

TEACHER'S NOTES

THE COMEBACK KID



AIRANA NGAREWA
ILLUSTRATIONS BY STORY HEMI-MOREHOUSE



STORY SUMMARY

Charlie Boy might be just an ordinary kid, but he's about to get into some EXTRA-ordinary trouble... Get ready for this funny, fast-paced, friendship adventure with lots of kick.

Meet Charlie Boy: skinny, small, looks like a strand of spaghetti. He and his best friend, Rocky the Lower Hutt Chief, are good at getting into trouble together. But when Charlie and Rocky get into a bit too much trouble, Charlie is sent to live with his dad in THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, and there's not much to do in a small town... unless your dad happens to be a retired mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter.

As Charlie learns the ins and outs of mixed martial arts, he sees an opportunity to redeem himself – a martial arts tournament that will declare the best fighter and the best fighting style AND has a prize of ONE MILLION DOLLARS. Only it's not easy to make a comeback, and there's more to MMA than the fight. Charlie is about to find out just how far he's willing to go to get to the top.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Airana Ngarewa (Ngāti Ruanui, Ngā Rauru, Ngāruahine) was born and raised in Taranaki. He is a schoolteacher and a former professional cage fighter. His debut novel *The Bone Tree*, published in 2023, was the number one bestselling work of fiction in Aotearoa New Zealand for 11 weeks. His second book, *Pātea Boys*, was published in 2024 and is uniquely designed to be read one way in English and the other in te reo Māori.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Story Hemi-Morehouse (Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Koata, Ngāti Kuia, Kāi Tahu, Te Ātiawa) took her professional and creative background in scriptwriting and animation and ran! She now works as a full-time, freelance illustrator/writer.

SUGGESTED SHARED READING QUESTIONS

Chapter 1–3

- Why do you think Charlie thought it would be better to be invisible, rather than unremarkable? Do you think he is right to think that?
- What is a ‘goody two-shoes’?
- From what you know of Charlie so far, do you think he is ‘programmed’ to be the kind of boy that causes trouble?
- What did the supervising teacher give Charlie and Rocky while they were in detention? What do the boys have in common with each other?

Chapter 4–6

- How does Rocky warm up for the fight? Do you think Rocky won fairly?
- What made Charlie question Rocky about the fight?
- Why don’t Rocky’s parents worry about him? What is Charlie’s wish for his mum?

Chapter 7–9

- What does “It’s not ego if you can back it up,” mean?
- What is Charlie’s mission? What do you think motivates him to do it?
- How does Rocky respond when Charlie completes his mission?

Chapter 10–12

- What does Mrs T pride herself on?
- What makes Charlie confess to Mrs T?

Chapter 13–15

- What do you think is making Charlie the most upset about going to live with his dad?
- How does Charlie recognise his dad even though he hasn’t seen him for 8 years?
- What is Charlie’s first impression of Pātea?

Chapter 16–18

- What does Charlie find out about his father from the photographs in the house? What questions do you think Charlie has for his father about the photographs?
- What do you think about what Charlie’s dad taught him? Do you think Charlie’s dad is right?
- Why do you think Charlie told the girls he was learning dance moves?

Chapter 19–21

- How does Charlie work through his anger after not being allowed to speak to Rocky?
- What does Charlie’s dad think is a fighter’s greatest weapon?
- What do you think Charlie’s dad’s reaction will be to him signing up for the fight? What do you think Charlie should have thought about before signing up?

Chapter 22–24

- How did Charlie get a chance to enter the competition?
- What does ‘fervour’ mean? What is something you do ‘with fervour’? What does Charlie tell his dad to prevent his dad asking too many questions about his training?
- What do you think the woman who welcomed Charlie at the fight meant when she said, “you’re known as a bit of a boy-next-door”?

Chapter 25–27

- What were Shihan’s two focuses?
- How long is each fight in the first round?
- Why were the audience worried about Kick when they first saw her?

Chapter 28–30

- How does Kick win the first fight?
- Why did Shihan want the competition to be between children rather than adults?
- How does Charlie's fear show on his body?

Chapter 31–33

- Describe Charlie's opponent in 3 words.
- What did the referee mean when he said, "I'll have to call the match"?
- Why does Charlie feel guilty? Do you think he should feel guilty?

Chapter 34–36

- Who won the fights that Charlie didn't see?
- Why does Charlie lie to his mum?
- How did the bus driver know who Charlie was?

Chapter 37–39

- What did Charlie's dad do to Eugene when they were boys?
- What happened in the buildup to the fight between Charlie's dad and Eugene?
- What does Charlie decide to do once he's stopped crying?

Chapter 40–42

- Why does Sonny want Charlie to keep fighting in the competition?
- What motivates Charlie to keep going?
- How do you think Charlie's dad felt when Charlie told him the truth about why he wanted to fight?

Chapter 43–45

- What is the focus of Charlie's training?
- What else was happening that meant Charlie could easily get to the next round of the tournament? Who is the competition favourite?
- Why is Rocky in the fight?

Chapter 46–48

- What does Charlie do to win the round?
- How does Rocky cheat?
- What makes Rocky even more fired-up and eager to win?

Chapter 49–51

- Who is Charlie referring to when he asks Rocky if there was an angel whispering in his ear?
- What does Charlie find out about the competition?
- Why does Charlie's dad change his mind about helping Charlie to train?

Chapter 52–54

- List 3 things Charlie does in his training.
- Do you think the way Shihan is approaching the fight is fair?
- Why does Rocky describe Charlie as 'the king of the comeback'?

Chapter 55–57

- Why didn't the people that were there to support Charlie speak to him before the fight?
- What does Charlie use to his advantage in the third round?
- What does Charlie have to do to get the advantage in round four?

Chapter 58–60

- What do you think Charlie's plan is in round five?
- What was Charlie's ultimate choice between in the fight?

Chapter 61–63

- What are the true principles of martial arts? How did Charlie show them in the fight?
- What does Charlie do with the prize money?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Research & Comparison

Choose three of the fighting styles described in the story. Read about them and write down some characteristics of each style. Do they all have some things in common? Do they all have unique aspects? You could look for things like when and where they were started and which weapons they use.

Decide how you will present the information you have found to show the similarities and differences between the martial arts you chose to research.

Poetry Prompt

Using some of the research you have done, or by reading the research of classmates, write an acrostic poem using the name of the martial art you like the best to share some of the elements of the martial art that interest you.

Prediction

The story ends with some information that suggests there could be another book. We know that Kick and Charlie would like a rematch. Predict how the rematch might end and write the fight scene as you imagine it could happen.

Design a poster advertising their rematch.

Famous Quotes

These quotes are from famous people that excelled in martial arts or had a big impact on martial arts. Research who said them and add their names and the timeframe they lived in. Choose one and explain how it could be relevant to a problem someone might have today.

- "I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times."
- "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones."
- "The green reed which bends in the wind is stronger than the mighty oak which breaks in a storm."
- "The best fighter is someone who never has to fight because they control the situation."
- "There is no losing in martial arts. Either you win or you learn."

Dojo Values

Watch this clip of a sensei talking about her dojo and what her karate practice means to her and her community.

Make a list of all the things that Sensei Mary thinks are important to martial arts and the value of karate.

<https://frankfilm.co.nz/frank-changing-south/stories-from-the-south-season-3-2025/s3-e4-mary-still-kicks-at-86/>

The same video can be found on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EsSg7cpI5E>