

## FRANKIE FISH AND THE SONIC SUITCASE Teachers Notes

Written by Peter Helliar  
Art by Lesley Vamos

Published by Hardie Grant Egmont in March 2017

### SUMMARY

Frankie Fish is excited. He's about to spend the school holidays with his best friend, Drew Bird, and the entire Bird family, at their beach house. Frankie won't have to spend time with his sister (a professional saint), or help in the family business, Fish Pest Control.

But Frankie is a prankster and Drew is an even bigger prankster. So when they target the end-of-term assembly, pulling a stunt that humiliates Miss Merryweather, things don't go as planned. Frankie is sent to his grandparents' house as punishment.

But instead of the 'old-people jail' that Frankie expects, he discovers some amazing things: a shed full of mysteries and a Sonic Suitcase that makes time travel possible. He also discovers that his knowledge of *Doctor Who* and popular culture are invaluable, and that he has much more in common with his cantankerous grandad that he could have ever imagined.

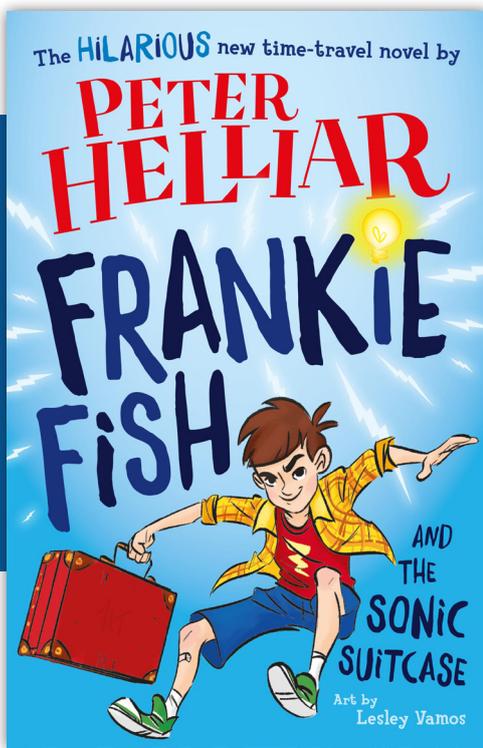
Together, Frankie and his grandad must return to Scotland, 1952, to save the family. It's a cracking adventure.

*Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase* is a brilliant novel for class study. Beautifully written with glorious characters, it's fast paced and hilarious. Students will love it and there's much to study. All that, plus there are wonderful illustrations that allow for students to discuss the choices involved in framing an image and the placement of elements on the page.

Themes include **friendship, courage, regret, love, family** and **hope**. Frankie's feelings of isolation in his family, and his relationship with his sister, are explored with insight and lightness. There's an opportunity for students to discuss their own experiences and to create texts that reflect these. There is also opportunity for students to imagine wonderful spin-offs – creating their own stories about Sonic Suitcases or extraordinary items of their own imaginings.

Students can identify and study literary techniques – **puns, alliteration** and **similes**. They can experiment with improving pace in their own narratives. They can have fun with language – inventing similes and studying neologisms.

This novel provides a wonderful opportunity for the study of craft in a class, while being a whole lot of fun.



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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

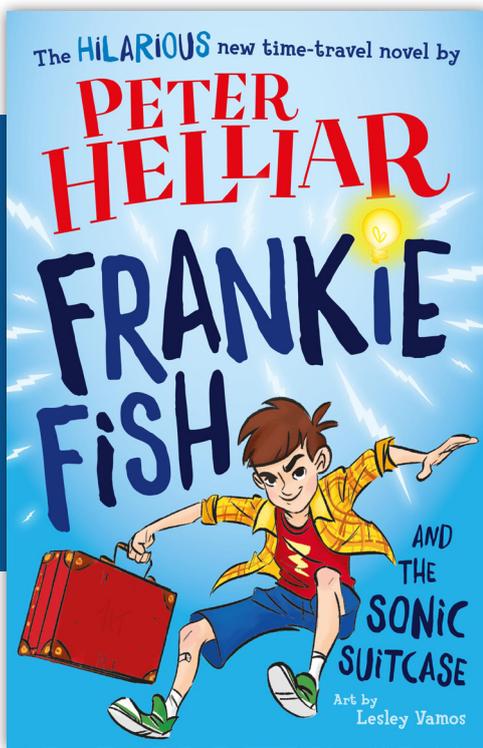
**Peter Helliar** burst onto the Australian comedy scene as a cast member on *Rove Live* in the late 1990s, and he's since become one of Australia's most beloved comedians and presenters. Most nights you can catch him on Channel Ten's *The Project*, delivering the nation's news with his distinctive comedic style and wit.

