

# TEACHERS' NOTES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary school readers  
(ages 13+, or years 7 to 11)

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking; Literacy; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Literature (Shakespeare); Intertextuality

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

Bestselling author R.A. Spratt has written a contemporary novel exploring the themes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through a young adult lens. With humour, sharp societal observations and an obvious love of language, R.A. transports the reader into the world of *Hamlet*. In the protagonist Selby, R.A. has created a dyslexic character who engages in Shakespeare's storytelling in a dynamic, meaningful and often humorous way.

## THEMES

- Grief, despair and mental health
- Ethics and morality
- Revenge
- Corruption
- Appearance vs reality
- Friendship

## PREPARED BY

R.A. Spratt and Penguin Random House Australia

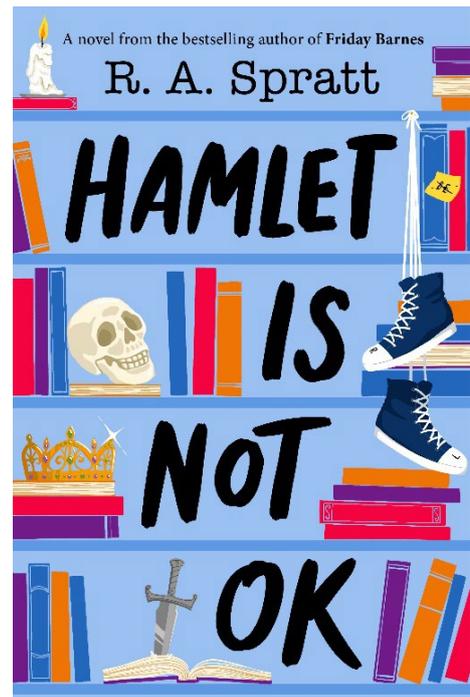
## PUBLICATION DETAILS

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## Hamlet is Not OK

R. A. Spratt

## PLOT SUMMARY

**From the bestselling author of the Friday Barnes series**

Selby hates homework.

She would rather watch TV – anything to escape the tedium of school, her parents' bookshop and small-town busybodies.

So Selby didn't plan to read *Hamlet*. She certainly never planned to meet him.

This novel transports Selby, and the reader, into the cold and crime-ridden play itself. Here she meets Hamlet: heavy with grief, the young prince is overthinking and over everything.

Selby can relate. But unlike Hamlet, Selby isn't afraid of making decisions. In her world, Selby is used to feeling overlooked. But in the bloody, backstabbing world of Shakespeare, Selby's good conscience and quiet courage might just save some lives... hopefully *before* Hamlet stabs one of her classmates.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**R.A. Spratt** was born in the UK and lived in Dursley, Gloucestershire – a town immortalised by Harry Potter’s deeply unpleasant relatives – until she was two years old. Then, like many ambitious English people cursed with regional accents so strong no other British person can take them seriously, her family moved to Australia. The tedium of growing up in the western suburbs of Sydney was fertiliser to the growth of R.A.’s imagination. The only thing for a kid to do was get on a bicycle and go to the library, so R.A. Spratt did just that. Once there, she read everything, devouring the books of Arthur Ransome, Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Robin Klein and Judy Blume, and audiotapes of Shakespeare productions and Sherlock Holmes dramatisations.

And so, her young mind was formed, and set on the path of becoming the extraordinary author she is today. Now based in Bowral NSW, she’s the bestselling writer of dozens of absurd and witty books including *Friday Barnes*, *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins*, *The Peski Kids* and the *Shockingly and Astonishingly Good Stories* collections. Her podcast, *Bedtime Stories with R.A. Spratt*, has had over 2 million downloads and connects R.A. with story-lovers across the globe. For more information, [visit raspratt.com](http://raspratt.com)

