COOKIE

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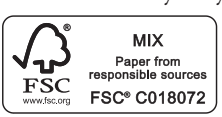

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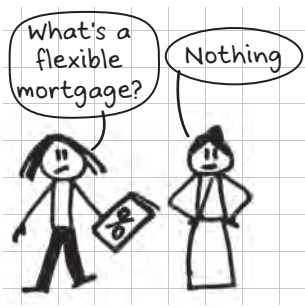
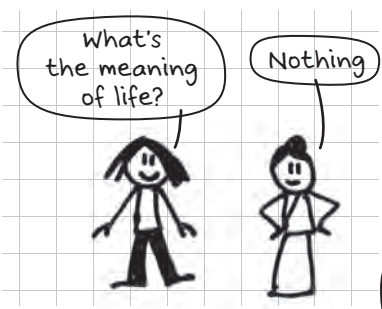
CHAPTER 1

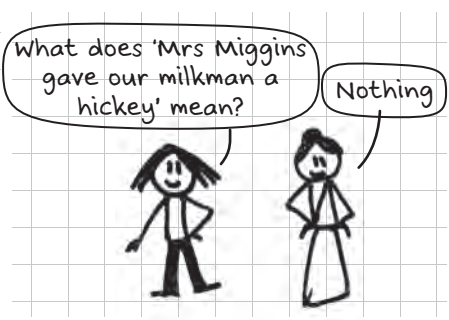
Secrets



Why is it that parents always say 'nothing' when you ask them questions about their conversations with other grown-ups?



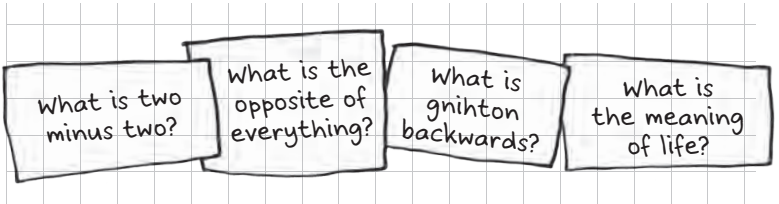
It's like they think we're being nosey or that we're too young to understand things. But how can we learn anything if they don't tell us stuff in the first place?



In general, a good

way to learn things is to ask questions, but 'nothing' is NOT a helpful answer!

I suppose there are a few exceptions . . .



Today, my mum got a letter from my nani (her mum) and spent a good twenty minutes reading it and laughing out loud, like it was the funniest joke book ever written. When I asked her what it said, she just kept saying 'nothing'.

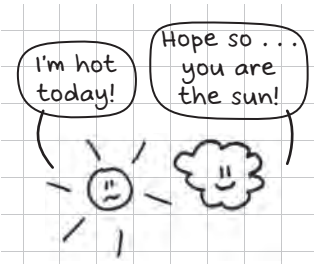


'*Nothing* doesn't make people laugh,' I said, to which she replied, 'Really, it's nothing . . . just Nani being Nani.' Well, that's even more ridiculous! Of course Nani is being Nani. Who else would she be? Father Christmas?! Now *that* would be weird.

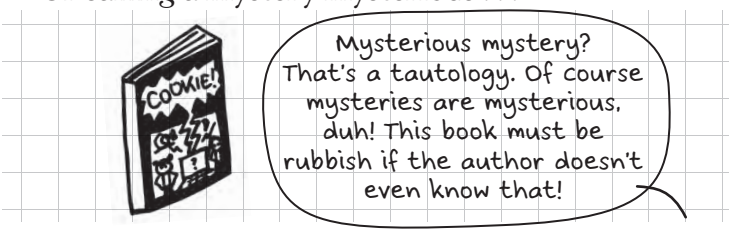


I think saying 'Nani is

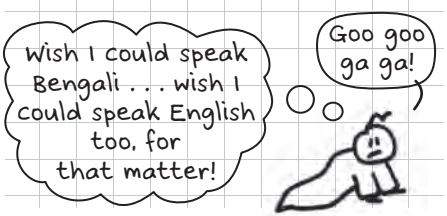
just being Nani' is a tautology. A tautology is when you repeat something that's already been implied in the same sentence, like 'the scorching sun was boiling hot'. Well, of course it was, otherwise it wouldn't be scorching!



Or calling a mystery mysterious . . .

