

This wild romp into the world of superheroes will keep readers entertained as they track the troubled path to success of Hazy (aka Focus) and his team of 'wanna be' heroes. Hazy is the butt of the school bullies and teased by his dad as he loses 'focus' and becomes transparent when under stress. A committed superhero fan, Hazy's parents take him to a group session for 'blurred' people. This visit convinces Hazy that you can be anything you want to be, and he wants to be a superhero! This personal belief in himself is the 'entry' card into the world of superheroes, but Hazy has a lot to learn, starting with the need to control his own power. He forms the OK Team, and he and his fellow entry-level trainee heroes become the laughing stock of the superhero world. Training from past hero Mr Fabulous fails to get the results the team crave and then Focus is sacked. Hazy has to draw on his own powers of self-belief to pull through in the end.

The current interest young readers show in graphic novels and movie tie-ins to the superheroes of past generations is complimented nicely with this story of young heroes struggling to be successful and respected. The culminating achievements of the young heroes rests on the own efforts to persevere and have faith in their own abilities. The climax of the story sees the OK Team pull together as a united and supportive group to save Mr Fabulous and to see an A Grade hero also overcome his own self-doubts to save the world. A website with tips for young readers is also available at <http://www.herohints.com>.

Jennie Bales, Lilydale District School, TAS

This story is about Hazy Retina who has the condition of fading when he is upset or concerned. His life is generally difficult especially at school where he is ridiculed and bullied. He realises early in the book that he is a super hero and his life changes forever. The cover of the book is very busy mixing cartoon and real images. It is hard to gauge what the story is about from looking at it so the teacher might need to sell it to students. The story is slow to get started but once the reader moves through a few chapters the tension begins to build and draws the reader back again and again until they complete the story.

The short chapter format makes it accessible to many readers. However, the illustrations don't support the reader to get further understanding of the text. They are a mixture of real and cartoon. The play on words used by the author will pull many readers into the book as will the feel of the book. You think you are in Gotham City or a similar place featured in comic books. It is not until Melbourne is mentioned that you are pulled back to real time. The next chapters have a strange feel as you are not sure where you are hearing this story. The journey the OK team experience could be used as a teaching point to develop self-belief and the value of using self-talk. Friendship is also a feature of the story.

Roxanne Steenbergen, Claremont Primary School, TAS

Nick Place has written a hilarious book with totally original ideas. Hazy Retina is born with a disability and develops a low self-esteem because he thinks he is a freak. His disability is that he was born out of focus. It is possible that this condition has a hereditary component as an uncle was born with a pixelated face. Nobody can see Hazy clearly and when stressed he completely disappears and has the ability to go through walls.

His well-meaning parents fail in their attempts to tell him, "You're OK.", and end up sending him off to a support group where he meets Humphrey Sepia who was born in black and white, Jennifer Synchoff whose mouth is on time delay and others with similar visual afflictions.

The AFHT (Australian Federation for Hero Types) makes contact with Hazy and convinces him he has what it takes to control his powers and become a hero. Hazy chooses a new name: Focus, dresses in hero gear and so begins a new chapter in his life as a low-grade hero.

Full of eccentric characters, great adventure and hilarious moments, this book will appeal to children aged eight to thirteen. The author has used different styles of writing, from narrative to medical and newspaper reports and interviews along with pictures and different fonts to make it a more interesting read and hook the attention of reluctant boy readers. I will be recommending this book to my senior boys to read.

Nova Gibson, Summerland Primary School, New Zealand

When is a freak not a freak? When he or she is a superhero, a member of the OK Team (“I’m okay, you’re okay, we’re okay. Go!”), fighting arch villains and saving the world, just like their comic book heroes. Well, taming Moonface (aka Boris Scumm, school bully) at least. *The OK Team* is an easy-to-read, action-packed, fun-filled fantasy adventure, sure to entertain teen readers and adults alike. Nick Place’s sense of humour and fun has created a central character, Hazy Retina, who was born out of focus (with a Mum called Iris, to boot!), that bully (indeed “scum”), wannabee superheroes and rejects like Bad Fashion Boy, Captain Snot, and The Slacker Bros, Dance teacher, Mrs. Strangefloosie, Heroes Anon meetings and the Underachieving Trainee Hero Assistance Scheme. Beyond humorous happenings and amazing antics, Place explores the universal themes of family and friendship, belonging and identity, in an original, exciting way. His characters are ordinary kids, exploring their abilities (or lack of), different perhaps, even seen as “freaks” to others. Indeed, Hazy’s Dad is always trying to find someone even freakier than his son! They have this secret quest, to find acceptance through their alter ego, to have friends, to belong, to see themselves as “special” not a freak. Focus, Cannonball, The Torch, Yesterday and Liarbird discover that being a hero comes from within, from attitude and understanding, through belief and hope, enthusiasm, the power of imagination and the ability to dream. Liarbird’s musings add an unconventional wisdom to the tale, and we also empathise with Golden Boy, Australia’s favourite Super Hero, in his quest to prove himself.