Over the past two decades, Peter has hosted radio shows, written and directed ABC TV's hit series *It's a Date*, masterminded a feature film (*I Love You Too*), and created an AFL icon in his alter-ego Strauchanie. Throughout it all, he's toured stand-up comedy shows to sold-out houses across Australia and New Zealand.

Yet Peter's writing credentials stretch back even further than these achievements – all the way back to his very own 'publishing house', Better Books, which he founded when he was just eight years old. Young Peter produced limited-run (only one edition) masterpieces such as *Me*, *The Sport Star* by Peter Helliar, *Raquas of the Lost Park* by Peter Helliar, and *Buried Alive* by Peter Helliar.

These days, as a dad to three boys, Peter is once again focused on entertaining kids – whether it's voicing 'The Wolf Pack' in Disney's hit film *Storks* or promoting children's literacy on Star Wars Reads Day. Drawing inspiration from his Better Books beginnings, Peter has embarked on his greatest challenge yet by authoring an awesome and epic middle-grade time-travel series for youngsters.





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## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

- In groups, brainstorm a list of all the things a Sonic Suitcase might do.
- After you've finished, draw your own Sonic Suitcase. Label your suitcase, identifying all its powers/functions. Share your suitcase with the class.
- Study the title graphics. What do they reveal about Frankie's character?

## READING ACTIVITIES

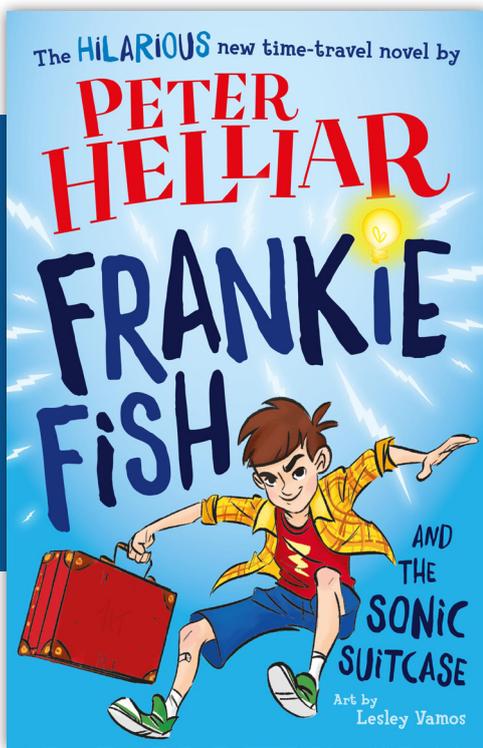
### A Short Bit Before We Meet Frankie Fish

1. 'The pigeon makes a deposit from its feathery bottom' is a very lovely sentence. What does it actually mean?
2. How does the writer make the reader want to read the next chapter?
3. As a class, discuss the difference between first-, second- and third-person narrations. How does the use of the second person make you feel? Is the writer using the first person, the second person, the third person, or a combination? Why might he have chosen to use this style?

### Chapter 1

#### Vocabulary: Culmination

1. What things do Frankie and Drew have in common?
2. Make a list of pranks that they've pulled. What do you think of Drew's prank at the end of the chapter? Give reasons for your answer.



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## Chapter 2

### Vocabulary: Misinterpreted

1. What's the prankster's code? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
2. Why does Frankie think his grandparent's house is like old-people jail?
3. There are some wonderful similes in this book. What's your favourite so far?

