

WOW! What a great read. These short stories are a wonderful way to fuel the imagination of your students. They certainly do 'spin your head' and 'twist your brain'. Six quirky stories that make the impossible seem possible and some that just make you think that that could really happen. Each short story is a length that makes it a suitable for reading out loud to your class. Year 5–7 students would appreciate the subject matter of these stories. Time machines, magic fish and kids who can fly – all springboards for interesting discussions and starting points for creative writing activities or maybe just for their entertainment value. The first story is about a time machine – every child's dream. Imagine being able to re-sit exams to gain better marks. Or being able to know what happens so you can avoid being the butt of everyone's jokes. It doesn't always go to plan though and sometimes changing one thing that has happened has a domino effect and other things change as well. Undoing what has been done may be out of the question. A highly recommended book.

**Kathy Hotz, Hercules Road State School, QLD**

This book is a collection of six short stories that would appeal to middle to upper primary children. The cover is eye-catching with a dog wearing crazy glasses in a brightly coloured vortex. Each story opens with a normal kid in a normal situation: a boy looking forward to his birthday; a son going shopping for bread rolls with dad; selling a watch to buy a game console or a girl concerned about a tiny lump on her arm. However in each story something bordering on science fiction develops. The birthday present is a time machine and Sam must learn to use time-travel for good not selfish purposes. Danny discovers astral travel but has a spooky feeling someone or something is following him. Brooke thinks a mosquito has bitten her but the tiny lump grows into a third arm. The central character in each story has a dilemma to consider or a problem to solve.

There is a moral or message in each story that will get the readers thinking: 'What would I do in this situation?' Or the stories could be used as discussion starters in the classroom: How do I deal with fears? Do we hide or accept people who are different? Communication with family members is better than bottling things up!

The narrative is full of action and snappy dialogue, making this book a real page-turner. Readers will enjoy the clever mix of reality, the hint of science and a good dose of fantasy.

**Nova Gibson, Massey Primary School, New Zealand**

Extra body parts...time travel...vengeful ghosts...living food. Not since getting hooked on the short stories of Roald Dahl years ago have I again come across narratives which are, on one level, very entertaining and on another profoundly disturbing...not until I opened up *Head Spinners*. Each of the six short stories in this excellent book by Thalia Kalkipsakis was thoroughly enjoyable, yet left me thinking that these, in most cases, could potentially be based (very) loosely on some level of fact – which was scary. Nevertheless, it was also food for thought as I was left pondering about the ethics behind plastic surgery, the pitfalls of not being grateful for gifts you receive and the emotional stress that death of a loved one can place on people.

I am reluctant to go into any detail about these well-constructed stories, because they do truly leave you guessing right up to the last paragraph and the resolutions (to frequently multiple complications) will surprise you. Anything I say will, inevitably, take some of this delicious anticipation away from you and may prevent your brain from being 'twisted' as advertised on the front cover. In terms of sharing these stories with a class...I shouldn't be doing this with anyone younger than a very mature Year 5 group. These are not stories which could be read as light entertainment only for our younger students; they deserve to be analysed and pulled

apart...and will lead into brilliant and deep discussion about ethics and morals, as well as some more light-hearted issues such as the possibility of time travel and uses of E.S.P. I can also see myself using some of the stories as stimulus for writing, drama, art or even technology. At the very least ... it is a worthwhile 'downtime read' for any stressed and overworked teacher.

**Kellie Nissen, ACT**

Loved this book. So entertaining. The stories are quirky and engaging from the very beginning. They are easy to read and the picture of the dog on the front cover is a real attention grabber. Within the stories, ordinary children are depicted in extraordinary situations that are mind boggling and surprising. Upper primary classes would love these stories. Their imagination is given the freedom to run wild as children explore the possibilities of the themes in these stories, and the discussion generated is lively and lots of fun. These stories can be used in many ways in the classroom. They are great for exploring feelings, 'what if' situations, ethical concerns and problem solving. Creative writing, research skills and technology can also be incorporated very easily.

**Daisy Antoniou, Gardenvale, VIC**

Subtitled 'Six stories to twist your brain', this book certainly lives up to its claim. Whether it's time machines, or extra limbs; deceased Greek grandmas or out of body experiences, be ready to expect the unexpected. Being a Paul Jennings reader and having enjoyed his quirky storytelling for a number of years, it's wonderful to find another writer following in his footsteps. These six short stories took me on a mystery tour of reading pleasure. I read them in bed, which was probably a mistake, as I was kept engaged long after the end of each story. A really appealing book for readers who struggle with long chapters, I will be recommending this book to our middle primary and lower secondary students who are not keen on densely written text. Cleverly, the author has created a book that would appeal to boys and girls. I also found myself wondering what it would be like to write my own endings to some of these stories – perhaps an opportunity for a crazy creative writing exercise?

**Debbie Williams, Mountain District Christian School, VIC**

*Head Spinners* by Thalia Kalkipsakis is advertised as 'Six stories to twist your brain' and I found it fascinatingly different. In it are stories that encourage learning and appreciation of difference. The book is a collection of stories about the choices people make that can influence their lives. One looks at coping with grief, another with dealing with fears, yet others are about possibilities (and family love). The overall message seems to be that we must make our own choices and decisions, with an underlying reiteration that we are not alone and unsupported. Each story focuses on a young person who learns something about themselves and life in ways that make a reader smile, laugh, tingle and dream. The author has captured vignettes of youthful living and youthful angst that keep readers involved from beginning to end. She has created a collection of stories that draw young readers into interesting situations that always contain a twist based on personal fears, experiences and interactions. My personal favourites are to do with children who are physically 'abnormal' and have operations that remove their abnormalities at the expense of their sense of self, and also the boy who learns to cook with the assistance of a dead relative. Each story explores personal achievement and growth as a stronger individual. In a way I hope young people don't read this review because the six stories open up a world of ideas and possibilities that they should consider without feeling they are lessons in life being aimed at them. They are stories for enjoying whether

you are younger or older! And they are stories for considering and remembering later!  
**Colleen Thistleton, Wanniasa Hills Primary School, ACT**