

# Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos

by GEOFFREY McSKIMMING / Illustrated by KERRY MILLARD

## 1. A tree of their own

**Y**AKKA AND YIP LIVED in one of the best trees in the rainforest.

It was an enormous Moreton Bay fig tree.

Yakka, who was a very clever cockatoo, liked it because it had wide, thick branches that spread out from the trunk like the arms of a welcoming, woody octopus.

Yip, who was an eager little pygmy possum, liked it because the thick leaves reminded him of rustling, whispering curtains of green.

On the day that Yakka had first seen the tree, she had got all squawky and excited. “Scraaark!” she scraarked to Yip. “That’s the place, Yip! That’s the perfect place for us to live!”

Yip, who was flying with Yakka in Yakka’s small plane, looked carefully at the tree as they flew all around it. “It’s very big,” he said to Yakka.

“You’re right there, my little friend. It *is* big. And it’s beaut! There’s plenty of room to build our house. Scraaark! We can even have a special wing just for our office, where we can make the *School Mag* for all our readers!”

Yip looked at Yakka. “Haven’t you got enough wings already?” he asked. “You have two wings, Yakka, and they’re both special, aren’t they?”

Yakka gave a laugh-screech. “No, Yip. I mean a special wing on our *tree house*. Another part of the house that we’ll build on a special branch. A separate part from where we’ll live.”



“Oh,” said Yip. He thought about it for a moment. “Yes, that sounds like a good idea. We’ll live in one part of the tree house, and make the *School Mag* in another part. You have good ideas, Yakka.”

“Thanks, my little cobber. It comes from being a cockatoo, you know.”

Then Yip had an idea. “We can park your plane on one of the topmost branches, so when we want to go flying we can just scoot up there and away we go!”

“Excellent idea, Yip. You have excellent ideas, you know.”

“It comes from being a pygmy possum,” said Yip happily.

So they landed Yakka’s plane on one of the topmost branches and started to make the tree their home.

## 2. Recycling

While they were exploring their new tree, Yip remembered something that was a very good something to remember.

“Yakka!” he shrieked.

Yakka jumped—Yip’s shrieks often made her jump. “What, my little cobber?”

“I know just the place where we could find some things for our tree house!”

“Where?” asked Yakka.

“The old, abandoned farm cottage.”

Yakka clapped her wings together. “Clever Yip! Of course! No-one’s been there for years!”

“Maybe we could find floorboards!” squealed Yip.

“And a door!” squawked Yakka.

“And some bits of wood for our walls!”

“Who knows *what* we’ll find?” Yakka said, putting on her flying helmet. “Come on, let’s go!”

So off they went, to the abandoned farm cottage.

It was an old ruin. Many years ago, there had been a fire, and part of the cottage had burnt down. The rest of it had been left to rot away in the wind and the rain and the hot summer sun.

Yakka flew her plane down and landed next to the ruined farm cottage. She and Yip leapt out of the plane and rushed into what was left of the old place.

“It’s wonderful!” cried Yakka.

“It’s bonza!” cried Yip.

They found so many bits and pieces that they had to make seven trips back and forth between their tree and the farm cottage. Soon they had all they needed (and some things they didn’t need).



They worked quickly. Yakka and Yip used the old wood from the cottage to make some walls, some floors, some tables, some perches (for Yakka to rest on), some shelves (for Yip to leap from) and two beds.

When they had finished, their tree house blended in beautifully with the tree. The leafy branches hung down over the top to make a thick, rustling roof. The thick branches snaked around the wooden walls, like big, gentle arms, cradling the tree house. From the floor of the rainforest, the tree house was almost invisible among all the greenery.

Everything was perfect. Yakka and Yip were happy, making the *School Mag* in their office wing and relaxing in their house.

Until, late one night, there came a dreadful noise!

### 3. Yahoos!

“**R**WEEEEEEAAAAAARRRRRRRKKKKKK!” It was so loud, that Yip fell out of his shelf-bed. He stopped himself from hitting the floor by gracefully gliding upwards again. But he was very shaken.

“Scraaaaark!” squawked Yakka, jumping out of her bed. “What was that?”

“RWEEEEEEAAAAAARRRRRRRKKKKKK!” came the awful noise again.

Yip’s tail curled at the sound. “It’s coming from next door!” he squealed.

