

Gymnastica Fantastica!



BRIONY STEWART

TEACHERS RESOURCES

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Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

Quick! Come and see! Something fabulous, it's . . . me!

Bursting with colour and movement, *Gymnastica Fantastica!* is a joyful and exuberant picture book about a child discovering and attempting new physical skills and putting on wonderfully imperfect shows for whoever will watch them. From award-winning writer and illustrator Briony Stewart.

Join Gymnastica, a small person with big energy, as they bend and balance, bounce and roll, attempt a cartwheel and a spectacular trapeze flip-out finale. Written in playful rhyming text and with brightly energetic and appealing illustrations, this is a book that kids and parents alike will find irresistible to read aloud and delight in its energy and humour.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

See: <<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>>

GYMNASTICS

Discussion Point: The small person who features in this book executes some 'fancy moves', not all of which are bona fide gymnastics! Encourage students to learn and enjoy some simple gymnastic exercises.

Activity: Your students may enjoy learning more about the history and origin of gymnastics. [See **Bibliography**.]

IMPERFECTION AND INDIVIDUALITY

Discussion Point: One of the most important lessons a child can be taught is to revel in their own individuality. Being 'the best' shouldn't be the aim of every activity. It should simply be to have fun and enjoy what you're doing. Discuss the things your students enjoy doing in their spare time.

Activity: What do your students consider that they are good at? What would they

like to practise in order to improve their skills?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

See: <<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

Activity: This is a rhyming text. eg around/ground, pose/nose, moon/soon, show/go, moving/improving, tricks/flicks, twirls/swirls, etc. Write your own rhymed lines describing gymnastic moves.

Activity: The text also contains devices such as alliteration (bending and balancing, twizzle and twist) and assonance (whizzy and dizzy). Examine the text for use of such devices and then write your own examples.

Activity: The text also contains some exuberant made-up words eg superest, stretchiest, cat-pouncing, gymnastical, twizzle, razzley, dazzley. They even come up with an original roll – ‘a sausage-roll’!!! Make up some other inventive words which describe gymnastic routines. [See **Worksheet 2.**]

Discussion Point: Gymnastica Fantastica has adopted a very grand name. What would your name be if you were performing such fantastical tricks? [See **Creative Arts 1.** below.]

Activity: Write a funny story about doing gymnastics.

Activity: Test your students’ **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text. [See also **Author’s/Illustrator’s Notes** below.]

VISUAL LITERACY

See: <<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>>

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book’s design and illustrations, as explored below:

Activity: The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. The small person twirling a long rainbow-coloured ribbon streamer as they exercise their imperfect gymnastic routines features on the front, and a bemused-looking dog with the ribbon twirling around them is the audience! Create a new cover for this book.

Activity: The **endpapers** are vibrant pictures of the twirling ribbon streamers. Paint your own endpapers for this book.

Activity: The illustrator often draws the young gymnast filmically, by featuring them several times on a page, executing their very 'original' gymnastic moves. This gives the reader a sense of movement. Encourage students to create a series of images of the character executing handstands, or swinging from a trapeze, or balancing on a plank supported by two bricks. [See **Creative Arts 2.** below.]

Activity: There are many **brightly coloured patterns** in the background of each page. Encourage students to use paints, crayons or coloured pencils, to create patterns of their own before they draw an image of a young gymnast in the foreground.

Activity: The author/illustrator, Briony Stewart, likes to make art with lots of different techniques. For this book she used a mixture of crayon for the lines, gouache paint for the textures, and she coloured other parts digitally on an iPad. Briony also had her children help her make bright, rainbow scribbles on paper with coloured markers for the backgrounds. She put all of these things together on her computer and 'digitally scratched' into the paint to reveal the rainbow colours underneath.

Have you ever made a scratch artwork?

[See: 'Make Your Own Scratch Art' *Craft Project Ideas*

<<https://www.craftprojectideas.com/make-your-own-scratch-art-2/>]

Visit Briony Stewart's website <<http://www.brionystewart.com/>> and you can see the various mediums in which she works.

