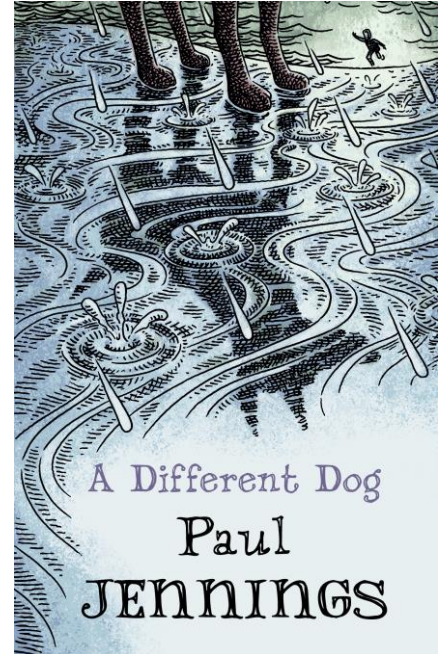


# A Different Dog

By Paul Jennings

May 2017 ISBN 9781760296469 paperback  
Recommended for readers aged 10-14 years.



## Summary

Paul Jennings' fans will be familiar with *A Different Dog's* protagonist – the troubled young loner – and know that when it comes to creating such characters Jennings is without parallel. The boy in this story can't speak to others, although he speaks to himself and animals when no one is around. No reason is given but we assume his problem is due to a disability or a reaction to a trauma in his past. Whatever the cause, he is teased mercilessly by other kids.

The story opens with the boy setting out to compete in a fun run taking place on a cold, wintery day. Conditions are bleak and when hail sets in they become thoroughly dangerous. As he cautiously makes his way up a winding mountain road the boy is passed by a car with a dog sitting in the front passenger seat. Minutes later he hears the car's brakes lock and realises that it has plunged over a guard rail to the mountain forest floor far below.

Clambering to the wreckage the boy discovers that the driver has been killed and the dog thrown from the vehicle uninjured...but acting very strangely. The boy and dog set out on a perilous journey through difficult terrain and across a rickety old bridge. Along the way they come across a group of cruel teenagers and discover a bond that helps them beat the bullies and find their way home.

## Use in the curriculum

This short but powerfully written novel is appropriate for Grade 4 to Year 8 classrooms, depending on the way it is treated.

## Language

Much of the dialogue is idiomatic: 'I don't give a rat's'; 'Get a load of the dog'.

Text features of note are:

- chapter opening illustrations and hand drawn font for first words of each chapter;
- well-spaced text for readability (consider the audience);
- italicized section on pp. 44-49 which reveals the important back-story of Deefer;
- action sequences written in short sentences and simple past tense with well-chosen verbs and adverbs ('paid no attention and vanished...grabbed...gave a shiver...followed without thinking...plunged...stumbled...hurried...worried...sniffed and snorted and panted and determinedly continued its journey' p29)
- 'From the Author' section at the end of the story.

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## Literature

The novel is an excellent example of economy of writing producing tension in the plot structure and a mystery surrounding the boy who doesn't speak. See pp 7-9 for character description of Skinny Luke's father through dialogue and actions—even minor characters are clearly illuminated.

In such a tightly-written text, word choice is paramount. Examine in relation to plot tension, character development and the creation of sympathy or dislike for characters.

Compare and contrast the novel with Paul Jennings humorous stories to reveal similarities and differences and examine the author's style.

## Literacy

Comprehension questions and related texts of different genres/text types are provided below in these notes.

## Themes

- Survival
- Rescue
- Dogs
- Bullying
- Family
- Resilience
- Courage

In addition to examining these themes in the novel, students can easily find other novels that address each theme and compare and contrast the treatment of the themes in different novels.

## WHILE READING: comprehension questions

### Comprehension Questions for Chapter One:

- How do we know that the boy is poor?
- Who do you think Deefer might have been?
- What does his encounter with Skinny Luke tell us is different about the boy?
- What caused the red van to have an accident?

### Comprehension Questions for Chapter Two:

- Why would a phone be useless for the boy in this situation?
- How does the boy know the driver is dead and the dog is alive?
- How is the car's horn like the boy?
- Why does the boy say that the dog is like him?

