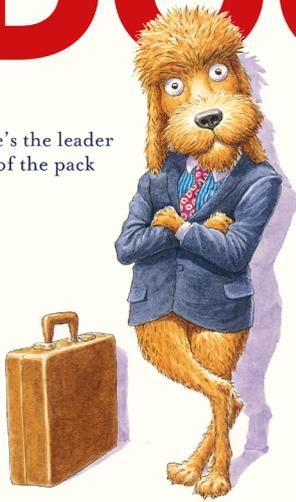


# TOP DOG

He's the leader  
of the pack



Rod Clement

## Top Dog Rod Clement

### Book Summary

Written with enormous wit and insight, from the delightfully deadpan Rod Clement, comes a tale about Samson, top dog and corporate high-flier. Will tickle children and resonate with parents.

### Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes

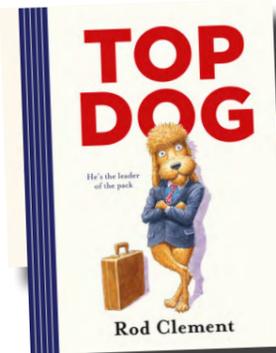
*Top Dog* is appropriate for ages 4-8 and the activities have been designed for Primary School (Stage One) classrooms in mind. You may wish to modify them for your own group.

- English Language
- English Literature
- Visual Literacy
- Personal & Social Competence
- The Arts

### Appropriate Ages:

4-8

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Notes By Simone Evans



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Rod Clement

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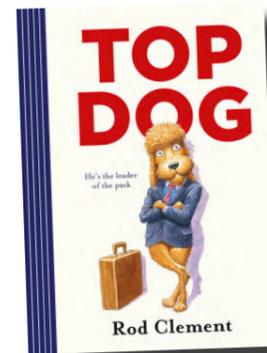
## Themes

- Animals and Humans: Are We So Different?
- Being the Boss: Leadership and Responsibilities

## Study Notes on Themes and Curriculum Topics

- English Language
- English Literature
- Visual Literacy
- Personal & Social Competence
- The Arts

## Activity Sheets Bibliography



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## Introduction

In this story, Rod Clement introduced us to a dog called Samson. Samson is a poodle, and we all know poodles are pretty smart but this poodle is something else. We don't know exactly *how* he got the job but Samson is the CEO of a very important company. We don't know exactly *what* the company does but it must be doing pretty well because

Samson works on the top floor! He also seems to have a number of human staff at his beck and call ... staff that jump, sit and fetch when he says so! Yes, he's top of his game, he's a real top dog. But it must be tiring being Samson because at the end of the day, like any dog, he just wants to take off his shoes and suit and tie, lay down his briefcase and have a good ol' snooze.

Writer-Illustrator Rod Clement brings Samson to life with his detailed doggie drawings and issues us with a little warning that one day the smartest dogs may just take over the world! Or at least the Central Business District...

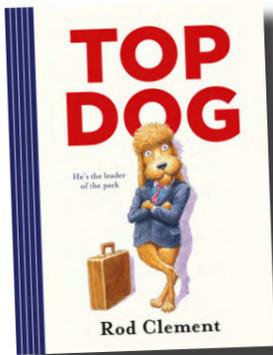
## About the Author and Illustrator

Humour prevails in Rod Clement's books with wacky and exaggerated situations and illustrations, and his nature-lover's eye helps him portray the animal world with a precision and flair that makes images leap off the page. When he went to school, Rod's main ambition was to draw and to make people laugh.

Living in Papua New Guinea for several years as a child gave Rod an intense awareness of nature and his initial work was in the realism mould. Rod soon decided that this was too restrictive and that he wanted to draw straight from the imagination.

His acclaimed picture books include *Counting on Frank*, *Just Another Ordinary Day*, *Olga the Brolga*, *Louisa May Pickett's Best Show and Tell Ever*, *Grandad's Teeth*, *Feathers For Phoebe* and the bestselling *Edward the Emu* and *Edwina the Emu*, both written by Sheena Knowles. *Counting on Frank* is a Children's Book Council of Australia (CBC) Honour Book, *Louisa May Pickett's Best Show and Tell Ever* is a CBC Notable Australian Children's Book, and *Just Another Ordinary Day* and *Grandad's Teeth* have both been shortlisted for CBC Awards.

