

## Teacher Notes

*The slightly skewed life of Toby Chrysler*

by Paul Collins

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*It wasn't even five o'clock and Milo had already murdered Mrs Appleby. Twice.*

The opening sentences to *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler* raise many questions in the reader's mind. Write down some questions you thought of after reading the opening sentences.

Write some opening sentences of your own that raise questions and make readers want to read on.

# The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler

*Milo noticed his dad's eyes were red-rimmed, as if he'd gotten something in them, and his normally neat hair was greasy and unwashed.*

The author, Paul Collins, describes Milo's father's appearance in detail. This detail enables readers to gain an insight into how Milo's father is feeling. It is much more interesting to show (like the above extract) than to be told, such as:

Milo's dad had been crying and not looking after himself.

Write how a character experiencing the following emotions would feel:

Emotion	Description
Tired	
Excited	
Scared	
Elated	

<b>Nervous</b>	
<b>Shocked</b>	

Have a go at using descriptions like the ones you've written in your stories.

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*On an impulse, he looked in the wardrobe.*

*Some of her clothes were there and some weren't. Lined up neatly in a row at the bottom were several pairs of his mother's beloved shoes.*

Authors can let readers in on characters' traits and personalities by describing items from their life. What does Milo's description of his mother's wardrobe tell you about her? Is she neat or messy? What does she value?

For each character in the list below, describe how you think their wardrobe would look:

A teenager, who lives at home, likes riding a skateboard and sleeps a lot.

A businessperson who spends long days brokering deals over the phone and thinks looks are everything.

A sportsperson, who monitors the nutritional value of every meal he eats and trains five hours a day.

An elderly gentleman, who lives in a retirement village and spends his days playing chess.

A twenty-something female, addicted to on-line internet games and her computer.

Invent your own character and describe their whole bedroom, including the wardrobe.

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*Shoes came in pairs, like conjoined twins.*

In this statement Milo has used a simile. A simile is a figure of speech where one thing is compared to another. Here Milo is comparing shoes to conjoined twins. Come up with similes for the following items:

Ice cream

A sports car

The beach

Honey

Clouds

Ants

Money

Zoos

Choose your favourite simile and write an interesting paragraph that contains it.

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*He put the red sparkly shoe back in place and went downstairs to watch re-runs of his favourite television show, Third Rock From The Sun. He liked this show because the people in it were like him: not quite in sync with the rest of the world.*

In this section, Toby reveals information about himself by comparing himself to the characters in his favourite television show. Think of the other characters in the text. Write a few sentences where you compare the character to a television show/movie character. For example:

Mrs Appleby placed the empty pudding container on the bedside table and focussed back on the television and Return of the Jedi. Lying on the bed, she resembled Jabba the Hutt. Her chins had claimed the area where her neck should've been and flab oozed off the edges of her bed.

Mr Appleby:

Mr Chrysler:

Mrs Chrysler:



Ginger:

Mr Petersham:

Mrs Petersham:

Fluke:

Detective Barnes:

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*Fluke seemed to think Milo was on the right track. 'Always make the most of a mad situation.'*

Authors use different words, phrases and traits to differentiate between characters' dialogue. A character's way of expressing themselves reveals more than the words they are saying. A bikie, for example, may use colourful language while a child genius may use complicated words. Think about the character descriptions below and then write dialogue for them:

A scientist who has found an alternative to fossil fuels yet cannot describe it in simple language.

A maths teacher who does not understand the topic he is teaching.

A commentator, at the World Chess Championships, who's clearly not a fan of the sport.

A student completing a class presentation but she's distracted by her friend who's pulling faces.

A supermodel who compulsively drops famous names.

Make up your own characters and phrases.

# The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler

*Just as he thought. Dead as a doornail. Groaning, he jumped back down. No doubt about it. Mrs Appleby had suffered a cardiac arrest. Followed soon, Milo mused, by his arrest – unless he did something very quickly.*

*Fortunately he knew just what that was, as his fifth favourite show was ER.*

We know *Third Rock From The Sun* and *ER* are first and fifth on Milo's favourite TV show list. What other shows do you think would fill the list? Write them in the spaces provided and provide justifications for your responses.

1. Third Rock From The Sun

The characters are like Milo: not quite in sync with the rest of the world.

2. TV show: \_\_\_\_\_

Justification:

3. TV show: \_\_\_\_\_

Justification:

4. TV show: \_\_\_\_\_

Justification:

5. TV show: ER \_\_\_\_\_

Justification:

Select another character from the text and make a top 5 list for them. The list could be favourite TV shows or something different like foods, hobbies or songs.

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*As he'd dived out the window, Milo had had a brief glimpse of the startled face of Mr Appleby as he charged into his wife's room.*

*Milo's Mum often told him to put himself in other people's shoes (it had taken a year to work out what that meant) but always it was a mystery to him what other people were thinking.*

Some sayings and words take on an entirely different meaning if they are taken literally, as Milo seems to do. For the following sayings and words, write their intended meaning and then their literal meaning:

*Food for thought.*

Intended meaning:

Literal meaning:

*Act your age.*

Intended meaning:

Literal meaning:

*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*

Intended meaning:

Literal meaning:

*Couch potato.*

Intended meaning:

Literal meaning:

Write a short story about a person who gets into trouble by taking the literal meaning of sayings.

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*It was a short drive to the police station. Too short really. Milo would happily have taken a tour of the city; it would have given him time to think up some really good answers to the really good questions he knew the police were going to ask him.*

Milo is understandably nervous on the way to the police station. Imagine yourself in Milo's situation. Make a list of the questions you think the police might ask you.

Using your questions as a guide, write a new scene involving Milo being questioned by the police.



# The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler

*Milo's face fell. 'But what does it mean?' But even as he said it, he knew the answer. In fact, he could 'see' it. In his mind's eye, he re-ran the moment when her hand wove through the air... it was very clear to him now. Mrs Appleby had been air-writing, and as he watched the scene in his mind, he realised she had been writing numbers and letters.*

*3-7-4-7-2-6-5-1-4-4-5-8-2-2-E.*

Select a partner to work with. One of you needs to select a word from the text and write in the air. The other partner has two guesses to correctly guess the word.

Toby discovers the code Mrs Appleby was air-writing was map coordinated for a house in O'Grady Street. Use the internet or a map to find the map coordinates for the following locations in your town:

The Police Station:

The Supermarket:

The School:

The Post Office:

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*Standing in a cloud of eddying smoke was the biggest, meanest looking bloke Milo had ever seen. He had a huge bushy beard and long dank hair. Tiny crucifix earrings - Yes! He's a Christian! - hung from his ears and a chrome replica of a bent dog's bone pierced his nose. His arms were dark with tattoos and hair poked above the neckline of a grubby blue singlet.*

Reading this description, you can form a detailed picture of the character and therefore the situation that confronted Milo. Being able to picture the characters makes reading a text more enjoyable as you can imagine the scenes in your head.

Select an interesting photo of a person from a newspaper or magazine. Write a detailed paragraph describing their appearance:

Ask someone to read your descriptive paragraph. After they have read your passage, show them the photo. Is the picture they formed in their mind similar to the real photo?

# The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler

*'So this is where your mother lives.'*

*Was that a question or a statement? What a pity you couldn't see question and exclamation marks when people spoke.*

Milo wishes you could see question and exclamation marks when people were talking. How good are you at recognising where punctuation belongs? The following extracts have been written with no punctuation. Re-write them correctly.

wheres my dad she demanded

this was so out there and so déjà vu ish that for a moment milos mind went completely blank.

hello earth to milo

milo came back to himself you were spying on me he said

i was being discreet said the girl well don;t stand there looking like youre actually thinking

milo said your father isnt here neither is mine

milo was so deep in thought when he arrived home he failed to see someone hiding in the bushes

pssst

wah he yelped jumping back and falling on his behind

his eyes widened as ginger appeared quiet do you want the whole neighbourhood to know im here

milo picked himself up what are you doing in there im supposed to have done horrible things to you

get a grip on yourself toby ginger said crossly

but what were you doing in there

theres three pieces missing you know

ginger stared up at him then at the jigsaw

how could you possibly know that

milo looked at the pieces as if he had made a mistake

you counted them just by looking at them

he shrugged again couldnt everybody count things just by looking at them

unsure what to say he said well goodnight

goodnight toby its not even dark yet youll be coming back here throughout the night wont  
you

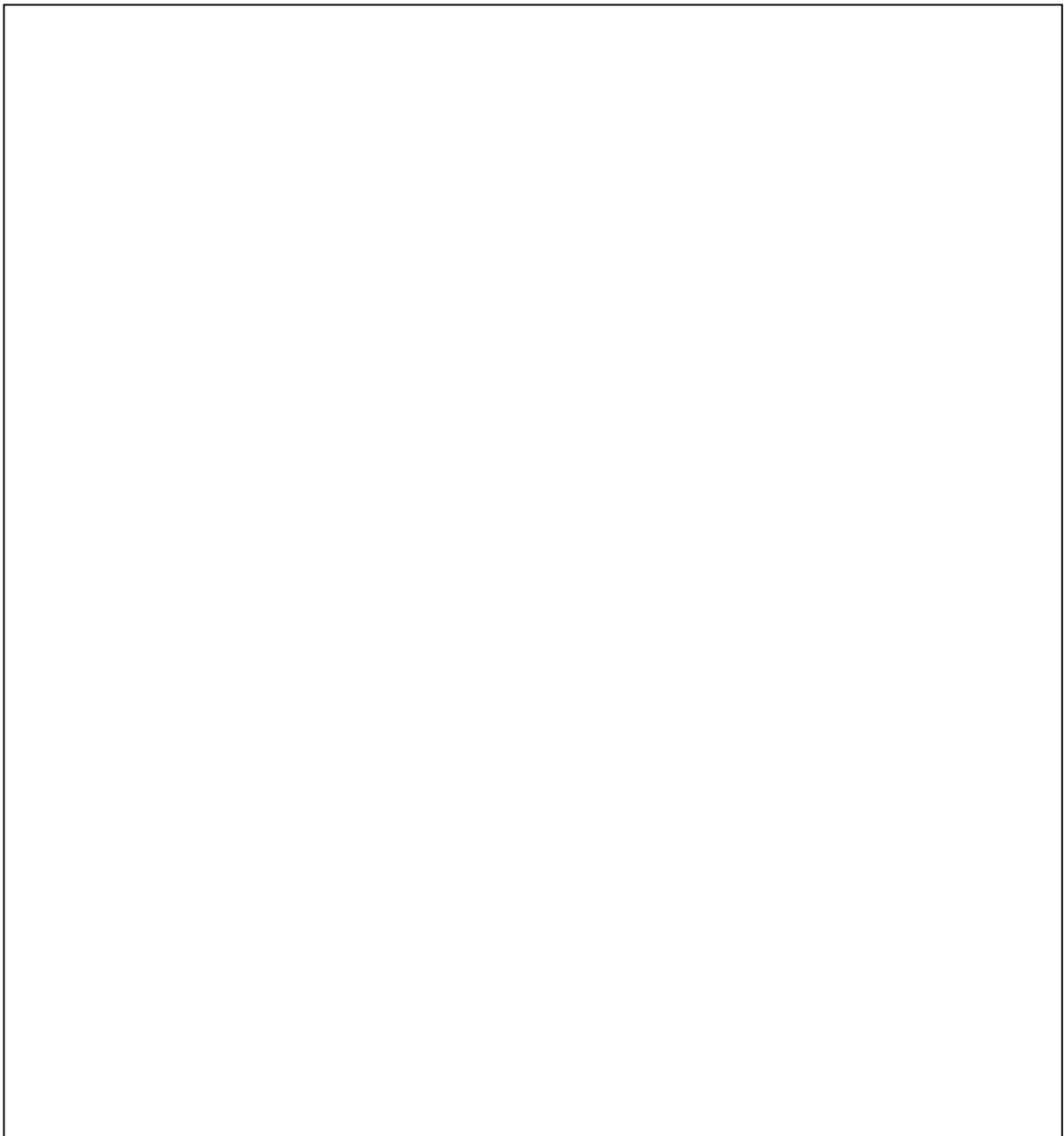
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*'I did,' said Milo simply. 'I killed a woman. Twice. But I think if we both did it, it might work. It'd double our chances.'*

*Ginger started pacing. 'Let's put that on the backburner for now, okay?' What else have you tried, aside from killing the neighbours?'*

*'I put up some posters,' said Milo.*

Using everything you know about Milo, design a reconstruction of the poster he made to ask his mother to return.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to design a reconstruction of the poster mentioned in the text. The box is currently blank.

# *The Slightly Skewed Life of Toby Chrysler*

*Milo gulped, his eyes blurring, as he held up the front page of the newspaper. The headline read:*

## **COUPLE KILLED IN MOTORBIKE ACCIDENT**

*Milo stared at the magistrate, wondering if he was right. Was he dangerous? Milo had recognised several neighbours on the way to the courtroom, all with pursed lips and flinty eyes that seemed to say, 'Always knew he was bad' and, 'Oh, yes, he was never what you'd call normal'.*

*He tried to imagine the headlines:*

## **YOUNG HANNIBAL LECTER STRIKES IN PEACEFUL NEIGHBOURHOOD!**

Imagine you are a newspaper reporter and you are covering the events that occur throughout the text. Choose five of the most interesting events and write newspaper headlines for them that are short, summarise the event and make readers want to read the full article.

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*'There's three pieces missing, you know?'*

*Ginger stared up at him, then at the jigsaw.*

*'How could you possibly know that?'*

*Milo looked at the pieces as if he had made a mistake.*

*'You counted them just by looking at them?'*

*He shrugged again. Couldn't everybody count things just by looking at them?*

Toby possesses an amazing skill of counting things just by looking at them. Select something like a jigsaw, a tin of counters, tub of cards or something similar. Estimate how many of the item there are. Now, count how many there actually are. How close were you?

Toby possesses an extraordinary skill that no one else seems to know about. Have a look around your classroom. Have a chat to several classmates and list any interesting skills they possess (the skills don't have to be as amazing as Milo's).

Daniel Tammet is a high-functioning autistic savant. Research his amazing abilities and write a paragraph describing them.

Daniel Tammet recalled the digits of pi to an incredible 22, 514 places. Look up pi and spend ten minutes memorising the digits. How many digits can you recall, in order, after ten minutes?



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*Halfway to the fridge he passed an open door. Through it he could see a staircase leading up into shadow. He had a powerful urge to race upstairs and check all the bedrooms and closets, especially for solitary red shoes, the dancing kind.*

*But he didn't. He knew he was on a mission and people on a mission had to 'stay on target,' like Luke Skywalker near the end of the movie when he had to blow the Death Star to smithereens.*

In this extract, Milo compares his situation to that of Luke Skywalker. Have you had moments in your life that could be compared to scenes from a movie? List five events from your life and a section from a movie that you could compare it to.