

NIPS XI

Ruth Starke

Nips XI is a wonderful and poignant story about growing up in Australia when you are from a different culture and nationality. It is concerned with fitting in and being accepted. Lan, a young Vietnamese lad, is tired of not belonging. When the principal of North Illaba Primary School talks to the students about the annual Multicultural Week they have to celebrate the population's diversity, Lan has the idea to do something that is typical of Australia. He forms his Big Idea of getting an ethnic cricket team together to play King's School during Multicultural Week. How the team comes together and what they achieve makes for a very funny and enlightening story. Much is learned by the characters and the reader in the unfolding of the story. Many curriculum issues can be covered whilst enjoying a brilliant story.

Opening

- How did the principal of North Illaba primary School present Multicultural Week to his students?
- What is the purpose of Multicultural Week at Illaba Primary School?
- What is Lan's attitude to the celebrations?

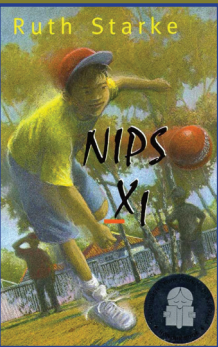
Characters

- Write a profile of Lan mentioning his nationality, his background, his family, the type of person he is and his attributes.
- Do a pen sketch of the principal, Mr. Drummond, saying what he is like, and mentioning his habits and attitude.
- What sort of person is Mr. Burrridge?
- Who is Grace?
- Who is David Ho?
- Do a pen portrait of "Spinner" McGinty, touching on his background, his present situation, what happens when he coaches the boys and anything else you know about him from the story.
- Who is Larri? What is his full name? What does it mean? What part does he play in the story?
- What role do the twins, Linh and Tien, play in the story?

Language and Literacy

- What is Lan's Big Idea? (See page 12)
- Make a list of the things that are suggested that 'they do and we don't'? (Refer to page 13)
- Where did Lan's inspiration for his Big Idea come from? (Look on page 15)
- Where and how does Lan learn about cricket? (Refer to page 18 for a start)
- What is meant when Izram says: *Of course I know about cricket, I'm Pakistani?*
- Who plays cricket and why do they? (There is some information on page 28)
- What does Lan think it takes to be a good cricketer?
- How did word about the Big Idea get about?
- Find instances from the story that show how smart Lan is.
- What was Lan's criteria for selecting his cricket team? (Look at pages 35, 36)
- Describe the session Lan and Izram have with Mr. Drummond about Lan's plan.
- Relate what happens when the coach from Illaba Cricket Club is telling the boys what they are going to do and has to refer to his Golden Rule. (See page 61).
- What is the rationale for calling the cricket team the *Nips*? Look at the discussion between the boys on page 72 for one aspect.

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- How did the Nips get a coach? (Refer to page 84)
- What does cricket stand for, in Mr. McGinty's opinion? (See page 106)
- Relate the incident that led to Mr. Thistleton saying there was a first time for everything. (Page 114)
- Why is Lan astonished on page 143?
- Find some examples of where language is misinterpreted by speakers from a non-English speaking background.
- What was Lan's reason for playing cricket against Kings?
- Is Spinner a good teacher?
- What did Spinner teach the boys?
- What does teaching the boys cricket do for Mr. McGinty?
- "Looking around, Lan could see their confidence dribbling away *like water from a leaky tap.*" 152 is a simile.
- Use such vivid images in your own writing to make it more graphic.
- What is meant when Grace says: *You boys have done him a lot of good* on 178?
- Why did the game progress as it did after lunch?
- What was the final outcome of the cricket game?

Vocabulary

- Try to ascertain the meaning of the following words in context, if you do not know their meaning. Jot down other words that you are not familiar with and look them up in a dictionary. Once you know their meaning use them in your own writing:
- incredulously (40), despondently (83), confiscated (87), elitist (99), ambience (101), complacently (123), indignation, defiantly (131) distraction (132), despondently, (139), assimilate (145), initiative (146), intimidating (150), ferociously (151) stipulate (198), prestigious (198), contempt (219), resolutely (220).
- Look at the use of opposites: predictability / unpredictability (156). and, overestimate / underestimate (189,190).
- Look at words that convey attitude such as: sauntered (159), impassively, dismissively (160), complacent (205), sustenance, demoralised (216).
- Make a list of words that tell the reader about how a character feels.

Nicknames

- Why do we have nicknames?
- Make a list of the nicknames that appear in *Nips XI*
- What does Spinner call the librarian? Why?

