

THE ORCHARD UNDERGROUND

TEACHERS NOTES

Written by MAT LARKIN

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont in May 2018

SYNOPSIS

'Smart, mysterious and funny. This book will make you think, make you laugh, and keep you guessing.' – Rebecca Stead, author of *When You Reach Me* and *Liar & Spy*.

Pri Kohli knows the town of Dunn's Orchard better than anyone. After all, he was the first kid to ever live there. He knows its mysteries (none), its secrets (also none) and the best ways to have fun in it (climb a big tree and sit there).

So why can't he answer newcomer Attica Stone's simple question: if the town's called Dunn's Orchard, where's the orchard?

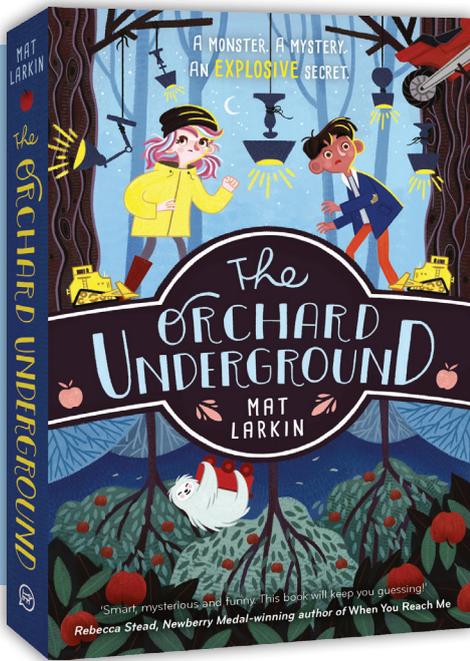
As Pri and Attica go in search of forbidden fruit, they will uncover stranger mysteries: a robot caterpillar, a mayor with a murky past, a Possibly Read Actual Boogeyman and a house made of doors in a haunted wood.

But what will Pri and Attica do when they discover the biggest secret of all – that something truly magical is about to be destroyed, and the only way to save it could be by destroying the town itself?

The Orchard Underground is the perfect book for class study. It's fast-paced, utterly surprising in its plot, lush in its descriptions and packed with characters so real they step off the page.

There's a big mystery at the heart of this book, and students will love predicting the upcoming events.

Even better for the English classroom, though, are the little mysteries scattered throughout the pages. *'Mysteries within mysteries, growing in other mysteries, with mysteries stuck in their branches,'* as Attica tells us in the novel. The delight for teachers and students is finding and figuring them all out.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mat Larkin is full of it. I mean, he says he's a writer of exciting middle-grade adventure stories, but anyone could say that. He's been overheard telling people he crafts tales where the not-quite-ordinary meets the nearly impossible, but if that's true, what wouldn't he make up?

Did he really write for the *Zac Power* series? Does he currently work as a mental health writer? Is this entire biography part of his cunning web of fiction? It seems likely.

No-one with half a brain in their head believes he lives in Melbourne with an incredible wife and an improbable son.

I'll give him this, though: *The Orchard Underground* is his first novel.



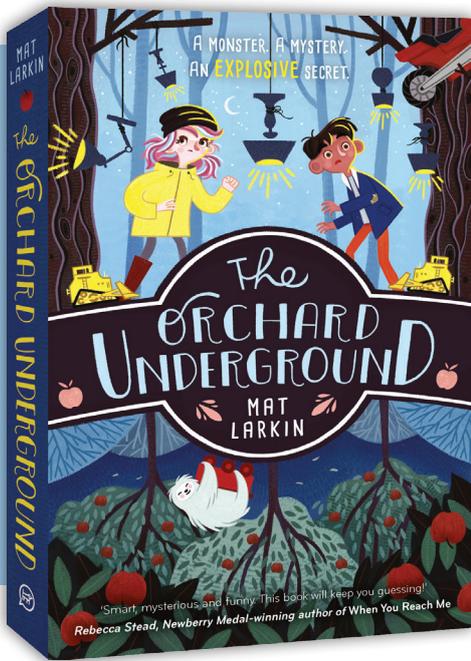
MYSTERY NOTE BOOK

The Orchard Underground will keep you guessing, as good mysteries always do. As you read, keep a Mystery Notebook. In this book, keep all your answers to the questions asked in these notes. Also, keep a record of any guesses you make about the mystery in *The Orchard Underground*.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

