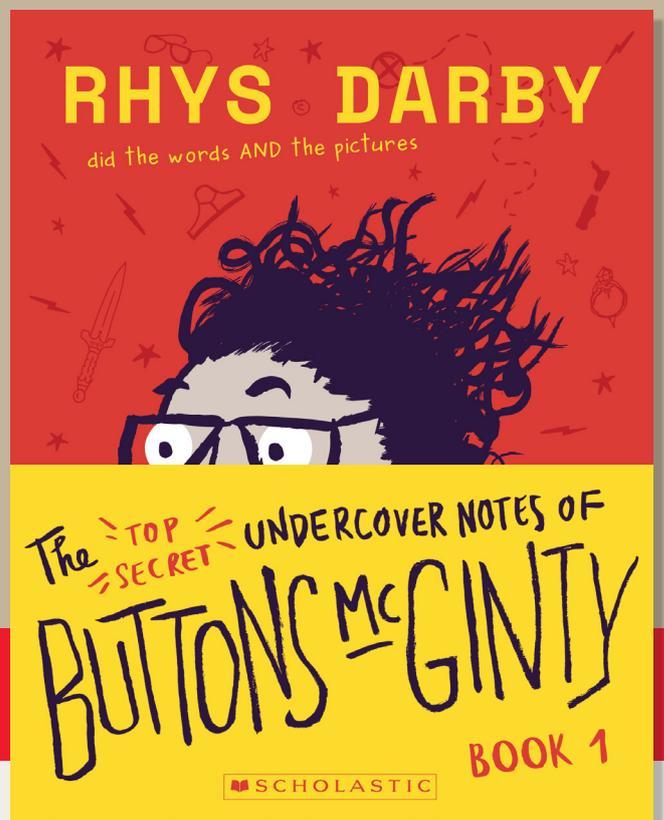


# The Top Secret Undercover Notes of Buttons McGinty Book 1

Text and illustrations  
by Rhys Darby

- Art • Reading • Writing •
- Thinking Skills • Oral Language •



## Synopsis

Buttons McGinty's parents give him a notebook to record his adventures before they strangely disappear, and Buttons is sent to a boarding school somewhere in the middle of nowhere. En route to Ranktwerp Island aboard the ship *HMS Juggernaut*, Buttons records and sketches everything he sees. And there is plenty to write about: making friends with Silky Dartmoore, his bunk mate; meeting Nigel Fairweather (Buttons thinks there's something not quite right about that kid); and witnessing a large cage being smuggled onto the ship in the middle of the night. He runs out of time to find out what is in the cage when his ship arrives at RIEFGLUM School, a large fortress on an isolated island in the south Pacific.

Buttons settles into the school routine and soon makes friends – who are also suspicious of the goings-on at the school. Things get even more mysterious when the cook, Mrs Sandwich, sends a message asking Buttons to meet her because she knows something about his missing parents ... and then she also disappears. Buttons creeps around the school grounds at night and discovers a creepy cottage. He's sure it has something to do with whatever the teachers and headmaster are up to behind closed doors and in secret rooms.

Buttons and his friends plan a magic trick for the school talent show that will enable Buttons and Silky to 'disappear' and then witness the ritual they have learned the teachers are planning for later that night. What he sees goes beyond what he ever thought possible. Soon Buttons is captured, and fighting for his life. His friends try to rescue him – they're triple-crossed, but saved in the nick of time. Buttons then prepares to go through a portal into another realm, ready to continue his story in Book 2. Before he goes, he hands his notebook over to his friends for safe-keeping in case he never returns.

## About the Author & Illustrator

Born in Auckland, but now living in Los Angeles with his family, **Rhys Darby** is a well-known actor and comedian. He rose to fame as the lovable but inept Murray Hewitt on HBO's *Flight of the Conchords*. He has starred in films like *The Boat that Rocked*, *Yes Man*, *What We Do in the Shadows*, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and *Jumanji 2*. He regularly features on a number of animations including *Barefoot Bandits*, *Voltron: Legendary Defender* and *Star and the Forces of Evil*. He has also appeared on American TV shows such as *How I Met Your Mother*, *Modern Family* and *X Files*.

When not acting, he treads the floorboards in stand-up comedy shows on stages around the world. He has written and starred in his own 8-part mockumentary comedy series for TVNZ and Netflix called *Short Poppies* and is currently writing his next one. *The Top Secret Undercover Notes of Buttons McGinty* is his first children's book ... but will not be his last, with a sequel due out in 2019.



