



Teachers' Notes

The Wombat and the Grand Poohjam

JACKIE FRENCH
ILLUSTRATED BY ANDREW
MARLTON

OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Young Readers
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Illustrator	Andrew Marlton
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INTRODUCTION

The Grand Poohjam of Stink'um knows exactly how to make kids do as they are told – that is, before the Princess of O'Straylia arrives in his court with her pet wombat. He thinks he's going to make mincemeat of the Princess, but he has another think coming! It's going to take more than a bed with silk cushions, a huge marble bath and a big-screen TV to bring untold riches to his kingdom!

From tall tales to spooky stories and everything in between, Mates are all-Australian stories for Aussie kids, illustrated in colour on every page.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie French is a full-time writer who has produced over one hundred and twenty books for kids and adults. In 2000, her novel *Hitler's Daughter* won the CBC Younger Readers' Award. *To the Moon and Back* (with Bryan Sullivan) won the Eve Pownall Award in 2005. *Macbeth and Son* and *Josephine Wants to Dance* were both shortlisted for the 2007 CBC Awards.

Jackie and her husband, Bryan, live in the Araluen valley, a deep valley on the edge of the Deua wilderness area, in a stone house they built themselves, with a homemade waterwheel as well as solar panels to power their house (and computers). Their garden rambles over about four hectares. There are eight hundred fruit trees, and about two hundred and seventy different kinds of fruit (not counting one hundred and twenty-five varieties of apple), so there is never a time when there aren't baskets full of fruit. Jackie also describes herself as a 'wombat negotiator' and has spent three decades studying the wombats in her valley.

Jackie is the ACT Children's Ambassador, and a patron of Club Cool (an ACT library programme to encourage kids to read), At Home with Books (a programme to encourage reading with foster children) and the local Wildcare (an organisation that looks after injured wildlife and returns them to the bush). She is also a director of the Wombat Foundation, which raises funds for research into the preservation of the endangered northern hairy-nosed wombat.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Andrew Marlon was born in Bega, NSW, and now lives with various humans and animals in Melbourne, Victoria. He publishes comics every day at First Dog on the Moon at crikey.com.au. *The Wombat and the Grand Poohjam* is his first book.

ACTIVITIES

The following questions can be used to begin a class discussion or they can be answered individually, in pairs or in groups.

1. English

a) In this story the author uses simple words to describe the characters' actions. These words suggest more than they actually say. Have a look at this example: 'She looks nice,' the little Prince said *softly*. The Grand Poohjam *blinked*. He'd forgotten the Prince was there.

i) What do you think the little Prince is like? Have a look at the first sentence. Do you think the word *softly* gives us a clue about his character? We speak softly when we only want a few people to hear us or when we are speaking to ourselves. Sometimes we speak softly because we are shy or because we are afraid of something. We could be speaking softly so we don't scare the people we are talking to, like we do with animals that don't know us. Do you think one of these descriptions fits the little Prince? Why?

ii) Now look at the second sentence. We blink when we have something caught in our eye or if the light is glary. We blink away tears and we blink in surprise. Why do you think the Grand Poohjam is blinking and what other clues support this? When do you blink?

iii) As a class, write a description using words that suggest meaning.

Have a look at this example: When I come home, my dog Gus wags his tail at me and jumps up and down. (Gus' movements suggest he is happy to see me.) He licks my leg and then he licks the rim of his empty food bowl. His stomach growls and he whines at me. (Gus' actions suggest he is hungry and wants to be fed.)

I could have just written: When I come home, my dog Gus is excited to see me, because he wants to be fed.

When you begin your example, you could start with a simple sentence – Kelly loves eating ice cream on hot days – and try to expand it.

2. Creative Activities

a) Make up a play with the characters in the novel. You could set it in the future or before the Princess has arrived in Stink'um. You could even set it in O'Straylia. Be as imaginative as you like!

b) If you were the ruler of a country, what would you call it? What sort of rules would you have? What would your title be? Would you live in a castle?

c) Draw a map of your made-up country and then design a poster that advertises it as a tourist attraction.

d) Imagine you lived in Stink'um *before* the little Princess arrives. Write a diary entry describing your life. Remember, Stink'um isn't a very nice place to live!

e) Pretend you are an investigative reporter breaking the story about what it's like to live in Stink'um. Write a short report suitable for a newspaper. You could chose to expand on this in groups and perform your findings to the class in a television show format where you interview characters from the story.

f) Design an alternative cover.

3. Society and Environment

a) What do you know about wombats? Did you know these facts?

- Wombats are marsupials
- Wombats are nocturnal
- Wombats are shy animals
- Wombats stay with their mums until they are two
- Wombats can swim

- Wombats have dust baths
- Wombats live in burrows
- Wombats are herbivores
- Wombats have thick, soft fur
- Wombats can sleep on their backs

Are there any words here that you are unfamiliar with? Look them up and see if they apply to other animals you know.

b) There are three types of wombats: the common wombat, the northern hairy-nosed wombat and the southern hairy-nosed wombat. The latter two are endangered species. Do you know what endangered means? Why do you think wombats are endangered? Is there anything you can do to help?

c) Who has seen a wombat? Where? Do you know what kind you saw?

d) Do you believe that wombats can climb trees and sing? Why or why not?

e) Before the little Princess arrives, the land of Stink'um is not a very nice place to live. The Grand Poohjam's subjects have very few rights. The children aren't taught to read, nobody celebrates Christmas and people are punished with floggings. This wouldn't happen in Australia. Why do you think this is? Discuss what *rights* mean. What are your rights?

5. Geography

a) Where do we find wombats in Australia? Find out and mark the places on the map.

b) Using an atlas, find a place that is far away from Australia. What is different about your chosen country? Write a paragraph saying if you would like to live there.



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