The characters in *The Orchard Underground* discover some strange and wonderful things. Study the cover of the book. Make a list of things on the front cover that seem a little out of the ordinary.

The Orchard Underground is a brilliant mystery. Make a list of some other mystery books that you've read and loved. As a class, discuss some of the best things about mystery stories. In *The Orchard Underground*, Pri and Attica become good friends. Describe one of your good friends. (This could be a person, or a pet, your brother, sister or grandmother.) What do they look like? What makes them a good friend? Describe some of the fun things you do together.



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READING ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 1 - THINK OF THE TOWN

In Chapter 1, we're introduced to the main character, Pri Kohli. Say this name quickly to the person next to you. What do you notice? Write your answer in your notebook.

List three things you find out about Pri Kohli in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2 - NO APPLES, ONE PINE

'I mean, who is this Attica Stone, anyway?' Pri asks on page 14. Choose three words to describe Attica Stone's personality.

CHAPTER 3 - CHEEKY LITTLE MOGGY

There's a big mystery at the heart of this book. But there are also lots of little mysteries scattered throughout the pages. Evan Gray and his new best friends call Pri 'Shelly'. What might be some reasons why? Don't worry about being wrong. Use your imagination.

As you read, make a list of all the mysteries in the book – big and small. Another way to think about this is to write down any of the things that you wonder about as you read the book. For example, in this chapter, you might wonder why Evan and Pri aren't friends anymore.

CHAPTER 4 - THE WEIRDEST OBJECT

How is the Razyzy Wood different from the town?

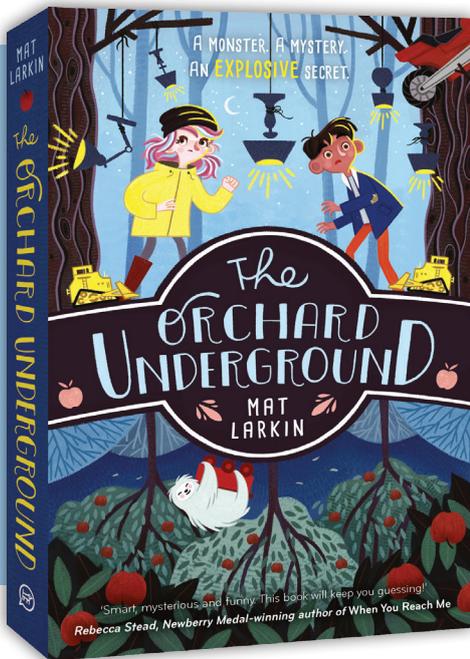
What's a boogeyman? In pairs, write a definition.

CHAPTER 5 - BLACKOUT

Pri's house smells like spices. Imagine that you have just walked into a kitchen where your favourite food is being cooked. What does it smell like? Write a description.

CHAPTER 6 - YOU HAVE TO BECOME THE LONE PINE

In this chapter, Pri gives the reader rich and detailed descriptions. In your notebook, describe your favourite place. Use all the senses – describe what you see, hear, taste, touch and smell.



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CHAPTER 7 - THE BONFIRE

What decision does Pri make in this chapter and why does he make it?

What do you think Slotcar means when she tells Pri to *'be careful of people who tell you you're a bird?'* (p.53)

CHAPTER 8 - THE RAZZY WOOD

What things do Pri and Attica discover in this chapter?

CHAPTER 9 - THE HOUSE OF DOORS

Draw one thing that happens in this chapter.

