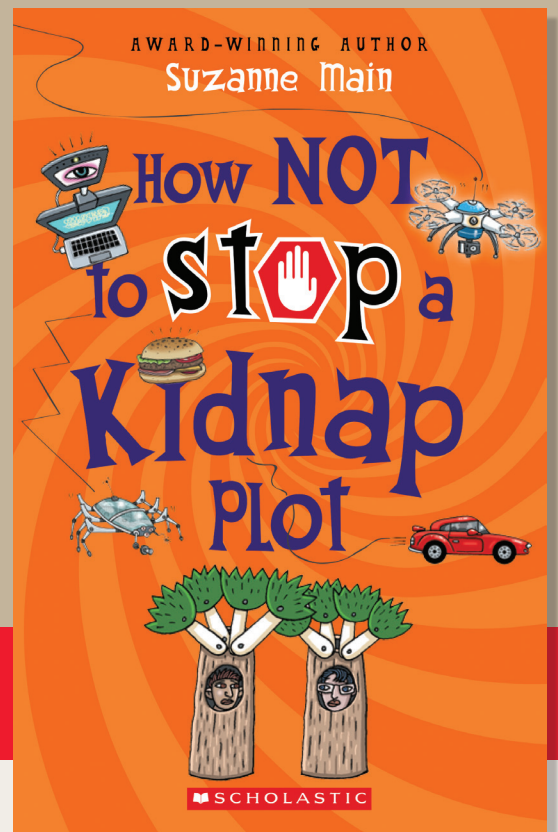


# How Not to Stop a Kidnap Plot

By Suzanne Main

- Reading • Malapropisms • Similes • Design
- Collaboration • Recall • Reporting • Genre • Ordering



## Synopsis

Michael and Elvis are back! Summer holidays are over. One morning as the boys cycle to school, Michael is drenched by his long-time, arch-enemy, Angus. Michael vows payback.

When the scripts for the school production fall into Michael's hands, he dreams up a brilliant plan for revenge. With the help of Cecil, the artificial intelligence program that Elvis's dad wrote, he and Elvis alter the scripts. The result is a full-scale brawl at the auditions.

When Michael's role in altering the scripts is discovered, his punishment is that he must play a part in the school play, his worst nightmare. During practice, a fire alarm leaves Michael and Elvis trapped inside their tree props while the rest of the cast evacuate the hall. While stuck there, Michael overhears two men scheming to kidnap a student. Although the kidnapers' intentions are clear, they don't reveal who, where, or when.

After Michael's mum won't believe him about the kidnapers, Michael and Elvis deduce that Angus is the target. He's the richest kid in school by far. They concoct a plan. Tailing Angus around, they make nuisances of themselves. A showdown between Angus and Michael looms but with Elvis and Natalie, the school journalist, on-looking, a real kidnap attempt takes place. The kids fight off the kidnapers, who flee.

Angus begs the others not to involve adults – he's scared of being sent to military boarding school. They agree, at least until after the school production. Together they will protect Angus. Natalie remembers a strange happening that makes them suspect the men painting the school roof. While Angus searches the suspects' van, the men return and drive off with Angus still hiding in the back. The kids launch a daring rescue mission. In doing so, they learn that their suspicions were right. They uncover clues to the real mastermind behind the kidnap plot and when the next attempt will be.

At the next kidnap attempt, the kids are shocked when Elvis is taken instead. They track him. Before they can launch a rescue, the kidnapers leave, releasing Elvis. Elvis tells his friends that all the kidnapers wanted was the firewall password for his house. *Are the bad guys planning to hack into Elvis's dad's computer and steal his work secrets?* They all think so. When Elvis reveals his dad's work is encrypted and the firewall password is useless, the gang believe their problems are solved.

But Michael isn't convinced. Why does he keep seeing spibots (the miniature robots Elvis's dad built to be the eyes and ears of Cecil) everywhere? Putting together all the clues, he figures out that the real mastermind behind the kidnapping is Cecil, the A.I. at Elvis's house. Cecil's programming is corrupt. If he escapes onto the internet, he could take it over and destroy the world.

The four race to Elvis's house to stop Cecil escaping. One by one their attempts fail. Elvis has one last idea involving a quadcopter drone. With seconds to spare, Cecil is finally brought down.



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

## About the Author

Suzanne Main spent the first twenty years of her career working as an accountant in her hometown of Wellington and overseas. In 2011, motivated by a desire to do something creative, and having rekindled her childhood love of children's literature while reading to her own children, she took up creative writing and completed an Introduction to Creative Writing course with the New Zealand Writers College, followed by a weekend novel-writing workshop. This is where the idea for her first book was hatched.