## Chapter 3

### Vocabulary: Cantankerous

1. What does Frankie dislike about his grandparents' house?
2. Read through Frankie's list of possible events that should, according to him, allow him access into his grandad's shed. Add three things to Frankie's list.
3. What do you think is inside the shed? Make three predictions. Share them with the class.

## Chapter 4

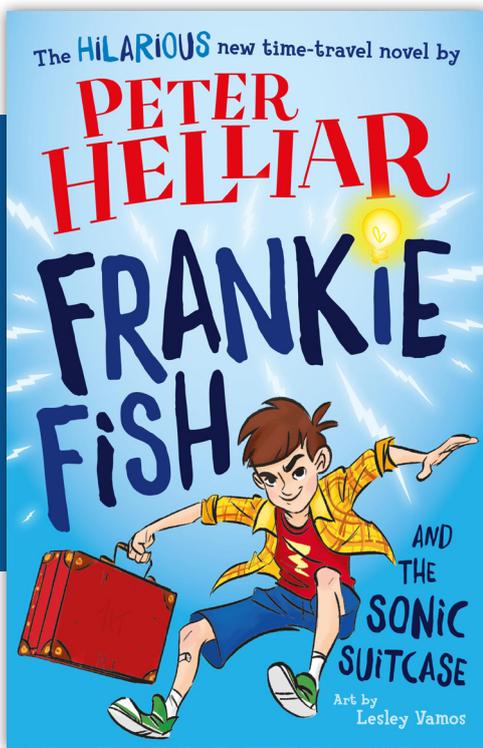
### Vocabulary: Anti-climax

1. What does Frankie find in the shed? Check your predictions. Were you right?

## Chapter 5

### Vocabulary: Barrage

1. What's happened to Nanna Fish? Make some predictions.



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## Chapter 6

### Vocabulary: Velocity

1. What does travelling through time feel like, according to the narrator?
2. Study the illustration. How many time periods can you see? The illustration isn't framed. It goes all the way to the edges of the page. How does this picture make you feel?
3. As a class, re-read how the writer describes time travel. Is this how you imagine it would feel? Make a list of pros and cons of time travel on the board.

## Chapter 7

### Vocabulary: Kaleidoscope

1. Do some research. Find out five things about 1952 Scotland. Share these with the class.
2. What does Frankie think is the problem with going back in time too often?

## Chapter 8

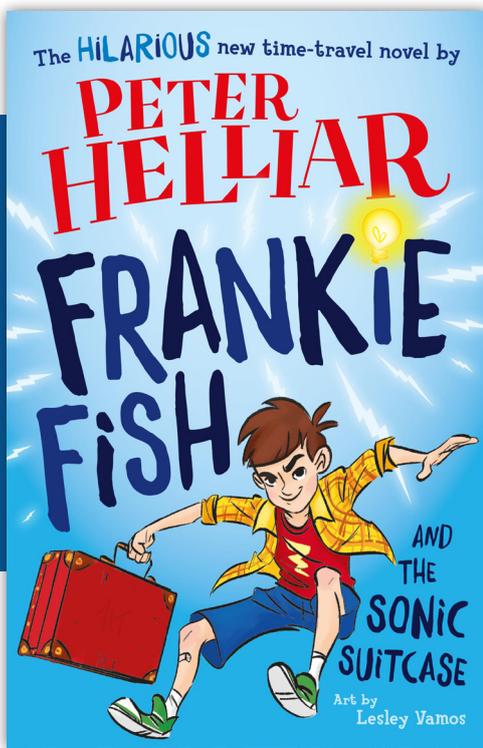
### Vocabulary: Incredulous

1. How did Frankie's grandad get his hand back?
2. Why does this make his nanna disappear?
3. How does Frankie change in this chapter?

## Chapter Nine

### Vocabulary: Catastrophic

1. Imagine you could go back in time and talk to a younger version of yourself. What three pieces of advice would you give?



