair dinkum, you beauty) and provide their meanings.
- What challenges would these expressions create for travellers in Australia?

WHAT DID YOU SAY?



- Write a dialogue between two people using as many stereotypical Australian phrases as possible. Swap them with other students and see if you can work out what is being said.
- Imagine that you are a tourist listening to this conversation. Write your own version of what you think has been said.



STEREOTYPES

Discussion questions and activities

- Consider the Australian man Rafe meets on the plane. Do all Australians really look like this?

“You saw something, son?” he said in a strong Australian accent. His face was leathery, and his blond hair was greying at the sides. He had the air of a man who wrestled crocodiles for fun.’ (p. 52)

THE TRUE BLUE AUSSIE

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the stereotypical Australian look like? Find examples from movies, magazines or advertisements and paste them here. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do Australians really look like? Paste or draw images of 'real' Australians. |
|---|---|

- What other stereotypes can you find in the story?



- Why do writers use stereotypes to create characters or situations?
- How does this help add to the interest or understanding of the story?
- Why do Kell and the man on the plane warn Rafe about drop bears? Do you think this sort of humour is also part of the Australian stereotype? Provide evidence to support your opinion.

AUSTRALIA

BY RAFE KHATCHADORIAN

- What events or features does Rafe see or experience in Australia that totally surprise him? (e.g. cyclones, huge hailstones) Draw images of them in true Rafe style.



AUSTRALIAN ICONS

Discussion questions and activities

- Rafe is surprised to see a huge T-Rex on top of a café. There are many 'big' icons throughout Australia. What 'big' places do you know of (e.g. the Big Pineapple, the Big Banana)?

BIG AUSTRALIA

- Make a poster of all the 'big' places in Australia. Create some new ones to add to the list.



FRIENDSHIP AND BULLYING

Discussion questions and activities

- Why do the Coogan twins and their friends exclude The Outsiders?
- What are the differences between the two groups?
- How are the Coogans and their friends seen as bullies?
- Why are they so hard on Rafe?
- What would his time in Shark Bay have been like if the Coogans had decided to accept and embrace his differences, rather than make fun of them?
- How does his friendship with Ellie and The Outsiders help Rafe enjoy his stay in Shark Bay?
- Why do Ellie and her friends agree to help Rafe with his project?
- How does his friendship with Ellie and The Outsiders change Rafe?
- What does this suggest about the power of friendship?
- We usually associate bullying with children. Is Kell's behaviour towards Rafe bullying? Why does he treat him this way? Kell would argue that he is just having fun. Do you see his behaviour this way? Why?
- What weakness does Kell later reveal that makes us suspect that he was in fact bullying Rafe?
- Why does Rafe's mum stand up for him even when the whole of Shark Bay turns against Rafe?
- Why does the whole town turn against him?

SELF-ESTEEM

Discussion questions and activities

- Apart from the chance to visit Australia (and have 3 weeks off school), why does Rafe enter the art competition?
'It didn't really matter, though, I reflected on my way back to class. There was no way on earth I'd win. Stuff like that doesn't happen to me. Rafe Khatchadorian is the kid who gets busted, the kid who stuffs things up, the kid who is stalked by Miller the Killer through the halls of Hills Valley, the kid who, above all else, fails.' (p. 34)
- Why might Rafe struggle with self-esteem issues?
- How do you think a kid like Rafe is treated by other children at school?
- What does Rafe learn from The Outsiders about being yourself?
"We were always The Outsiders," she'd said. "That's the way I like it too."
That was a good way of looking at things. I was kind of an outsider at Hills Valley. The thing was, before I met Ellie and the rest of The Outsiders I'd always seen that as a negative. Perhaps I'd been looking at things the wrong way. Instead of trying to fit in with everyone else, maybe I'd be better off not fitting in and liking it.' (p. 260-261)
- How might Rafe be different after his trip to Australia?



ANALYSING PERSPECTIVES

Discussion questions and activities

- How does Frost DeAndrews, the art critic, react to the idea of fancy dress? What does this tell us about the differences between Sydneysiders and people from outside the capital cities?
- How do the people of Shark Bay react to Rafe's bunyip scenario? How does Frost DeAndrews and Rafe's Mum react?
- Find other examples in the text of people reacting differently to an event.
- Why can people have different reactions to the same situations?
- Choose a scene from the story and re-write it through the eyes of a different character. What changes in this version of the story?
- People can perceive artwork in different ways. Why do you think this is?
- How can humour be interpreted differently? Consider the diverse reactions to the snake in the bed, the bunyip scenario, Rafe's surfing incident etc. Who finds these situations funny? Why could it be seen as not so funny to other people? What does this tell us about the dangers of practical jokes?

GEOGRAPHY

Discussion questions and activities

- What is the difference between a cyclone and a hurricane?
- What are typhoons, tsunamis, hurricanes, and tornadoes?
- What sort of natural disasters or extreme weather patterns does the USA experience?
- What other geographical differences can you identify between USA and Australia?
- What animal encounters might an Australian tourist have in America?



ORDER FORM

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