### Comprehension Questions for Chapter Three:

- Describe the dog's behaviour once the boy finds him a second time.
- Why do you think the boy says, 'You're heavy Chase but you're not a burden'?
- Why do the boy and Chase need to cross the railway bridge?
- Why do you think the boy remembers Skinny Luke's words as he is about to cross the bridge?



## Comprehension Questions for Chapter Four:

- How might the boy's story explain why he can't speak?
- What does the boy's mother say in the story that is a repeat of something the boy said in Chapter Three?
- What does the boy discover is special about Chase in this chapter?
- Why was Chase wearing earmuffs earlier in the car?

## Comprehension Questions for Chapter Five:

- "'You're too late,' the boy said to himself. 'The man is d...'" Why do you think the boy is never able to say the word 'dead' in the story? Do you think his inability to say the word might have something to do with the story he told Chase? Why?
- What do the bullies make Chase do and why is the boy so upset?
- In your own words describe what happens when Chase finds his own voice.
- What is the significance of the final sentence in this chapter?

## Comprehension Questions for Chapter Six:

- What new trick does the boy tell Chase he needs to learn?
- Why do you think he tells the dog this?
- Why does the boy's mother not want to keep Chase at first?
- Would you describe this chapter as a 'happy ending'? Explain.

## Comprehension Question for Chapter Seven:

- In your own words explain why some people might describe this chapter as having a 'twist'?

## AFTER READING: discussion and activities

### Language

Read the passage from 'He fell back and sprawled on the damp earth, screwing up his eyes, mumbling to himself, trying to block out the sight' (p19) to '...Finally he found the dog' (p20).

Find an example of each of the following literary devices in this extract.

- Simile
- Metaphor
- Repetition
- Alliteration

### Characterisation

- Make a list of words to describe the boy in the story. Give examples of things he said or did in the story that made you think this about him.
- How does the boy change by the end of the story?
- Why do you think we are never told the boy's name?

### Theme

Finding your voice is an important theme running through the story.

- What do you think 'finding your voice' means?
- What happens in the story to help both the boy and Chase find their 'voice' by the end?

## Plot twist

- Define the term 'plot twist'
- Explain if you think the ending in *A Different Dog* is a plot twist.

## Title

The final chapter of the story helps explain the title *A Different Dog*.

- Explain why you think the story is called that.
- Can you come up with an alternative explanation for the title? (Hint: something to do with Deefer).

## Writing exercise

Write a book review in which you say what you liked about *A Different Dog* and what you didn't like.

## Related texts/Further reading

### ***Love that Dog* by Sharon Creech. Bloomsbury 2002.**

Short but powerful **verse novel** about a boy and his dog. For 10-14 year olds.

### ***Prince of Afghanistan* by Louis Nowra. A&U 2015.**

Another excellent example of a **tightly-written survival story** about a young Australian soldier and a mine-detecting dog stranded behind enemy lines. For 13-16 year olds.

### ***The Fox and the Child*. French film directed by Luc Jacquet 2007.** English version narrated by Kate Winslet.

Almost dialogue-free, beautifully shot **film** of a girl who roams the mountainside near her home, observing nature. She befriends a fox and learns the difference between owning something and loving it. For nature lovers of all ages.

### ***Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson. A&U 2007.**

A much-loved American **classic children's novel**. Set in frontier times, the story of a boy who befriends a dog with the heart of a lion. For 9 year old readers and older.

### **"My Dog Has Got No Manners"** <http://www.gigglepoetry.com/poetrytheater/mydog.html>

**Drama activity**, with information on poetic rhythm and how to perform poetry in the classroom. For 10-13 year olds.

### ***Funniest Stories* by Paul Jennings. Penguin 2007.**

Collection of twenty-five **short stories** hand-picked by Paul himself, from his series of 'UN' books. See also *Spookiest Stories*, *Weirdest Stories* and *Trickiest Stories*. For 8-14 year olds.

## Paul Jennings

Paul Jennings has written over one hundred stories and won every Australian children's choice book award. Since the publication of *Unreal!* in 1985, readers around the world have loved his books. The top-rating TV series *Round the Twist* and *Driven Crazy* were based on his popular short-story collections such as *Unseen!* In 1995 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to children's literature and he was awarded the prestigious Dromkeen Medal in 2001.



On page 85 of *A Different Dog*, Paul suggests some influences on him in the writing of this book.

Read more about Paul Jennings on his website: <http://www.pauljennings.com.au/about.asp>