

THE AMAZING SPENCER GRAY

DEB FITZPATRICK

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YEAR LEVEL: Y4–8

ABOUT THE BOOK

Spencer Gray is twelve – finally old enough to join Dad in his glider. His mates are going to be so jealous! Going up is awesome – but when disaster strikes, Spencer will need to be nothing short of amazing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deb Fitzpatrick is the author of more than ten books. Her novels have received awards in Australia, been published in the US, and optioned for film. Deb has a Master of Arts from UWA, loves using stories from real life in her writing, and regularly teaches creative writing to people of all ages. In her early writing days, Deb did all manner of jobs to fund her writing, including making bad coffee, cleaning houses, supervising university exams, and helping kids cross the road safely as a crosswalk attendant, or 'lollipop lady'. She lived for several years in the cloud forest of Costa Rica and still pretends to speak some Spanish. Deb loves bushwalking and shares her life with a lovely family and their kelpie, who is absolutely not a failed sheepdog.

THEMES

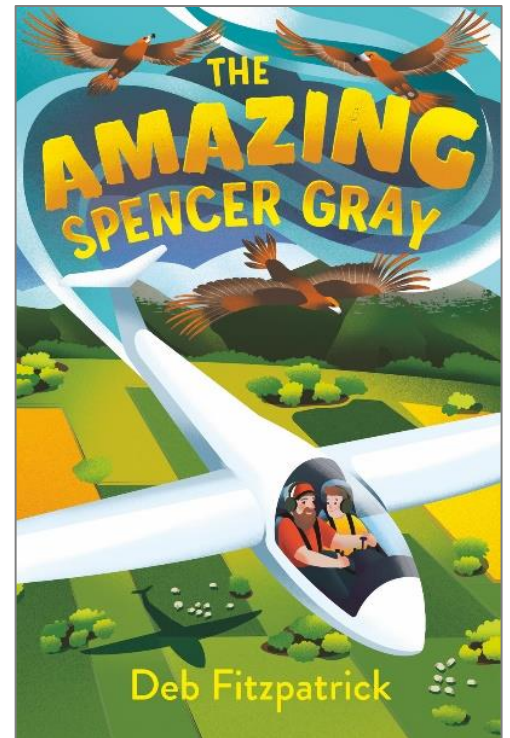
- Adventure
- Family and home
- School

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y4–8 English
- Y4–8 Humanities and Social Sciences

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: debfitzpatrick.com.au



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Before Reading

1. What do you think are the ten most important items to have in a survival situation? Work in pairs or small groups to compose a list that you all agree on. Share your list with the rest of the class. What are the most common items that are listed? Are there any that everyone believes are 'must haves'?
2. Who are some survivors that you know of? How did they survive in harsh, unforgiving conditions? Choose one person's story and conduct research into their experience. You might like to use the following table:

Survivor's name	
What adventure/achievement were they trying to accomplish?	
What obstacles did they encounter?	
How were they rescued?	
What were the key elements to their survival?	
What can we learn from their story?	

3. This novel focuses on a family who moves to the (fictitious) town of Skippers Cove, in the South-West of Western Australia. What is a 'sea change' or 'green change'? Why do you think more and more people are doing this?

During Reading

1. Read the prologue to the novel. What do we learn about Spencer Gray through this passage? What qualities does he possess? Use evidence to support your answer.
2. The prologue does not actually specify the activity that Spencer is doing, yet it is clear that he is running and trying to endure the exhaustion he feels in doing so. Write descriptively about another activity that you enjoy, without naming it. Think about using similar techniques to the author in achieving this, for example:
 - a. descriptive language
 - b. sentence length
 - c. inner thoughts
 - d. repetition
3. In this novel, there are a number of occasions where the Australian idiom is used. What is your understanding of the expressions below? Share with the class to come to a common understanding of what they mean. Add any others you come across in the book.

Expression	Meaning
Don't mention the war (p. 5)	
She's on deck with it (p. 11)	
He's a turkey (p. 20)	
You're a chip off the old block (p. 37)	
Chunder rides (p. 48)	
Bugger (p. 74)	
Bush-bash (p. 86)	

4. Jargon is the terminology used in particular environments or activities. In the novel, the jargon of skateboarding and gliding are used in particular. As you read, keep a list of these words and look up the meaning of any you are unsure of.

Skateboarding term	Meaning	Gliding term	Meaning
e.g. Board/deck		e.g. fuselage	

5. Read Chapters 1 and 2. What do the three boys value in life? What are their attitudes towards:
- family
 - skateboarding
 - library books
 - friends
6. Chapter 4 introduces us to Spencer's mum, dad and sister, Pippa. Using the headings of Speech, Actions, Appearance, and Reactions of Others, record what we learn about each of these characters.
7. In Chapter 7 the Gray family tell each other about their first individual day in Skippers Cove, using their family tradition of 'the talking stick'. Write descriptively about your first time doing something – perhaps your first day at a new school, the first time you tried a new sport or activity, or the first time you met a friend or family member.
8. **'Between the loud *chank chank* of plates, Spencer was sure he could hear her mumbling something about 'the bloody Drifter' (p. 30).** What are the positive and negative aspects of the *Drifter*? How do each of the characters see the glider? Is there any aspect of it that they all agree on?
9. **'Mum was silent all the way down after that, but her silence spoke her thoughts loud and clear' (p. 31).** What does the author mean by this? What is the name of the technique whereby non-human objects are given human qualities? Do you think it is an effective descriptive technique to use? Explain your answer.
10. In Chapter 12, Spencer relates to us 'the Computer Rules' that his mum and dad enforce. Do you have similar rules in your household, either for computer use or something else such as the television? What are the rules your parents have made? Why do you think rules like this exist?
11. **'We're going for hot chocolate and gingerbread men at Indie's,' Pips said happily. 'Aww, I love it there!' (p. 61)** Why is Suzie taking Pippa on an outing to the cafe?
12. In Chapters 14 and 15 there are a number of references to the clouds, each with different meanings. What do the clouds in the examples below symbolise? Why do you think the author has made so many references to clouds?

Quote	Connotations of clouds in this example
Dad adjusted his sunnies. Even though there were clouds about, the glare in the cockpit was harsh. (p. 42)	<i>In this example, the clouds have a literal meaning. However, they might also point us to negative experiences to come.</i>
'Sorry mate, I didn't want to upset you, but I just thought I should explain why a cloud passed over Reg back there.' (p. 43)	
It was a blue spring day with a cottonwool cloudbank in the distance. (p. 40)	
'Those clouds'll be beautiful from up high, Spence.' (p. 41)	

13. Chapter 17 tells us of the glider crash. How have language, sentence structure, and inner thoughts been used to increase the tension in this chapter?

14. **'Cool air and dirt ? and light! – rushed across Spencer's face. It was still the afternoon, not night!'** (p. 49) Why do you think Spencer was so pleased to see that it was still afternoon? What feelings and connections with the night do we make?
15. Chapter 21 makes a dramatic shift from the previous chapters, where we have been following the frightening experience of Spencer and his dad, to the relative calm and worry-free afternoon Suzie and Pippa are having. Why do you think the author has done this? How does this chapter show the reader that time has passed since the Gray family moved to the town and that they are now feeling at home there?
16. In Chapter 22 Spencer makes a list of things that are rushing through his mind, ending with **'Suck leaves. Eat crickets. Cook spiders. Aaaaargh!!!!'** (p. 57) How has the author used language devices to increase the tension in this passage? Does making the list help Spencer to feel better about his situation? How can you tell?
17. **'But the silence was long and cold. He heard a noise outside and turned around. It was raining. The sky was the colour of a gun'** (p. 61). When the environment or objects are connected to the mood of a character it is known as a pathetic fallacy. In this case, Spencer's misery seems to be connected to the silence, rain and the colour of the sky. How might a rainy day be seen when a character is happy? Sad? Confused? Angry? Hopeful? Write sentences that incorporate your ideas. e.g. Happiness – The rain splashed off the pavement excitedly, with a musical pitter-patter that sounded almost like laughter.
18. **'In twenty-five years he'd only had to do this once before. He hoped this time they were more successful'** (p. 70). What is Reg alluding to? Write a newspaper article that reports on the situation Reg was thinking about, or on Spencer's crash landing.
19. **'Not for another hour did they find Spencer'** (p. 91). What do you think that Suzie would have been thinking during this hour? What emotions would she have been feeling? Write a diary entry from Suzie's perspective that recounts what was happening and how she reacted during this time.

After Reading

1. Construct a plot graph that visually represents the exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution of the novel:
 - a. Remember that in a novel, there might be a number of periods of rising action and climax, and your graph should demonstrate this.
 - b. You may wish to split into two different colours or lines once Spencer and Rory crash, to represent their storyline separately to Pippa and Suzie's experience.
 - c. Label your plot points with a brief summary of what is occurring at this moment in the story.
 - d. What did you mark as the point of highest tension?
2. Research the recommendations for survival in situations such as the one Spencer found himself in. Do you think that Spencer did the right things? What would you have done differently? Choose a scenario – e.g. a boating accident, a car breakdown in a remote area, a plane crash – and construct a poster or brochure designed to educate people your age on what to do in such a situation.
3. After completing the novel, reread Chapter 13. What events, thoughts or conversations take on greater meaning after learning what happened later that afternoon? Give details as to why they are more significant once you know what happened to Spencer and Rory.
4. The title of the novel is *The Amazing Spencer Gray*. In the final chapter he is referred to in this way by several people, including himself. In what ways was Spencer amazing? To whom is he amazing and how so?
5. Who do you think is an amazing person? It could be a friend, a family member, a sports person – perhaps even you! Write a short story, biography, or other text which details what makes this person amazing.



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