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# Writing Style

Written in diary format, this is a hilarious adventure story illustrated with Rhys Darby's own sketches. Jokes and puns are scattered throughout the text, and an action-packed storyline will have readers 8-11 years old wanting to read until the gripping end. The story is also broken up with graphics, dialogue boxes and diagrams, making it attractive to the reluctant reader. It will appeal to girls and boys who enjoy a good joke as well as a mystery.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What do you think the tone of this story might be?
- How has the author set the scene on the first page?
- How would you describe Buttons after reading the 'Author's Particulars'?
- How important do you think Morse Code is going to be in this book? (page 9)
- What does RIEFGLUM stand for? What sort of place do you think RIEFGLUM will be and why do you think that? (page 11)
- How important do you think the artefacts pictured on page 12 will be to the story?
- How long have Buttons' parents been missing and where has he been staying in the meantime? (pages 14)
- Why is he sent to RIEFGLUM? (page 14)
- How does Buttons get to the school? (page 15). Guess what might go wrong on the trip.
- Who does Buttons meet and how trustworthy are they? (pages 16-19, 33)
- What are the Morse codes the boys clap on page 20? (refer to Morse Code Key on page 192)
- What shocking news does Silky tell Buttons? (page 22)
- What is the joke that Buttons told on page 23?
- What is the 'foreshadowing' (ie a clue that you need to know later on in the story) that Buttons gives you on pages 23-26?
- What do Buttons and Silky witness on page 27?
- Why does Buttons not tell the truth to the captain? (pages 30-31)
- Buttons brainstorms what could be causing the noise below their deck – which one do you think it is? Brainstorm some more ideas. (page 34)
- Imagine you are Buttons seeing the island and the RIEFGLUM entrance for the first time. What would you be thinking? How would you feel? (pages 36-37)
- Why do you think the welcome starts with a lolly scramble? What are they trying to make the new students think and feel about the place? Predict why they would want to do that. (page 39)
- Who do you think Buttons can trust in his dorm? Why? Give your reasons. (page 45)
- What happens on Buttons' first day in class? Anything that would make him suspicious? (pages 51-57)
- Who do you think told the principal what Buttons had been doing that night? (pages 58-69)
- What are the Morse Code messages on pages 65 and 71?
- What clue does Buttons pick up on pages 62, 73, and 75?
- What does Buttons overhear on page 83 and why is it so important for him to find out?
- What does Buttons see on page 93, and what comes out of it on page 117?
- What do the students decide to do for the talent quest and how would that enable them to find out what the teachers are doing that night? (pages 109)
- Who is Mitch Mistaken? Good guy or bad guy? Why do you think he is at the school? (page 112)
- What startling news does Nigel tell Buttons on pages 119 and 125, and what does he promise to do on page 127?
- What code name do they give Nigel and how does he live up to that name? (page 130)
- What is a pronoun? Give an example. Why would Buttons have to change some of the pronouns in his journal (page 134)?
- What is their plan and does it go smoothly? (pages 132-142)
- What happens at the secret ceremony and do you think the teachers will notice that Buttons has joined them? Why? (pages 143-152)
- What shocking thing does the principal do in the underground room? (page 157)
- How is Buttons rescued? How does the dagger help? (page 161-162)
- What does the symbol stand for and how does Buttons come to the shocking conclusion? (pages 165-168)
- How does The Weasel betray them and why doesn't Buttons trust him when he swears allegiance yet again? (pages 177-182)
- Where does Buttons go and why do you think he did it?



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# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: SECRET SERVICE

Look at the diagram on page 52 carefully, and then close the book and draw the same diagram, trying to remember all the details. Label all the parts. Try to remember as much as you can – your life could depend on it! Afterwards, memorise it, then eat your drawing. Nah, just kidding, but you do need to practise your secret service skills by memorising and drawing the diagram.

## ACTIVITY 2: YOUR OWN TOP SECRET UNDERCOVER NOTES OF YOUR LIFE

Here's a scenario: Your parents have disappeared and before they left they gave you a notebook to record your own adventures. Write the first chapter about being transported to a faraway boarding school and end your chapter with a 'cliffhanger' (exciting bit at the end of a chapter). Illustrate your diary with a picture of yourself, a diagram of the boat/car/helicopter/UFO you are travelling in, and decorate it with graphics just like Buttons has in his notebook. Include some good jokes to amuse your readers!

## ACTIVITY 3: WHAT A CHARACTER!

Draw a character chart of some of the main characters in the story. Label their type of character such as protagonist (main character), antagonist (bad guy), side-kick, friend, etc. Name their characteristics, such as leader, trustworthy, honest, deceitful, curious; and also add what they're good at and what they're not good at.

| CHARACTER CHART |                   |                 |         |                |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------|
| Name            | Type of character | Characteristics | Good at | Not so good at |
|                 |                   |                 |         |                |

## ACTIVITY 4: MORSE CODE MESSAGES

Littered throughout the book are numerous secret messages written in Morse Code. Study the Morse Code key on page 192 and send a secret message to someone in the class. It will be an instruction for them to do something. You'll know they've understood the secret message when they carry out the instruction. It could be something like: do a handstand in the middle of the classroom (if there's room!), put one hand on your head, close your left eye, stand on one leg, do a surprise kind act to someone in the classroom, recite a poem in the middle of a quiet period in class, beg the teacher to give you a chore ... The message must not be dangerous for them to carry out, or embarrassing, or be a put-down. But it can be funny.

## ACTIVITY 5: INTERROGATE BUTTONS

Write down ten questions you'd ask Buttons (or another character in the story) if you were a journalist or a detective. When you've finished, ask someone in the room to pretend to be your character and ask them your questions. Practise the interview and perform it for the class.

## ACTIVITY 6: FORTUNE TELLING STORYBOARD

Predict what will happen in Book 2. Will Buttons find his parents? Will he find more monsters? What evil plan do you think the principal has for the monsters? Write a storyboard for what could happen in the next book.

| Beginning | 1 <sup>st</sup> Incident | 2 <sup>nd</sup> incident | 3 <sup>rd</sup> incident | Climax | Conclusion |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------|------------|
|           |                          |                          |                          |        |            |

Teaching notes by Maria Gill



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