CHAPTER 10 - THE DOOR IN THE FLOOR

What's a 'fundamentally inexplicable phenomenon' and what 'fundamentally inexplicable phenomenon' happens in this chapter?

CHAPTER 11 - FNARGH

Why is this chapter called 'Fnargh'?

The English language is always evolving, which means new words are always being invented. New words are called neologisms. Make a list of words that have recently (or fairly recently) become part of the English language. (For example: Twitter, tweet, Facebook, frenemy.) In groups, make up some new words of your own, and give them definitions.

CHAPTER 12 - LET'S BREAK BULLDOZERS

Do you like Glue and Rahm? Why or why not?

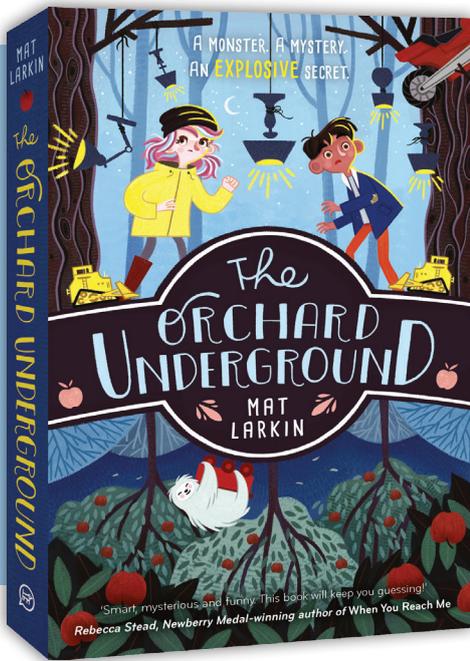
Do you agree with Evan – is Attica a bully? Give reasons for your opinion.

CHAPTER 13 - ONE-ARMED ELEPHANT CRAB-TANKS

Explain the title of this chapter.

CHAPTER 14 - THERE IS A PERSON

What mysteries are solved in this chapter? What new mystery appears? Who do you think Person is? What do we learn about Person in this chapter?



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CHAPTER 15 - SLUGGERS

Who owns the Sluggers? Make some guesses.

CHAPTER 16 - REMOTE-CONTROLLED CATERPILLAR TO THE TOP

Before you read this chapter, brainstorm all the ways a remote-controlled caterpillar could be very useful in your life.

'I'm starting to notice that, when you least expect it, Slotcar can suddenly make a lot of sense.' (p. 131) Do you agree? Why? How is she a 'total genius'?

CHAPTER 17 - THE ORCHARD OVERGROUND

According to Attica, Pri monologues a lot. What's a monologue?

Write a short monologue, delivered by Attica, letting the reader know her opinion of Pri. What strengths does she think he has? What weaknesses? Why does she like him?

Pri describes his earliest memories in this chapter. Describe a good memory that you have. This might be of a place, a person, or an event.

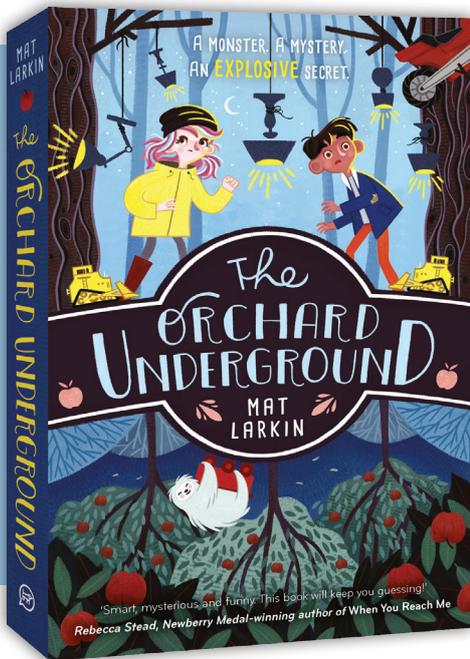
CHAPTER 18 - ORIGAMI MOOSE

What makes Pri so angry in this chapter?

