

# Super Finn

Author: Leonie Agnew

## Synopsis

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Finn is always getting into trouble and doing silly things. His teachers cut him a bit of slack because his father left, but now he is so far behind in his school work that he may have to repeat the year. The threat of being separated from his best friend Brain is enough to make Finn want to try harder. He has one final chance to prove himself to his teacher - a project about what he'd like to be when he gets older. Finn decides that he would like to be a superhero. He and Brain make a list of things needed to be a superhero, including a costume, superpowers and saving someone's life. When Finn's mother announces that the family can no longer afford to sponsor their World Vision child Umbaba, Finn decides that as a superhero it is his responsibility to take over the payments and save the boy's life. The only trouble is that he doesn't have any money. What he does have, however, are great ideas. Finn and Brain enlist the help of Finn's older brother Seymour, who earns money by losing weight. The two boys then begin performing dares and stunts for cash, inadvertently making Finn an overnight YouTube sensation. They also begin to sell junk food at their school, which is strictly prohibited. While the boys are earning lots of money and their intentions are good, this counts for little when their schemes begin to unravel. Now it looks like Finn doesn't have to worry about being in Brain's class, because he may have to go to a different school altogether!

## Text Type

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*Super Finn* is a hilarious and fast-paced novel written by primary school teacher Leonie Agnew. The novel won the 2010 Tom Fitzgibbon Award for a new author and is particularly suited to boy readers aged 8-12. Written in easy to understand colloquial language, the novel is set in New Zealand and even reluctant readers will relate to the references made and situations depicted in the story.

As the novel is written in first person, as a reader we get to know the protagonist Finn extremely well. We learn about his fears, thoughts and feelings. What is particularly interesting about Finn is his belief that he is not smart, and he therefore decides not to try at school. Finn is caring and funny and as a reader we really want him to succeed because he has the best of intentions and is only trying to help someone else. He is witty and his dry quips endear him to the reader. During the course of the story Finn begins to discover that maybe he is clever after all. He realises that he has great ideas and that being good at school

work is not the only way to measure someone's intelligence. This idea is highlighted when Brain reveals that he, in fact, is dyslexic. School is very difficult for him as he struggles with reading and writing. However Brain perseveres and through hard work is able to achieve good results. Learning that Brain has dyslexia has a positive effect on Finn because he begins to see the importance of trying your best, even if you struggle.

Themes in the story include family, friendship, school and the idea that everyone is good at something and that people can be intelligent in different ways. What comes through very clearly is the importance of being persistent and not giving up until you reach your goals.

## Sharing the Novel

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*The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-25), Chapters 3-16 (pp. 26-130) and Chapters 17-34 (pp. 131-249).*

*During the shared sessions have students make predictions about what will happen next in the story. Encourage students to ask questions to clarify words and ideas presented in the text. Have them relate Finn's antics to their own experiences. Encourage students to read closely and infer information. Students should have a sound understanding of Finn's character, including his thoughts, feelings and motivations. They should be able to explain how his character changes over the course of the story and what he learns from his experiences. Make sure students are aware of stylistic features of the text - particularly the use of colloquial language and the wonderful figurative language that is used by the author. Lastly, students need to be able to identify main themes presented in the text, explain how they are developed by the author and how these ideas could help them in their own lives.*

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Who is the main character in the novel? What is he well-known for?
- Who do you think is pictured on the front cover? What are they holding?
- Make a prediction about what is going to happen in the story based on this illustration.
- Name 5 superheroes. What qualities do you think superheroes need to have?

*Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-25) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.*

### **Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-25)**

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- Why does Mr Patel agree to let Finn do his careers project on being a superhero? Why is it so important that Finn does well on the project?
- Who bullies Finn as he leaves the classroom? What does he call him?
- Why does Brain have so many books in his bag? What does he tell Finn he has trouble with at school?
- Why do you think Finn doesn't want to tell Brain that he might get held back? How does Brain react when Finn gives him the news?
- Why is Brain suspicious when Finn tells him that he has to go home and do his homework? How is Finn's mother ensuring that he gets his homework done?
- What is Finn's usual excuse for his poor performance at school? Why do you think that this excuse doesn't work anymore?
- Why doesn't Finn want to try and complete the project? What argument does Brain come up with? How does Brain convince Finn to let him help?

