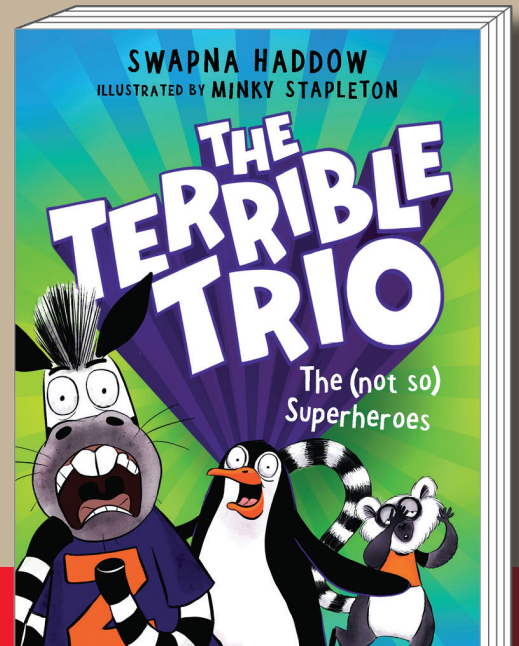


The Terrible Trio

The (not so) Superheroes (Book 1)

By Swapna Haddow

Illustrated by Minky Stapleton



• Reading • Writing • Friendship • Humour

Synopsis

Zeb, Margarine (Marge to her friends) and Barry meet waiting in line to get their superpowers. They hear the animals ahead of them receive powers of invisibility and super strength and extreme speed and they can't wait to hear what they will get.

But by the time they make it to the front of the queue the Superpower Ministry Manager, who is handing out the powers, is feeling tired and just wants to get home in time to watch her favourite show. She hands out the worst possible powers to the trio because she can't think of any more brilliant ones, leaving Marge the ability to make Mac 'n' Cheese, Barry the power to write nicely and Zeb the ability to blend in with a zebra crossing.

Zeb is disappointed in his powers and has to be taken in by Marge and Barry, who decide to put their abilities to good use by getting jobs at the Superheroes Café. But watching the superheroes go on missions makes Zeb miserable. He decides he needs better powers and if he can go on a mission himself, he can convince the Superpower Manager to improve his powers.

Zeb convinces Marge and Barry to join a mission he overhears in the café. But amid the danger, Zeb discovers that it's actually quite useful to be a zebra that blends in with a zebra crossing.

About the Author

Swapna Haddow grew up in the UK and wrote her first book at age eight. She wishes she'd kept it, but it seemed like a good idea at the time to trade it for two stickers and a couple of marbles! Her first published book was the hilarious junior novel *Dave Pigeon*, which grew into a laugh-out-loud, award-winning series. She has since written many funny, colourful and much-loved picture books as well as further junior fiction series. Swapna loves to write stories filled with boisterous animals causing mayhem, with friendship and humour consistently at the heart of her work. Swapna now lives in Dunedin, New Zealand, with her husband, son and their dog. Her first homegrown tall tale with Scholastic New Zealand is *But Then . . . the almost true story of an overdue book* followed by *Why Not . . . ? The almost true story of stuff that actually happened in a library*.

About the Illustrator

Minky Stapleton is a multi-faceted illustrator with a range of styles, all with a dash of humour. An award-winning Art Director and Creative Director originally from Johannesburg, South Africa, Minky gave up advertising to follow her first love, illustration. She now resides in Auckland, New Zealand, where she balances illustration projects with running classes for kids on how to design scary monsters. Minky has illustrated many titles for Scholastic, from hilarious picture books to historical fiction and high-energy, heavily illustrated junior fiction. She has also written and illustrated her own books, the very funny *Roo and Vladimir* and *Bubbles, the Zooting, Tooting Manatee*.



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Writing and Illustration Style

The Terrible Trio: The (not so) Superheroes is the first book in this laugh-out-loud graphic novel trilogy written for the 5–8 age group. Award-winning author Swapna Haddow and the terrible (I mean terrific) trio – Zeb, Marge and Barry – turn reading a book into a lively madcap adventure. Animals and superpowers are a winning combination for younger readers delving into the world of novels, and the goofy trio, who receive the worst superpowers of all, certainly will capture their hearts and hook them for life.