CHAPTER 19 - SUNLIGHT UNDERGROUND

'Mysteries within mysteries, growing in other mysteries, with mysteries stuck in their branches,' murmurs Attica. 'Let's get some answers.'

How many mysteries have you encountered so far in this book? These could be mysteries about character background, character motives, mysteries about the universe, or the overall plot. Who can list the most mysteries? Make a list of mysteries that you would like answered about life. Perhaps you would like to know what happens in your future. Perhaps you would like to know what your dog would say to you, if your dog could talk. Perhaps you would like to know why lightning happens (or perhaps you already know the answer to this one).



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CHAPTER 20 – BEHOLD, A SLOTH

What amazing things do the characters discover in this chapter?

CHAPTER 21 - THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS THE RAZZ MAN

Who is The Razz Man? Are you surprised to discover who he is? Can you think of any clues the author may have planted about his identity earlier on in the novel?

CHAPTER 22 - THE WORDS 'VERY' AND 'SAFE'

'Who would make an ordinary thing if you could make a magical one?' (p.190)

Do you agree that magical things are always better than ordinary? Give reasons for your answer.

CHAPTER 23 - THE ORCHARD UNDERGROUND

Draw the underground orchard.

Why is this orchard so important? Is it okay with you if it gets torn down? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 24 - BEFORE BEFORE, BEFORE AND AFTER

What mystery does Slotcar solve in this chapter?

CHAPTER 25 - THE ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

What's the alternate universe and what's your opinion of it? Why do you think Attica locks Pri out?

CHAPTER 26 - LOCKED OUT

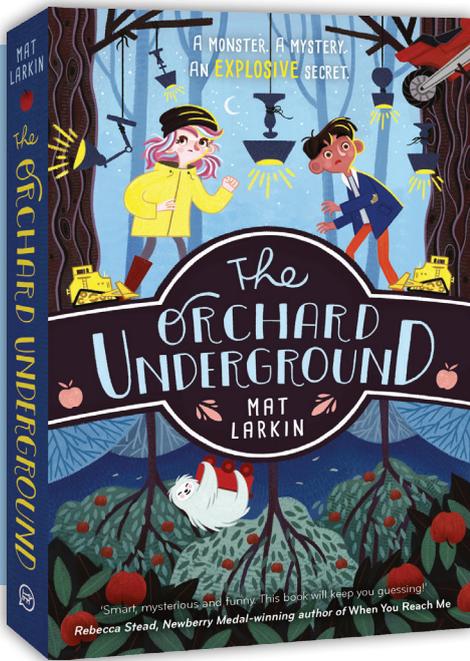
What do you think the word 'Lift' in Attica's text message means? What would you tell Pri to do?

CHAPTER 27 - THE SEWING ROOM

There are beautiful houses on the wall of the sewing room. Draw an unusual house that you would love to live in – it can be anything you like! Present your house to the class.

CHAPTER 28 - LIFT

What mystery is solved in this chapter? What do we find out about Evan and Pri?



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CHAPTER 29 - THE TURBO-TOOL ALLIANCE

Attica and Pri call each other some names in a run of great dialogue. Is there any truth to what they call each other? Or is it too simple to call Attica a bully?

CHAPTER 30 - NEW FACES

What mode of transport does Pri have in mind at the end of this chapter? Can you guess?

CHAPTER 31 - CHAIN LIGHTNING

What do we learn about Attica in this chapter? Did you guess any of it? If so, what did you guess?

CHAPTER 32 - TWO THINGS, ACTUALLY

Attica does something incredibly brave in this chapter. Write about a time when you were brave. Or, write about a time when you weren't.

CHAPTER 33 - SQUID INK

Why are squids better than birds, and why is this information so important?