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## Chapter Ten

**Vocabulary: Collectively**

1. What does Frankie realise about himself in this chapter?

## Chapter Eleven

**Vocabulary: Lavatory**

1. How do Frankie and his granddad get into Ernest Fish's house?

## Chapter 12

**Vocabulary: Delusions**

1. What do Frankie and Roddy have in common?
2. How does Frankie change the course of Roddy's history?

## Chapter 13

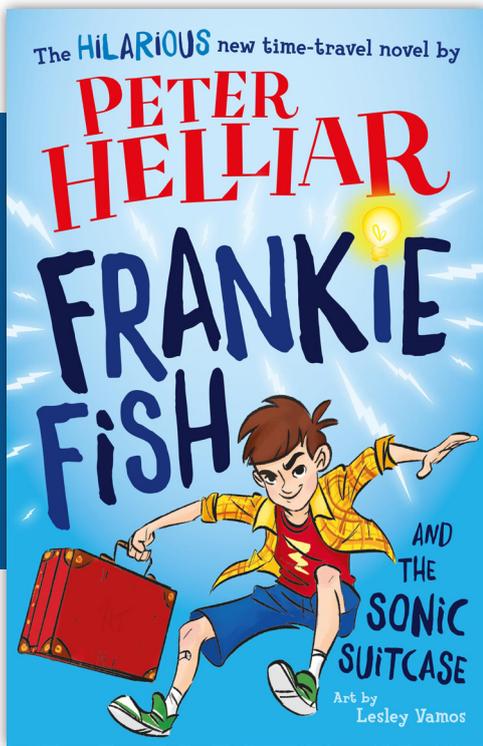
**Vocabulary: Destabilise**

1. Why is the weather important in this chapter? What danger does it suggest?
2. List three things that Frankie and his granddad have in common.

## Chapter 14

**Vocabulary: Pestering**

1. Why is Frankie becoming even more worried about his face?



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## Chapter 15

**Vocabulary: Scoundrel**

1. Why is Frankie's ice-cream the worst one ever?

## Chapter 16

**Vocabulary: Meddling**

1. What important thing does Frankie realise about his sister Lou in this chapter?

## Chapter 17

**Vocabulary: Rivalry**

1. What terrible thing happens in this chapter?

## Chapter 18

**Vocabulary: Morphed**

1. Why would Mavis never date Clancy?

## Chapter 19

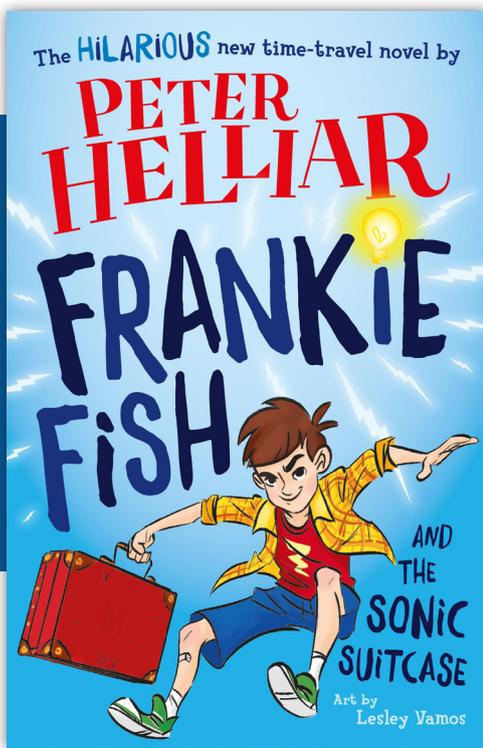
**Vocabulary: Disastrous**

1. Frankie has watched a lot of TV shows about time travel. In pairs, make a list of all the books and movies about time travel that you have read or watched.
2. What do Frankie and his grandad need to get back home? How will they get it?

