



## Lightning Strikes: The Big Dig

By Meg McKinlay

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### Themes:

Science  
Maths  
Swimming  
Informal Text Types

## Synopsis

An hilarious new *Lightning Strikes* story featuring characters from *Going for Broke!*

It is a rule of the universe that Ronnie, Weasel and Nathan spend their summers at the local pool. So when they turn up as usual on opening day to buy their season passes and discover the pool is closed, the boys are devastated. With their only choices being to join the pricey BayView Leisure Centre or get the old blow-up out of storage, their summer is looking dire. That is, until Nathan comes up with the very brilliant idea to build their own pool in his mum's backyard. The plan is simple: Dig. Dig Some More. Put Water In. Swim. But perhaps the plan is a little too simple as this dig isn't going to be as easy as it seems ...

## Activity Ideas

- Create an author profile using some of the information above. You can also visit Meg McKinlay's website: [www.megmckinlay.com](http://www.megmckinlay.com)
- Read the blurb for *The Big Dig*. The reader is asked the question "What could possibly go wrong?". What do you think could go wrong? Before reading the book write down some possible answers to this question.
- Read page 9. The boys' teacher made them work out how much it costs to swim each day. How much would it cost if you only swam every second day or once a week?
- Read Chapter 1. Why do you think the Newton Community Pool is closed? Have a discussion about possible reasons.
- Read pages 15 to 16. Why do you think the writing is wavy with bubbles around it? How would you write the text if this was for a park or a beach? Re-write "Make a SPLASH at BayView" with your own design.
- Read page 20. Do you have any rules at school e.g. no littering, out of bounds? As a class create signs for your school to demonstrate these rules.
- Read Chapter 4. What is the 'plan' that the boys come up with? Do you think this is a well formulated plan? What other steps do you think they might need to add?
- View page 50. What would the ultimate pool look like? Draw a picture of it. You might want to include plants, waterfalls, bridges and pool equipment.
- What is water aerobics? What other activities can you do in the water? Research different water sports and what they entail.
- Read page 68. Nathan says that you don't need "science or angles". What do you think of this? Think of other building structures e.g. your house, classroom. What shapes are used to create the building? Why would science and angles be important?
- What do you think the boys should call their self-made aquatic park? In groups think of a name for their pool and create a sign/pamphlet for it, outlining all the features that it has.
- After reading *The Big Dig* write a review of it.

## Author Focus

Meg McKinlay grew up in Bendigo, Victoria, in a book-loving, TV and car-free household. A poet as well as a children's writer, Meg developed an affinity with the Japanese language after going on an exchange year in high school, and went on to complete a PhD in Japanese Literature. Along the way, she has worked in a variety of jobs including swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. These days she lives with her family near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, and is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Western Australia where she has taught Australian Literature, Japanese and Creative Writing. Meg divides her time between teaching and writing, a balance that swings wildly between chaos and calm. She is the author of *Annabel, again* and the *Lightning Strikes* title *Going for Broke* published by Walker Books.

### Meg McKinlay's Inspiration for writing *The Big Dig*:

"Like the boys in *The Big Dig*, my brothers and I lived at the local pool when we were kids. It was only a fifteen-minute bike ride, but that seemed far enough in the middle of summer when it was pushing 40 degrees. We were always pressuring our parents for a backyard pool and one day Dad finally snapped and said, "Yeah, you can have one if you dig it yourself." That was more than enough for my older brother, who immediately took matters, and shovels, into his own hands. Things descended into "mud-pit" very quickly, though, and he only managed to salvage the hours of work he'd put in by turning it into a cunningly concealed booby trap for the rest of us. My brother's poorly thought out backyard pool was definitely the starting point for *The Big Dig*. I needed a stronger motivation for Nathan and his mates to start digging, though, and I decided the sudden closure of their local pool would do the job. This was something that never happened to my brothers and I, although the pool we so loved was radically re-vamped many years later into the kind of whizzbang aquatic centre complex Nathan, Ronnie and Weasel encounter in *The Big Dig*, complete with warning signs of every description. When I first visited it as an adult, I remember thinking how even though it was all kinds of fantastic in some ways, it had lost much of the homegrown flavour of the old pool, and that was a shame. That memory definitely came into play in the story, too. Funnily enough, shortly after I finished the manuscript, a series of articles started appearing in my local community newspaper - "Centre Closed!", "A Fifty Minute Drive for a Swim?" and "Sad Farewell to a Local Favourite." The council had closed a community pool and was "centralising" facilities at the fabulous new aquatic centre, which locals described as "too far," "too crowded" and "packed with grandparents and swimming classes", all things the boys rail against in *The Big Dig*. It was a little spooky! Now, I'm just waiting for a follow-up article "Boys Welcome Locals to Backyard Pool" to confirm my incredible psychic powers."