#### **Discussion**

- Have you ever been bullied by someone? How did this make you feel? What is the best way to deal with a bully?
- What do we learn about Finn in these first two chapters? What do we learn about Brain?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

*Students read Chapters 3-16 (pp. 26-130) independently before the next shared session.*

### **Comprehension Chapters 3-16 (pp. 26-130)**

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- Why does Finn's mother keep selling things out of the house?
- How does Seymour ensure that Finn does his homework? How does Brain convince Seymour to let him stay and help?
- What idea does Finn get from reading the newspaper article?
- What does Finn's mum do for a job? What announcement does she make when she comes home from work?

- How does Finn's mother react when she reads Finn's homework? What has Finn done in the past that convinces her that being a superhero is a terrible idea? How does he convince her to let him carry on with the project?
- Why does Seymour offer to help Finn with his adrenalin experiments?
- Why is there a lunchbox inspection? What surprise is waiting for Finn inside his lunchbox? Who is scared by the spider? Who does Finn believe is responsible for the prank?
- Describe Finn's superhero symbol. What is his uniform? What part of the project is Finn most interested in?
- Why does Finn get into trouble when he gets back into class? What did Wednesday Wright do? How does Finn's mum react when she hears about the adrenalin experiments?
- Why is Seymour reluctant to call the World Vision people?
- What happens when Finn's mum finds his superhero singlet?
- What is Brain's alternative plan to the adrenalin experiments?
- Whose life does Finn decide to try and save? Who does Finn have to convince about his plan? Why does Seymour decide not to phone World Vision? How long does he give Finn to raise the money?
- What ideas does Brain come up with for raising money? What potential problems do you see with his ideas?
- Describe what happens when Finn and Brain go collecting door-to-door.
- Why does Finn decide to complete dares for money? Why do Finn and Brain decide to write to Umbaba?
- What dares does Finn complete? Why is he apprehensive when Kyle approaches him? What is Kyle's dare?
- How does Finn convince Mr Patel to let him keep wearing the skirt?
- Why can't Brain talk? What problem does this cause for him? What does Brain say instead of asking to go to the toilet? How does Mr Patel punish the boys?
- Why does Brain believe that they can't afford to sponsor Umbaba? How does Finn convince him that they have to try?
- Why is Finn surprised when Seymour offers to give him action figures to sell at school?
- What is Kyle's second dare? How does Finn's mum react when he comes down to breakfast? How does Seymour react?
- How does Finn feel when his mother says that he is a lot like his father?
- How does Finn get into trouble with Mrs Crabtree? What does he say that angers her further? What does "existential" mean? Why does Mrs Crabtree decide not to call Finn's mother?

- How does Finn feel when Mrs Crabtree criticises his mother? Are the principal's comments justified? Why/why not?
- What punishment does Mrs Crabtree give Finn? What thought does Finn have as he leaves Mrs Crabtree's office that cheers him up?
- Why are the other students impressed with Finn's stunt?
- What dare does Ollie come up with for Seymour? Why does Finn begin to think that his brother is a bit heroic?
- What do Finn and Brain decide to start selling at school?

### Discussion

- What impression do you get about Finn and Seymour's father? In what ways has his leaving affected the family? What difficulties has it created for Finn's mum? How does Finn feel about being likened to his father?
- Think up 5 adrenalin experiments of your own.
- Is it fair that Finn gets into trouble for the adrenaline experiments when Wednesday pushes Timoti out of the tree? Justify your answer.
- What do we learn about Finn in this section of the book? What kind of person is he? What are his values and beliefs? What are his strengths? What faults does he have? Use evidence from the text to support your answers.
- If you were in Finn's position and had to raise money what would you do?
- What could potentially go wrong with Finn and Brain's business?

*Students read Chapters 17-34 (pp. 131-249) independently before the next shared session.*

### Comprehension Chapters 17-34 (pp. 131-249)

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- Why does Finn start eating so many carrots?
- How does Finn convince the other students that they won't get caught with the junk food?
- How does Seymour make money after only one day? What is his motivation for helping Finn?
- How do Brain and Finn deal with the huge numbers of students waiting to buy their lollies? Which group do they ban from buying any? Why do they do this?
- Who does the business employ to manage the other students? Why are these two chosen?

