Mr Bean in Town

Rowan Atkinson, Richard Curtis,
Robin Driscoll and Andrew Clifford

About the authors

Rowan Atkinson was born in Consett, County Durham, England in 1955. He went to public school, then took a degree in electrical engineering at Newcastle University before going to Oxford in 1975. It was at Oxford that he met screenwriter Richard Curtis, with whom he wrote and performed comedy revues at the Oxford Playhouse. In 1978, Atkinson joined the BBC's *Not The Nine O'Clock News* team – a show based on spoof news-reporting. The show recorded hugely successful albums, released several best-selling books, and won an International Emmy Award and the British Academy Award for 'Best Light Entertainment Program of 1980'. In 1983, Atkinson co-wrote (with Richard Curtis) and starred in the television show *Blackadder*. Atkinson and Curtis co-created *Mr Bean* for television in 1990. Atkinson himself starred as Mr Bean. After an extremely successful two-year run of the series, there followed a series of videos, cassettes and books and, in 1997, a feature-film version. Richard Curtis is a very popular and successful writer. He also wrote the 1994 hit-movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and the romantic comedy *Notting Hill*. In 1999, Curtis was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the British Comedy Awards. Robin Driscoll and Andrew Clifford are both writers contributing to the Mr Bean stories.

Summary

Mr Bean in Town contains two very funny stories. *Steak Tartare*, is about the hilarious events that happen as Mr Bean celebrates his birthday in a very peculiar dinner at a nice restaurant. In *The Launderette*, a series of mishaps occur when he unsuccessfully tries to do the laundry.

***Steak Tartare*, pages 1–6:** Mr Bean rarely goes to restaurants. Yet on his birthday, he decides to spend a special evening at a very nice one. In his best clothes, he asks for a table for one and sits at a very elegant table. As soon as he reads the menu he realises he can barely afford any meal there. So he orders steak tartare, not knowing what it is. In the meantime, he writes a birthday card for himself and leaves it on the table. Then he reads it pretending somebody has remembered his birthday. Mr Bean knows nothing about behaving mannerly at a restaurant. He does not understand why the manager pulls the chair away from the table for him or why the wine is to be tasted. He does not know why he should not play with the cutlery at the table or play the birthday song on the restaurant's glasses. When he is served his food, he gives it a try and finds it revolting. He tries to hide it: in a mustard pot, in a vase of flowers, and elsewhere.

***Steak Tartare*, pages 7–12:** Mr Bean continues to hide the rest of the steak tartare inside the bread rolls, under the plates, even inside the sugar pot. Unbelievably enough, a man with a violin comes in, and as soon as he sees Mr Bean's card, he starts playing the happy birthday song for him. Yet Mr Bean makes the most of this opportunity to put some meat down the back of the man's trousers! Mr Bean stretches to put some more meat inside a woman's bag. He accidentally leaves his foot out and he makes the waiter trip and drop some plates on to Mr Bean's table. Mr Bean complains about this. The manager takes him to a clean table. Mr Bean smiles and is happy again. Now he can do things right and start all over again. The waiter brings him a plate of food – a large plate of steak tartare!

***The Launderette*, pages 13–17:** Mr Bean takes his dirty clothes to the launderette. To pay for the wash he takes his pound coin hidden in his trousers at the end of a piece of string. A young man pushes him away from his machine. Mr Bean is angry but doesn't say anything because the man is taking a karate suit out of his bag. Mr Bean puts his clothes in another washing machine. He realises he is wearing Wednesday's underpants and takes them off. On getting dressed again, he accidentally puts on a young woman's skirt instead of his trousers. The woman puts his trousers with her washing.

***The Launderette*, pages 18–24:** Mr Bean tries to get his pants back but it is too late. He sees them going round and round inside the woman's machine. Still in

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the woman's brown skirt and without his underpants, Mr Bean tries to pass unnoticed as he looks for some underpants. The young man sees him and laughs his head off. Mr Bean hates him for this and tries to take revenge on him by getting a cup of black coffee and changing it for the young man's fabric conditioner. The young man puts the 'conditioner' into his washing, and his karate suit turns brown. He is very angry and complains to the manager. In the meantime, Mr Bean tries to find his trousers. He soon notices that his pants, now clean, are inside a large dryer together with the woman's clothes. He looks in the young woman's dryer and then climbs into the machine. The woman puts some clothes into the dryer and turns it on. Mr Bean is locked inside and begins to go round and round!

Background and themes

Mr Bean is a near-silent British television comedy series (1990–1992) that revolves around an accident-prone character who drives around in a little yellow car, creating chaos wherever he goes. Mr Bean is a child at heart. He enjoys carnival rides, reading adventure comics, playing mini-golf and hugging a teddy bear. Mr Bean also enjoys experimenting with different contraptions as well as solving problems through mechanical means.

The beauty of Mr Bean is that it uses actions and body language, rather than words and dialogue, in its comedy.

It is able to cross linguistic barriers, so the Mr Bean stories are accessible to people worldwide. Another reason why Mr Bean is so popular is that people are able to relate to his character and experiences – there are times when everyone does silly things, just to cover up mistakes or to make things go their way.

A typical Mr Bean episode consists of three stories, with each one usually having a different setting. In each story, Mr Bean finds himself in a situation which he has to find a way out of, with hilarious consequences.