## AUTHOR’S INSPIRATION

I’ve been asked to write a couple of paragraphs on what inspired me to write *Hamlet is Not OK*. The problem is – the answer is very complicated. My brain has been collecting the ideas that are in this book for decades. I’ve loved Shakespeare since the first production of *Much Ado About Nothing* I saw when I was in primary school. Then when my own children grew old enough, I started taking to see the National Theatre Live productions that were shown at our local cinema (they have a particularly brilliant production of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* that I highly recommend). Whenever I see a Shakespeare play I always come

away imagining how I would depict the same story. So I’ve spent my whole life unconsciously collecting ideas. The specific trigger for this book came when I was standing in my local bookshop. I was trying to encourage my younger daughter to read more. She really likes art so I was offering to buy her a graphic novel. But my younger daughter also enjoys being difficult so she went off to a totally different part of the shop to get away from me. I enjoy irritating her, so I loudly declared I was going to buy a graphic novel for myself and if she didn’t want to read it, that was fine. It was just for me (I was trying to use reverse psychology). I started picking up graphic novels and leafing through them, and that is when I picked up a graphic novel of *Hamlet*. I’d seen the play several times, live on stage and movie adaptations. But in every production I’d seen, Hamlet had been played by a middle-aged actor. It’s such a complicated role it is usually given to an experienced actor, which means someone older. But in this graphic novel Hamlet was drawn looking like a 23-year-old, which made sense. Hamlet is a university student. He should look that age. Seeing that depiction transformed my perception of the play. I suddenly got it. Hamlet was just like one of the young men I’d been to university with – smart but foolish, educated but pompous, charming but also and utterly infuriating. This sparked my imagination. A few weeks later I sat down to write this book.

– R.A. (Rachel) Spratt



# TEACHERS' NOTES

## KEY STUDY TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

### Writing Style

1. Author R.A. Spratt has been a television writer and a comedy writer. What are some of the writing techniques employed in *Hamlet is Not OK* that might also work in TV writing? What does the strategic use of dialogue, for example, give the novel's pace and plotting?
2. Both R.A. Spratt and William Shakespeare use humour in their writing. Humour serves many purposes. It can be used to lighten the mood, relieve dramatic tension and develop characters. It can also be used to challenge the audiences' perception, getting them to think about an idea in a different way. Some examples of the humour techniques are listed below. Discuss the examples of these techniques throughout *Hamlet is Not OK* and how they enrich the story:
  - Irony: A literary device in which the literal meaning is the opposite of that intended, especially when the locution understates the effect intended, employed in ridicule or merely playfully (Macquarie Dictionary). A simple way of putting it is that irony usually signals a difference between the appearance of things and their reality (Gail Erskine, 2014)
  - Hyperbole: Exaggeration used to evoke strong feelings or create an impression which is not meant to be taken literally. Often involves a surprise or unexpected event or consequence (Gail Erskine, 2014)
  - Parody: The opportunity to imitate the style of an individual, place, object or institution with a nonsensical approach (Gail Erskine, 2014)

### Intertextuality

1. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was published in 1601 and continues to be one of the most influential pieces of literature in the

world. After reading *Hamlet is Not OK*, do you feel like you have more of an understanding of Shakespeare's famous play? What is it about R.A. Spratt's novel that may help a reader grasp the plot and themes of *Hamlet*?

2. R.A. Spratt often includes pop culture references in her writing, those referred to in *Hamlet is Not OK* include the book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* and the TV show *Colombo*. How do these references impact our experience of reading the novel?

### Plotting

1. In *Hamlet is Not OK*, Selby and Dan attempt to give *Hamlet* a happier, or at least less deadly, ending. In intervening with the play's plot, simple changes have complicated knock-on effects. For example, the character Ophelia is displaced from the play and the climatic final scene takes an entirely different turn. What are other examples of the domino effect in life, or in other books you've read?
2. *Hamlet* is often described as a 'revenge tragedy.' However, unlike the protagonists in Shakespeare's other revenge plays (*Othello* and *Titus Andronicus* for example) in *Hamlet* we see the prince contemplate the certainty of his revenge, and question his motivations the whole way through. Does this add something to the story? How does R.A. Spratt treat the character's famous indecision? What are some modern examples of a revenge story in literature or film/TV?

