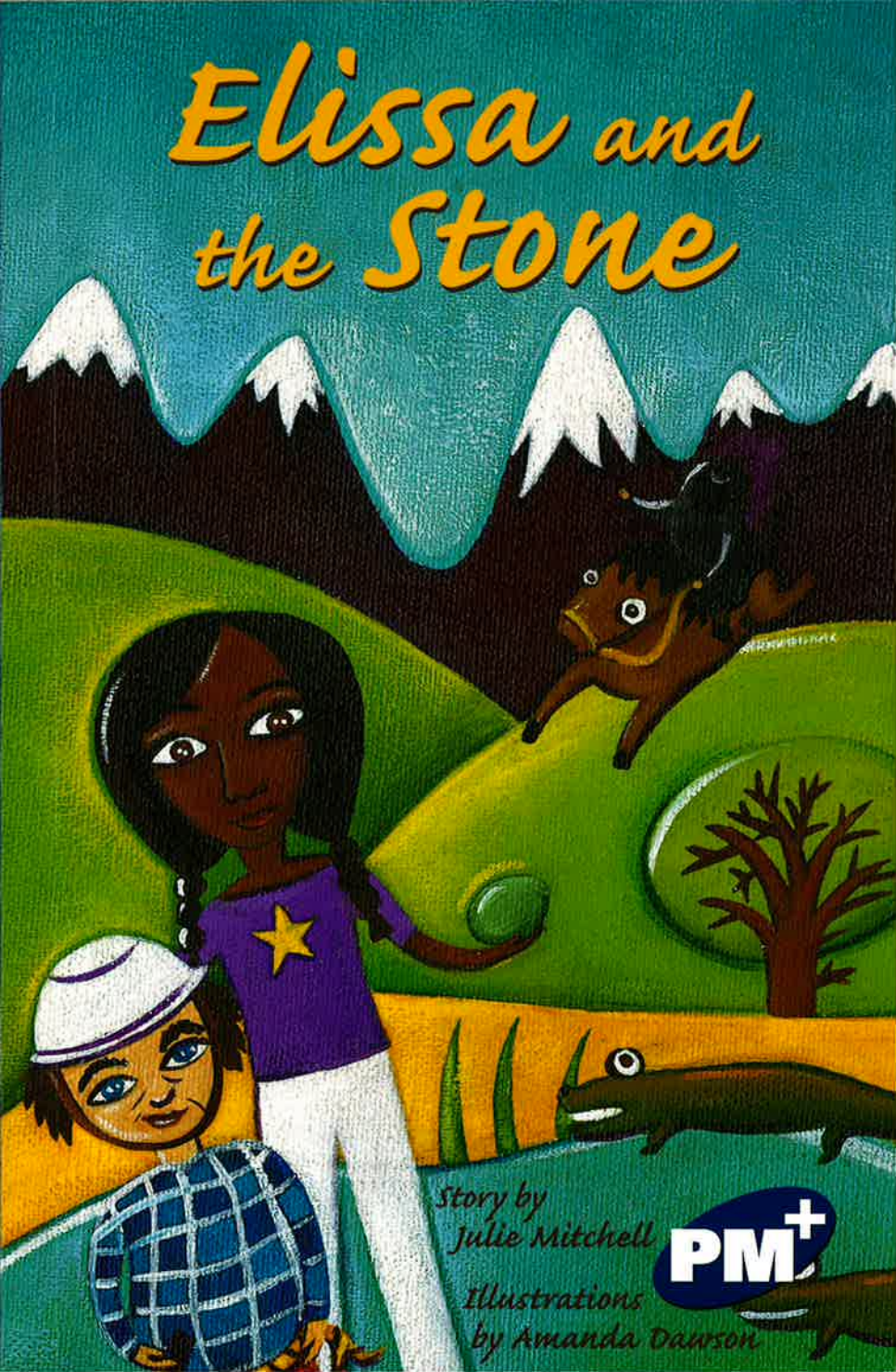
Elissa and the Stone



Story by Julie Mitchell

Illustrations by Amanda Dawson

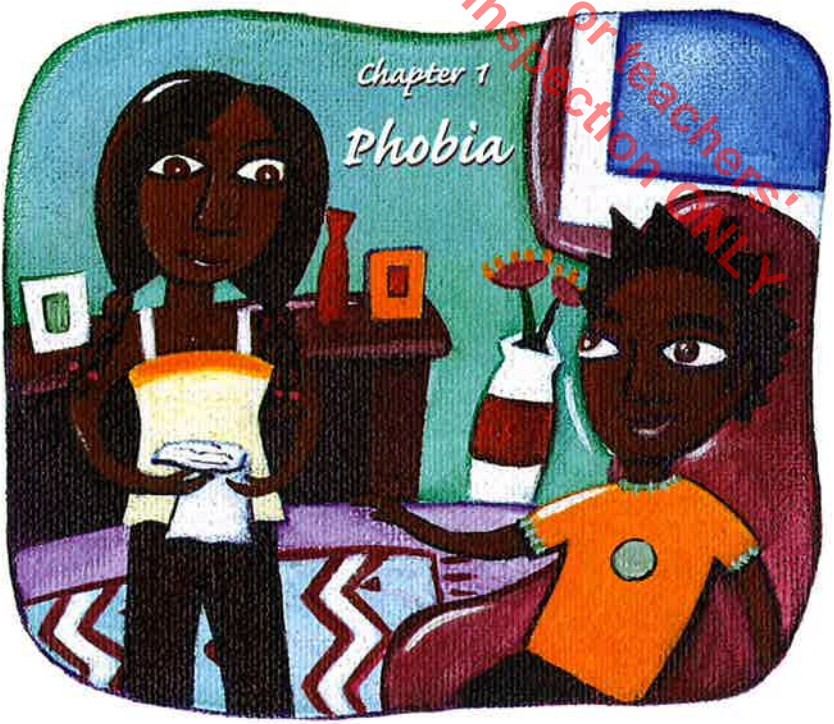
PM+

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Contents

Chapter 1	Phobia	4
Chapter 2	A Thorny Problem	9
Chapter 3	Ashakhan	13
Chapter 4	The Journey	18
Chapter 5	Strategy	26
Chapter 6	A Winner!	30





For teachers' inspection ONLY

"It's a great speech," Joel said. "It's just a shame no one else is going to get to hear it."

Elissa frowned at her twin. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Joel continued, "it's one thing to make a speech in front of your brother, but it's another to make it in front of all of Year Eight." He paused, looking serious. "Have you forgotten what happened the last time you tried to say something in front of an audience?"

For teachers' inspection ONLY

She had, of course. But now the memory sprang up like some hideous jack-in-the-box. There she was, dressed as a villager in last year's school play. The Pied Piper was beginning to draw the children of Hamelin away with his music, and she knew it was almost time to step forward and say her line. As she waited, she glanced at the audience – there were so many people out there, watching and listening to everything. If she made a mistake, they would know … every one of them would know. And she would die of embarrassment.

Her heart thumped in her chest, and her stomach trembled. Then she heard the piper play the run of notes that was her cue. She tried to move, but her feet seemed bolted to the stage. One of the other villagers gave her a shove, and she stumbled forward.



For teachers' inspection ONLY

The piper stopped playing. Elissa was supposed to say, "Where are you taking the children?" But something was terribly wrong with her throat. When she tried to speak, it locked up so tightly that nothing came out. Again and again, she tried to say her line, but her voice remained trapped inside.