## Chapter 20

**Vocabulary: Hectic**

1. What can Frankie and his grandad trust?



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## Chapter 21

**Vocabulary: Triumphantly**

1. What's your favourite part of this chapter?

## Chapter 22

**Vocabulary: Flourish**

1. What gives Frankie courage in this chapter?

## Chapter 23

**Vocabulary: Ovation**

1. Why does Clarissa help?
2. How does Bruno help?

## Chapter 24

**Vocabulary: Astonished**

1. Why is Frankie's grandad scared?
2. Would it be a terrible thing to live only among your memories? Why or why not?

## Chapter 25

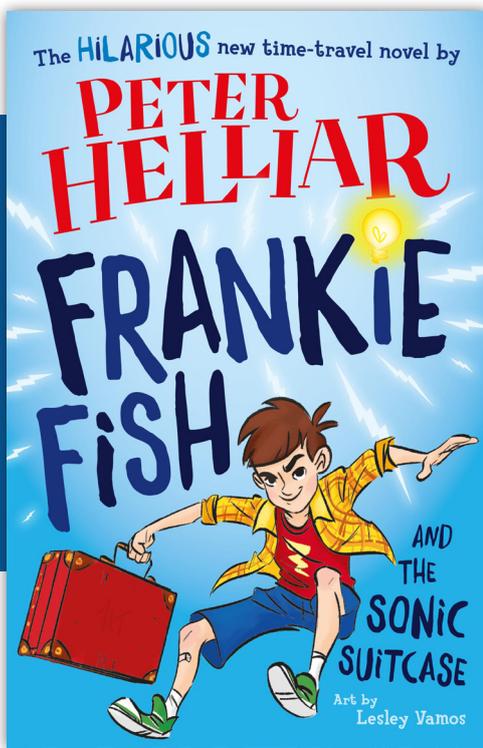
**Vocabulary: Quivering**

1. Make a list of things that have changed since Frankie left.

## Chapter 26

**Vocabulary: Nanosecond**

1. What do you think Frankie means by his question at the end of the book?



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## THEMES

A theme is a main idea that occurs in a piece of literature. Themes in literature are effective because readers can relate to them. They show what people have in common.

1. What things do you have in common with Frankie Fish?
2. Below are just some of the themes explored in **Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase**:
  - Family
  - Friendship
  - Regret
  - Love
  - Ambition
  - Hope
  - History
3. As a class, list three more themes explored in this book.
4. In pairs, choose one theme. Find one event in the book that illustrates your theme. Draw a picture of this event. Note on your picture the page where this scene occurs. Choose an appropriate line from the book as a title for your picture.

## CHARACTER

**Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase** has fantastic characters. The reader can imagine them easily because they are so vividly described.

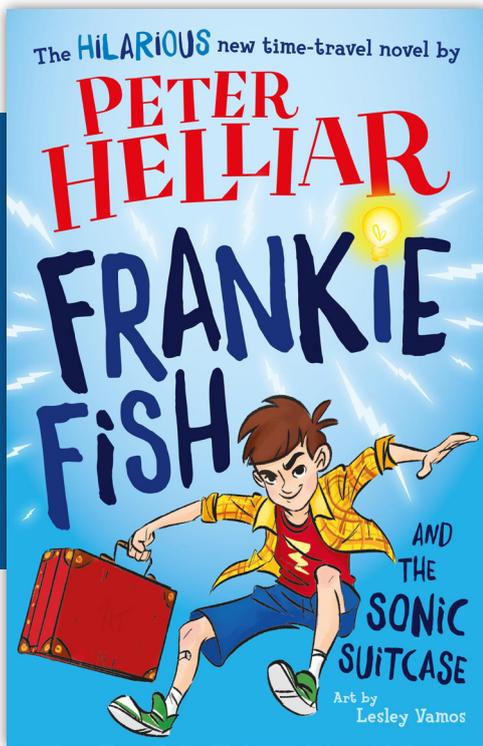
1. Choose your favourite character and fill out the profile below on them.

Name:

Age:

Nickname:

Physical description:



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Positive qualities:

Negative qualities:

Things I have in common with this character:

Ways in which the character changes during the book:

Peter Helliar is very good at describing his characters in short, sharp sentences: 'Frankie liked Nanna Fish OK because she loved kids, had sparkly blue eyes and made good pancakes.' (p.32)

2. Find your favourite description of a character and share this with the class.
3. Create three characters and describe each in a short, sharp sentence.