Laugh-out-loud funny, and prompting discussions about what makes a hero, *The OK Team* will be a very popular teacher read-aloud in the upper primary classroom, and will suit Year 7-9 students for independent leisure reading, borrowed from the school library. The appealing bold, active cover, short chapters, and text broken by hero snapshots, mock news clippings, photos and the like ensure engagement with the text. The associated Web page, www.herohints.com also adds another element of interest. Readers (perhaps themselves feeling slightly “out of focus” in their adolescent world) will also identify with Focus – “King Freak and Total Dweeb”, victim of the Gods of Humiliation – and want to read on as The OK Team “fights the good fight” in Book 2. “A hero is a hero. No matter what.”

Alison Cassell, QLD

With characters called Cannonball, Switchy and Super Dead Kid, this story takes hero status to a new level! The book centres on a group of teenage misfits and is quirky, funny and most entertaining. *The OK Team* is sure to appeal to most boys and girls, who can at some point, empathize with the awkwardness and uncertainty of being a teenager. The main character, Focus, has always believed in superheroes (much to the distaste of his father) and when opportunity knocks, he figures this is his moment of truth. From silver-painted Dunlop Volleys to the Human Torch, that does not quite match the Fantastic 4, the plot unfolds into the hilarious journey of a bunch of kids trying to fit in, feel good about themselves and generally not feel like the *freaks* that they are treated as.

The novel would be suited to Yr 6-9 and opens up opportunity for real discussion about the ups and downs faced by the tumultuous teenage years. This novel provides a great opportunity to investigate Top Level Structure in texts: character compare and contrasts, delve into problem-solution and deconstruct cause and effect in the numerous adventures throughout the story. Short, action-packed chapters with added character profiles and script dialogue, elevates this novel to hero status.

Does Focus get the girl and save the world? Tune in to find out!

Lisa Noonan, Narangba State School, QLD

The OK Team is a hilarious read for kids aged 10–15. It follows the life of Hazy Retina, as he attempts to come to terms with his problem of inadvertent invisibility. Putting a positive spin on his problem, “superpower”, Hazy sets out to find fellow “low-grade superheroes” to join his “OK Team”:

“Team members wanted.

Focus and Cannonball are looking for partners in crime-fighting.

Entry-level preferred. Girls as well as guys.

*Nobody over 14 years old.
No vomiting powers, please.
(Must have own utility belt.)”*

The narrative is interspersed with newspaper clippings, emails, medical reports, OK Team notes, wanted ads, hero profiles, book excerpts, meeting minutes and scripts. These would make ideal models for teaching various text types or interesting story-starters for writing tasks.

This title could be useful as a class novel study, incorporated into an English theme exploring narrative with a focus on the “comic book” text type or as the focus of a unit focusing on self-esteem.

Worthwhile activities could include:

- ◆ Writing fractured fairytales in comic strips – perhaps a superhero could rescue fairytale characters from known fairytale villains
- ◆ Speaking activity – interview a superhero
- ◆ Identify your best feature – “superpower” – and create a superhero based on yourself. Write a profile and create a narrative with you as the main character
- ◆ Form a superhero gang. Write a list of rules for your gang. Design a “uniform”, secret gang sign and graffiti tag for your superhero gang.
- ◆ Debate: “Spiderman is more powerful than Batman.”
- ◆ Brainstorm known superheroes. Categorise as female and male. Discuss gender stereotyping.
- ◆ Write “Who Am I?”s for various superheroes
- ◆ Write a paragraph stating which superpower you would like to possess and why.

Debra Bristow, Mooloolaba State School, QLD

The OK Team by Nick Place is a great story that engages the reader with lots of wit and humour. The names of the characters and their related superpowers are hilarious and children will have lots of fun coming up with their own versions. Designing and making a costume for their superhero would be a fun activity- perhaps they could 'test drive' it for a day to see if they like the attention!! The comic book hero aspect of this book is relevant to my generation and certainly children should be aware of a list of superheros but have they had much exposure to comic books themselves? Great resources could be used to look at the format, content and style of comic books. Artists such as Roy Lichtenstein could be a focus for art activities and computer programs may be utilised to create students own comic books. To fully enjoy the language of this book, I feel it would be appropriate for Years 5 and 6 as younger children will miss many of the inferences and humour.

Fiona Deppeler, Balgowlah Heights Public School, NSW