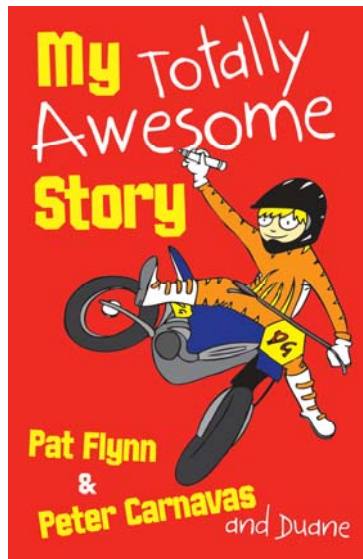


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# MY TOTALLY AWESOME STORY

## Pat Flynn & Peter Carnavas



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### Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising middle-school teacher librarian  
in context with the Australian curriculum (English)

Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Humour	
Writing and Reluctant Writers	
Writing Style	2
Illustrating Style	2
Study Notes	3
Author Motivation	8
Illustrator Motivation	8
About the Author	8
About the Illustrator	8

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## SYNOPSIS

Thirteen-year-old Duane loves playing footy and riding his motorbike. But he doesn't love writing stories. When he is partnered with teacher's pet Grace in a writing project, he takes the reader on a humorous trek through his daily life. *My Totally Awesome Story* not only teaches Duane how to write narratives properly – the audience learns this too.

View the book trailer at: <http://youtu.be/b8GBwUmqs84>

## THEMES

Humour:

- Duane shares humorous episodes through his writing activities.
- The illustrations contribute and add to the humour in the text.

Writing and Reluctant Writers:

- Duane is a reluctant writer. Many readers will identify with his reluctance to write.
- Comprehensive writing tips form the basis of the text.
- Readers will learn about features of writing such as structure, plot, setting, characters and the use of dialogue.
- The correct use of punctuation, vocabulary and grammar also feature in the text in a fun and engaging way.
- The exercises that Duane has to complete for Miss Wright are helpful tools to use in the classroom.
- Activities and tips for teachers are included in *My Totally Awesome Story*.

## WRITING STYLE

*My Totally Awesome Story* is written as a series of writing tasks and projects. The reader sees the task, Duane's response to the task and Miss Wright's feedback, so the reader experiences a variety of points of view. Occasionally, Duane's writing partner Grace shares her responses too, which contrast starkly with Duane's. Peter Carnavas' illustrations provide insight into Duane's character.

Duane's writing style is relaxed and very tangible to young, reluctant writers. The humour will engage the audience. Miss Wright's comments are also insightful and highlight many common writing errors that young writers make.

## ILLUSTRATOR STYLE

Peter Carnavas' illustrations provide insight into Duane's character.

Comment from Peter Carnavas:



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'I began scribbling some early ideas of the characters, keeping in mind the pictures needed to look as if the character, Duane, had drawn them. They could not look polished or professional. They needed to contain a lot of cheeky humour and a touch of naiveté. After some unsuccessful attempts (the pictures were too neat, most of the time), I decided to draw with my left hand. This would enable me to draw with my illustrator's eye, yet with the wobbly, wonky and slightly naive hand of a child. It was the perfect solution.'

'The process from there was to work through the manuscript to identify and sketch the illustratable moments from the story. There were many elements and characters that I wanted to draw: the friend/enemy complex between Duane and his mate, Meatball; the dynamics of Duane's working-class family; the classmates – Grace, Marco and Jackie. The humour running through the story provided me with a lot of material to use for the illustrations. Duane has a very biased view of himself and those around him and it was fun to play with this when drawing.'

'The internal illustrations were all drawn with my left hand, using an artist's pen, similar to a fountain pen. The other illustrations in the book, such as the workbook symbols, were rendered digitally, which was a new experience for me. The cover was initially hand drawn with a nib and ink, then scanned and finished digitally.'