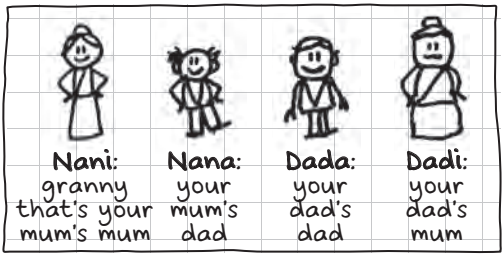


Unlike most other people at school who see their grans all the time, I hardly know my nani cos she lives in Bangladesh. I've only been there once, and although it was for the whole of the summer holidays I was just a baby so I don't remember it.

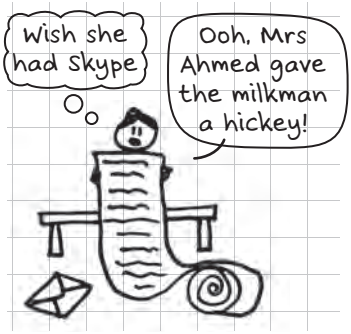


'Nani' is the Bengali word for a gran who's your mum's mum. Your grandparents from each side of the family are called a different thing. Keziah always laughs at the fact that a 'Nana' is a man and

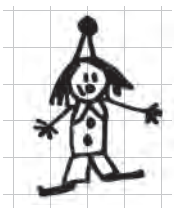
a 'Dadi' is a woman, but it's actually pronounced 'Nunna' and 'Duddy'.



My nani lives in a small village in Bangladesh. She doesn't even have Skype or a mobile phone, so every now and then she sends Mum these really long letters updating her on the family back home and all the village goings-on. Judging by the amount that my mum laughs, Nani seems to be funnier than a stand-up comedian.



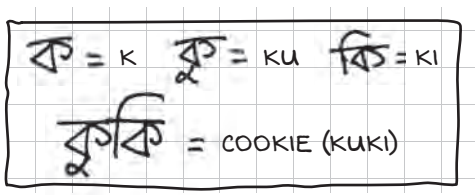
Maybe if Nani lived here she *could* be a stand-up comedian. I like to think I've inherited her genetics and that I'm quite funny too.



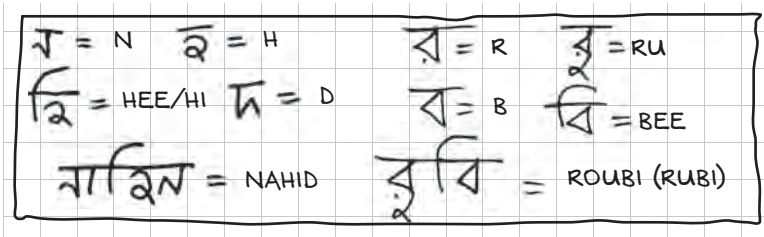
Genetics are the coding handed down to us from our biological parents that give us our inherited characteristics.



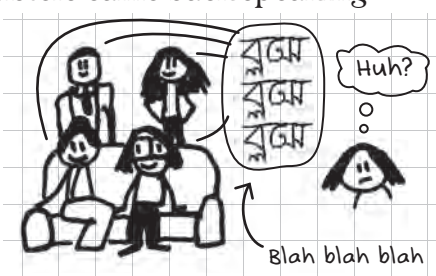
Talking of coding, Bengali's a bit like a code. After Mum had finished Nani's letter, she left it on the kitchen counter. I tried to have a look, but it was like a foreign language to me . . . probably because it is, I guess. Bengali looks really cool written down. It all hangs off a line and is in neat shapes. I already know how to write my name . . .



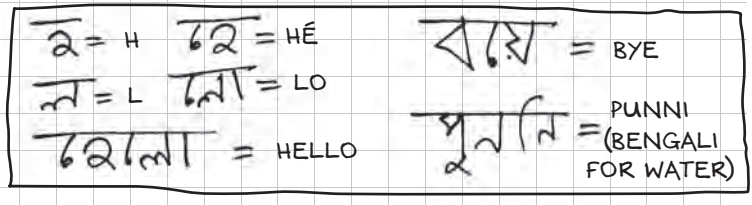
My sisters can write their names as well – we worked it out from this Bengali alphabet book Mum bought us.



