

**Tough Enough**

Author: Tania Hutley

**Synopsis**

---

Matt's mum has decided that they are going to spend their Christmas holidays at the beach. Matt can't help but feel nervous. Not only has he left his friends behind (and there's no cell phone coverage), but there have been two murders in the town that they are visiting. The murderer has yet to be caught.

On the day that Matt arrives he meets some local kids. Gordon, Susie, Daniel and Mouse seem friendly enough and Matt is determined to be staunch, act tough and fit in. He asks them about the murders and is surprised when they tell him that they not only know who is responsible for them, but also where he lives. They take Matt to see Guts McGrady's house. The group are chased by McGrady's vicious dog Razor and Matt is the first to run away. This makes Matt feel like a wimp, and wanting to impress his new friends, he talks himself up and pretends that he isn't scared at all. Gordon decides to test Matt's courage by daring him to break into McGrady's house and steal his walking stick. Backed into a corner Matt feels that he has no choice but to take up the challenge, so despite his reservations he waits until dark and breaks into the McGrady house.

When Matt enters the house he receives a huge fright when he finds not Guts McGrady, who he is expecting, but a little old lady, Guts' mother. Feeling terrible about scaring the lady Matt goes back to the house and confesses the next day. He agrees to do some work cleaning for her as a way of making amends. While he is there Mrs McGrady cuts her hand and Matt and his mother rush her to hospital. She is to remain there for two days. Feeling like he owes her, Matt offers to feed Razor while she is away.

That evening Matt returns to Mrs McGrady's house to feed Razor, but the dog runs off into the woods. Matt follows him and to his surprise stumbles across Guts McGrady's camp. Guts McGrady is just as mean and evil as he has been made out to be. He captures Matt and violently knocks him out. When Matt wakes up Guts informs him that he is going to take Matt with him as a hostage and try and evade the police. After all, they are looking for one man, not a man and a teenager. Will Matt be able to escape from the vicious murderer, or will he meet the same fate as his other victims?

**Text Type**

---

*Tough enough* is a fast-paced and exciting novel that has broad appeal. Suitable for readers of both genders aged 10+, it is written in easy to read colloquial language and contains short chapters. The story is set in New Zealand and is written in first person point of view.

The narrator of the story, Matt, is a likeable and realistic character who the reader will relate to easily. Matt is short for his age and is used to being hassled by people at home. Seeing a chance to start afresh with a new group of friends Matt is determined to prove that he is staunch and tough, not the sissy that he appears to be. Gordon, sensing that Matt's bravado is all for show, dares him to break into Guts McGrady's house and steal his walking stick. Matt is peer-pressured into completing the challenge to save face. When he finds a little old lady instead of a murderer he is mortified by his behaviour and is determined to make amends for his actions. The fact that Matt completes the dare causes a rift between Gordon and himself because Gordon is angry with him for showing him up.

Matt proves to everyone that he is courageous and determined when he is captured by Guts McGrady. Rather than simply accepting the situation that he is in Matt shows tenacity by escaping from the murderer's clutches, despite his injuries. Leading the police back to McGrady's hideout Matt is single-handedly responsible for the man's capture. He still feels

guilty about Mrs McGrady however, as he is not sure how she will feel about his role in her son's capture.

Themes include friendship, peer pressure, courage and doing the right thing.

## Sharing the Novel

---

***The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-20), Chapters 3-10 (pp. 23-95) and Chapters 11-16 (pp.99-152).***

***During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Wherever possible encourage students to relate Matt's story to their own experiences and broader knowledge. Encourage them to study Matt's character and track how he changes throughout the novel. Have them make inferences and predict what is going to happen next. Students should be able to identify themes such as peer pressure and explain how they are developed in the novel.***

## Introducing the Novel

---

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

- Where is the story set? Why do you think Matt doesn't want to holiday there?
- Who do you think Guts McGrady is? Who do you think dares Matt to confront him?
- Who is Razor?
- Do you think Matt accepts the dare? Why/why not?
- Who do you think the killer that Matt has to face might be? What potential danger could he be in?

***Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.***

## Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-20)

---

- Who is Jayden? What did he tell Matt about the town that he is holidaying in?
- What does Matt notice about the town as he and his mother drive in?
- Where are Matt and his mother staying?
- Describe Matt's meeting with the four kids who are hanging around the camping ground. What are their names? Why does Matt feel inadequate around them?
- How does Matt embarrass himself at the beach? How does Gordon make him feel worse?
- What does Suzie tell Matt about the murders?
- What plans do the group make for the next day?

### Discussion

- What information do we learn about Matt in the first two Chapters?
- What do we know about the four teenagers that he meets? What is your first impression of Gordon?
- Do you think the local kids really know who the murderer is? Why/why not?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

