

# First Dog on the Moon: Revenge of the Toxic Space Potato

Stripped of their powers and stranded on Mars, Letitia, Binky and Worried Norman – the Indefatigable EnviroTeens – must stop the sinister Baron Kartuffelpoffen from siphoning all of Earth's water. Alongside their unusual sidekicks, Stuart the wobbegong and Beverly the sourdough starter, they navigate a galaxy of absurd villains, unexpected allies, and interstellar challenges.

Filled with sharp and topical humor, this environmental satire from the award-winning Guardian Australia cartoonist combines adventure, social commentary, and heart in a way that will resonate with readers young and old.

## SATIRE, HUMOUR AND MEANING

*Revenge of the Toxic Space Potato* is funny, ridiculous... and making serious points. Why use humour to talk about serious issues like climate change or politics? What can satire do that news or nonfiction can't? When does humour make a message clearer? When might it make it confusing?

Students identify one joke, one absurd character, and one serious message from the book. Photocopy those pages so they can be annotated, i.e. by drawing arrows showing how the humour connects to the message.

## ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES IN SPACE

The EnviroTeens battle villains who want to steal Earth's water. What real environmental issues are exaggerated in the story? Why might the author choose Mars or space as the setting for an environmental story? What emotions (fear, hope, anger, motivation) does the story aim to create?

Students should design a one-page issue profile for a current environmental problem referenced or echoed in the book (e.g. water use, species extinction, pollution, climate change). The profile should briefly explain:

- what the issue is;
- who is affected;
- and how satire could draw attention to it.

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD POLITICAL CARTOON?

What is the difference between being funny and being cruel? Do political cartoons "punch up" or "punch down"? Why does that matter? Should cartoons have limits? Who decides where the line is? Have you ever seen a cartoon that changed your mind about something?

Discuss these questions as a whole class, and use some examples of well-known political cartoons. Teachers should record responses under three headings:

- "Makes us think"
- "Goes too far?"
- "Still not sure"

Emphasise respectful dialogue and that different students may respond differently.

## USING COMICS FOR SOCIAL COMMENTARY

First Dog on the Moon uses comics to respond to news, politics and social issues. What issues do cartoons often comment on (elections, climate, health, identity, rights)? How do images, labels and symbols help the cartoon make its point?

Students create a rough draft cartoon (stick figures welcome!) about an issue that matters to them at school or in society. They must include:

- one visual symbol;
- one labelled element;
- and one line of dialogue or caption.

Focus is on message, not artistic skill.

## ANALYSING A FIRST DOG ON THE MOON CARTOON

Teachers choose a First Dog on the Moon cartoon from The Guardian or the First Dog website, selecting one appropriate for the class maturity level.

(Note: many cartoons are deliberately provocative, so please choose based on your cohort.)

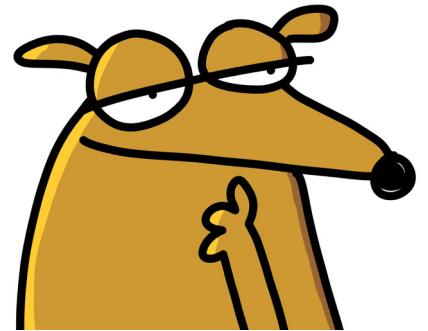
Discussion questions:

- What issue is this cartoon responding to?
- Who or what is being satirised?
- What is the cartoon asking us to think about differently?
- Which visual or verbal features make the point clearest?

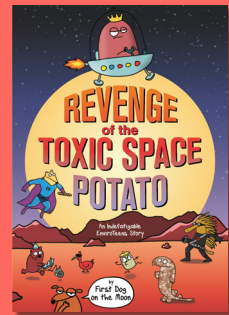
Students should then annotate the cartoon by marking any or all of the following:

- key symbols
- where their eye is drawn first
- the central message in one sentence

Finally, students write a short paragraph on whether they agree or disagree with the message and why.



## First Dog on the Moon



*Revenge of the Toxic Space Potato* is available at Readings.

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS (YEAR 7-10)

Learning areas: English, Humanities/Civics and Citizenship, The Arts/Visual Arts, Science

Capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Capability

Foundational Skills: Literacy

Cross-curriculum Priorities: Sustainability