

Teachers Notes: Squishy Taylor & a Question of Trust



About

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Tagline

An apartment full of questions on a street full of mysteries.

Blurb

1. Why is Boring Lady being so interesting?
2. What kind of person comes back from holidays with no luggage?
3. Why can they only have dessert on Saturday nights?
4. Who's been smuggling illegal diamonds?

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Share their favourite hobby with the class
- Learn about the word patronise and think about the way we use language to make people feel small
- Present a research project on diamonds
- Talk about police procedure and make a list of crime-solving steps
- Discuss the elements of a mystery story and write their own

About the story

Squishy Taylor and her bonus sisters got off to a rough start, but became friends when they realised that they all had one thing in common – they all hated their nasty neighbour Mr Hinkenbushel. In fact, they started a club – the Hinkenbushel Revenge Club (HRC) – whose sole purpose was to make Mr Hinkenbushel's life miserable.

There have been stories in the news about diamond thieves, and Squishy, always on the lookout for a mystery, is intrigued. She is even more interested when one night, while their horrible neighbour Mr Hinkenbushel is away, his apartment is broken into. Nothing is stolen, but the police are very suspicious and come to talk to Squishy's family in case anyone has seen anything. Squishy doesn't like the policeman. He calls the girls princesses, and treats them like stupid little kids.

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Squishy is convinced that Mr Hinkenbushel is somehow mixed up with the stolen diamonds. She tells her dad that she wants to go to the police, but he won't take her because she doesn't have any evidence. Squishy is so sure that she's right that she and Jessie go anyway. The policeman is nicer to them than the one who visited their apartment but even he laughs when Squishy tells him that her next door neighbour is a diamond smuggler. Jessie and Squishy leave, knowing that the only way they'll catch the thief is to gather evidence.

Squishy, Jessie and Vee decide that the only way they're going to get Mr Hinkenbushel arrested is if they keep a close eye on him – a stake out! They decide to pretend to play hopscotch outside his house so that they'll be able to watch his every move. When Mr Hinkenbushel comes out, the girls immediately follow him. It's not long before they realise that he's following somebody else, and they're shocked when they see that the someone Mr Hinkenbushel is following is Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery – a very important person who has been helping the police with their investigations. The girls are sure they're onto something now.

Just before Mr Hinkenbushel goes home, the girls overhear him make a phone call to someone, talking about a 'document' and telling them that he'll be away that night. This is their chance! Squishy decides to use her rope climbing equipment to climb from their apartment window across to Mr Hinkenbushel's, so that she can find the document – the evidence they need to finally report him to the police.

Squishy's expecting the document to be well-hidden, but she finds it straight away. She's just picked it up when there's a noise, and she realises that somebody is in the apartment with her – and it isn't Mr Hinkenbushel – it's Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery! He's surprised to see Squishy, but she's relieved. He'll be able to help her arrest Mr Hinkenbushel. She's trying to convince him to tell her parents when Alice finds them. Just as they're explaining things to Alice, Mr Hinkenbushel arrives – and arrests Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery! Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery is the real diamond thief, and grumpy Mr Hinkenbushel is actually an undercover investigator – Squishy and her sisters are shocked, but happy too – after all, it's not every day you can say you've caught a criminal red handed, not unless you're Squishy Taylor that is!

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Themes: Crime / Trust / Police procedure / Responsibility / Family

Reading Questions

Chapter One

- How does Squishy know something is wrong with Boring Lady?
- Where is Squishy's telescope from?
- Why won't Jessie wake up Alice?
- What other weird thing happens?

Chapter Two

- How does Squishy know that Mr Hinkenbushel hates her and the twins?
- How many hits did the HRC revenge declaration video get on You Tube?
- What does everybody do on Saturday?
- What news does Squishy hear on Jessie's iPad?
- What does Squishy notice that's unusual about Mr Hinkenbushel's house when they walk past it?

Chapter Three

- What's the Gargoyle's Escape? Who has climbed it?
- How long has it taken Squishy to become good at climbing?
- What does it mean when Squishy's dad calls her Sita? How

does it make her feel?

- Why is the policeman there? How does he treat Squishy and Vee?
- What does Squishy have that could be a clue to the crime?

Chapter Four

- What is on the news that could be connected to the break in at Mr Hinkenbushel's?
- Why should the Australian Police be 'very afraid'?
- What are the police looking for?
- What does Squishy notice about Mr Hinkenbushel when she sees him?
- Why does Squishy think that Mr Hinkenbushel is the diamond smuggler?

Chapter Five

- Why won't Dad let Squishy go to the police about Mr Hinkenbushel?
- What are the three rules for taking Baby for a walk?
- How does the policeman react when Squishy and Jessie make their report? Does he believe them?

Chapter Six

- What is Squishy allowed to do with her bonus family that she wasn't allowed to do on her own?

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- Why is Squishy in trouble when they get home? Is she entirely to blame?
- What did the HRC swear to do in their video? Why does this make Constable Graham suspicious of them?
- Why does Constable Graham want to speak to Squishy, Jessie and Vee one at a time?

Chapter Seven

- Why are Dad and Alice so mad about the website and the video even though they believe that none of the girls had anything to do with the break in?
- What is 'community spirit'?
- Why is Vee upset with Jessie and Squishy? How do they get her to forgive them?
- What evidence might make the police take them seriously? How can they get it?

Chapter Eight

- Who teaches them how to play hopscotch?
- Why does Squishy think that Mr Hinkenbushel looks nervous?
- Who is Mr Hinkenbushel following?
- Why do they decide not to call the police?

Chapter Nine

- When does Mr Hinkenbushel go home?

- What's in Mr Hinkenbushel's apartment?
- Could it have been a coincidence that Mr Hinkenbushel and Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery were in the same place at the same time?
- What decision does Squishy make? What helps her make it?

Chapter Ten

- How is Squishy going to get into Mr Hinkenbushel's apartment?
- Why isn't she worried about falling?
- What does Squishy find in the apartment?

Chapter Eleven

- Who comes into Mr Hinkenbushel's apartment while Squishy's there? Why isn't she afraid?
- Why do you think Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery doesn't want to come and explain things to Squishy's parents?
- Who is the diamond-smuggling criminal?

Chapter Twelve

- What does Mr Hinkenbushel say about Squishy?
- Why will the police want to question her in the morning?
- What is Mr Hinkenbushel's real job?
- Who broke into the apartment the first time? Why?
- What trap did the police set to catch Lord Smiggenbotham-Chancery?

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Activities

- In just a few weeks Squishy has become obsessed with rock climbing. In chapter three she talks about the process of climbing and the equipment she uses.
 - o Make a list of the equipment Squishy and Vee use for rock climbing?
 - o What are some of the tips Squishy gives for rockclimbing?
- Choose something you're good at and either make a poster for it, or share it with the class.
 - o What equipment do you need for your hobby?
 - o Where do you do it?
 - o What tips would you give someone just starting out?
 - o What's your favourite thing about your hobby?
 - o How do you feel when you're doing it?
- In Chapter Three, the policeman uses language that makes Squishy feel 'adorable and stupid'. When someone acts this way we would say they're being patronising. Talk about the word patronising in class.
 - o What does patronising mean?
 - o How does it make people feel when we patronise them?
 - o Can you think of a time when you've been patronised? Who by? How did you deal with it?
 - o Make a list of words or phrases that could be used to patronise someone – come up with a better alternative for each word, and some responses if you're being patronised.
- In Chapter Four, Squishy asks what makes diamonds legal or illegal. Either individually or in groups do a research project on diamonds (this could be done as a blog post, poster or oral presentation). See if you can find out the answer to Squishy's question, and also any other interesting facts about diamonds – why are they so valuable?

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- Make a list of the words in the book that are about the police procedure – write down what each one means. Based on the book (and you might need to do some research of your own) come up with a list of steps that police might use to solve a crime.
- What makes a mystery? Squishy Taylor and a Question of Trust is a good mystery story because it has suspense, twists, good clues and characters you care about.
 - o Find an example in the book of each of the elements listed above – why does this example contribute to Squishy Taylor and a Question of Trust being a good mystery?
 - o What other elements can you think of that make a mystery story work? Can you find examples of these in the book?
 - o In class or small groups, use the list you've made to write your own mystery story, then bind them together and add your stories to your class library.