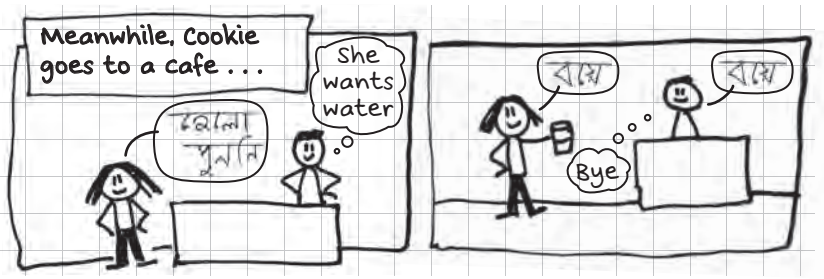
I was only a few months old when we went to Bangladesh, but my sisters came back speaking Bengali really well and now it's like everyone in my family can speak in code except for me.



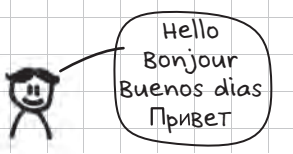
My eldest sister, Nahid, speaks it better than my middle sister, Roubi. I can hardly speak it at all – I only know three words.



But I like to think they're three really important words . . .



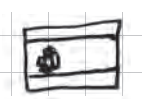
Clement Boudin in our year at school can speak FOUR languages.



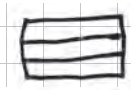
1. French – he was born in France and his parents are French.
2. English – he moved to England in Year Two and picked up English within a few months.
3. Spanish – his childminder only spoke to him in Spanish, so he learnt it from her.



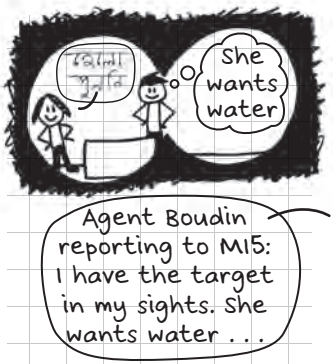




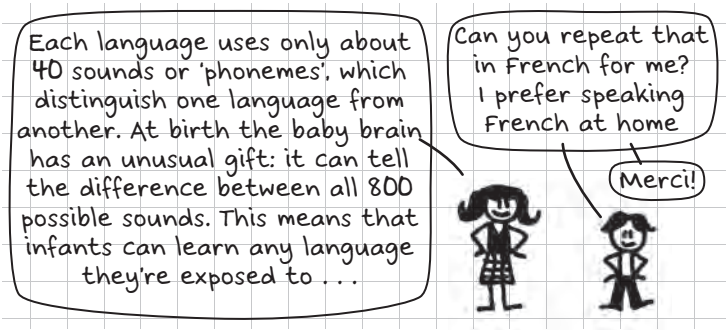
4. Russian – yep, Russian!! His mum's parents are Russian and they taught it to him.



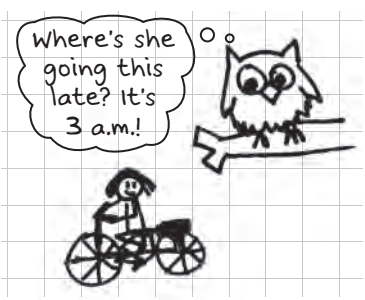
He could be an interpreter and work for MI5!



Imagine speaking FOUR languages! How cool is that?! Apparently, babies can learn hundreds of different languages . . .



I decide to bike over to Keziah's. I love having my new bike – it's so brilliant being able to see Keziah whenever I like.



As I'm leaving the house, Jake, who lives next door, is finishing off washing his mum's car and decides to tag along.

'Hey, Jake!' I say. 'How come you're washing the car again? You only just did it last week!'

'Mum keeps making excuses to get me out of the house,' he explains. 'Not only have I washed the car twice today, but I've also mown the lawn AND been to the shops three times to pick things up for her. It's so odd. She'll probably be over the moon that I'm going to Keziah's with you. She's acting SO weird and being really mysterious.'



'Let me guess,' I say. 'When you try to get to the bottom of it, she just says it's "nothing", right?'

'Right!' he replies.

Why are parents so complicated sometimes? Why all the secrecy? We're old enough to be trusted with stuff at our age.