He and Yakka rushed to the window and peered out.

“RWEEEEEEAAAAAARRRRRRRKKKKKK!”

“RWEEEEEEAAAAAARRRRRRRKKKKKK!”

“RWEEEEEEAAAAAARRRRRRRKKKKKK!”

Now there was not just one awful sound, but many, all on top of each other.



Yakka and Yip strained to see, through all the darkness, what could be making such a horrible din.

Slowly, as they kept looking, hundreds of dark shapes began to appear in the rainforest night.

Hundreds of dark, noisy shapes, hanging off the branches of the tree next door.

Hundreds of dark, noisy shapes, flitting and flying and leaping around.

Yip turned to Yakka. "What are we going to do?" he asked.

But for once, Yakka the cockatoo was squawk-less.

*What does this mean for Yakka and Yip?  
Will the noisy intruders leave them in peace?  
Find out next month, in Part Two of Yakka,  
Yip and the Yahoos! ■*

# Session 2

## Countdown

### **Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos** by Geoffrey McSkimming

#### Session Focus

**RS2.7 Discusses how writers relate to their readers in different ways, how they create a variety of worlds through language and how they use language to achieve a wide range of purposes**

- Identifies the main elements of structure in a narrative, such as orientation, complication and resolution.
- Identifies a writer's use of Australian slang and notices how this contributes to characterisation and other effects in a text text.

**RS2.8 Discusses the text structure of a range of text types and the grammatical features that are characteristic of those text types**

- Identifies a variety of saying verbs and discusses how these can be more effective than the repetitious use of 'said'.
- Discusses the use and effect of figurative language (simile) and literary devices (alliteration).

#### What you will need

- multiple copies of **Worksheet 2**
- copies of the *Macquarie Dictionary* for students to use
- <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/slang/> — background information for teachers regarding Australian slang and colloquialisms
- an image of a Moreton Bay fig tree to show students

#### Setting the Scene

- Explain to the students that the text they will be reading features the *Countdown* characters, Yakka and Yip.
- Ask students what Australian slang words they know. List these and determine the meanings e.g. G'day. How'zat? Ripper! Use the opportunity to point out that slang words often have several different spellings because they are mainly *spoken* words, not words we usually find in written language.
  - Invite students to look up the words in the *Macquarie Dictionary*.
  - Tell students that the cockatoo's name, Yakka, is an Australian slang word. Explain that 'yakka' means hard manual work and that the word may be of Aboriginal origin.
  - Ask students: why else might the cockatoo be called Yakka? (To 'yak' also means to talk, so perhaps Yakka is talkative.)
- Talk to students about how Australian slang is one type of what is called *colloquial language*, which means 'spoken language'. Discuss how writers sometimes use slang to make a text sound more informal, like speech, and to make characters seem more realistic by setting them in a place and time.

#### Modelled Reading

- Ask students to turn to the story *Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos* by Geoffrey McSkimming.
- Ask students to read the title out loud. Question them on what they hear.
- Explain that the author has used *alliteration* by repeating the 'y' sound at the beginning of each word. Encourage students to offer examples of alliteration using their own name e.g. Funny Frank.

- Ask students what they think the story will be about.
- Review with students the stages of a narrative. Remind them that the orientation is the beginning of the story, the place where the author introduces the characters and the setting (i.e. where the story is taking place).
- Read aloud or select students to read *Chapter 1: A tree of their own*.
- After reading, ask students to identify the characters and setting in the orientation.
- Before proceeding, ask students to predict what the next chapter will be about. Read aloud or select students to read *Chapter 2: Recycling*.
- Direct students' attention to the direct or quoted speech by finding examples from each character.
- Before proceeding to Chapter 3, ask students to predict what this chapter will be about. Read aloud or select students to read *Chapter 3: Yahoos!*
- Remind students of narrative structure and ask them to identify a complication. Explain that they will have to wait to read the resolution in Part 2, next month.
- Think! Pair! Share! Students take time to think up an appropriate resolution; students then turn to a partner and share their resolutions.