The story is broken up with lots of graphics and bite-sized chunks of narrative and dialogue text, making it easy for reluctant or struggling readers to tackle too. The narrative text is written in the third-person past tense, while the dialogue is written in the present tense. To add drama, some of the text is presented on angles and in a larger font size with a mix of different typefaces.

Minky Stapleton is the perfect illustrator for this lively, quirky series. In fact, Minky and Swapna are the dynamic duo for this terrible trio! Minky's multi-faceted talents are evident throughout her illustrations, which are packed full of expression and humour. Created in Adobe Photoshop and Procreate, the illustrations are black and white on all the internal pages. The three main characters – a zebra, a penguin and a lemur – are black and white in real life too. This monochrome palette works really well because it allows Minky's composition, line work and playfulness to shine through.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Questioning is an important part of reading and comprehension. Encourage the students to ask questions as they make inferences and predictions about what will happen next in the story. Allow time for the students to identify some of the themes presented in the book, such as accepting ourselves, friendship, team work and being grateful for our own abilities and 'superpowers'. Use some of the following questions to help promote discussion.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- What does the word *trio* mean? What clue is there on the front cover?
- Look at the trio's facial expressions. How do you think each one is feeling? Are they feeling the same or different?
- Why do you think the author put the words *not so* in parentheses?
- What would it be like to live in a world where each animal (or person) has superpowers?
- What do you think would be the worst power of all to have?
- The trio get jealous about the other animals saving the world. Have you been jealous of someone else's abilities? Why?

COMPREHENSION:

- On page 3, a great announcement is made. What do you think the great announcement might be? Then turn to page 4 to see if your prediction is correct. (pp.3–4)
- We know the line was very long, but the author uses the word *extremely* in larger bold type to emphasise her point. The word *extremely* is an adverb, which is a word that usually describes a verb or an adjective. What other adverbs could she use that also emphasise it, such as *incredibly*, *exceptionally*, *wildly*, *exceedingly*, *absolutely*, *seriously*, *mightily* and *substantially*? Use a thesaurus if you need assistance. (p.6)
- Have you waited with strangers in a long queue before? What did you queue for, and how did you pass the time? (pp.8–9)
- Do you know someone who has an unusual name? Does it suit him or her? Do you know how he or she got the name? Do you call him or her by a nickname instead? (pp.10–11)
- Barry the lemur suggests that everyone be kind about each other's names. Do you agree with Barry? Why or why not? (p.13)
- Zeb tells everyone to *SHHHH!* What does this mean? (p.15)
- Why do you think the lion is kneeling before the character in the armchair? (p.16)
- Do you think the ability to flatten trees and crush mountains with his roar is a useful superpower for the lion? Why or why not? (p.17)
- The hungry lion eats the poor tapir in the queue. Would you give up your spot in the line so that you didn't have to stand next to the lion, or would you risk it and be second in the line? Explain your answer. (p.19)
- Would you prefer to have the lion's superpower or the chameleon's superpower? Explain your answer. (p.20)
- Why do you think the line moves so slowly? (p.25)