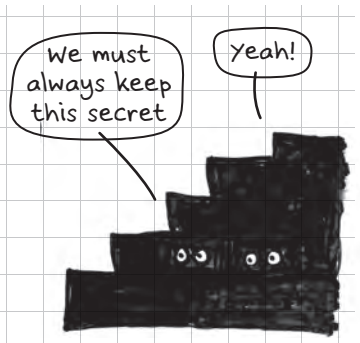


At Keziah's, her dads, Mal and Paul, are having a few people over to watch the football on the telly. They're laughing lots and keep talking about 'that time under the bleachers at their local football club'.

The three of us head up to Keziah's bedroom.

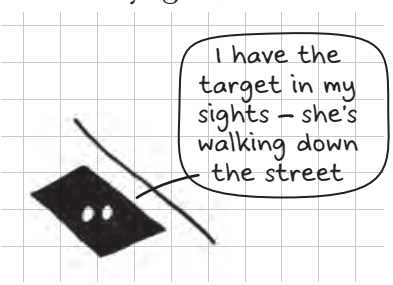
'What are bleachers?' I ask.

'It's an American word,' says Jake. 'They're the seats that are tiered or raised in rows, like stairs.'



'I know that, but I'm still none the wiser as to what happened under them.' Keziah sighs. 'It was before I was born so I have no idea what they're talking about.'

Keziah's room is in the loft, so it has sloping ceilings – it's a bit like being in a secret hideaway in the roof. It's also got massive skylights, which you can look out of and nosey at the whole street undetected! It's really cool and good for spying.

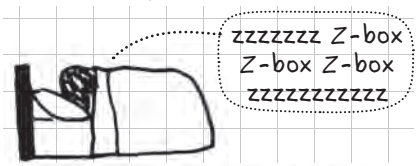


Keziah loves drawing and her whole room is covered in artwork – in fact, the whole house is! Paul and Mal have framed her pictures and hung them everywhere and some of them look really professional.

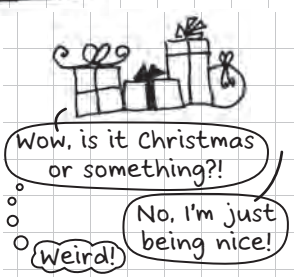


'Heyyy! Look what I've got,' says Jake, pulling a brand-new Z-Box 3 Pro out of his backpack.

'No way! You don't even like gaming! How come you've got one of those?' I ask, trying to hide my jealousy. I love gaming but can only dream of owning my own Z-Box 3 Pro.

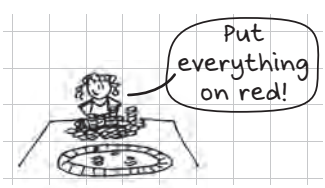


'I know, right?' says Jake. 'My mum got it for me out of the blue and I've no idea why. She keeps getting me presents.'



We start to formulate theories behind Jake's mum's sudden generosity, secrecy and general weirdness. Keziah reckons she might have an online gambling habit.

'She probably needs you out of the house so she can go on the laptop and log on to the cyber casino without you knowing,' she says.



'But why all the gifts?' asks Jake.

'Maybe she buys you stuff with her winnings out of guilt,' I chip in.

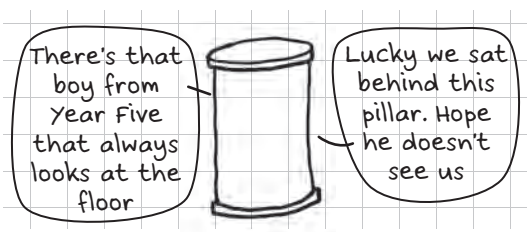
'Not a bad explanation,' he replies. 'Although it doesn't explain why she's being extra nice to me.'

'Maybe she's trying to make up for the fact that your dad's moved out?' suggests Keziah.

I wonder what Jake's mum's hiding. Keziah is brilliant at keeping secrets. I would trust her with my life.



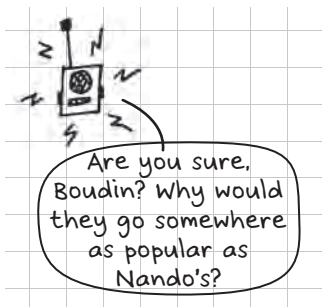
She's almost *too* good at it. One time, Axel Kahn told her that he'd seen Mr Hastings, our deputy head, and Miss Rai, one of the reception teachers, in Nando's together sitting in the corner behind a pillar!