## Guided Reading

- Show students a Moreton Bay fig tree, or describe the tree to the students, emphasising its size.
- Direct students' attention to the simile in the third sentence: *branches that spread out from the trunk like the arms of a welcoming, woody octopus*. Explain to students that a simile creates a relationship between two things or ideas by comparing them. Similes often make surprising connections, by comparing something ordinary and everyday with something unexpected or unfamiliar. Discuss the effect of this simile by asking: Why do you think the writer compares the tree's branches to an octopus? (e.g. to show how many branches there are and how alive and friendly the tree seems.)
- Reinforce understandings of simile by referring students to another simile at the end of Chapter 2: *The thick branches snaked around the wooden walls, like big, gentle arms*. Discuss the effect of these similes in this text. Why does the writer compare the tree to arms cradling the treehouse? (e.g. to show a soft, nurturing side to nature.)
- Give students time to re-read the story to themselves, with a partner or taking turns as a whole group.
- In small groups or pairs, ask students to read through the text and identify Australian slang. Students suggest the meanings of the words by looking at how they are used in the text.
- Complete **Worksheet 2 (Part A)**. Students may use the *Macquarie Dictionary* or website to assist them in finding the meanings.
- Check students' understanding.
- Ask students: what effect does this type of language create? Help students to appreciate how it enhances the characters' personality traits and makes the characters seem real, friendly, Australian ...
- Encourage students to try and use these words in an oral sentence. If needed, go back to the story and review the context in which these words were used.
- Point out that English contains many alternatives to 'said' as a saying verb. Create a list of saying verbs.
- Complete **Worksheet 2 (Part B)** Students record the saying verbs used by each character, e.g. squawked.
- Discuss why writers use other words for 'said'.
- Discuss what these words tell us about the characters and how they behave.

# Session 2

## Countdown

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### Independent Activities

- Use the text to develop a Readers Theatre.
  - Direct the students' attention to *Chapter 2: Recycling*.
  - In small groups ask students to take on the roles of Yip, Yakka and the narrator.
  - Discuss and model the use of voice, facial expression and hand gestures to interpret characters.
  - Encourage the narrator to pay particular attention to saying verbs and to be expressive in their narration. Choose fluent readers to model.
  - Rotate roles so students can experience different characters.
  - Select groups to present their Readers Theatre to each other or to the whole class.
- Build on students' knowledge by examining Australian idioms and rhyming slang. Refer to the Australian Government culture and recreation website: <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/slang/> ■

## Text Tip

### Reading *George Underpits* (back cover cartoon serial)

Aaron Blabey, the author of this month's Bookshelf title, *Sunday Chutney* (see session 3, next page), is also the author of our new back-cover cartoon series. *George Underpits* is a delightful ten-episode series on an environmental theme that will become clear from episode 2. Aaron Blabey has kept this first episode deliberately very straightforward, so that even our youngest readers can easily follow the plot. Notice the elements that keep it simple:

- it shows only nine frames, two of them filling complete lines: later episodes will contain a larger number of frames.
- each frame has clear boundaries, with white borders.
- each frame shows only a single action or event and each is very uncluttered.
- boxed narratorial comments are used in frames 1 and 4, to make the text stand out against the background.
- narratorial comments are simple sentences only.
- speech bubbles are clearly assigned to discrete speakers.
- key events are narrated explicitly: e.g. he took a bit of a tumble; He woke up to an unfamiliar voice.

Like all excellent cartoons, however, this one leaves plenty of implicit meanings for readers to fill in. For example, in frame 1 we are told that George was doing something stupid but readers must work out what that something stupid is from the illustration. Readers are also not told explicitly whose unfamiliar voice woke him, or why that gave him a bit of a shock.

Aesthetically, this episode uses a rich browny-red palette, and the colour continuity, variation in frame sizes and shifts from distance to close-up views give the episode visual appeal as well as balance. ■




# Worksheet 2

## Part A: Slang Words in Yakka, Yip and the Yahoos

by Geoffrey McSkimming

Locate the Australian slang words in the story. Use the story and a dictionary to help write the meaning of each word.

Word	Meaning
Yakka	
cobber	A mate or friend.
beaut	
yahoos	
bonza	
din	

# Worksheet 2

## Part B: 'Saying' Verbs in Yakka, Yip And The Yahoos

The author uses different words for 'said'. These are called *saying verbs*. These verbs are often found near "speech marks" or dialogue. Record in the table other saying verbs the author uses when Yakka and Yip speak.

Yakka	Yip
scraarked	shrieked

