

The countdown to World Cup glory; Europe's mantis menace; the messiest parking spot in space; and Indian posties deliver better vision

Hello and welcome to Squiz Kids Today ... your fresh take on what's happening in the world around you.

I'm Christie Kijurina

It's Wednesday, July 15 -

In Squiz Kids Today ... The countdown to World Cup glory; Europe's mantis menace; the messiest parking spot in space; and Indian posties deliver better vision

That's what's making news, kids' style ...

THE LOWDOWN

As we hit publish on the podcast this morning, France and Spain are facing off in the first World Cup semi-final of this series!

It's kinda no surprise, because both nations are World Cup regulars, both making their 17th appearance. France has been the champion twice, Spain once. Yet somehow, they've only met once before at a World Cup. France won that match 3-1 in 2006, so Spain may have a tiny grudge to settle.

Then, tomorrow morning, set your alarm, because England meet Argentina in a clash that will be loaded with history and probably a lot of nervous pacing by the manager. Argentina are the defending champions and have three trophies, and England have only won once, and that was wayyyy back in 1966.

The losing teams will then meet in Sunday's third-place playoff, while the winners head to Monday morning's final.

And for the first time in World Cup history, halftime is going big. Madonna, Shakira, BTS and Justin Bieber are sharing the stage for an 11-minute show. Which raises one important question: when exactly are the players supposed to eat their oranges?

Anyhoo, once the music stops and the final whistle blows, just one captain will lift the trophy!

What a ride it's been: a record 48 teams, three host countries, controversies, heroes, African nations making waves and unforgettable fans.

Next stop: the Women's World Cup in Brazil next year. Then the men do it all again in 2030.

We have some sad news today, because we're saying goodbye to much-loved actor Sam Neill, who died this week, aged 78.

You'd probably recognise Sam because he's faced dinosaurs in Jurassic Park, rabbits in Peter Rabbit and the New Zealand wilderness in one of my favourite-ever movies, as Uncle Hec in Hunt for the Wilderpeople.

Sam Neill brought warmth, humour and adventure to screens for generations.

You'll be missed, Sam.

SPIN THE GLOBE

Each day we give the world globe a spin and find a news story from wherever it stops... and today we've landed in India, where post offices are delivering something rather unexpected: better eyesight.

In Assam State, people visiting the post office can now stop for a free eye test while they're there. Former teacher Sangita (Sun-ghee-tah) Kalita runs one of the testing kiosks. If she notices someone squinting at a form or struggling to read the small print, she offers to check their eyesight. And if they need reading glasses, they can walk out wearing a free pair.

More than 5,000 people have been tested so far, and most of those who received glasses had never owned any before. That matters because in remote areas, visiting an eye specialist can mean a long and expensive trip, but post offices are already everywhere. India has more than 150,000 of them!

So one tiny kiosk, one quick test and one pair of glasses can suddenly make reading, working and everyday life much easier. Now that is a special delivery.

ANIMAL KINGDOM

Disturbing news now, because Europe is under attack and the invaders come with folding arms, swivelling heads and enormous appetites. Two Asian praying mantis species have now been officially labelled invasive after spreading through parts of Europe.

The problem is that both species reproduce quickly, faster than local mantises, with one egg case producing about 200 young, and they eat everything from bees and native insects to frogs and lizards.

They're even causing trouble in the romance department. Native male mantises sometimes mistake the invasive females for their own species and get eaten for their efforts. As if dating wasn't already hard enough already!

Climate change and warm city environments are also helping the mantises spread north. The good news is that ordinary people are helping scientists keep track of them. A citizen-science project has already gathered more than 2,300 reports. And, during winter, people can also look for their brown, sponge-like egg cases on branches, although experts should check them before anything is removed. Let's hope Europe can repel this mantis menace.

SPACED OUT

Researchers have been investigating a minefield of space junk in one of the busiest and most useful parts of Earth's orbit and found it's much junkier than they previously thought.

The area is called the geostationary orbit, and it sits about 36,000 kilometres above us. Satellites placed there, orbit Earth at the same speed that Earth rotates. That means they appear to stay parked above the same place, making them perfect for beaming television, internet and weather information across huge areas.

But experts say the neighbourhood contains tiny, previously unseen pieces of space junk. Although some are only a few centimetres across, they're moving fast enough to cause major damage if they run into an expensive satellite. And unlike junk closer to

Earth, these fragments won't easily slow down and burn up because there is almost no atmosphere at that altitude to slow them down.

Fortunately, scientists now have a sharper way of finding them. By combining lots of telescope pictures, new software can reveal faint moving objects that once disappeared into the background.

Basically, space now has a better junk detector. Because, before satellites can dodge the junk, we first need to see it.

Q+A ANDY GRIFFITHS Q&A

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(TYPE WRITER SOUND EFFECT) Can you hear that? That's the sound of kids author extraordinaire Andy Griffiths putting the finishing touches to his new book - *You & Me And The Gigantic Knucklehead*.

And because he's such a listener favourite, and because he's always hilarious each time we have him on the podcast - we're excited to say that Andy has kindly agreed to once again take the Squiz Kids Q+A hotseat and answer any questions you clever kids might have for him.

He's written more than 40 books - including of course the hugely popular Treehouse series - and now he's back with another in the *You + Me* series - this time we meet Johnny Knucklehead in the *Land of the Giants* - where he's just become King and the power has gone to his knuckle-head.

Here's your chance to get inside the head of one of Australia's favourite authors - ask him any question you like - about your favourite book or character, the process of writing, where he gets his silliest ideas, how to become a best-selling author, if there's ever been an idea too gross to put on paper - anything you like.

Email through your question to squizkids@thesquiz.com.au .. Teachers - feel free to send in questions from your class. There are prizes to win for the best questions - including a signed book pack from the author himself. But hurry! You've only got until Monday 27 July to get your questions in ...

THE S'QUIZ

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening ...

1. In which year will the next men's FIFA World Cup be held?
2. How many post offices are there in India?
3. What is the name of the area that sits about 36,000 kilometres above us and is a great place to park satellites?

SHOUTOUTS

It's Wednesday, July 15 – On this day, wayyy back 1912, the Commonwealth Bank opened its first branch at 317 Collins Street in Melbourne. It began with just 12 staff, but Australians could also use hundreds of post offices to access their savings. Happy birthday Comm Bank.

It's also a special day for these Squiz Kids, celebrating a birthday today...Boyang from Mansfield, Hanna from Kogarah, Harry from Arcadia, Harry from Maiden Gully and Gemma from Doncaster East.

Belated shoutouts go to Sophia from Bentleigh East, Olympia from Carnegie, Rudi from Middleton and a very special belated shoutout to Maya from the Maclaren Vale.

Remember, if you celebrated a birthday over the recent break, your shoutout was featured in our Road Trip Quiz episodes released each Friday during the holidays. If you missed the cut-off, send us an email and we'll happily give you a belated birthday shoutout.

Classroom shoutouts are back next week! If you'd like us to give your class a shoutout, ask your teacher or a parent to send us an email with your school, class and teacher's name or complete the shoutout request form on our website.

The S'Quiz Answers:

1. 2030
2. More than 150,000

3. The geostationary orbit.

Don't forget .. if you've got a birthday coming up and you'd like a shoutout, or if you want a classroom shoutout... drop us a line at squizkids@thesquiz.com.au or fill out the form on our website.

Well - that's all we have time for. Thanks for listening to Squiz Kids Today - we'll be back again tomorrow

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In the meantime ... get out there and have a most excellent day ... over and out.