

$$\sqrt{\frac{(x^2 - y^2)(3z + 2x - y^3)}{a^2 + b^3}}$$



$$= (a^3 + b^2 + x^2 + y^2)(x^3 - b^2)$$



$$\frac{x^3 - y^2}{\sqrt{2}} = 2$$

$$\frac{x^3 - y^2}{\sqrt{2}} = 2$$



HOLLY SMALLE



**HOLLY
SMALE**



HarperCollins *Children's Books*

For my grandad. My favourite geek.

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geek/gi:k/h noun informal, chiefly N. Amer.

1 an unfashionable or socially inept person.

2 an obsessive enthusiast.

3 a person who feels the need to look up the word 'geek' in the dictionary.

DERIVATIVES *geeky* adjective.

ORIGIN from the related English dialect word *geck* 'fool'.



My name is Harriet Manners, and I am a geek.

I know I'm a geek because I've just looked it up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. I drew a little tick next to all the symptoms I recognise, and I appear to have them all. Which – and I should be perfectly honest here – hasn't come as an enormous surprise. The fact that I have an *Oxford English Dictionary* on my bedside table anyway should have been one clue. That I keep a Natural History Museum pencil and ruler next to it so that I can neatly underline interesting entries should have been another.

Oh, and then there's the word **GEEK**, drawn in red marker pen on the outside pocket of my school satchel. That was done yesterday.

I didn't do it, obviously. If I *did* decide to deface my own property, I'd choose a poignant line from a really good book, or an interesting fact not many people know. And I definitely wouldn't do it in red. I'd do it in black, or blue, or perhaps green. I'm not a big fan of the colour red, even if it *is* the longest wavelength of light discernible by the human eye.

To be absolutely candid with you, I don't actually know *who* decided to write on my bag – although I have my suspicions – but I can tell you that their writing is almost illegible. They clearly weren't listening during our English lesson last week when we were told that handwriting is a very important Expression of the Self. Which is quite lucky because if I can just find a similar shade of pen, I might be able to slip in the letter *R* in between *G* and *E*. I can pretend that it's a reference to my interest in ancient history and feta cheese.

I prefer Cheddar, but nobody has to know that.

Anyway, the point is: as my satchel, the anonymous vandal and the *Oxford English Dictionary* appear to agree with each other, I can only conclude that I am, in fact, a geek.

Did you know that in the old days the word 'geek' was used to describe a

carnival performer who bit the head off a live chicken or snake or bat as part of their stage act?

Exactly. Only a geek would know a thing like that.

I think it's what they call ironic.

2

Now that you know who I am, you're going to want to know where I am and what I'm doing, right? Character, action and location: that's what makes a story. I read it in a book called *What Makes a Story*, written by a man who hasn't got any stories at the moment, but knows exactly how he'll tell them when he eventually does.

So.

It's currently December, I'm in bed – tucked under about fourteen covers – and I'm not doing anything at all apart from getting warmer by the second. In fact, I don't want to alarm you or anything, but I think I might be really sick. My hands are clammy, my stomach's churning and I'm *significantly* paler than I was ten minutes ago. Plus, there's what can only be described as a sort of... *rash* on my face. Little red spots scattered at totally random and not at *all* symmetrical points on my cheeks and forehead. With a big one on my chin. And one just next to my left ear.

I take another look in the little hand-held mirror on my bedside table, and then sigh as loudly as I can. There's no doubt about it: I'm clearly very ill. It would be wrong to risk spreading this dangerous infection to other, possibly less hardy, immune systems. I shall just have to battle through this illness alone.

All day. Without going anywhere at all.

Sniffling, I shuffle under my duvets a little further and look at my clock on the opposite wall (it's very clever: all the numbers are painted at the bottom as if they've just fallen down, although this does mean that when I'm in a hurry, I have to sort of guess what the time is). Then I close my eyes and mentally count:

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2...

At which point, absolutely on cue as always, the door opens and the room explodes: hair and handbag and coat and arms everywhere. Like a sort of girl