Rod lives in NSW with his wife and three daughters.



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## Themes

### Animals and Humans: Are We So Different?

In this story the main character, Samson, is a dog that behaves like a human. He wears a suit jacket and works in an office. He does all the things that a regular human might do but with a little doggie edge to them. On top of this, sometimes the humans in the story behave a bit like animals! It's funny to think what the world might be like if animals ran the world.

#### Discussion Points:

What are some of the things that humans and animals have in common?  
What is different about them?  
Are humans a kind of animal? Why? How?  
Do you think animals could run the world?  
What might be different about a world run by animals?

### Being the Boss: Leadership and Responsibilities

Sometimes it might look easy being a boss but being a *good* boss means being a good leader and this comes responsibilities. share or leave them with anybody at all.

#### Discussion Points:

What responsibilities do you think come with being a leader?  
Have you ever been the boss of anything?  
Would you like to be?  
Do you think it would be easy or hard? Why/Why Not?

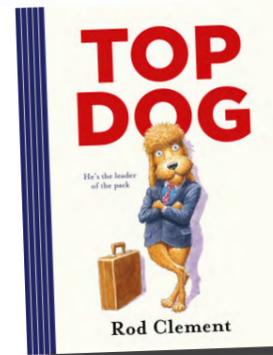
## Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes

### English Language

#### Expressions

On **Page 18** Rod Clement tells us it's a '**dog Eat dog**' world. You might have heard this **figure of speech** before. People don't really eat each other at work so what does this expression mean? People use the expression '**dog eat dog**' when they are talking about tough environments where people have to fight to win. It's really talking about human competition! Sometimes these kinds of expressions are called **idioms**.

**Activity:** Explore some familiar expressions and think about what they might mean. There are no wrong answers. **Worksheet One** gives you some examples and will help you to work through your ideas.



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### Contractions

A **contraction** is formed when two words are joined together (contracted) and an apostrophe is added to replace the missing letter/s. We use lots of contractions in our every day language and writers use them in their writing. In *Top Dog* Rod Clement uses two different contractions a lot. The first is **it's** (it is) and the second is **he's** (he is).

**Activity:** As your teacher reads through the story for a second time, concentrate on finding these two different kinds of contractions. Afterwards, practice writing them on small whiteboards or in the air with your fingertip.

- Page 1 (It's)
- Page 15 (it's)
- Page 16 he's
- Page 18 (it's)
- Page 18 (he's)
- Page 21 (it's)
- Page 24 (he's)

On Page 23 there is a different contraction (**can't**). Can you find it? Can you **expand** it?

## English Literature

### Word Play

Rod Clement is very clever with words. He can use the same word in different ways and make it mean different things. This is sometimes called **Word Play**. **Pages 12 to 15** give some excellent examples of this.

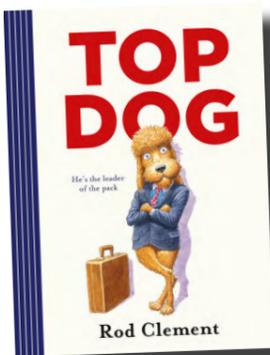
**Activity:** Re-read **pages 12 – 15** as a class and examine how Rod Clement has used clever word play with a few different 'doggie' words. Find the doggie word in each sentence and use it in a sentence about a dog instead of a human.

1. He has **trained** his staff well at the Staff Training School. They **sit** when he says 'sit'.
2. They **stay** when he says 'Stay back, work late.'
3. They **fetch** when he says 'fetch me a coffee'
4. Every now and then they might have to **beg**
5. **Jump** through hoops.

### Homophones

There is a short passage on **Page 25** which is also a play on words that makes us laugh.

Can you find the **homophone**? A homophone is a word that sounds like another word but means something completely different.



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**Activity:** Re-read the text on Page 25, find the homophone and explain why it might make you laugh.

After a few stretches  
Some nibbles  
And a little whine...

In small groups of four, brainstorm some of your own homophones. How many can the group think of? Record them and share them with a class. Build a homophone 'word bank' for the classroom wall.