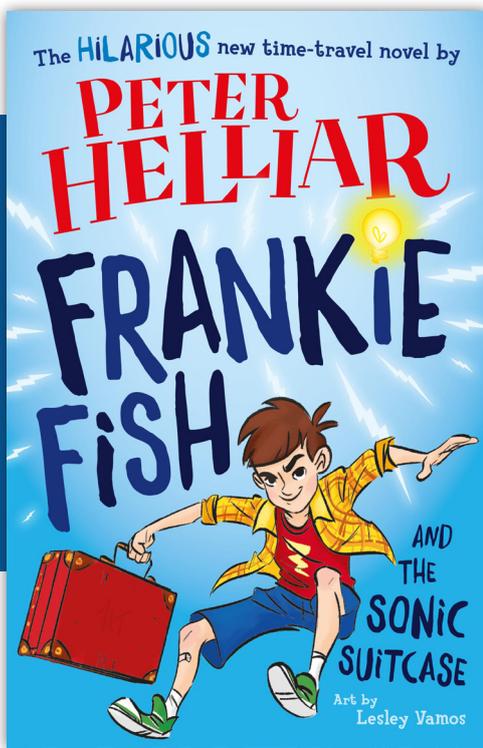
## LITERARY TECHNIQUES

### Humour

1. There are lots of funny moments in ***Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase***. What part of the book made you laugh? Share this part with a friend.
2. There are many literary devices that create humour – pun, surprise, exaggeration, slapstick, sarcasm. Can you find examples of these devices in the book? Make a list.

### Similes

1. What is a simile?
2. Choose your favourite simile in ***Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase*** and share it with the class.
3. As a class, discuss what makes a successful simile. Why are the similes in this book so good?
4. In pairs, make up your own original, surprising, but accurate similes.



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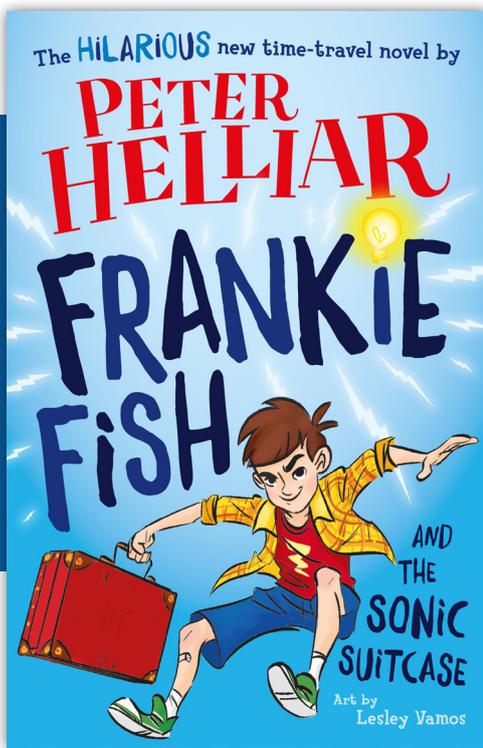
## Alliteration

1. What is alliteration?
2. Find three examples of alliteration in the book.
3. Why might the author have used this literary technique?

## Neologisms

One of the wonderful things about Peter Helliar's writing is how playful it is with language. His novel demonstrates how Standard Australian English continues to evolve. He uses words that have been in the language for centuries, while also drawing on words that have recently entered the language.

1. Use a dictionary to write a definition of the term 'neologism'.
2. Can you find some newly coined words in the novel? (Snooze-fest, Facebook, Twitter)
3. In pairs, brainstorm a list of other neologisms.
4. Choose three neologisms from your list.
5. Using your general knowledge, write definitions for them.
6. Share these words and definitions with the class.
7. As a class, make a list of the reasons why language changes. Consider things such as technology, culture, gender or generational change.



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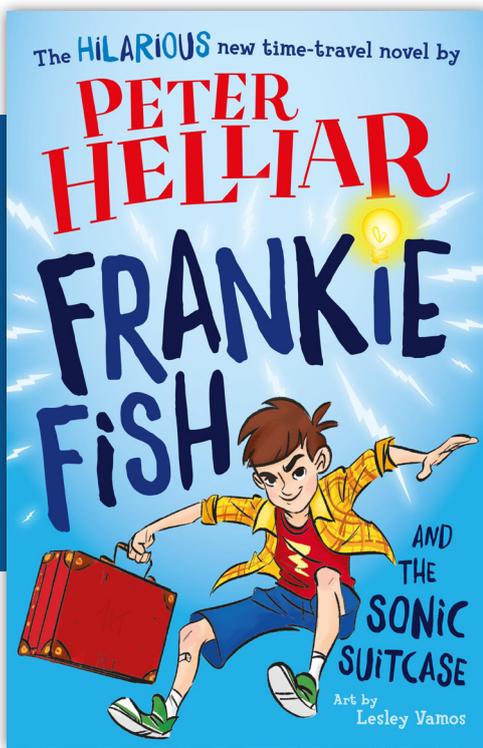
## STRUCTURE/FORMAT

This book is high on suspense. How does the writer create this feeling? Look at:

- The titles of chapters
  - The last sentence of chapters
  - The length of sentences
  - The detail included
1. How do the illustrations enhance the story? What extra information do they tell us about events or characters?
  2. Why have some words been printed in bold? Name some other books that do this. Do you like it? Why or why not?

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

1. **Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase** is a story about a developing friendship between two unlikely allies – Frankie and his grandad. Write a short story about two very different people who discover that they have something in common.
2. Choose an ordinary item – like the suitcase – and give it extraordinary abilities/powers. Write a story about your item.
3. Write a personal piece about a good friend.
4. Write a short story that uses some of the techniques used in **Frankie Fish and the Sonic Suitcase**. Include:
  - Exciting chapter headings
  - Dramatic last sentences
  - Original similes
  - Alliteration
  - Vibrant characters



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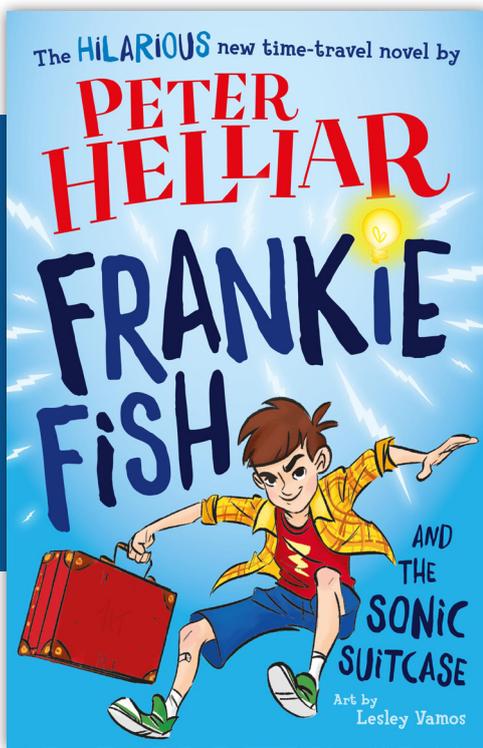
5. Write about a time when you showed courage. Or, write about a time when you didn't.
6. Write a story where you meet yourself twenty years in the future. What is the world like? What are you like?
7. Write the first chapter of the next book – the one where Drew gets his hands on the Sonic Suitcase!

### DRAMA ACTIVITIES

1. In groups, choose one of the chapters in the book and write it as a script. Perform your play to the class.
2. Pretend that you're Drew. Make a list of the pranks that you pulled over the summer. Read your list to the class.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you could time travel, would you? Why or why not?
2. If you could and would time travel, where would you go? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Technology has greatly improved our lives. Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. When are pranks OK? Was the prank at assembly at the start of the book OK? Why or why not?
5. Do adults sometimes misjudge young people? How and when?
6. Do young people have skills and information that adults don't? Give some examples.



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## COMPARISON TEXTS

The following fiction titles may provide some opportunities for comparison studies. Suggested thematic comparisons are provided in brackets.

### Titles

*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis, HarperCollins, United Kingdom, 2009 (time travel, fantasy, adventure, courage, friendship, family)

*The History Keeper* series, Damian Dibben, Random House, 2011 (history, time travel, family, adventure)

*Axel and Beast*, Adrian C. Bott & Andy Isaac, Hardie Grant Egmont, 2017 (adventure, courage, unlikely friendship)

### Authors

Roald Dahl (character, pace, courage, adventure)

J.K. Rowling (friendship, adventure, narrative pace)