Activity: Creating characters entails studying **facial expressions and 'body language'**. This small character is bursting with life. Body contortions and grand gestures indicate that the character has a vibrant spirit. The face is self-confident, proud, joyous and determined. Draw a portrait of the character using facial expression and body language to indicate the nature of the character.

Activity: Invite students to draw, paint, or collage a scene to accompany the funny story they wrote above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1** below.]

Activity: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography.**] [See also **Worksheet 4.**]

CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

1. Create a Gymnastica Fantastica concert with your students. Hang up a curtain and invite each student to perform a trick, announcing the performance name they have selected for themselves, and wearing a costume that relates to their performance name.

2. Make a flipbook featuring a stick figure doing a simple gymnastic exercise.

See: 'How to make a Flipbook' by Andymation *YouTube*
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un-BdBSOGKY>>

3. Have fun playing balancing games. Invite students to walk in a straight line with a book balanced on their heads. Then conduct the same activity walking on a slightly elevated surface such as a plank supported by two bricks.

4. Create a poster to advertise a performance by *Gymnastica Fantastica*.

5. Create a Book Trailer to promote this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Briony Stewart. Compare this to her other books.
- Students might research this book in comparison to reading other picture books such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

CONCLUSION

Gymnastica Fantastica! is a joyous celebration of movement, imagination and invention. Young children often find joy in being totally immersed in their own world. This small person obviously loves to perform and to execute extremely tricky manoeuvres. The world is her stage, even if the only creature watching is a slightly confused shaggy dog!

AUTHOR'S/ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

Inspired by my children, *Gymnastica Fantastica!* is an early childhood picture book about discovering and delighting in movement and the attempt of new physical skills. It's about the age of 'watch this!', 'look at me!' and that charmingly funny but sweet way little people put on wonderfully imperfect shows for whoever will watch them. I hope child readers of this book will be inspired to get their bodies moving, and also to know it's okay not to be perfect – it's all about having fun!

For adults, I hope that they are reminded of the playfulness of their child and get a little moment to celebrate and cherish this delightful, fleeting age.

The writing is playful with some linguistic gymnastics thrown in with plenty of examples of alliteration, assonance and rhyming words, (including internal rhymes) to have fun identifying.

*Whizzy and dizzy and – whoops now I'm landing
Onto the wall (they call it 'headstanding').*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR



Briony Stewart is an award-winning author and illustrator of children's books. In 2022 she won the Prime Minister's Literary Award in the category of Children's Fiction for her work with Sheryl Clarke on the verse novel *Mina and the Whole Wide World*. She is the author and illustrator of the award-winning *Kumiko and the Dragon* series and *We Love You Magoo*, which was a CBCA Early Childhood Honour Book for 2020. Briony lectures on children's literature at university and conducts talks and workshops

with children across Australia. She loves live drawing challenges, daydreaming and discussing dragons, bunnies, and how to tame lions. See: <http://www.brionystewart.com/>

See also:

'An interview with creative dynamo, Briony Stewart', *Care for kids* 18 August 2021 <https://www.careforkids.com.au/blog/an-interview-with-creative-dynamo-briony-stewart/>

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WORKSHEETS

WORKSHEET 1. COMPLETE THIS IMAGE

Draw a background to this image of a child performing a complicated gymnastic manoeuvre.



WORKSHEET 2. GYMNASTICA FANTASTICA WORDS










Make up a word (as Gymnastica Fantastica does) from the gymnastic words in the left-hand column.