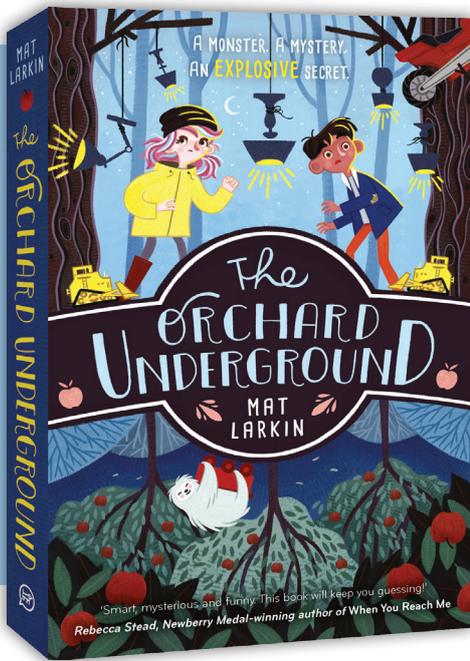
What choice do you think Pri should make?

CHAPTER 34 - THE RIVER

How has the town changed?

CHAPTER 35 - TILL THE END OF THE UNIVERSE

Pri says he's no-one special in this chapter. He is, though, isn't he? Who is the most special character to you? Choose your favourite character in the book, and explain your choice to the class.



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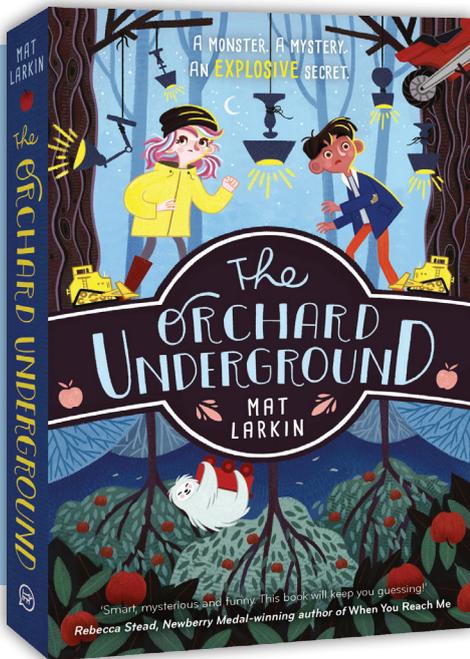
THEMES

Below are just some of themes found in *The Orchard Underground*. As a class, think of some more themes to add to the list.

- Friendship
- Being yourself
- Individuality
- Protecting the environment
- Conflict
- Families
- Courage
- Imagination
- Secrets

In pairs, choose one theme and complete the activities below in your notebook.

- Use magazines to create a collage of pictures that symbolise your theme.
- Choose a song that symbolises your theme, and play this for the class.
- Find an example from the book that illustrates your theme. For example, if you choose courage, you might describe how Attica stayed behind to fight Rahm and Glue so that Pri could escape.
- Write a paragraph explaining why your theme is important for people to study. For example, why might people of all ages need to read that it's okay to be different?



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WRITING IDEAS

Mystery stories are a lot of fun. Write a mystery story that begins with the class pet mysteriously disappearing. Start your story in action, and try to keep the reader guessing.

Orchards don't usually exist underground. As a class, brainstorm new places for everyday things. Perhaps on your list there might be schools underground or schools in trees or animals in schools or chickens in swimming pools. Choose one thing on your brainstorm list and write a story about it.

DRAMA ACTIVITIES

In groups, act out the first chapter of your mystery novel.

or

In groups, act out your favourite scene from *The Orchard Underground*.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

One of the themes in *The Orchard Underground* is the destruction of the environment. In groups, choose one way in which the environment is under threat today, and create a campaign to raise public awareness about your issue. You might like to choose some of the threats covered in *The Orchard Underground* – deforestation, lack of water, lack of bees.