About the film

Mr Bean stories have been made into videos, cassettes and books, and in 1997, its first film version, *Bean*, was made. In the film, Mr Bean is sent by the London National Gallery to accompany a painting to a new home in Los Angeles and, as usual, this triggers a chain of hilarious events. The second film version, *Mr Bean's Holiday*, exploring a never-ending series of bizarre events on a trip, was released ten years later, in 2007 and was also a blockbuster the world over.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 **Discuss:** Ask students to look up the word 'comedy' in their dictionary or tell them what it means then talk about these questions: *Do you like comedy programmes? Say why/why not. Which comedy programme do you like best?*

2 **Match:** Photocopy the pictures from both stories in the book. Cut off the captions. Divide the class into two teams: A and B. Give each student in Team A a picture or caption from *Steak Tartare*. Give each student in Team B a picture or caption from *The Launderette*: *Now match the captions with the pictures. The team with the most correct matches is the winner.*

3 **Write:** Ask students to work in the same groups, Teams A and B, as in the previous activity. Each one will write a short paragraph about one of the stories in the book using at least ten of the words in the boxes below: *Now Team A will pick ten words from the box* Steak Tartare *and Team B will pick ten words from the box* The Launderette *and write a story about Mr Bean:*

Team A: *Steak Tartare*

bread roll	restaurant	steak	dislike	hide
cover	birthday card	chair	waiter	music
violin	manager	mustard pot	manager	
napkin	eat	smell	vase	

Team B: *The Launderette*

coin	cover	underpants	trousers	laugh
string	washing machine	money	coffee	
manager	dryer	launderette	conditioner	
karate suit	pair	partition		

Ask students to look up the words they do not know in the Word List in back of the book.

Steak Tartare, pages 1–6

While reading

4 **Pair work:** Copy the phrases below on the board. Ask students to do the following activity in pairs: *What do you think people should do in a nice restaurant? a) Tick the right sentences in the box. b) Discuss which of these things Mr Bean does on pages 1 to 6.*

eat nicely …..	speak in a loud voice …..
make noise …..	throw food …..
play with food …..	be nice …..
dress nicely …..	say 'please' …..
say 'thank you' …..	

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5 **Read and check:** Tell students to read pages 1 to 6 now finding all the mistakes Mr Bean makes because of his bad manners and write what he is supposed to do: *In groups, fill in the chart with all the mistakes Mr Bean makes at the restaurant and write what he should actually do:*

Mr Bean's mistakes at the restaurant	What a man should do at a restaurant

After reading

6 **Role play:** Ask students to work in pairs. They choose any of the two situations below to write down a dialogue and then role play it: *In twos, choose one of these situations and imagine what the people say. Write the dialogue down and then act it out.*
   a) You are two waiters. Talk about the strange man who is eating the steak tartare.
   b) You are the man and the woman sitting next to Mr Bean. How do you feel about this man?

7 **Write:** Tell students to re-tell the whole story on pages 1 to 6 from the point of view of the manager. Guide them with these instructions: *In pairs, imagine you are the restaurant manager. Describe everything you saw Mr Bean do from when he first came to the restaurant until he starts hiding the steak.*
Choose three pairs to read their retellings out loud.

Steak Tartare, pages 7–12

While reading

8 **Read and write:** Tell your students to do the following activity as they read pages 7 to 10: *In pairs, make a list of all the crazy places in which Mr Bean hides his steak. Then read it to at least three other pairs and compare your lists*

9 **Write:** Tell students to work in groups and think of a different ending for Mr Bean's terrible dinner: *In groups, re-read page 12 and decide which thing you will change to make Mr Beans birthday dinner better. Write down your ideas and then write a different ending.*

After reading

10 **Role play:** Ask students to work in pairs and to write a dialogue to role play: *Imagine you are the violin player. You see Mr Bean's card and you know that he is spending his birthday alone. Talk to him. What does Mr Bean tell you? Write down the conversation and then act it out.*

11 **Discuss:** Ask students to work in groups and to discuss the following: *What five words best describe Mr Bean? What makes you laugh about him? What makes you sad?*

The Launderette, pages 13–17

While reading

12 **Write:** Tell students to work in pairs and to do the following activity together: *In twos, write down what the woman, the young man and the manager think of Mr Bean as you read pages 13 to 17. Then read what you wrote to another pair.*

13 **Read and complete:** Ask students to work in pairs on the following activity as they read pages 13 to 17: *In twos, fill in the chart with all the things that go well for Mr Bean and the things that go wrong for him as you read pages 13 to 17.*

What goes well	What goes wrong

14 **Role play:** Ask students to work in pairs on the following activity: *Imagine you are the young woman and the young man. You cannot believe what this strange man, Mr Bean, does. Talk to each other about what you saw and how crazy it was.*

After reading

15 **Write:** Tell students to work on the following activity: *You are the launderette manager's wife in her husband's office watching everything. Write in your diary about the people that went to the launderette today.*

The Launderette, pages 18–24

While reading

16 **Read and write:** Ask student to do the following activity in pairs: *In twos as you read pages 18 to 20, imagine you are Mr Bean. You are angry at how everything goes wrong. Write down what problems you have had since you arrived at the launderette.*

17 **Discuss:** Tell students to discuss the following in groups as they read pages 20 to 22: *How is Mr Bean feeling? What does he feel about the young man? What does he do to him? Was that a good thing to do? Why did he do it?*

18 **Write:** Students work in pairs on the following activity: *In twos, as you read pages 22 to 24, write down the things that Mr Bean loses and finds and what he does each time.*

After reading

19 **Group work:** Ask students to work in groups imagining this situation: *In groups imagine that the story goes on and it starts: Open the door! Go on writing and make sure you write a very different ending to the story.*

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