Expressions and Sayings

Mr. Drummond uses the expression: *Pie in the sky*

- Why was Lan so perplexed about this? Find other instances from the story where words or expressions or sayings are confusing
- What is the significance of: *That's not cricket?*
- Look for other expressions or sayings in the story and talk about them

Plot

- Tell the story in your own words.
- What is *Nips XI* about?

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Style

- Who tells the story?
- How is the story told?
- Find some lines, or thoughts, that give authenticity to the voice

Humour

There are many funny aspects to *Nips XI*.

- Find some parts that made you laugh. Try and say why you found these amusing.
- Talk about what constitutes humour.
- Chose an amusing incident and relate it in your own words.

The Craft of Writing

- Look at the place of exaggeration in *Nips XI*.
- Examine what humour contributes to the story
- Examine the place of dialogue in the novel. Look, for instance what the author establishes when Adam, Ryan and others voice their opinion on the subject of the Big Idea. (See page 36).
- Look at the opening and conclusion of chapters and make some observations of how Ruth Starke holds the reader's interest.
The author brings in elements of surprise.
- Find some instances from the novel.
- Look at the way in which the author uses contrast in her writing
- Writers often use analogies to make their writing more meaningful. Look at the beginning of Chapter 17 where Hiroki makes an analogy with chess and cricket, and then the reader finds out where the boys are.
- What does this do for the story?

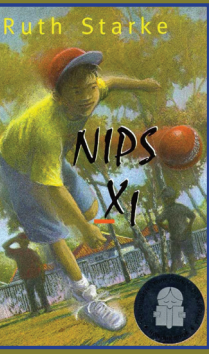
Discuss

political correctness	stereotypes	wisdom	families	friends
perspective	being fair	optimism	being a refugee	being a migrant
motivation	expectations	wanting to belong	being trendy	tradition
tactics	daydreaming	the imagination	responsibility	winners and losers
change	losers			

- What is cricket a symbol of in the story?
- What do we learn about the media from the story?
- What are the boys' strategies for handling derogatory remarks and nicknames?

There are several instances of how the young people that Ruth Starke is depicting are adjusting to two cultures.

- Look at some of these and talk about them further.
- Talk about the name of the cricket team: Nips XI
- Relate examples from the story of how people are put in categories.
- What is the meaning of multiculturalism?
- What is meant by the term ethnic diversity?
- What makes us what we are?



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Writing

- Describe the school that Lan attends.
- Make a list of the names of the children mentioned in *Nips XI*.
- Write down their nationalities, the food they eat, their dress, what each family does for a living, their religion if you know it, their cultural practices, habits and any customs that they observe.
- Describe King's College and its students
- From reading *Nips XI*, we learn a great deal about the difficulties children from different ethnic backgrounds face.
- What are some of these?
- Give an account of what happens when the boys from Illaba Primary School go to try out for selection
- Describe the scene at the Adelaide Oval and what happened there.
- Write about the dinner that Mr. Hussein hosts, mentioning its purpose and what happened on the evening.
- Who contributed to help Lan achieve his dream?
- Make a list of what the boys learned from playing cricket.
- Jot down what their families gained from the experience.

Activities

The class can relate the story, with all of them contributing a portion.

- In pairs or groups, students can give their own commentary on the game of cricket *Nips XI* played against King's School, particularly relating the final outcome.
- If members of the class are interested, they can find further information about cricket in the library and on the web.
- The class can go to: www.ruthstarke.itgo.com to find out more about the author.

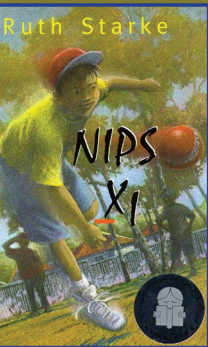
The Author

Ruth Starke worked in public relations and travel marketing before turning to fiction writing in 1992. Since then she has written many books for young people (*Nips XI* being her tenth) including award-winning *The Twist in the Tale*. She is also the co-editor of *Solo Spots*, a collection of drama monologues for senior students (OUP, 1998) Her entertaining history of Adelaide Writers' Week, *Writers, Readers and Rebels* (Wakefield press) was launched at the 1998 Festival.

Ruth now lives in Adelaide and is currently completing a doctorate at Flinders University, where she teaches English and Creative Writing.

She is Chair of the SA Writers' Centre and has a keen interest in young people's literature. She writes and reviews for *Australian Book Review* and *Viewpoint: On Books for Young Adults*, and has been a Judge of the National Festival Awards for Children's Literature since 1995.

Until she wrote *Nips XI*, Ruth had absolutely no interest in cricket. Now she has posters of Steve Waugh and the World Cup team on her study wall and is thinking of applying for membership of SACA.



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