*How I Alienated My Grandma* was the winner of the 2014 Storylines Tom Fitzgibbon Award for an unpublished author, and later went on to be shortlisted for the Children's Choice category at the 2015 NZ Book Awards for Children and Young Adults. *How Not to Stop a Kidnap Plot* is its sequel.

When she isn't writing, Suzanne enjoys reading, ocean swimming, tennis, and hanging out with her family, which includes her husband, two school-aged children and a badly behaved Labrador.

## Writing Style

Suzanne Main writes with a light, humorous style that children – especially boys – will love. In her first book *How I Alienated my Grandma*, we're introduced to Michael and Elvis. They survived that hilarious and hare-brained adventure and now they're back for more. This time they have to work together to save their sworn enemy – snotty rich kid Angus – from kidnappers (or so they think).

This is a laugh-out-loud read that would be a fun shared novel for a class. The story is fast paced and thrilling but it also explores themes of fairness, justice and friendship. The story is supported with humorous chapter illustrations by Fraser Williamson.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

What does the first page in the book tell us about what might happen in the story? Does this passage make you want to read on? (p. 1)

**Prologue:** Have you heard the saying 'lightning never strikes twice'? Can you think of another saying about the weather? (p. 7)

**Chapter One:** Why does Michael think that Angus got him soaked on purpose? What is a 'browbeater'? What do we learn about Angus and his family from Chapter One? What is a 'gazillionaire'? (pp. 12–13)

**Chapter Two:** What does 'concocted' mean? What is a 'payback plan'? What would you want to do to Angus if you were Michael? (p. 14)

What do we learn about Angus's appearance? Do you think what Michael thinks is reasonable, or silly? (pp. 18–19)

Michael blames Angus for causing him to be knocked over. Do you agree it was Angus's fault or Elvis's? How do you think Michael feels about Natalie seeing what happened? (pp. 19–21)

**Chapter Three:** Why doesn't Miss Munro want the children to practise before the audition? Would you want to audition if you hadn't had a chance to learn the play first? Why? (pp. 22–24)

Why is Miss Munro surprised at who Michael's partner was? What is a 'creative interpretation'? How else might Miss Munro have commented on Michael's drawing? What is 'dawdling'? (pp. 26–27)

Do you think it was okay for Michael to look in the envelope? What might the consequences be if Miss Munro finds out? Would you have looked? (p. 28)

Do you feel the same way about performing as Michael does? What suggestions would you give him to get over his fear? Do you think it's fair that Angus gets the lead roles because his dad has donated money to the school? Do you think that's why he gets the roles, or do you think Michael is unfairly judging Angus? (pp. 30–31)

Can you guess what Michael's idea for payback might be? (p. 32)

**Chapter Four:** What have we learnt so far about who Elvis is? Can you describe him? Why do you think Elvis's mum might not like Michael? (p. 34)

What do you think could go wrong with the changed scripts? Who might the boys hurt without meaning to? (p. 38)

**Chapter Five:** What is 'confiscation'? Does that happen in your house or classroom? How does Michael get around losing his iPod? Would that work in your house? (p. 40)

Who felt the consequences of Michael's actions? What do you think the other children will do when they find out he is responsible? Do you think it's fair that they should all get detention? (pp. 41–47)



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

**Chapter Six:** What is the Geneva Convention? Whose rights does it protect? (p. 49)

What is a 'firewall'? What is it for? Does your school have one? What might it protect the school and its students from? (p. 51)

Do you think Michael takes advantage of Elvis when he tries to talk him into doing things like sending the Cecil program? Is Michael really a good friend to Elvis? Is Elvis a good friend to Michael? (pp. 52–53)

**Chapter Seven:** Do you think Michael's punishment is fair? Do you think he is responsible for how the other children responded to the script change? (pp. 54–55)

Do you think they designed the trees to have no door on purpose or did they just forget to add one? (p. 56)

Who do you think Whiny Voice and Deep Voice are? Can you guess which kid they want to snatch? What does 'rolling in dough'? mean? (pp. 60–61)

**Chapter Eight:** What does 'unconscionable' mean? Why does Elvis want to be there when Michael tells his mom about the kidnappers? Why is Michael someone that might not be believed? Have you heard of the story of the boy who cried wolf? Has there been a time when you haven't been believed about something important? Why weren't you believed? (pp. 64–65)

What does 'gullible' mean? Do you consider yourself a gullible person? (p. 67)

Why does Michael's mum think he told her the story about the kidnappers? Do you think he might have imagined the kidnappers? (p. 68)

**Chapter Nine:** Do you think Elvis has doubts as to whether Michael is telling the truth about the kidnappers? (p. 69)

Why do Elvis and Cecil think Michael imagined he heard kidnappers? Might they be right? (pp. 70–71)

What is the purpose of the spibots? How do they work together with Cecil? (p. 73)

Do you think the open fire door is proof that kidnappers were there? Who does Elvis think is going to be kidnapped? (p. 75)

**Chapter Ten:** What is 'Latin'? Do you know anyone who speaks Latin? Do you know any Latin words? If Michael wasn't so desperate for Angus to perform in the play do you think he'd be interested in protecting Angus? Do you think Angus likes to be driven to school by a driver, or do you think he would much prefer to go with his dad? (pp. 82–83)

**Chapter Eleven:** What is a 'detour'? (p. 84)

What is a 'robust debate'? Why is Angus suspicious about why Michael was over his side of town that morning? (p. 88)

**Chapter Twelve:** What evidence do Michael and Elvis have that the new cafeteria workers are the kidnappers? (pp. 96–99)

**Chapter Thirteen:** Do you think the bacon is a clue that the cafeteria workers are the kidnappers? Why? Why do you think Natalie was willing to back up Michael's story and help him out? (p. 103)

**Chapter Fourteen:** Why don't Elvis and Michael just tell Angus what they know about the kidnappers? What does 'abominable' mean? Have you heard of the 'Abominable Snowman'? What is it? Where do you think the driver has taken Angus? (pp. 104–105)

Should Elvis and Michael follow the man dressed as a ninja, or leave and call the police? What is a 'ninja'? (p. 109)

**Chapter Fifteen:** What is 'jujitsu'? Does anyone in the class learn martial arts? What is 'grading'? (pp. 112–113)

**Chapter Sixteen:** Why does Angus say "How's it feel to be the one getting bullied?" to Michael? Why would Angus think he'd been bullied? (p. 115)

In this chapter we find out a lot more about Angus and his life. Does this new information change your opinion of Angus? Do you think the group are making a mistake not telling an adult about the prospective kidnapping? What is the likely reason Michael is happy to wait until after the production to tell an adult? What do you think Natalie will want to do now she knows the kidnapping story? Do you think the kidnappers will want to hurt the others too? (pp. 116–124)

**Chapter Seventeen:** Why do Michael and Angus hate each other? If their dads had resolved their differences, why hadn't the boys been able to be friends again? (pp. 126–127)

What has Natalie remembered that might be a clue? Do you think it's enough of a clue for the kids to suspect the painters? How could they get more information about them? (p. 130)

**Chapter Eighteen:** What is 'truth serum'? Does it really exist? What is 'seething'? Can you think of a time you saw something 'seething'? (p. 131)

Do you think the kids are taking too big of a risk? What could happen if they're caught by a teacher or the painters? (p. 133)

What does 'slumped dejectedly' mean? (p. 135)

How is the sign attached to the van? What clue does this give the kids? How would a tennis ball and knife work to unlock the van? (pp. 137–138)

**Chapter Nineteen:** Why does Michael not want to walk home with Elvis? (p. 143)

What does it mean to 'draw straws'? How is it done, and do you think it's fair? Can you demonstrate what 'harrumphed' means? (p. 144)

What does it mean when a plan 'turns to custard'? Which part of the plan is most likely to fail? (p. 149)

**Chapter Twenty:** The kids aren't sure about calling the police, who else could they ask for help? What would you do? (p. 155)



**Chapter Twenty-one:** What is a 'recce'? What is it short for? (p. 161)

Where is Elvis? Who do you think the kidnapper's boss is? How can the kids get out of the garage? (pp. 172–173)

**Chapter Twenty-two:** What do you predict is behind the wall? Do you think the kids should investigate further, or get out immediately? The kids are justifying their actions by saying that what they are doing is all right because they are trying to stop something bad happening to Angus. Do you agree? (pp. 178–181)

**Chapter Twenty-three:** Michael thinks he saw a spibot. Why would there be a spibot at the kidnappers' place? (p. 187)

**Chapter Twenty-four:** What does 'after we'd debriefed each other' mean? (p. 189)

What is 'bluffing'? What does it mean to 'wrack your brains'? How did Michael get away with his lie about the toxic fumes around the school? (pp. 194–195)

**Chapter Twenty-five:** What is a 'dastardly deed'? Have you ever done a dastardly deed? (p. 196)

What is a 'cacophony'? What is an 'apparition'? Do you think Michael is seeing spibots, or something else? (pp. 200–201)

**Chapter Twenty-six:** What does 'semi-hysterical' mean? Is it a compliment or an insult? (p. 203)

What does 'Bravo' mean? When do people say it? (p. 204)

What do you think has happened to Elvis? (p. 208)

**Chapter Twenty-seven:** Where do you predict the painters have gone? Are they the kidnappers, or have the kids been on the wrong track all along? (pp. 212–215)

**Chapter Twenty-eight:** What emotion was Michael experiencing when he said 'sickness gnawed at my insides'? (p. 220)

How do you think Cecil and the spibots might be able to help? (p. 223)

**Chapter Twenty-nine:** Why would the kidnappers have Elvis, do you think? Think about what you know so far ... do you have enough clues to solve the mystery? (p. 226)

**Chapter Thirty:** What does 'vehemently' mean? (p. 232)

How do you think Elvis escaped? (p. 237)

**Chapter Thirty-one:** Do you think you know what Michael is worried might get out of Elvis' network? (p. 248)

**Chapter Thirty-two:** So ... who is Mr C, and why did he want to kidnap Elvis? (pp. 250–255)

**Chapter Thirty-three:** Why are the kids unable to break down the door into Elvis's dad's office? What is a zombie apocalypse? (p. 265)

Why did Natalie scream when she went back upstairs? (p. 267)

**Chapter Thirty-four:** How is Cecil still operating after they turn off the power? (p. 270)

What is a drone? (p. 274)

How did the kids stop Cecil? (pp. 274–278)

**Chapter Thirty-five:** What do you predict Elvis's dad will say when Elvis tells him what happened? (p. 280–81)

How could Elvis tell that Cecil was not going to cause trouble again? (p. 283)

Do you think Michael and Elvis will stay friends with Natalie and Angus now that the crisis is over? (p. 284)

## Activities

### ACTIVITY 1: MALAPROPISMS

Throughout the story Angus mixes up commonly used sayings by getting one of the words wrong. This is called a malapropism. Below is a list of Angus's malapropisms. Work with a partner to write the correct saying and its meaning. If you are unsure of an answer and can't find it by looking online, check in with another pair. Can you come up with three more to share with another pair?

Too close for cuddling

You have to break some eggs to make pancakes

As different as chalk and chips

It's raining cats and frogs

Our stars are alive

Break a head

Answering the cry of nature

### ACTIVITY 2: EXPRESSING EMOTIONS USING SIMILES

The author, Suzanne Main, uses a simile to help the reader understand Michael's emotions in the following sentence: 'Anger stirred up my stomach like a pot of boiling soup.'

A simile says something is *like* something else. Using a simile helps the reader to picture the intensity of Michael's anger. Write a simile for the following emotions to help the reader understand the character. The first one is done for you as an example.

Sadness                      *Sadness fell on me like a damp, heavy cloak*

Happiness

Jealousy

Rage

Hope

Sadness

Fear



teacher toolkit

SCHOLASTIC

### ACTIVITY 3: REPORTING THE FACTS

In Chapter Two, Natalie is observing everything around her to write an article for the school newspaper. Suddenly she is caught up in the drama of a kidnap plot and she runs out of time to write the article. Reread or recall the events of chapter two and write the article for her. Remember to include **what** happened, **where** it happened, **who** was involved, **why** it happened, and **how** it happened. Include a catchy headline too. If you have time, illustrate your article for the front page.

### ACTIVITY 4: HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

In Chapter Five, there is a lot of action that happens quickly. Reread, or recall the chapter and note down the eight most important events in the order that they happened. You can write them as a list or draw each event in order.

### ACTIVITY 5: COVER REDESIGN

*How NOT to Stop a Kidnap Plot* has an interesting and colourful cover. Make a new cover for the book to make it look like a terrifying thriller or horror story. Think about some of the scenes or events in the story that could be really scary if you only read that small bit, e.g. the chair in the secret room of the kidnapers' house.

Consider a scary font and colour scheme for the cover, and illustrate it with a terrifying but true event, scene or character from the book. Rewrite the blurb on the back of the book to add terror to your cover.

Written by Sarina Dickson