The silence was awful. It went on for so long that the piper finally said, "I suppose you're wondering where I'm taking the children."

She managed to nod and, mercifully, a short time later, the curtain fell.

"Liss?" Joel said, bringing her back to the present. "I didn't mean to upset you. I think you'd make a great student council representative."



For teachers' inspection ONLY

"Well, we'll never know," Elissa said, blinking back tears, "because you're right – there's no way I can make a speech in front of everyone. And without a speech, I don't stand a chance of being elected." She ran upstairs to her room.

What a waste of good ideas, she thought, tossing her speech in the bin. New books for the library ... up-to-date computer software ... an afterschool activities program ...

They were all good ideas, but she wouldn't be able to develop them further. And why not? Because she was afraid of speaking in public. Afraid she would be embarrassed again.

Fresh tears threatened, and Elissa knew she had to think about something else. She changed into her pyjamas, curled up under her doona, and began deliberately studying the wallpaper.



For teachers' inspection ONLY

On a beige background, golden leaves wound themselves around vertical golden stripes. Elissa examined each stripe in turn, trying to spot a flaw in the pattern. And on the twelfth stripe from the corner, she found one – the leaves on this stripe were shinier, and slightly green. She moved on to the thirteenth stripe, and found another fault – the stripe was brown and the leaves were a glossy dark green.

Her eyelids grew heavy with the strain, and her body began to relax. Moments later, she discovered an amazing thing – the wallpaper didn't seem like wallpaper at all any more. It had become a dense green jungle of bushes and vines.

"Helps!" cried a voice somewhere in the distance. "Please, helps me!"