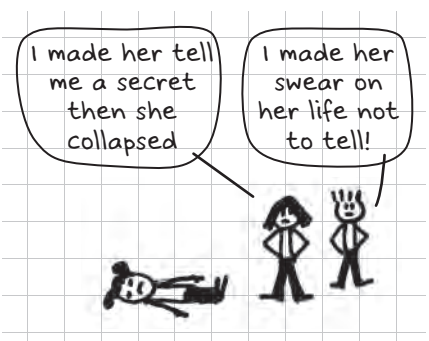
Keziah didn't even tell *me* cos Axel made her promise not to tell anyone. Not even ME?!! Come on, Keziah!! I've no idea why it was such a big deal in the first place. Two teachers eating chicken . . . hardly a classified state secret.



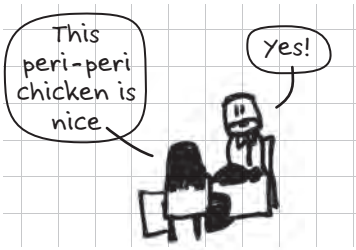
I only found out when Axel accidentally mentioned it to me. Anyway, if it *was* supposed to be a secret, why go somewhere as popular as Nando's?



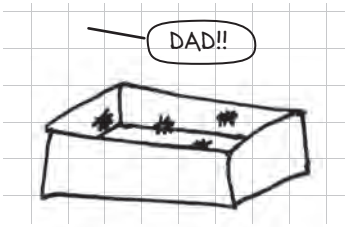
But the point is . . . KEZIAH DIDN'T TELL ME!! She said it was because Axel made her swear on her life. I was really annoyed. I think she's learnt her lesson – we tell each other everything now.



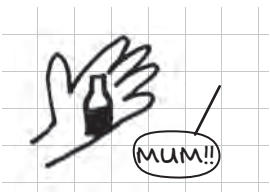
Does make you wonder, though . . . was it some sort of staff meeting or is something else going on? What did they chat about? School? Teaching methods? Their undying love for each other?

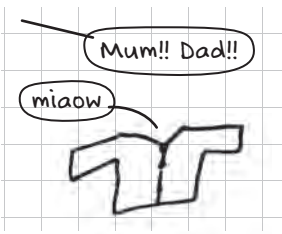


My eldest sister, Nahid, is the WORST at keeping secrets. There was the time when she told Dad about my secret woodlouse farm, which I kept in a shoe box under my bed . . .



AND the time she told Mum I'd stolen a cola bottle from the pick and mix . . .

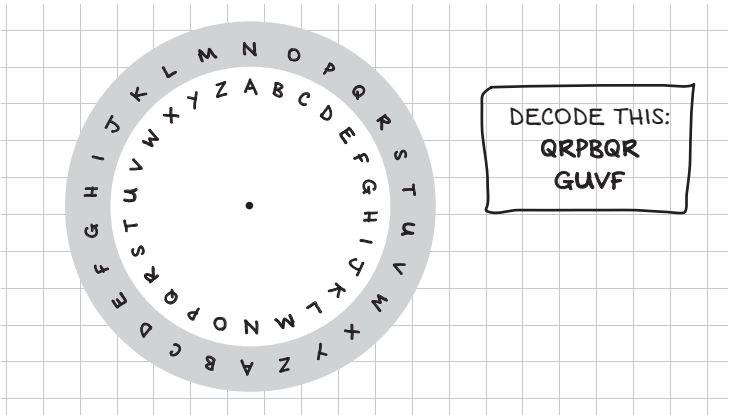




AND the time she told Mum AND Dad that I pretended my cardigan was a pet cat . . .

After we finish playing on the Z-Box, Keziah shows us how to make a coding wheel.

A coding wheel is basically two circles of card with the alphabet written on them, and you set the circles so that each letter of the alphabet corresponds to a totally different letter. You can then code messages to send to each other.



We all decide to make one, and we code and decode messages until it's time to go home.

When I get back, there's an ambulance parked outside my house. What on earth is going on? My dad and Roubi are standing on the pavement and a few other neighbours are gathered around too, including Jake's mum.

The ambulance drives off. Huh?

'What's going on?' I ask

'Get in the car,' says Dad. 'Your sister's been in an accident. We need to go to the hospital.'