

Dragon Knight: Joust!

Text by Kyle Mewburn

Illustrations by Donovan Bixley

• Reading • Writing • Visual Literacy



About the Book

Dragon Knight: Joust! is the fifth title in a hilarious series for young readers. The book's adventurous hero, Merek, is a shape-shifting dragon disguised as an ordinary boy. At the start of this story, Merek is in his dragon form and is trapped in a cave by eager dragon hunters. Before readers can find out what happens next, the book goes back in time to explain how this dramatic situation arose. Merek and his Knight School classmates had begun the day with a jousting lesson from the terribly keen and very short Sir Tain. After choosing helmets bearing many dents and sometimes the remains of previous owners, the students engaged in a jousting competition. The final two students in the competition were the nasty Percy and Merek's best friend Brin (who is really Breena, a girl in disguise). Due to cheating rather than talent, Percy beats Brin in the final round. His prize is to go dragon hunting with Sir Tain. After school, Merek meets Breena and they make jokes about dragon hunting. Merek changes into a dragon to tease her, at which point he is spotted and driven into the cave. Fortunately, Breena speeds off to get Merek's father, who returns as an enormous fire-breathing dragon, so terrifying that all but Sir Tain and Percy rush off and Merek can escape.

About the Author and Illustrator

Kyle Mewburn has had more than 40 children's books published in nine countries. His titles include *Old Hu-Hu* (winner of the 2010 New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year award), *Kiss! Kiss! Yuck! Yuck!* (Best Picture Book and Children's Choice at the 2008 NZ Post Book Awards) and *Melu* (Children's Choice at the 2013 NZ Post Book Awards). He is also the author of the popular series *Dinosaur Rescue*, his first collaboration with Donovan Bixley. Originally from Brisbane, Kyle now lives with his wife in Central Otago.

Donovan Bixley is a talented artist with a wide range of styles. His work brings another dimension to Mewburn's text, often adding additional humour to enhance the storyline. Donovan is the only artist to have ever had three books simultaneously shortlisted for the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults (in 2015), with Scholastic titles *Dragon Knight: Fire!*, *Little Red Riding Hood ... Not Quite*, and his debut comic book/novel as an author and illustrator *Monkey Boy*, which took out the top prize for junior fiction. Donovan lives with his wife and family in Taupo.

Writing Style

The *Dragon Knight* series comprises hilarious junior novels that will appeal to young boys (and plenty of young girls) in the 7-to-10 age group. Large dollops of disgusting details and toilet humour will make the most reluctant reader eager to turn the page. These 96-page novels based on fact and fantasy are set in the Middle Ages. They are broken into chapters, and every two-page spread is brought alive with action-packed illustrations. There are also maps, diagrams and humour-filled 'fact' boxes that allow young readers to learn about many aspects of non-fiction text in a fun way. Like the other titles, *Joust!* begins at the most dramatic part of the story (Merek has been cornered in a cave by dragon hunters), and then goes back in time to explain how the situation developed. It is written in the past tense with short, highly descriptive sentences that bring the scenes to life.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover. What is a joust? Can you tell from the picture?
- Who do you think is the main character? Why? Do you think he looks like he will win the joust? Why?
- Look at the cartoon on page 3. What is unusual about one of the horses?
- Look at the map. How many jokes can you find in the names of the places? (pp.4–5)
- Which characters do you think will be good and which do you think will be evil? Why? (pp.6–7)
- Can you find the joke in Sir Tain's name? (p.7)
- What do you think has happened to Merek? How do you think he will get out of this predicament? (pp.9–13)
- How many of his parents' simple rules has Merek broken? Do you think he did it on purpose? Why? (pp.9–10)
- Look at the diagram. Which bits of text do you think provide real information and which bits are jokes? Would you want to read it if the jokes were not there? (pp.14–15)
- This chapter heading could have more than one meaning. What meanings could it have? (p.16)
- Where is the entrance to the stables? Use the numbered key to find it. (pp.18–19)
- What is a serf? Why do you think Lord Crumble treats his horses better than his serfs? (pp.20–21)
- Parsons seems to love joking about. What trick does he play on the trainee knights? (p.22)
- What do you think is going on with Brin? (p.27)
- Why is Percy fuming? What mistake has he made? (p.31)
- Can work out the double meaning for 'a head', or 'ahead'? (p.31)
- What are the three main reasons knights avoid beaches? Why are the knights' names funny? (pp.32–33)
- What is a lance? Use a dictionary if you are not sure. Why do you think jousting lances are different from battle lances? (p.34)
- Does Sir Tain look like you expected? Why? Do you think he has good eyesight? Why? (pp.36–37)
- Why do you think Sir Tain has such a big horse? (p.38)
- How does Sir Tain get onto his horse? (pp.40–41)
- Why wouldn't the apprentice knights meet Sir Tain's gaze? (p.42)
- What does the author mean when he says the groom's face was a death mask? Is this a simile or a metaphor? Why? (p.43)
- Do you think Sir Tain's legends are true, false or exaggerations? Why? (pp.44–45)
- How do you think the local people feel about Sir Tain given that these legends are probably all they know? (pp.44–45)
- Can you find three meanings for the word 'lance' on these pages? (the weapon, the gravedigger's name, to cut open a boil with a sharp tool so the pus flows out) (pp.46–47)
- Now that you know about jousting, would you want to try it? Why? (pp.46–47)
- How is the groom feeling? Why does he feel this way? What do you think will happen next? (pp.48–49)
- Was your prediction about what would happen next correct? (pp.50–51)
- What effect do the words on the illustrations have? Have you seen words on pictures before? Where? (pp.50–51)
- What does Sir Tain mean by: 'a joust is not done until your opponent cedes'? (p.52)
- Whose idea was it to use training lances and donkeys? Why doesn't Sir Tain admit that he didn't think of it? (p.53)
- Can you find an illustration to match each of the five ways that the jousts generally ended? (pp.54–56)
- Merek was in three jousts. Who did he beat and who did he lose to? (pp.56–57)
- Why does Sir Tain tell Parsons he needs his ears cleaned out? (pp.58–59)
- Who did Brin chose as her squire? (p.60)
- What event caused Brin to feel anxious? (p.60)
- Why can Merek understand how Brin feels? (pp.60–62)
- How do you think Merek plans to help Brin? (pp.62–63)
- What went wrong with the plan? What misunderstanding has Brin had? (pp.64–65)
- What is the pun, or double meaning, in the chapter heading? (p.66)
- Who do you think will win the joust? Why? (pp.68–69)
- What does Percy plan to do in round two? Why didn't it occur to Brin that he would plan that? (p.71)
- Much of the story is told from Merek's point of view, but not this part. Whose point of view is it? (p.72)
- What happened in round two? Was the horse hit? What did Brin do to save the situation? (p.72)
- Who won round two? How does Brin feel about it? (p.74)
- The first chapter of the book was a flash forward. Now you have read this much, what do you think will happen next to result in Merek being trapped in a cave? (p.74)



- Why is Merek embarrassed when he meets Breena in the woods? Why is Breena disgusted? (p.75)
- In what ways does Breena rebel from the expectations for girls in her world? (p.76)
- Why does Merek change into a dragon? Was this a wise move? Why? (pp.78–79)
- What are scythes? What are they meant to be used for? What does Merek think these ones will be used for? (p.80)
- Why can't Merek fly off or change back into a boy? (pp.80–81)
- Why do you think Breena disappears back into the forest? (p.83)
- Why is the cave filling with smoke? (pp.84–85)
- What do you think will happen next? (p.85)
- Were you right? How do you think Merek's dad knew where Merek was? (pp.86–87)
- Is Sir Tain brave or cowardly? Do you think this has anything to do with the legends about him? (p.89)
- Why was it risky to change back into a boy in the cloud of smoke? (p.90)
- Do you think Percy's prize for winning the jousting competition was a good one? Why? (p.95)
- Why were Breena and Merek laughing? (p.96)
- Did you like the ending? Why? (p.96)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: SIR TAIN'S UNCERTAIN LEGENDS

Reread the legends about Sir Tain on pages 44 and 45. Discuss how legends can evolve over time: what starts out as a true story is exaggerated so much over the years that it becomes barely recognisable. Talk about how Sir Tain's exploits might have become exaggerated. Decide what actual event might have led to each of the legends described.

Either as a class, in groups, or individually, allow students to plan and draft a new legend for Sir Tain. They can then share their drafts with one another and make any changes that would improve them. After that, they can write the final text and present it to the class. The class members can guess what actual event might have led to each legend.

ACTIVITY 2: DON'T FORGET CHAPTER HEADINGS

Readers sometimes ignore chapter headings in their eagerness to find out what happens next. However, it is a good practice to read them as they often provide information that can improve comprehension.

To encourage your student to notice chapter headings, go through the first few chapter headings in *Joust!* together, discussing their meanings and, in some cases, their puns. Then divide the students into small groups to discuss the remaining headings. When they have finished, bring the groups back together and have a class discussion about their ideas.

ACTIVITY 3: WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Display pages 28 and 29 in a form that all students can see and read the text. Focus their attention on the sentence: *The clang of clashing helmets and curses bounced off the cavern walls like bamboozled bats.* Ask them to identify the simile, and then discuss how it makes the sentence both easier to understand and funnier.

Then ask the students to find three more similes on this spread. When they have found them, ask the students to write replacement similes that the author could have used instead, e.g. *The clang of clashing helmets and curses bounced off the cavern walls like crazy cats.* Some students might find this easier working in pairs.

When they have finished, allow the students to share their sentences and laugh at the varied examples.

ACTIVITY 4: WHAT'S IT SOUND LIKE?

Repeat activity 3, but this time focus on examples of onomatopoeia on pages 28 and 29. Again display pages 28 and 29 and focus the students' attention on the sentence: *The clang of clashing helmets and curses bounced off the cavern walls like bamboozled bats.* This time help them to see that both 'clang' and 'clashing' create atmosphere because they sound like their meanings.

Divide the students into groups or pairs and ask them to identify other examples of onomatopoeia on this spread (e.g. muffled, spluttered, snort, snatched).

ACTIVITY 5: DRAW A DIAGRAM

Use the diagram on page 15 to introduce students to basic diagrams with labels and leader lines. Discuss how a 'picture speaks a thousand words' (i.e. written words describing each piece of armour would take much longer to read and may not be as easy to understand as the diagram).

Model creating a similar diagram with a 'teacher's outfit'. For example, you could have such things as 'strong shoes for running around all day', 'a large shoulder bag for carrying home piles of homework', etc. Then allow the students to create diagrams of their own uniform. It could be their school uniform, a sports uniform, a scout uniform or something similar.