### Character development

1. We see Selby's motivations change throughout the novel, and chapter 13 marks a turning point for the course of the plot. Here Selby progresses from a passive spectator of *Hamlet* to a motivated heroine. This is called

character development. What inspired her change? Can you think of times from your own life, or examples from other stories, where someone progresses from one position to another? What does this add to the story, and our enjoyment of it as readers?

2. Selby can sometimes feel like she doesn't fit in: her parents love books and reading while she finds it difficult; her siblings are academic while she prefers the storytelling of TV; her small town is claustrophobic. This is a trope in literature call the 'outsider protagonist' or more colloquially a 'fish out of water' story. What are some other examples of outsider protagonists in books? Why do you think this is a common characterisation technique in stories?
3. The character of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, has been assessed and discussed for centuries. What do you make of Selby's view of him as a man beset with grief and despair, rather than a madman? What evidence is there of grief, compared to mental disorder? What do you think attracted R.A. Spratt to this story, and this character, in particular?

### Themes

1. Commonly cited themes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* include revenge, honour, corruption, death, deceit, friendship and grief. Did these come across while reading *Hamlet is Not OK*? Why do you think these themes continue to inspire readers? What are some examples of modern books, films or TV that explore these perennial themes?
  - 1.b) How did R.A mirror the themes of Hamlet in the story of Selby and Dan? How does grief affect Dan in comparison to Hamlet? How does guilt shape Selby's relationship with her

mother, compared to Hamlet's relationship with his father?

2. **Hamlet and women:** Selby calls Hamlet out for his reproachful attitude towards women. Do you think Hamlet loved Ophelia, and his mother Gertrude? Why do you think he treats them so appallingly? When Hamlet rails against Ophelia and Gertrude how much of it is the character Hamlet and how much of it is William Shakespeare revealing what he personally thinks?

### Language

1. Many phrases coined by Shakespeare are still in use today some 400 years later. A list of phrases that were first expressed in *Hamlet* is below. What do you think they mean, and why do you think they are still in use today?

- Brevity is the soul of wit
- Conscience doth make cowards of us all
- The cat will mew and dog will have his day
- I must be cruel only to be kind
- In my mind's eye
- Murder most foul
- Neither a borrower nor a lender be
- O, woe is me
- Sweets to the sweet
- The lady doth protest too much
- There's method in my madness
- To thine own self be true
- What a piece of work is man
- Witching time of night

- 1.b. The below famous quotes are spoken by Polonius (Ophelia's father).

- Neither a borrower nor a lender be
- To thine own self be true
- Brevity is the soul of wit

These quotes sound wise, but Polonius is a foolish character. How does this effect our perception of the words? Why does

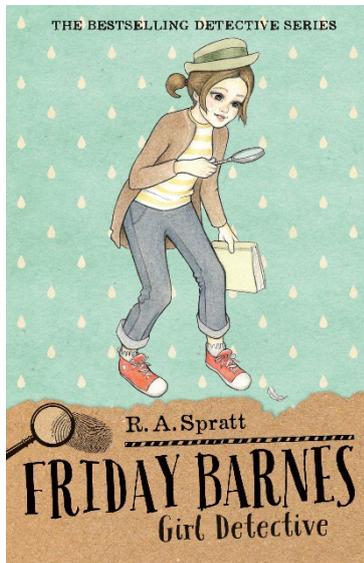


Shakespeare give these wise platitudes to a fool to say?

2. Do you feel differently about a story when listening to the words being read aloud? Shakespeare's plays were intended to be acted, with the drama and pageantry of the stage. How does the act of reading Shakespeare compare to watching a live performance of it, or listening to a reading? What are some favourite audiobooks, radio plays or podcasts?