Tumble	eg Tumbleicious
Leap	
Vault	
Roll	
Skip	
Run	
Twirl	
Hula Hoop	
Swing	
Trampoline	

Then write a sentence using some of these words:

WORKSHEET 3. GYMNASTIC EXERCISES

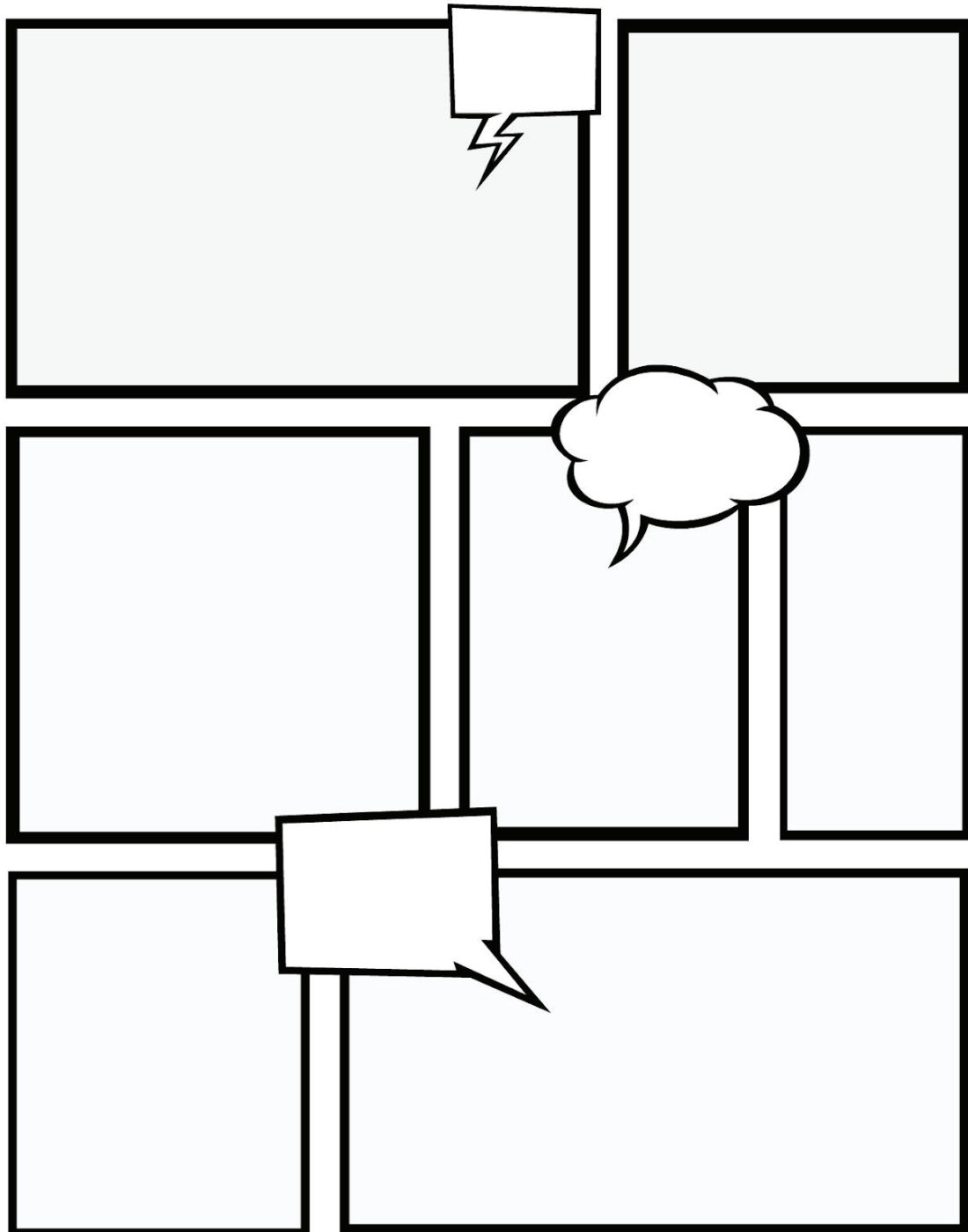
Name the exercises below.

		
1.	2.	3.
		
4.	5.	6.
		
7.	8.	9.

ANSWERS: 1. Handstand. 2. Trapeze. 3. Splits. 4. Chair Squat. 5. Trampoline Exercise. 6. Hula Hoop Exercise. 7. Skipping. 8. Running. 9. Streamer Twirling Exercise (Cheerleader's Exercise).

WORKSHEET 4. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Comic Book Template viewed at: <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia.