

The extract below is the first chapter in Morris Gleitzman's book, *Toad Rage*. Although he wrote it for young children, it's useful for us to read as it provides one way to shine a different perspective on the cane toad invasion. In order to show this perspective, the author gives human characteristics to cane toads - which we know is impossible in real life. However, it reminds us there's more than one perspective for every situation, sometimes many, and prompts us to ask, 'Why is this important?'. See what you think ...

As you read the extract, highlight any words, phrases, or sentences, you feel the author has deliberately used to appeal to our emotions, and by doing this, to influence us.

### Extract from TOAD RAGE by Morris Gleitzman

#### Chapter 1

"Uncle Bart," said Limpy. "Why do humans hate us?"

Uncle Bart looked down at Limpy and smiled fondly.

"Stack me, Limpy," he chuckled, "you are an idiot."

Limpy felt his warts prickle with indignation as Uncle Bart hopped onto the road after a bull ant.

No wonder I've never heard any other cane toad ask that question, thought Limpy, if that's the reply you get.

Limpy was glad the grass at the edge of the highway was taller than he was. At least the millions of insects flying around the railway crossing light couldn't see who Uncle Bart was calling an idiot.

"Humans don't hate us," Uncle Bart was saying, his mouth full of bull ant and grasshopper. "What are you on about? Stack me, some of the dopey ideas you youngsters come up with..."

Limpy waited patiently for Uncle Bart to finish. Uncle Bart was his fattest uncle, and his bossiest. When Uncle Bart had a point to make, he liked to keep on making it until you gave in and looked convinced.

Tonight, though, Limpy didn't give in.

He didn't have to. When Uncle Bart was getting his mucus in a knot about how humans definitely didn't hate cane toads, a truck came roaring round the corner in a blaze of lights, straightened up, rumbled through the railway crossing, swerved across the road straight at Uncle Bart, and drove over him.

Limpy trembled in the grass while the truck thundered past in a cloud of diesel fumes and flying grit. Then he hopped onto the road and looked down at what was left of Uncle Bart.

The light overhead was very bright because it had a whole railway crossing to illuminate, and Limpy was able to see very clearly that Uncle Bart wasn't his fattest uncle anymore.

Flattest, more like, he thought sadly.

"See," he said quietly to Uncle Bart. "That's what I'm on about."

"Har har har," chortled a nearby grasshopper. "Your uncle's a place mat. Serves him right."

Limpy ignored the grasshopper and turned to watch the truck speeding away into the darkness. From the movement of its taillights he could tell it was weaving from side to side. Each time it weaved, he heard the distant "pop" of another relative being run over.

"Yay," shouted the grasshopper. "More place mats."

Limpy sighed.

He decided not to eat the grasshopper. Mum was always warning him he'd get a bellyache if he ate when he was upset or angry.

To take his mind off Uncle Bart, Limpy crossed the road to have a look at Uncle Roly.

Uncle Roly was extremely flat too, but at least he was smiling. Which is what you'd expect, thought Limpy sadly, from your kindest uncle, even when he has been dead for two nights.

Limpy reached forward and gently prodded Uncle Roly. He was dry and stiff. The hot Queensland sun had done its job.

Limpy remembered how Uncle Roly had never been dry and stiff when he was alive. He'd always had a warm smile for everyone, even the family of holidaymakers two evenings ago who'd purposely aimed their car straight for him down the wrong side of the road.

"Oh, Uncle Roly," whispered Limpy. "Couldn't you see the way they were looking at you?"

Limpy shuddered as he remembered the scary expressions on the holidaymakers' faces. It was exactly the same look of hatred that had been on the face of the truck driver who'd tried to kill Limpy when he was little.

I was lucky, thought Limpy sadly. When it happened to me, I'd only just finished being a tadpole. I had a pair of brand-new legs and I could hop almost completely out of the way. I only got one leg a bit squashed. Poor old Uncle Roly was completely flat before he knew what hit him. Limpy felt his crook leg start to ache, as it often did when he was sad and stressed. He gazed down at Uncle Roly's very wide smile and felt his throat sac start to wobble.

Why?

Why would a carload of humans purposely kill an uncle who had such a good heart that he was still smiling two nights after being run over by a station wagon and a caravan?

I don't get it, thought Limpy. I can understand why grasshoppers and other insects don't like us. It's because we eat them. But we don't eat humans. We can't even fit them into our mouths. So why do they hate us? Limpy felt his warts tingle with determination.

One day, he thought, I'll go to a human place and find out why and try to do something about it, even if I end up dry and stiff and flat myself.

The thought made him feel weak and sick. "Time to go home, Uncle Roly," he said.

Limpy picked Uncle Roly up, heaved him onto his shoulders, and hopped slowly back across the road to Uncle Bart.

"Bye, Uncle Bart," said Limpy to the damp layer of pressed skin and flat warts on the tarmac. "I'll be back for you when you've dried out."

He wondered if he'd find the courage to visit the humans before he saw Uncle Bart again.

I need to get braver, he thought. But how?

"Rack off, place mat," yelled the grasshopper.

Ignoring all thoughts of bellyache, Limpy ate him.

Practice, thought Limpy as he chewed, that's how.

1. In groups, discuss parts of the story you highlighted, by considering these questions:

- Did you all highlight the same bits?
- What other parts did group members highlight?
- Did each of you feel the same about common parts you highlighted?
- What about parts only one person highlighted?
- How did all/any of the parts affect you?
- What did they make you feel?
- What do you think the author wants us to feel?

Write your own answers to the following questions. They'll help you to decide if the author included any facts about cane toads in his story, and wasn't just trying to entertain you. Think about *only* what's in the story, and try not to include anything you knew before reading it.

2. What information is given about cane toads' appearance? What words give you this information?

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3. What does the story tell you about cane toads' prey? Do you think it suggests they consume other animals? Why do you think this?

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4. Did you discover anything about cane toads' living and eating habits? Do cane toads have to beware of any predators? Describe what you learned.

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5. What did you learn about attitudes of humans towards cane toads? Use a different colour to highlight parts that provide this information.

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6. From what you're told in the story, why do you think humans' attitudes are as you described? Do you have the same attitude?

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7. The author gives personal names to toads in the story. Do you think this influences your feelings towards them? What are your feelings? In what other ways does the author try to influence you?

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8. As a result of reading this extract, have you changed your attitude towards cane toads? If yes, in what way? What made you change? If no, why do you think that is?

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9. Does the story suggest there is a cane toad problem? What is it? If yes, highlight (in a different colour) parts that give you this impression.

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10. List facts (not opinions) about cane toads provided in the story. Include any you've mentioned in your answers above.

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