## FURTHER READING FROM R.A. SPRATT



### *Friday Barnes: Girl Detective*

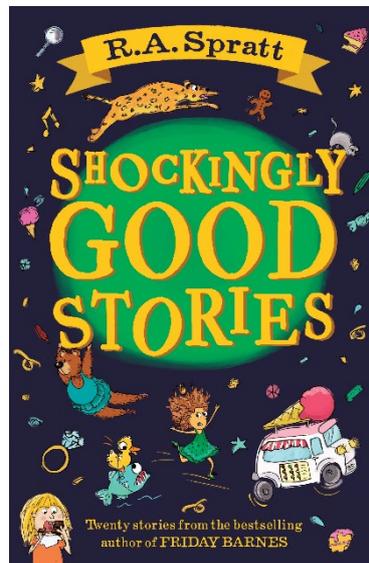
by R.A. Spratt

When girl detective Friday Barnes solves a bank robbery she uses the reward money to send herself to the most exclusive boarding school in the country, Highcrest Academy.

On arrival, Friday is shocked to discover the respectable school is actually a hotbed of crime. She's soon investigating everything from disappearing homework to the Yeti running around the school swamp. That's when she's not dealing with her own problem – Ian Wainscott, the handsomest boy in school, who inexplicably hates Friday and loves nasty pranks.

Can Friday solve Highcrest Academy's many strange mysteries, including the biggest mystery of all – what's the point of high school?

*Teachers' notes available.*



### *Shockingly Good Stories*

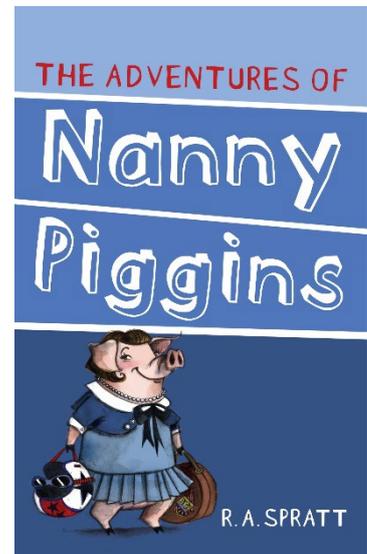
by R.A. Spratt

From R.A. Spratt, bestselling author of *Friday Barnes*, comes this collection of twenty short stories perfect for fans of Roald Dahl, David Walliams and Paul Jennings.

Featuring fractured fairytales told by none other than Nanny Piggins, previously unpublished Friday Barnes mysteries and a bunch of other hilarious and highly original tall tales.

This book will delight kids from seven to seventy, whether they're after a bedtime story, entertainment for a long car ride or distraction in the doctor's waiting room!

*Teachers' notes available.*



### *The Adventures of Nanny Piggins*

by R.A. Spratt

A Nanny with trotters!

Nanny Piggins, the world's most glamorous flying pig, runs away from the circus and goes to live with the Greens as their nanny. The Green children, Derrick, Samantha and Michael, fall in love with her instantly. Who could not fall in love with a Nanny whose only job qualifications are her astonishing ability to be fired out of a cannon and her amazing ability to make chocolate cake, sometimes both at the same time?

*Teachers' notes available.*



## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Hamlet is Not OK	R.A. Spratt	9780143779278	7-11	\$16.99		
Hamlet: Popular Penguins	William Shakespeare	9780141195186	8-12	\$14.99		
Friday Barnes 1: Girl Detective	R.A. Spratt	9781760890735	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 2: Under Suspicion	R.A. Spratt	9781742759647	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 3: Big Trouble	R.A. Spratt	9781760890759	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 4: No Rules	R.A. Spratt	9780857987016	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 5: The Plot Thickens	R.A. Spratt	9781760892159	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 6: Danger Ahead	R.A. Spratt	9781760892166	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 7: Bitter Enemies	R.A. Spratt	9781760892173	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 8: Never Fear	R.A. Spratt	9781760892180	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 9: No Escape	R.A. Spratt	9781760895761	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 10: Undercover	R.A. Spratt	9781761043659	6-9	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes 11: Last Chance	R.A. Spratt	9780143779247	6-9	\$16.99		
Shockingly Good Stories	R.A. Spratt	9781761043376	4-7	\$19.99		
Astonishingly Good Stories	R.A. Spratt	9780143779261	4-7	\$19.99		
PRE-ORDER: Bedtime Stories with R.A. Spratt	R.A. Spratt	9781761340017	4-7	\$24.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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