- What games would you play while you wait in line? Barry always thinks about sandwiches as he waits. What do you think you would think about? (p.29)
- The author emphasises how long and winding the line is by using the words *up, down, around, under, over, through* and *around*. What is another sentence she could have written? (p.31)
- The illustrator draws a small note on the buffalo's bottom that says *WASH ME!* What note would you draw? (p.31)
- Have you seen a blue-footed booby in books or on TV? A male blue-footed booby is very proud of his blue feet. In fact, the more blue they are, the better. He uses them to attract a female blue-footed booby. Are you proud of something about yourself? It doesn't have to be a physical attribute, such as pretty eyes and shiny hair, it might be that you are kind, thoughtful or good at including people. (pp.34–35)
- Has someone made fun of you for the way you look? How does it make you feel when that happens? (p.36)
- What does the word *ginormous* mean? What other words mean the same thing? (p.41)
- What is a documentary? Do you watch TV shows about real people and events? Why or why not? (p.43)
- The author weaves humour throughout the book. Why is it funny when she says that the show *Watching Grass Grow* was cancelled after fifty-two seasons? (p.43)
- Zeb gets angry when Marge and the Superpower Ministry Manager talk about their favourite TV shows. How do you think you would react? (p.44)
- The Superpower Ministry Manager is in a hurry as he wants to rush home. Do you think he'll put much thought into the trio's superpowers? Explain your answer. (p.46)
- Would you like Marge the penguin's superpower of making mac 'n' cheese? Why or why not? (p.48)
- Barry gets nice handwriting as his superpower. What if you have nice handwriting already? Do you think you could ask the Superpower Ministry Manager for another superpower? Why do you say that? (p.53)
- Why do you think the Superpower Ministry Manager gets annoyed when Zeb shouts that mac 'n' cheese and handwriting are not superpowers? (p.55)
- The Superpower Ministry Manager calls Zeb *Stripey-pants*. Do you think this is rude or funny? Why? (p.63)
- Do you agree with Zeb that his superpower is dangerous? When would being black and white and striped be useful? (p.67)
- Out of Marge, Barry and Zeb, who do you think gets the worst superpower? Explain your answer. (p.70)
- Why does the author repeat the first two sentences on page 71? Have you done this in your writing? (p.71)
- Why is Marge freaked out by toucans? (p.73)
- Marge and Zeb are both black and white. Barry is grey and white. Do you think Barry might be freaked out by colour like his friends are? Explain your answer. (p.73)
- Both Marge and Barry are thrilled with their superpowers. What does this tell you about their personalities? (p.75)
- Should Zeb be happy with just being a zebra? Why do you think he doesn't realise that this is his superpower? (p.76)
- Barry gives Zeb a great big hug to reassure him. Does it help if someone you know gives you a hug if you're feeling down? How? (p.77)
- The author uses the word *nope* on pages 78–79. What does this do to the pace of the story? (pp.78–79)
- In Marge's thought bubble, we see Zeb sweeping the floors in the café. What else could he do since there are no zebra crossings in there? (p.85)
- Zeb's mum tells him to stop being a whiny unicorn so that he snaps out of his mood. How might Zeb feel when she says this? (p.91)
- Why does the owner of the café have a shortage of workers? (p.95)
- Zeb slinks down to the floor when he hears the lion say that the napkin service isn't great. How do you feel when you hear something negative said about you? (pp.100–101)
- How can you stop rumours from being spread? (p.102)
- Why do you think Marge isn't so sure when Zeb suggests they get the Ministry squirrel to give them new powers? (p.109)
- Zeb wants Marge to have the power to make gourmet food, but Marge is happy making mac 'n' cheese. Is it okay to be happy with what you've got rather than always wanting bigger and better things? (pp.112–113)
- Does Zeb have a right to be miserable about Marge and Barry's powers? Explain your answer. (p.117)
- Is it easy or hard to accept and support someone else when you mightn't agree with what he or she is doing? (p.118)
- How do you think they're going to stop the prisoner from breaking out of the jail? (p.127)
- The crocodile is a supervillain, which is the opposite of a superhero. What other animals could potentially be supervillains, or do many animals have the potential to be good or evil? Explain your answer. (p.128)
- Why does Zeb give Marge and Barry chef hats to wear? (p.135)
- Marge is upset when Zeb suggests to serve the lunchtime food for breakfast. Do you get upset if different meals are served at different times? Why do you think you react like that? (p.137)



- Barry tries to smooth out the discussion and settle Marge down when Zeb says that the mac 'n' cheese all tastes the same. Who acts as the peacemaker in your friend group? What makes him or her good at that role? (pp.138–139)
- Why do you think Marge is refusing any help with carrying the huge box? (p.141)
- What clues in the illustration on page 151 show you that the prisoners might be rather unfriendly? (p.151)
- Are you supportive to your best friend? How? (p.158)
- Can you do things on your own, or do you need your friends to do them with? Why is that? (p.162)
- What does the prison guard mean when he uses the word *riled*? (p.163)
- Zeb's obsession with the evil crocodile is a little too obvious to the prison guard. How else could he get the information about the crocodile from the guard? (pp.164–165)
- The prison guard shouts that it's a 'code green', but doesn't know what it means. What do you think it might mean? (pp.171–172)
- Do you think the crocodile is going to eat Marge or the mac 'n' cheese that she's stirring madly? Why? (p.175)
- Do you think Zeb has a plan when he jumps in front of Marge to shield her? If so, what's the plan? (p.177)
- What does the word *flummoxed* mean? (p.181)
- Have you been overlooked for praise before like Zeb? How does that make you feel? (p.183)
- Zeb is proud of himself by the end of the story. Are you proud of yourself? What are you proud of? (p.184)
- What is Zeb feeling when he feels a warmth rise in his chest? (p.191)
- Why does Zeb now feel good about his superpower and his ability to fold napkins well compared to how he felt when he first got those skills? (p.192)

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Activities

ACTIVITY 1: EXTRA POWERS

The author uses her fabulous sense of humour to come up with all the fun superpowers. She also adds in some extra powers for Barry, Marge and Zeb. Barry gets eraser drool, Marge is able to make mac 'n' cheese from anything and Zeb can roll his eyes really, really fast. Now it's your turn to give the trio some extra super power tools. For instance, Barry could get lightning fast calligraphy pens, glow-in-the-dark rulers that help him write in straight lines at night-time, erasers that rub out but never run out and so on.

ACTIVITY 2: RICH AND FAMOUS

Zeb daydreams about a superpower that would make him a proper hero. He also daydreams about all the benefits that come with being a superstar, especially if he has the ability to win the lottery every week. Zeb imagines himself with a five-stable mansion, a diamond-encrusted saddle and designer sunglasses. Pretend you're a superstar (and a superhero) and that you can buy yourself five things that you've always wanted now that you're rich and famous. Write them in a list and share it with a friend.

ACTIVITY 3: THE WATCHING PAINT DRY SHOW

The Superpower Ministry Manager likes to watch the TV show *Watching Paint Dry*. It's an hour-long show in which the viewers just watch a painted wall dry. Now it mightn't be the most riveting show on Earth, but that doesn't mean that the introduction has to be boring. You're part of a TV production crew and you have to write the intro. Of course, if you prefer to write about Marge's favourite TV show, *Watching Grass Grow*, then do that instead.

The purpose of a TV intro is to let the viewers know what they're about to watch. Introductions are usually short and clear, and they are accompanied with music and sound effects. For these two shows, the sound effect of a clock ticking might work well! Ensure the intro is memorable. For instance, is the general tone conversational, funny or both? No TV production is done alone, so work in pairs or in groups, then present your creation to the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 4: THE HANDWRITING JOB

Barry receives the superpower of nice handwriting (with the added bonus of some eraser drool for those blackboard mistakes). He finds the perfect job at a café where he puts his handwriting skills to use writing the menu on the specials blackboard. Imagine that you see a job advertisement online for a handwriting job. It could be a job as a billboard handwriting specialist. Design and write the text for the advert. Begin with a clear, concise title and a short paragraph describing what the job is. Then write a list of responsibilities in bullet-point format, such as: lead a small team of sign writers, assist with writing billboards, check the quality of all the handwriting, must meet deadlines and budgets and report to the sign-writing boss. Now write the skills you need, such as: must have nice (and neat) handwriting, must be able to do calligraphy with different writing tools, needs to be able to work well with others, needs a sense of humour, having eraser drool is an added bonus, but not a necessity!

ACTIVITY 5: RIDICULOUS SUPERPOWERS

On page 102, we learn that rumours have run amok and that some other animals think that Zeb's superpower is the power of having quite sharp toenails on a Sunday. Write down five rumoured superpowers for Zeb that sound totally ridiculous. Go wild! Share your work with a friend or the rest of the class.

ACTIVITY 6: A SPECIAL BATCH OF BREAKFAST MAC 'N' CHEESE

Marge is a whiz at whipping up mac 'n' cheese, thanks to lots of stones, pebbles, cutlery, toilet rolls, a street sign, a rubbish bin and a small tricycle (and almost a chihuahua)! Pretend you're Marge and have to give Barry the ingredients and recipe instructions for a special batch of Breakfast mac 'n' cheese. Write them down so that Barry can copy them in his very best handwriting and calligraphy paint pens. If you prefer, you could attempt to do some special calligraphy handwriting on the headings.

ACTIVITY 7: ZEB THE PRISON SUPERHERO

The newspaper article on page 183 has the headline *Chicken Superhero Success at Prison!* But poor old Zeb never gets a mention in the article. Imagine that you're a newspaper reporter for a rival newspaper and that you write a piece about Zeb the superhero and his prison antics. The features of a newspaper article are: a short and catchy headline, a first sentence that summarises the events and hooks in the readers, a first paragraph that includes some of the 5 Ws (*who, what, where, when, why*), written in the third person, quotes from interviewees (written in the first person); facts, photographs and captions.

Written by Janine Scott



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