**Exaggerating the Truth**

Think about the style and content of Rod Clement's writing. Is this a true story? Do you think a dog could really be the CEO of an office? We know that poodles are smart but Rod Clement has made a very funny story out of **exaggerating the truth**.

**Activity:** Play an exaggeration game called 'Yes and then...'

Sit the class down in a large circle. The first person shares something completely normal about their day, for example: 'This morning I walked to school.' The person to their left has to say 'yes and then...' before adding something a little out of the ordinary to the story. E.g. 'Yes and then I saw something purple disappear into the

bushes...'

The person to *their* left carries on in the same way, adding something new to the story and then the person to their left until you have been around the whole circle and created an extraordinary story with the class. You never know where it might take you.

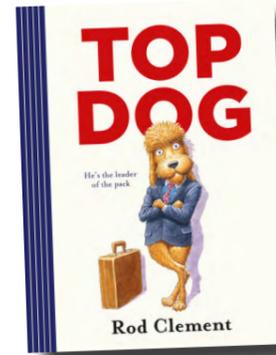
**Activity:** Close your eyes and imagine you own a smart dog like Samson. Get into pairs and in *one minute* tell your partner all the things that you think a smart dog like Samson might get up to around your house. Don't stop thinking of ideas until the teacher calls STOP and SWAP! The second person to go has to be even more imaginative and think of some new ideas. When the class returns to sit in a circle, share your partner's best three ideas.

**Activity:** On **Page 3**, Samson has his head buried in the paper. What articles do you think he likes to read? Write three 'headlines' that a CEO may be interested in and three 'headlines' that a regular dog might like.

**Visual Literacy**

Rod Clement uses his illustrations as well as his words to make the story funny for readers.

**Activity:** Examine the illustration on **Page 22**. Part of the reason it's funny is because Samson is the smallest animal there (in size) but he is



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also the most powerful. He is the biggest boss! Rod Clement has made it funny by **drawing the opposite of what would be considered normal**. Normally we would expect those big fat cats to be chasing Samson out of the room, but in this story he is showing them it's the smallest who is the boss.

**Challenging Activity:** Imagine that you are an illustrator and you have to draw the front cover of *Top Dog* but this time the story is actually about something else. What else could a story titled *Top Dog* be about? Draw an image that shows us an entirely different story.

**Activity:** Explore some visual jokes. Think of some small animals and give them some power over larger animals. Make sure you show the audience who is the boss! Here are some ideas to start you off:

1. A mouse and a lion
2. An ant and a rhino
3. A goldfish and a shark

**Personal and Social Competence**

Because Samson has to juggle being an important CEO with being a regular dog, he must have to have a schedule. Schedules are important for busy people with lots of

responsibilities and help you know where you have to be and when. Your teacher would have a schedule for your class; your family might have a schedule. Sometimes schedules are called timetables.

**Activity:** Use **Worksheet Three** to explore Samson's schedule. Use your knowledge of the story as well as your imagination to fill in the times. Try creating your own schedule.

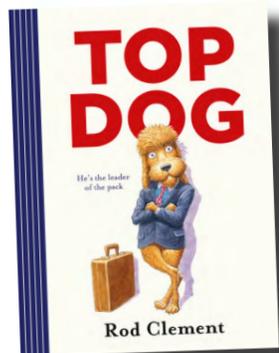
**Being the Boss!** As a group, discuss the characteristics of a good leader. Record these ideas on the class whiteboard.

**Activity:** Think about a company that you may like to run one day. Give it a name and write a sentence about it. Create a list of rules for your company that would keep your workers safe and happy. List three characteristics of a good leader that you think are especially important to your company.

**The Arts**

The text on page 22 reads:

'When dealing with fat cats from the city, or the ever-circling sharks, he has to be firm.'



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Have a look at the way Rod Clement has given the humans here some animal qualities. He has kind of 'morphed' humans and animals together to exaggerate their personalities. The first two humans have become 'fat cats' with ruddy faces and grey whiskers, which makes us think they might be a greedy and a bit sly. The other two humans have become 'ever-circling sharks' with slit eyes and pointy-noses, which make us think they might be predatory and a bit aggressive.

**Activity:** As a class, brainstorm some different animals and the personalities you associate with them.

For example, an echidna may be shy and a dolphin may be playful. Could you draw these animals as people? Have a go.