***Students read Chapters 3-10 (pp. 23-95) independently before the next shared session.***

## Comprehension Chapters 3-10 (pp. 23-95)

---

- What does Suzie tell Matt about Guts O'Grady? Who's Razor?
- Describe Guts O'Grady's house.
- What startles Razor?
- Why does Gordon accuse Matt of being a wimp? Why is Matt so determined to prove him wrong?
- What does Gordon challenge Matt to do? Why does Matt feel like he has to accept the dare?
- Describe how Matt feels as he lies in bed waiting for midnight.
- What does Matt pull out of the rubbish bin to take with him?
- How does Matt encourage Razor to run out the gate?
- Why does Matt have so much trouble crossing McGrady's front yard?
- What is the first thing that Matt notices when he enters McGrady's house? How does he feel as he goes into the house? How does he try and justify his actions?
- Describe the inside of Guts McGrady's house.
- Where does Matt find the stick? Why is Matt so shocked when he sees who is lying in the bed? Why does Matt decide to leave the walking stick behind?
- What happens when the woman wakes up?
- Why does Matt think that the kids lied to him? How does this make him feel?
- What decision does Matt make when he wakes up in the morning?
- Why does Matt think that Mrs McGrady "looks even worse in the sunlight"? How does Mrs McGrady react when Matt tells her that it was him in her house? What does she tell Matt he can do to make up for his actions?
- Why does Mrs McGrady have difficulty cleaning up her house?
- What sudden realisation does Matt come to when he finds the photo in Mrs McGrady's house?
- What is Guts' real name? Who does Mrs O'Grady blame for her son's problems?
- How does Mrs O'Grady cut her hand? Who takes her to the hospital? Why do the doctors want her to stay for a while? What does Matt offer to do for her while she is in hospital?
- Where does Razor run off to when Matt goes to feed him? What does Matt do to ensure that he doesn't get lost?
- What does Matt hear the man in the bush say? Describe what he sees as he peers through the trees.
- How does Guts know that someone is there? How does he react when he sees Matt? What does he do when Matt tries to run away?

## Discussion

- How does Matt feel after he tells Gordon and the others that he is not scared? Why does he feel like this?
- Have you ever been peer pressured into doing something that you don't want to do? If so, explain what happened and how your friends made you feel.
- Matt feels extremely guilty as breaks into McGrady's house. What does this suggest about his character?
- Why was Guts picked on at school? Is this an excuse for his behaviour? Why/why not?
- Why do you think that Guts is hiding out in the woods? What do we learn about his character from his encounter with Matt?
- Predict what will happen next in the novel. What injuries will Matt sustain? Will he be able to escape?

***Students read Chapters 11-16 (pp. 99-152) independently before the next shared session.***

***Comprehension Chapters 11-16 (pp. 99-152)***

---

- How does Matt feel when he regains consciousness? What is McGrady doing when he wakes up? What lie does he tell Guts about why he was in the bush? Why doesn't Guts believe him when he says that he doesn't know who he is? Why does Guts believe that it was a stroke of luck that Matt turned up? Why does Matt think that Guts is lying when he says that he will let Matt go?
- How does Matt escape from Guts? What does he take with him when he runs away? Describe how Matt feels as he runs away.
- Who does Matt find when he arrives back at Mrs O'Grady's house?
- How does Matt's mum react when she sees her son?
- Why is Matt so adamant that he needs to return to the forest with the police? Why won't the policeman let him go back straight away?
- What does Constable Briggs tell Matt to do when he nears the campsite?
- What do the policemen do as they approach the campsite? Describe what happens when they run into the camp.
- Why does Matt take Razor rather than allow the police to call dog control? Why does he feel apprehensive about this?
- How did Mrs McGrady react when she heard the news about her son?
- What suggestion does Matt's mother make to Matt in the hospital?
- Why does Matt have to return to the police station after he leaves the hospital? Why does Matt feel like he betrayed Mrs O'Grady by helping to capture her son? What is Matt's theory about how Guts survived while he was hiding out?
- Why does Matt look forward to seeing his friends after he leaves the police station? How do they react when they see Matt with Razor? What does Gordon say to Matt that makes him angry? How does Daniel defuse the situation?
- Why are the kids so surprised when Matt mentions Mrs O'Grady? Why does Suzie think that Matt is brave? How does Gordon react while Matt is telling his story? How does Matt feel when he realises that the group believes his story and he has their undivided attention?
- Why is Matt nervous about seeing Mrs O'Grady when she is released from hospital?
- What do Matt and his friends do to Mrs O'Grady's house while she is away? How does the old lady react when she sees their work? Who is at her house to welcome her home?
- What is Matt's favourite part of what he did for Mrs O'Grady?
- How does Gordon try and make peace with Matt? Why do you think Matt talks to him?
- How does Matt know that Mrs O'Grady has forgiven him?
- How does Gordon react when Razor approaches him? Why is Matt pleased to hear the tremor in his voice?

## Discussion

- Describe Matt's character. What qualities and characteristics does he possess? How does he display these in the story?
- How would the story have been different if Matt hadn't escaped from Guts?
- Describe Gordon. Why does he react the way he does when Matt turns up with Razor at the beach? Why do you think he comes around and wants to hang out with Matt again? What does the fact that Matt is willing to talk to him suggest about his character?
- Why do you think Matt's friends are willing to help him clean up Mrs O'Grady's house? Why does it make you feel good to do something nice for someone else?
- Identify the climax of the story. Why is this event important?

## Activities

---

**Newspaper Article** – Write a newspaper article about Guts McGrady's capture and Matt's role in it.

**Poster** – Design a “Wanted” poster for Guts McGrady.

**Letter** – Imagine that you are Matt. Write a letter home to Jayden explaining everything that has happened since you arrived at the beach and how you feel about it.

**Monologue** – Create a monologue for Matt in an important part of the novel. What is he thinking and feeling in that moment? Why?

**Epilogue** – Write an epilogue for the story. What is Matt doing now? What happens to Mrs O’Grady and her son? Is Matt still in touch with his friends from the beach?

**Movie Pitch** – Write a one page “pitch” to a producer explaining why the story would make a great movie.

**Static Image** – Design a static image that illustrates a theme from the novel. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your idea.

**Book Review** – Write a book review for *Tough Enough*. Include a brief plot summary, describe the setting and explain why it is important. Describe the characters and explain how they develop and change as the story progresses. Identify major themes and ideas in the story. Remember to give your personal opinion about the book.

**Character** – Imagine that you are Matt and have been asked to give a speech about your experiences when you return to school. Write the speech and present it to the class in role.

---

Notes written by Vicki Ladd