Watch Peter drawing Duane at: <http://youtu.be/UzI-suB2m3E>

**STUDY NOTES**

- Watch Pat reading from *My Totally Awesome Story* while Peter draws: <http://youtu.be/ZJmSikrkPAI>
- Use the structure and approach of *My Totally Awesome Story* to run a similar project to Miss Wright's in your classroom. It is suggested that you use examples from well-known novels/stories to discuss each of the steps and processes below.
- Miss Wright takes both students and teachers through the process of writing. At each stage of this process, take time to explain the following elements of story writing, re-reading the relevant passage and Duane's response from *My Totally Awesome Story*. Follow the same structure as the text, teaching the writing of narratives in smaller chunks. Below is Pat Flynn's suggested order in which to teach story writing. In addition to *My Totally Awesome Story*, use examples from a range of novels to support each of these steps:
  - Structure – p13

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- Beginning (main character is introduced, usually with a problem he or she has to solve), middle (main character tries to solve the problem, but instead the problem gets worse), end (the problem is resolved, perhaps with a twist).
  - Structure activity – come up with a beginning, middle and end for a story (p14).
  - In pairs, write down the basic structure of a few well-known stories.
- Plot – p23
- Hero's Journey (p23) – the hero is happy with his/her life but is forced to take on a challenge. The hero goes on a journey to overcome this challenge. The hero fights evil but is defeated. The hero gets a new piece of information or power and is victorious at the end.
  - Brainstorm examples from literature of a hero's journey eg Bilbo Baggins; Harry Potter.
  - Plot activity – comic strip (p25-27) – create a comic strip to show major events of something memorable that has happened to you. Try using online comic strip generators.
  - Use a page from a graphic novel to help generate ideas for plotlines.
  - Coming up with a good idea (p34)
    - Take something important away from the main character – think of examples from books when the main character has had something important taken away from them. Alternatively, brainstorm your own examples of characters having something significant to them taken away.
    - Fish out of water – put the character in a place they will be uncomfortable (p35) – brainstorm characters you know who have become 'fish out of water'. Experiment with ideas for your own characters becoming 'fish out of water'.
    - Person vs someone/something (p36) – as a class, write a list of people vs someone/something.
- Setting – p39
- Have each member of the class create a setting for a story. Keep these ideas in a 'setting' box. Use this box to help generate ideas for stories. You could also have a box for 'characters' and 'problems'. Practise creating plotlines based on the characters, problems and settings chosen out of the boxes.
- Characters – p49-53
- Main character = protagonist

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- What are the ideal qualities of a protagonist? Discuss some well-known protagonists and their qualities. Highlight that protagonists need to have some faults too. Flawless protagonists will not have much room to develop as a character.
  - Protagonists have to change and grow. How might your protagonist change and grow throughout the story?
  - Main character's opponent = antagonist
  - What are the ideal qualities of an antagonist?
  - Minor characters – these are 'flat' characters who rarely change (p53). Don't overload your story with too many minor characters.
  - Getting to know your character – interview your character (p55-56). This is a great way to make your protagonist three-dimensional. Not everything you know about your character needs to be specifically written about in the story. Let your reader have the chance to 'read between the lines' and infer some things about your characters. Show your characters' personalities by what they say, don't say, do and don't do.
- Once the structure, plot, setting and characters have been established, further enrich your students' understanding of the writing process by focussing on:
    - Point of View – p63
      - Narrator/point of view eg 1<sup>st</sup> person (p63), 3<sup>rd</sup> person (p65).
    - Getting the balance right through description – p72
      - Description through thoughts (p70).
      - Description through action (p70).
      - Description through dialogue (p71).
    - Theme – p113
      - Theme is the main message or lesson of a story. Explore the concept of theme by discussing the themes of movies, stories, fairytales, myths, poems and novels.
    - Dialogue – p102-107
      - Dialogue is a very powerful tool in writing. It should not be overused. Dialogue should only be used to enhance the story, not drag it out. When characters speak, it should contribute to plot and characterisation rather than 'hang' there unnecessarily.
    - Symbolism – p115
      - For advanced writers, discuss symbols to represent something else, for example, a mockingjay represents freedom in *The Hunger Games*.



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- Extension ideas
  - Blurb – analyse a range of blurbs. What is the role of a blurb? What should it reveal and what should it ‘hide’ from the reader?
  - Dust cover – discuss dust covers of novels. Which dust covers are most effective? Which dust covers are unappealing? What role do they play in the marketing of a book? Create a dust cover for your story.
  - Gifted and talented writers – extend writers by discussing powerful end words, repetition and sentence openings – p127-128.
    - See p128 ‘sentence openings’ that suggests various ways to start sentences such as starting with the subject, starting with a conjunction or preposition, starting with the ‘ing’ form of a verb or describing something about the subject.
  