- Who threatens to expose the boys' operation? How does Finn deal with the bully? What stops the bully from punching Finn? How does Finn convince him not to do them in?
- Who starts up a rival company? Why is it less successful?
- What problem does the increased demand for lollies create for Finn and Brain?
- Why does Finn collapse? What explanation does he give to his mother and the nurse about the reason for his experiment?
- Describe some of the ways in which Finn and Brain smuggle lollies into school. Why is Brain worried that Finn might be getting cocky? How does Brain manage to smuggle lollies in his lunchbox?
- What is Ollie's involvement in the money making scheme?
- Why do the boys decide to take a break from selling lollies?
- Why is Finn so reluctant to start writing his project up?
- What idea does Finn come up with for smuggling the lollies into school? What suggestion does Seymour make?
- How does Finn become famous?
- Why is Brain reluctant to sell the last forty dollars worth of lollies? How does Finn convince him?
- Why do Finn and Brain argue? Is Brain's position justified? Why/why not?
- Why are Finn and Seymour so amazed when they look up Ollie's clip on YouTube?
- Why does Finn's mum decide to have pizza for dinner? Why does Finn feel bad when he learns that Mr Patel has rung his mother?
- What message does the monitor deliver to Finn's class in the morning? Why does this spell trouble for Finn and Brain? What happens when Finn gets back to the changing rooms?
- What falls out from under Finn's shirt in assembly? Who is responsible for this?
- What does Finn receive an award for? Why is he so surprised by this? Describe what happens when Finn goes up on stage to collect his award.
- What idea does Finn come up with while he is waiting outside the principal's office? How does Brain get Mrs Heap out of the office? Who does Finn call while Mrs Heap is out of the room? Why doesn't his plan work? How does Finn feel when he learns that his mother is coming in?
- Why does Finn's mum think that Mrs Crabtree is overstating the seriousness of Finn's offence? Do you agree with her? Why/why not? What does Mrs Crabtree suggest that Finn's punishment should be?
- Who is waiting outside Mrs Crabtree's office? Who are they there to see?
- How did the reporter find Finn? What does the reporter reveal about Finn and Seymour during her conversation with Finn?

- Why does Finn's mother say "You did the right thing, just maybe not in the right way"? Do you agree with her? Why/why not?
- Why does Finn's mother want the reporters to stay while she talks to Mrs Crabtree?
- Why do you think Finn's mum starts sticking up for him? What does Mrs Crabtree say that really annoys her? Why does Finn's mum decide to take Finn out of the school? How does having the support of his mother make Finn feel?
- What do Finn and his mum talk about on the way home? In what ways is Finn like his father? How is he different? Why does Finn's mum think that he stopped trying with his schoolwork? Why does Finn's mother think that he might take after her?
- What punishment does Finn's mother give Finn and Seymour? What decision does she make about Umbaba?
- Why does Brain think that Finn is clever? What startling admission does he make to Finn on the phone? Why hasn't Brain told Finn this earlier?
- What does the chairman of The Board of Trustees ask Finn's mother when he calls? How does Finn convince his mother to let him go back to school?
- What makes Finn decide to get started on his project? What does Mr Patel say about Finn's project? What other good news does he give him?

### Discussion

- What skills and talents does Finn possess? How does he use them?
- Finn's mother tells him that "it's not what you *are*; it's what you *do* that counts". Do you agree with this? Why/why not?
- Identify the main message or idea in the story. How is this developed by the author? How could this idea help you in your own life?
- Explain how the character of Finn develops and changes as the story progresses. What lessons do you think he learns from his experiences?
- Identify the climax of the story. Why is this event important?

### Activities

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- **Book Review** - Write a book review for *Super Finn*. Include a brief plot summary, comment on the setting and characters, and explain the main themes and ideas. Identify your favourite features of the novel and explain why people should read it. Remember to include your own opinion about the book.

- **Static Image** - Design an alternative book cover for *Super Finn*. Write a paragraph explaining why your book cover is effective at encouraging people to read the book.
- **Static Image** - Choose a main theme from the story and design a static image that conveys this idea. Include a quote from the text that helps to reinforce the theme.
- **Writing** - Write an alternative ending for the story.
- **Character** - Complete a character profile for Finn. Include his name, age, family, personal qualities and characteristics, motivations, important actions and quotes that illustrate interesting aspects of his character.
- **Drama** - Choose an important event from the story. Write a script that depicts the event. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions in your script. Practise your play and present it to the class.
- **Plot** - Create a plot graph for *Super Finn*. Choose 10 important events from the novel and list them in the order that they happen along the horizontal axis of the graph. Label the vertical axis "Level of excitement". Plot each event according to its level of excitement. Clearly mark the climax of the novel.
- **Soundtrack** - Imagine that *Super Finn* is being made into a movie. You are in charge of the soundtrack. Choose 5 songs and explain when they will be played in the movie and why you chose them.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd