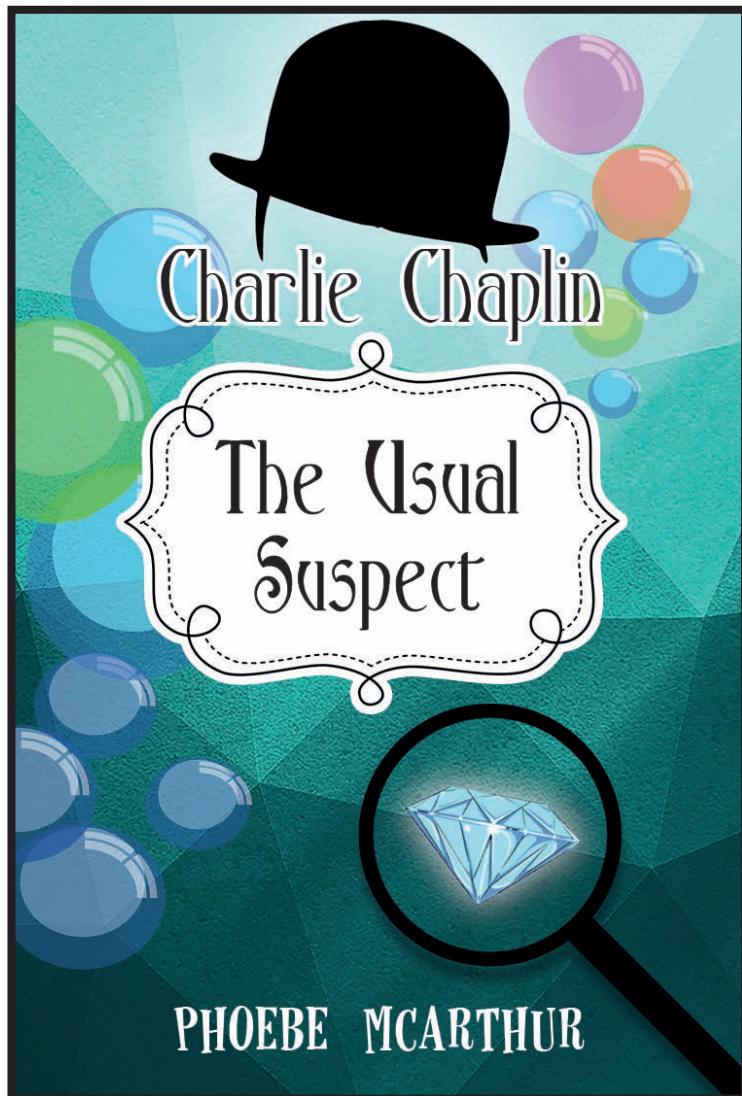


Charlie Chaplin: The Usual Suspect

Teachers' Notes



By Phoebe McArthur
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About the book...

Charlotte Chaplin is a city girl. She's cool and stylish and her best friend is the Prime Minister's daughter. Her life is perfect.

That is until her parents get divorced and Charlie is dragged to the sleepy town of Gulgong in the middle of nowhere.

There's nothing to do — or so Charlie thinks. Things start to heat up when she makes an unlikely friend: Ruby, the daughter of a man wanted for burglary.

Charlie and Ruby, with a little technological aid and some friends in high places, must catch the real thief and clear Ruby's dad's name before he's sent to gaol.

A lively, fast-paced mystery with vivid characters and an atmospheric country town setting.

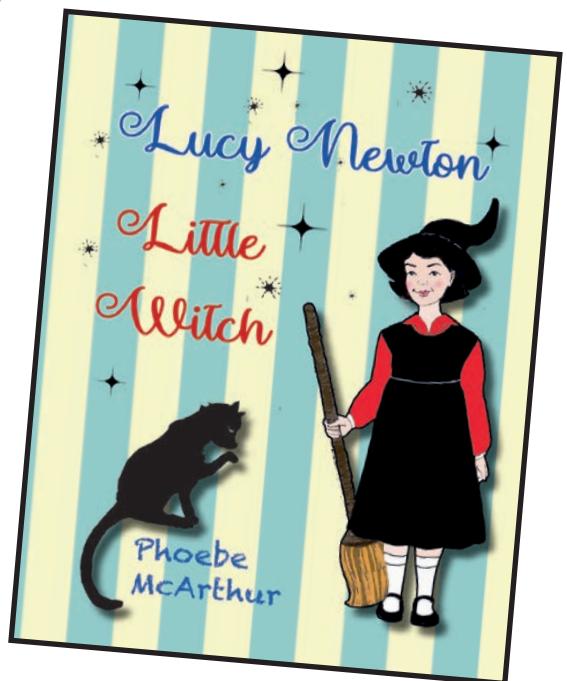
About the author...

Phoebe McArthur lives in a run-down, yet cosy cottage in the middle of nowhere.

She's not at all lonely thanks to her four cats, three chooks, two guinea pigs and her extensive library.

If she's not tipping cats off her lap as she writes stories, she's cooking all sorts of yummy food, such as scones with extra cream and homemade blackberry jam, or doing art at the table near the window, which has the best view of her garden.

Her first book, *Lucy Newton, Little Witch*, a popular chapter-book for younger readers, was short listed for the 2019 Speech Pathology Awards.



Charlie Chaplin: The Usual Suspect is her first middle-grade novel.

Something from the author...

As you may or may not know, Phoebe McArthur is a nom-de-plume for a mother-daughter writing team. Generally one of us writes the initial draft of the story and then sends it to the other one for editing/adding/rewriting. In this case the daughter (me) of the team, wrote the story and the mother (hereafter known as 'Mum') was the one doing the edits and additions. Whenever we've got a completed manuscript we can't tell who wrote what bits!

So, I have always loved mysteries and detective novels. I can't remember if I started with *Nancy Drew* or *The Famous Five*, but I recently found an old mystery story that I started writing when I was about 8. It's very embarrassing and the punctuation is atrocious.

When I was given the secret information that a publisher was after a '*Trixie Belden*' style middle-grade novel I started to plan.

This was right up my alley!

The story started off with Charlie (whose name was originally Meg) moving into a tiny house with her mother. It changed to an old post office when I realised that so many of Australia's original post offices were now something else.

After I had my first couple of chapters done and a (very) vague synopsis I met with the publisher who was interested. Amazingly enough I had set the story in her family's home town of Gulgong! A complete coincidence! She got very excited and said that the Pioneers Museum in Gulgong would be a great place for a mystery. So I headed off to Gulgong to find this magical museum. And yes, it was perfect! I'd like to say that I did a lot of writing while I was there, but I didn't. I explored and took photos and ate a LOT of food. Ideas were forming slowly and I couldn't wait to get home and finish it.

I've mixed a few ideas and urban legends into the story, one of them being the tunnels under Gulgong. Now, I haven't heard of any secret



tunnels in the town, but I grew up in Katoomba, in the Blue Mountains. It is rumoured that there are tunnels under the main street between one of the pubs, the big hotel and the bank. Apparently these were for visiting royalty to be able to move around and not be bombarded by the masses. Perfect for kids to sneak around and solve mysteries too! I have noticed, particularly in the Famous Five stories, that there are almost always secret passages and tunnels, so my tunnels under Gulgong are a nod to the books that I loved (and still do!) so much. I also have a memory of Mum telling me that we're secretly descendants of Queen Victoria. Something about one of her sons and a maid and someone being sent out to Australia to avoid a scandal. How true that (or my memory) is, I have no idea, but it made its way into the book, nonetheless.

One thing I wanted to avoid was any romance in the book. I had recently read a middle-grade girl detective story and she kept getting distracted by her crush, which lead to more danger. I always quite liked the romance in the Nancy Drew books, but the characters were older, whereas I found the Trixie Belden love interests to be a bit forced and they detracted from the main point of it — to solve a mystery. Obviously there was nothing romantic about the Famous Five, which could be why, as an adult, I still read them.

Is this our great-great-great-grandmother?
Did she really have a maid
steal her tiara?
Is it hiding in a jewellery
shop in Gulgong?



The facts and the fiction...

Geography:

Gulgong is a 19th-century gold rush town in the Central Tablelands of New South Wales with a population of about 2500 people. The town centre is full of old buildings and looks almost as if it hasn't changed in 150 years. The name 'Gulgong' is derived from the word used by the Wiradjuri people, for 'deep waterhole'.

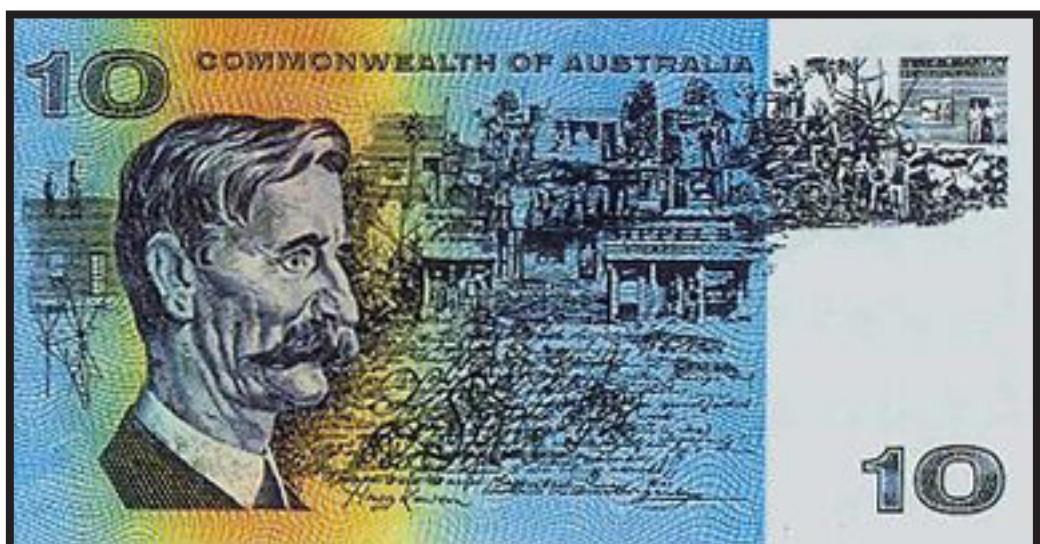
Gold was first discovered in 1870 and by 1873 there were over 20,000 people living there.

The famous Australian poet, Henry Lawson's mother was born in Gulgong and there is a museum dedicated to him.
<http://www.henrylawsongulgong.org.au/>

Gulgong and Henry Lawson appeared on the first \$10 note in Australia and there is a motel called the Ten Dollar Motel.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_ten-dollar_note



The shop filled with everything is a real shop! It was almost as described and I did see hidden doors, but I doubt they lead to anywhere particularly exciting.

The hole in the footpath was also real! Because I was on my phone instead of paying attention to where I was going, I almost fell in. It is a delivery hatch to the cellar of the pub.



The hole in the footpath (but it was open the first time I saw it).

The Post Office is very real, but I did take some liberties with it. Yes, it is set on a hill, but not one steep enough to have a house on the downside of it. It is also a working post office. I didn't go in because it was quite busy. It was built in the 1880s and has been restored.

The Gulgong Pioneers Museum. Well, what can I say about that? I spent an entire day there, only leaving when I was so hungry that I couldn't bear it anymore. It takes up an entire block near the centre of town. They give you a map when you first arrive and I needed it! It is a labyrinth of history, winding this way and that, with rooms set up and videos playing and an entire town in the backyard including one of the original schools (a very small, one-room school!).

<https://gulgong-pioneer-museum.business.site/>



Above: The museum



Below: Inside the old schoolhouse



I needed more than one day to look through the museum. There are more photos of Gulgong and the Pioneers Museum in the illustration section of these notes.

Katoomba is also a very real place, as is their 'slow food' movement — they have successfully kept fast food out of the Blue Mountains for many years, with the exception of Hungry Jack's/Burger King which was around for about ten years before closing down due to lack of interest.



Growing up I heard the rumours about secret tunnels under Katoomba for visiting royals to use when they visited. However, they seem to be rumours and I can only find comments about them on the internet.

<http://springwoodhistorians.blogspot.com/2011/04/savoy-theatre-katoomba.html>

https://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC4A3HZ_the-grand-old-lady-of-the-mountains?guid=5e7c5a9c-6ca6-4171-abba-aa84100ac2ea

<https://www.weekendnotes.com/fascinating-facts-blue-mountains/>

It's
a
mystery!

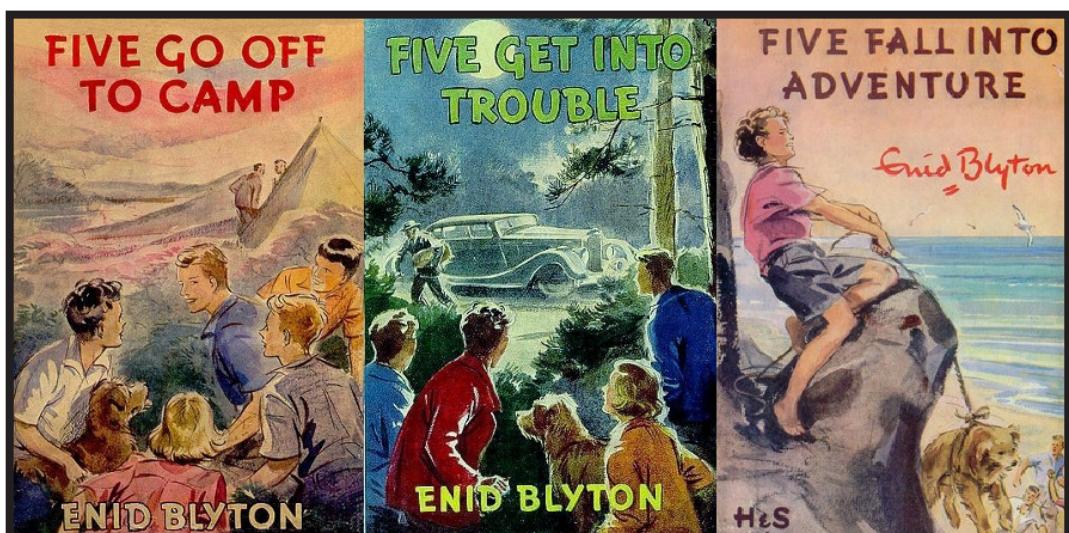
Mystery stories:

Mystery stories and detective novels are still some of the best-selling books today, whether they're for children or adults.

I love them because, generally, the detective/hero/heroine is a normal person. A normal person who just happens to be smart enough to out manoeuvre the baddies. A normal person who could, if I had an exciting life —be me!

It's more than just wanting to live vicariously though, it's also about the thrill of the chase, being drawn into a world that you can't put down until your curiosity is satisfied. Did they catch the thief? Would they survive? Did justice prevail?

My favourite ones will always be Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* novels. Three siblings, one cousin and a dog all getting embroiled in mysteries in the school holidays and almost all of them involved secret tunnels. They were simple and suitable for younger children, each one following the same pattern — which is partly why I liked them.



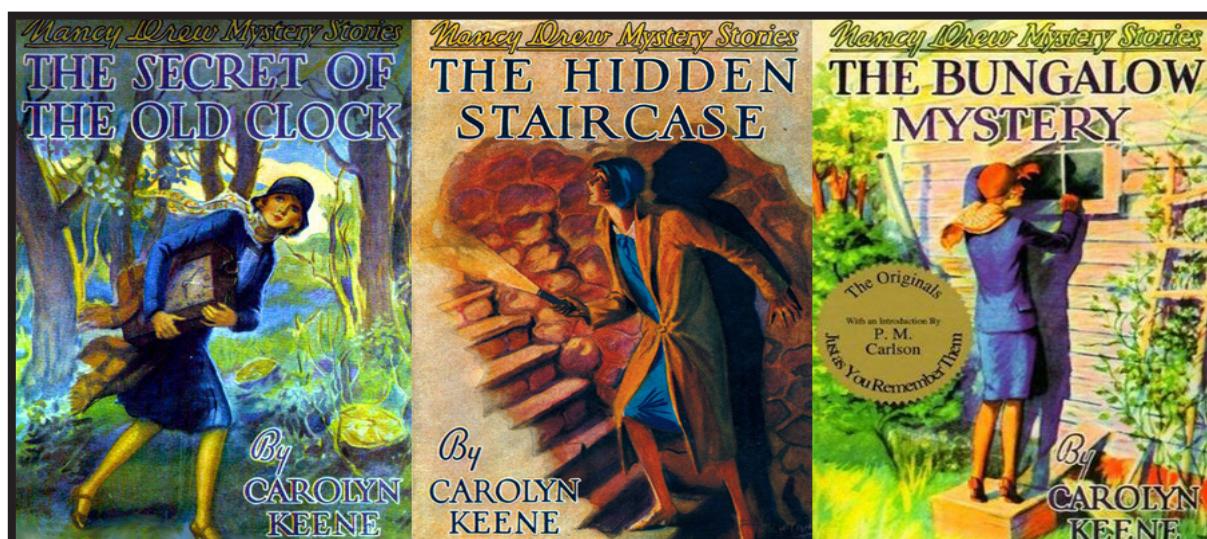
Each book was the same — but different! Perfect for when I didn't know what to read and felt like going on an adventure.

The Famous Five, Julian, Dick, Anne, George (Georgina) and Timmy the dog, are between 10 - 15 in age (if we don't count Timmy), Anne being the youngest and Julian being the oldest. The books have been updated — slightly — to reflect modern times. They have changed some of the currency (no more crowns or sovereigns, just pounds, shillings and pence) and the boys are now required to help with the housework, which was not a usual thing when the books were written. They also, briefly, changed some of the language to fit the current readership: Mother and Father to Mum and Dad, tinker to traveller.

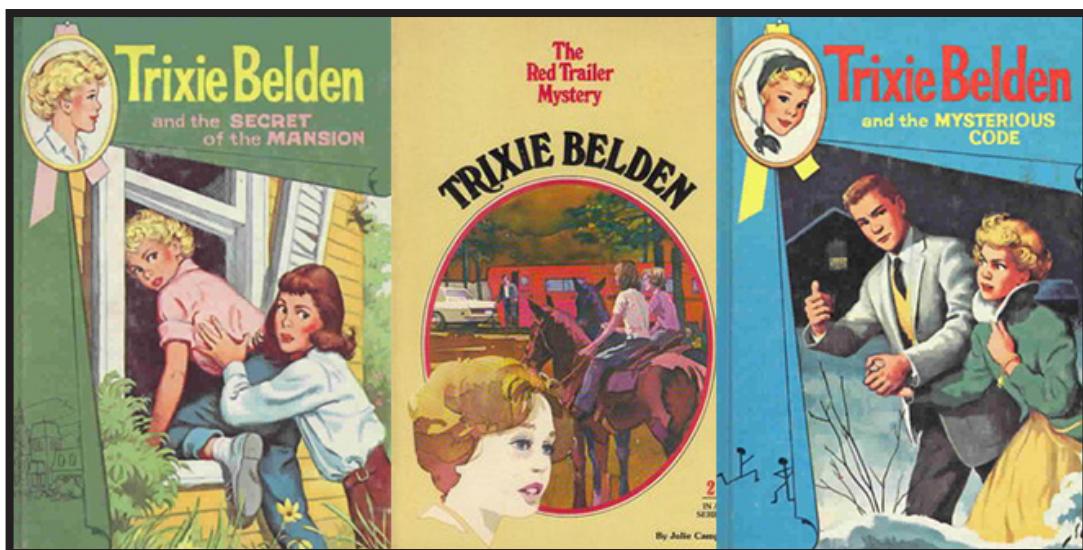
The *Nancy Drew* novels were written by a whole team of writers under the pseudonym of Carolyn Keene. They began in 1930 and are still going in some form now. I gave up in the early 2000s because Nancy just wasn't right with a mobile phone. Nancy's stories are for the slightly older readers. They can be a bit scarier and deal with more grown up mysteries than the Famous Five do. Nancy is joined (at least up until the point that I stopped reading) by George (Georgina) and Bess.

Interestingly, George is also the name of one of the Famous Five characters, who also shortens her name.

Whilst they haven't updated the old Nancy Drew novels, they have kept her almost the same age for 90 years. She is between 16-18 for most of the stories, she can drive (mainly a convertible in the books I read) and is no longer at school. Again, they follow a formula. The same, but different. Although they got a bit too different towards the end of my readership. There are several TV series and movies based on the books (the 1970s TV series is by far better than the current one on Netflix).



And now we come to *Trixie Belden*, the whole reason that Mum and I wrote Charlie Chaplin. The Trixie Belden novels fall somewhere between Nancy Drew and The Famous Five in terms of reading ages. Beatrix 'Trixie' Belden is 13 years old, but I think she has a birthday in one of the books. She has a rather large group of friends and family members who help out solving the mysteries that she finds for them. One thing that I like about Trixie is that she's normal! She has trouble with her homework (maths is the hardest for her), has to work for her pocket money (babysitting her youngest brother, tending the garden) and she gets in trouble when she does something silly or naughty. In some ways this makes the stories more believable.



Links to information about the books

- <https://www.enidblytonsociety.co.uk/famous-five.php>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/16/famous-five-go-back-to-original-language-after-update-flops>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Famous_Five_\(novel_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Famous_Five_(novel_series))
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy_Drew
- <https://theconversation.com/my-favourite-detective-trixie-belden-the-uncool-girl-sleuth-with-a-sensitive-moral-compass-149624>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trixie_Belden

Something from the illustrator...

The way that Mum and I worked on Charlie Chaplin was a bit different to some of our other stories. I wrote most of the story and she edited it (normally it's a bit more 50-50). However, Mum is **ALWAYS** the illustrator. What happens is generally a conversation like this:

Me: we need illustrations.

Mum: Sure! What do you want?

Me: I want this, this and this.

A few days later...

Mum: Here you go! What else do you need?

Me: Nothing. Well, maybe this and this. And a bit of that if you've got time.

A few more days later...

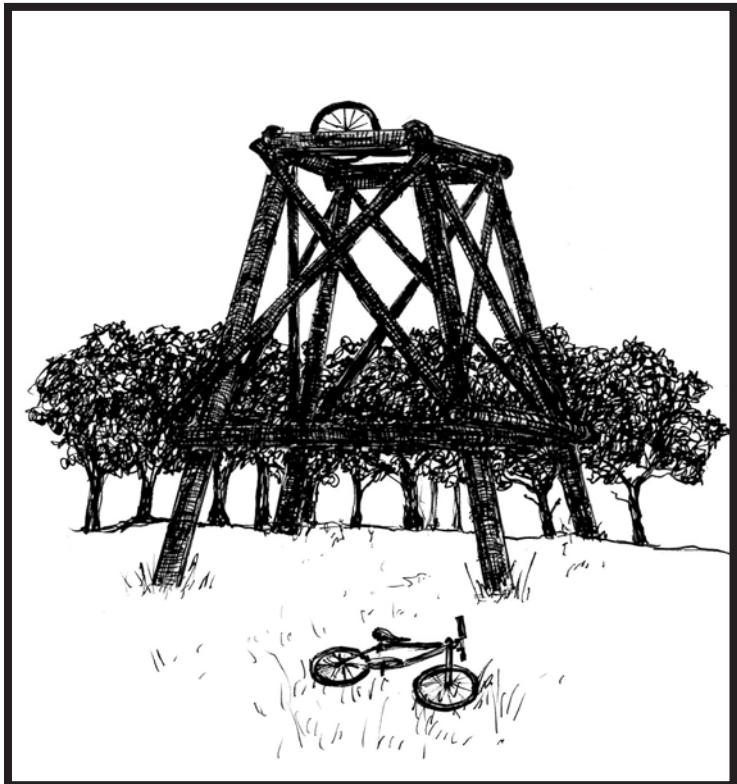
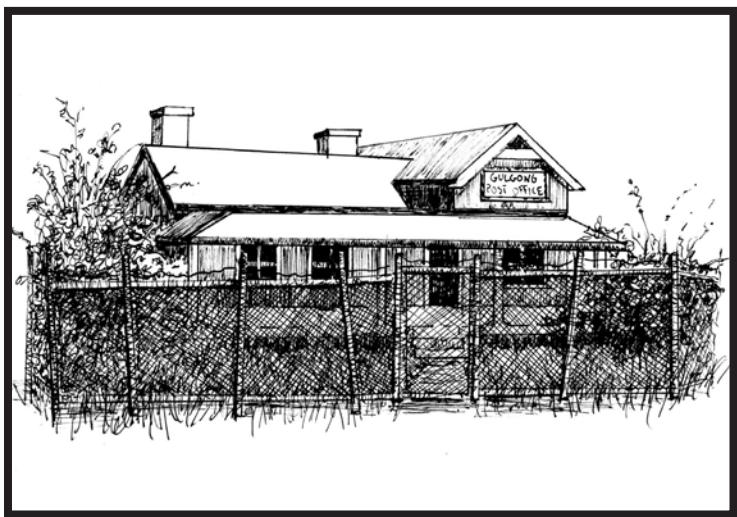
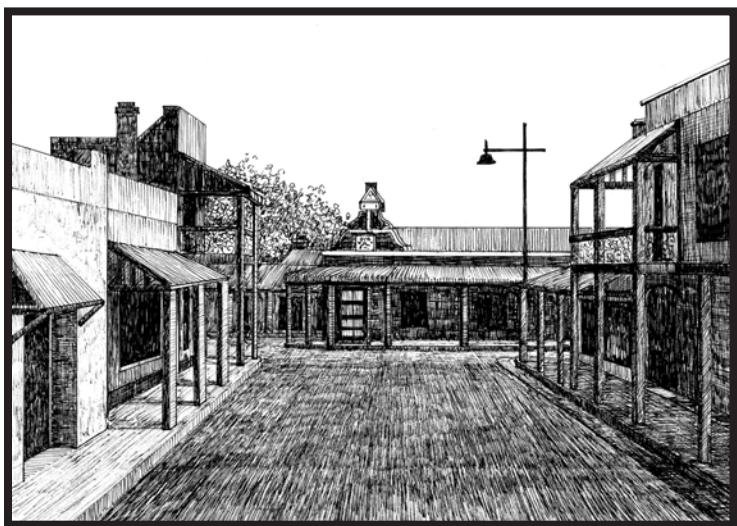
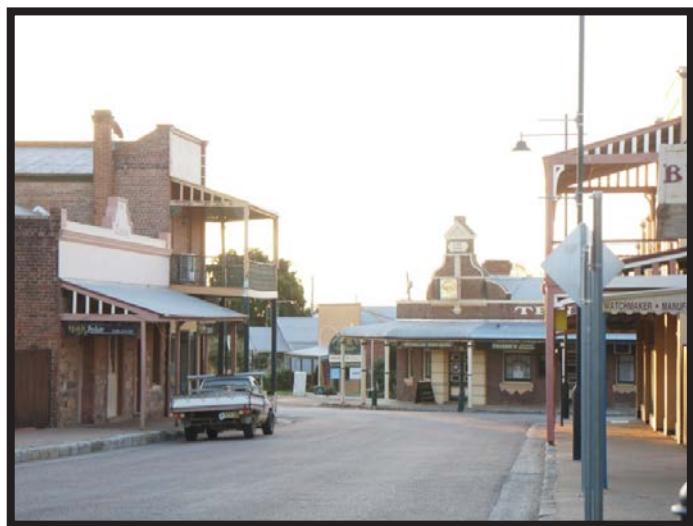
Mum: Done! Anything else?

Me: No, we're good now.

Because I had gone to Gulgong and taken a LOT of photos I was able to send Mum the photos of 'this, this and this'. We discussed the style that we wanted — nothing too cartoony or young and settled on her beautiful pen drawings. We decided against doing illustrations of Charlie and her friends because we wanted the reader to decide for themselves what they looked like.

The sheep were slightly harder. I decided at the last minute that we needed sheep running down a road, but I couldn't find any images that worked, so Mum had to come up with it on her own. And then we couldn't remember if the sheep had been released during the day or at night!





Post-reading discussion questions

1. Charlie doesn't want to move away from her childhood home, but eventually she leans to like Gulgong. Talk about why change is a good thing — even if it doesn't always feel good.
2. Nancy and Charlie move into an old post office with plans to turn it into a restaurant. Do you know of any other buildings that started as one thing, but turned into something else?
3. James has an after school job helping his grandad. Have you got a job? If you were to get one, what would you do? Work in the family business? Join a circus? Dream big. Discuss.
4. Hannah and her friends didn't like Ruby, but didn't really know her. Why do you think they acted like that?

Classroom research activities

1. The book is set mainly in the small town of Gulgong, which dates back to the gold-mining days. Look into how gold-mining worked and what the towns were like.
2. The museum plays a big role in the book. Make a list of some museums and see if they have online tours available. They don't have to be in Australia!
3. Trixie is the Prime Minister in this book. How many female prime ministers have we had? Who was the first female prime minister — in the world? When and where (country) was she elected?
4. Research some other mystery novels for children — and read them!

Classroom creative activities

1. Mr. Bailey was addicted to playing games on his phone. Come up with an idea for a new game to be played on a phone/computer/tablet. Give it a name and explain how it works.
2. We didn't illustrate any of the characters in the book. Feel free to have a crack at it for us! Check in the book for descriptions of them (hint, we sometimes give hair colour or eye colour, but we've left the rest up to your imagination).
3. There will be a book two — and Charlie's dad makes an appearance. Discuss or write down your ideas for where he's been and why.