- Use the activities from *My Totally Awesome Story* as writing drills:
  - Free writing p4 – write for five minutes on any topic.
  - Using real life – write about a time when something interesting, funny or scary happened to you (p37).
  - Guided story p72-73 – use the cloze template (p164-165).
  - Description activity – body language and voice expression – describe emotions using a range of body language/voice expression (p80).
  - Description activity – using the senses to describe something (p82).
  - Description activity – using similes and metaphors to describe things (p83).
  - Thoughts activity – linking thoughts and description (p90).
  - Action activity – using verbs effectively (p91).
  - Story starters – give three story starters and let students write from that point onwards (p93-94 – template to use on p163).
  - Dialogue activity – fly on the wall (p102-104) – listen to a conversation between two people and write it down.
  - Dialogue activity – opposites (p105) – have a pretend conversation between two people who are very different.
  - Partner story – with a partner, create a story where you write one sentence each until you are told to stop (p117).
  - Six-word memoir – write a story about yourself using exactly six words. Choose each word carefully. (p130).
  
- Use the Homework Journal ideas from *My Totally Awesome Story* so that students are writing each week. Each journal entry should have a title and be at least one page in length. ‘Write about anything you like: your

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day, favourite hobby, family and friends or your dreams for the future' (p6).

- The teacher's comments correct a lot of Duane's writing errors. Use Miss Wright's comments as explicit teaching points on grammar, punctuation and vocabulary:
  - 'then' and 'than' (p11)
  - 'witch' and 'which' (p22)
  - 'its' and 'it's' (p33)
  - 'there', 'they're' and 'their' (p48)
  - 'should have' rather than 'should of' (p62)
  - 'bought' and 'brought' (p79)
  - run-on sentences (p89)
  - 'quiet' and 'quite' (p101)
  - using apostrophes (p112)
  - using quotation marks with dialogue (p125)
  - subject and verb agreement (p142)
- Author visit – p143
  - Invite an author to speak with students about writing.
- After planning, write the first draft of your story. You may wish to use the subheadings 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end' to help you stay on track (p146-149).
- Editing – p152. When editing:
  - Check the writing makes sense.
  - Check the tense is consistent throughout.
  - Cut repetition and unnecessary information.
  - Proofread – check for correct spelling, punctuation and grammar.
  - Write three drafts of a story:
    - 1 – does it make sense? Are tense and point of view consistent?
    - 2 – add detail such as effective description, strong verbs and powerful end words. Delete repetition and unnecessary information.
    - 3 – proofread for spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Select some of Duane's journal entries to edit.
- Peer-edit a friend's work, offering constructive feedback.
- Reflection – write a reflection about your writing journey (p156).



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- Additional teaching ideas can be found at: [www.patflynnwriter.com](http://www.patflynnwriter.com)

### **AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

Pat has conducted hundreds of writing workshops for young people across Australia, working with many 'Duanes' and 'Graces', and felt that here was a story that needed to be told. He says, 'Young people often write with a lack of self-consciousness that is both endearing and highly amusing. I wanted to capture that natural humour in the novel.'

### **ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION**

'After a chance meeting in 2011, Pat approached me with his first draft of the story. It struck me as a very original story – a workbook that demonstrated how to write a narrative, with the exercises and activities already completed by a reluctant writer, the twelve-year-old motorbike-riding footyhead, Duane. The project appealed to me immediately, as I laughed my way through the draft.' comments Peter.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Pat Flynn grew up running around an old dairy farm in Queensland before moving to the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra on a tennis scholarship. After playing and coaching on the professional circuit he became a teacher, where his observations of young people – their interests and stories – led to him writing a series about a teenage skateboarder called Alex Jackson.

Pat now writes full time and lives on the Sunshine Coast. *To the Light* was shortlisted for the 2006 CBCA Book Awards, and *The Tuckshop Kid* received an Honour Book prize in the 2007 Awards, as well as being shortlisted for the QLD Premier's Award.

Pat likes to start the day with surf and end it walking along the beach with his wife and son. He also enjoys the occasional game of tennis.

[www.patflynnwriter.com](http://www.patflynnwriter.com)

### **ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR**

Peter Carnavas was born in Brisbane in 1980. As a small boy he enjoyed copying out his favourite picture books and occasionally typed a small newspaper about the goings-on of his household. At age ten, Peter's family moved to the Sunshine Coast, where he gave up the violin, took up the guitar and learned to fish.

Peter initially studied Media Studies before becoming a primary school teacher. He has conducted cartooning workshops with children, painted school murals and developed an online travel buddy with students, which was awarded an





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Education Queensland Showcase Award. If it was all up to Peter, he would spend most of his time reading books with his daughter, trying to play the mandolin and drawing little pictures of people.

[www.petercarnavas.com](http://www.petercarnavas.com)