Select an animal and use coloured pencils to create their 'human version'. Think about how you can express their personality. Do they wear human clothes like Samson? Do they have a half-human half-animal face like the fat cats from the city? You decide. Share your drawing with the class.

**Activity:** Have a look at the website of an Australian artist called Michelle Dawson. She has created a book called *How Weird is That?* and in it she explores what would happen if she morphed two different kinds of animals together

to create one, like a tiger with a butterfly and a zebra with a bird.  
<http://msdawson.com/book.html>

(scroll to the bottom of the webpage for drawings).

Try creating some of your own fantasy creatures with charcoal. Ask a friend to give you an animal, then think of a second animal yourself. How would you morph them into one? Charcoal is a fantastic medium for blending together lines and shapes. Experiment with your charcoal piece on its side to create fat, soft lines and on its tip to create thin, dark lines. You can smudge it with a tissue or leave it as a precise mark. Give your creature a unique name and share your drawing with the class.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Worksheet 1

Familiar Phrases – What Do They Really Mean?

If the expression 'it's a dog eat dog world' is really talking about humans, what might these other familiar phrases mean? And how can we work them out? Remember, this is a thinking exercise and there are no wrong answers!

**'It's Raining Cats and Dogs'**  
Draw what this would actually look like!

Explain what it might mean in real life.

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**'You are worth your weight in gold'**  
Draw what this would actually look like!

Explain what it might mean in real life.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Worksheet 2**

**Samson's Schedule**

We know from the story that Samson does a lot of things in one day.

a. Cut out the activities at the bottom of this page and use the clues in the book to help you work out how to complete his schedule.

Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Time	Place	Activity
7:00am		
8:00am		
9:00am		
10:00am		
11:00am		
12:00pm		
1:00pm		
2:00pm		
3:00pm		
4:00pm		
5:00pm		
6:00pm		

Relax	Read Newspaper	Drive Home
Choose Ties for Work	Have breakfast at cafe	Have business meetings
Buy bones for workers	Jog on Treadmill	Have a coffee break
Have a haircut	Have nibbles and a whine	Drive to office

b. Choose a day of the week have a go at creating your own schedule. Fill in what you know you do and then add some activities that you would like to do!

Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Time	Place	Activity
7:00am		
8:00am		
9:00am		
10:00am		
11:00am		
12:00pm		
1:00pm		
2:00pm		
3:00pm		
4:00pm		
5:00pm		
6:00pm		

c. Draw a picture of your favourite activity in the day.

## Questions for Reading and Discussion

Look at the illustration on Page One. What is the first visual clue that Samson might be just a little smarter than regular dogs?

What do you think is the 'breaking news' on TV that night?

Look at the illustration on Page Two. Samson's shadow is on the ground in front of him. Where do you think the light is shining from?

What might be in the 'doggie bag' that Samson's butler carries for him?

On Page Six Samson goes to his favourite café and hairdresser. What would the other customers think and say when they saw him there?

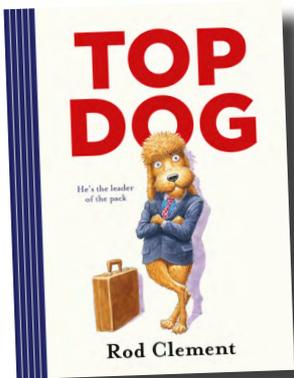
What do you think Samson's Company does? What business might a dog be interested in?

On Page Ten Rod Clement has added a little detail in the drawing that tells us a dog might just work in the office. What is it?

On Page Seventeen Samson has left some little treats for his workers. Would you eat a bone to please your boss?

What is a 'blog'? What might Samson 'blog' about?

On the last page, Samson is being given a scratch. He is a dog after all... What other things do ordinary dogs like?



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## Bibliography

Michelle Dawson, *Book: How Weird is That?*  
retrieved from:  
<http://msdawson.com/book.html>

## About the Author of the Notes

Simone Evans attended Newtown High School of the Performing Arts before completing a Bachelor of Media and Communications at Charles Sturt University. She worked for almost a decade producing theatre for young people in Australia and England and is now a primary school teacher in rural NSW