

## These notes are for:

- 6+ yrs
- Primary

## Key Learning Areas:

- English
- PDHPE
- SOSE/HSIE
- Science & Technology

## Example of:

- Chapter Book
- Junior Fiction / Illustrated Fiction
- *Walker Stories*

## Experience of:

- Reflecting on text
- Shared reading/viewing
- Reading & Writing
- Speaking & Listening
- Viewing & Creating
- Research

## Values addressed:

- Care & Compassion
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Understanding

## Themes:

- New babies
- Families
- Older people/grandparents
- Imaginative play
- Independence & responsibility

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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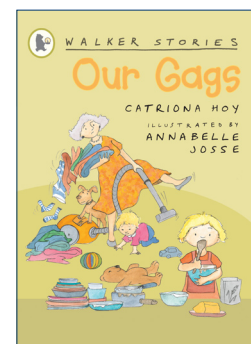
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## Our Gags

### *Our Gags (Walker Stories)*

Written by: Catriona Hoy  
Illus. by: Annabelle Josse  
ISBN: 9781921529092  
ARRP: \$11.95  
NZRRP: \$13.99  
No. of Pages: 64  
April 2011



## Outline:

A new baby means a hectic household. Luckily Gags, the narrator's grandmother, is always around to help, turning into the "Gags Machine" when the house is in need of a good clean and dinner must be made. But Gags also has time for fun things like playing dress up and going to the park. And when there is so much to pack for the family holiday to the beach, Gags is a great help too – but everyone soon learns that even the Gags Machine needs a rest.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

**Catriona Hoy** is a Melbourne based writer, teacher, storyteller and mother. Born in Scotland, she moved to Australia as a young child. Catriona began to write after the birth of her second daughter. Her title *The Music Tree* (Lothian Books), illustrated by Adele Jaunn was an Early Childhood Notable Book in the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards in 2007.

**Annabelle Josse** was born in Normandy, France, but moved to Australia in 1997. While Annabelle's main educational background is in biology and chemistry, she has also studied art as a side-project since she was fifteen years old. Today, Annabelle illustrates with a focus on children and she currently lives in Sydney with her husband and three kids. *Noah's Garden* was her first picture book with Walker Books Australia.

## How to use these notes:

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the text *Our Gags*. Multiple copies of the text are recommended for shared reading. This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.



## Classroom Ideas for *Our Gags*:

### BEFORE READING *OUR GAGS*:

- View the cover of the book and identify the following:
  - the series title
  - the author
  - the illustrator
  - the publisher
  - the logo
  - the blurb
- From the title of the book only, what do you think the story might be about? How do your predictions change after looking at the cover? What about after reading the blurb?
- What sort of personality do you think the character on the front cover would have? What gives you this impression? Consider body language, positioning, facial expressions and clothes, as well as what she is doing.
- From the picture on the front cover, where do you think this story is set? What adjectives would you use to describe this setting?

### ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The narrator begins the story by listing the words she used as a baby. Ask a parent or an older relative about when you were first learning to talk. Were there any words you mispronounced or made up? Share this information with the rest of the class then create a "baby dictionary" giving the meaning of each word and the name of the class member who contributed it.
- Our Gags* is based on the author's own family. Interview a parent or older relative about their memories of when you were a baby. Use one of these memories as the basis for a short story about your own life.
- In the first section of the book, the narrator mentions some of the things involved in caring for a new baby. Make a list of these things. As a group, brainstorm some of the other responsibilities involved.
- Create an illustrated pamphlet entitled: "Looking After a Baby" (you may need to do some research in the library or on the internet first). Include information on sleep, feeding, bathing, holding and anything else you can think of.
- On page 9 the narrator says, "Mum spends so much time with that baby, there's not much time left for other things." How do you think the narrator feels at this point? Consider the illustrations as well as the words. Has there ever been an occasion when you experienced similar feelings to the narrator? How did you cope with this?
- Do you think the narrator's mother finds it easy looking after a baby? What evidence can you find for this? Write a diary entry from the mother's perspective, focusing particularly on her feelings.
- Although Gags works hard, she also knows how to have fun. What examples can you find to prove this? Make a list of all the jobs Gags does in the first chapter, as well as all the fun activities.
- How important is it to combine work and responsibility with fun and relaxation? Make a seesaw diagram showing your responsibilities and duties on one side, and the things you do to relax on the other. Which side is heavier?
- Throughout the first chapter, Gags repeatedly says "hmph". How do you think she would say this? Why is it printed in different font to the rest of the text? Practise saying "Hmph" as if you were Gags.
- Look up the meaning of "ellipsis" in the dictionary. Why do you think the author has used this form of punctuation on the last two lines of page 12? What is she trying to emphasise about the kitchen?
- On page 18 the narrator's mother describes herself as a "milk machine". Why is this humorous? Using this picture as inspiration, draw a picture of the "Gags Machine" as if she were an actual machine.
- Make a list of the chores you do at home in a typical week, and the amount of time you spend on each. Interview a parent or relative about the chores that they would do. Present this information as a bar graph, showing your chores in one colour and your parent's or relative's in another. What do you notice? Discuss your findings with a partner.
- "Gags turns into a mad vacuum-cleaning robot" says the narrator on page 16. This is an example of a metaphor: a comparison between two things, where one thing (Gags) is said to actually *be* another (a robot). Why does the author use this metaphor? What is she trying to emphasise about Gags? Can you find any other metaphors in *Our Gags*?
- Write your own metaphors for different members of your household. For each, explain what you were trying to highlight about them. For example: "My mother is the moon shining over us. This metaphor shows how she is always there making sure we are safe." OR "My little sister is a darting fish. This metaphor emphasises how she has lots of energy and is always moving around quickly."



- “Some machines are useful. Some machines are fun. But nothing beats the Gags Machine.” (Page 24) Watch excerpts from *The New Inventors* “Bright Sparks” children’s specials (available at <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/newinventors/brightspark/>). What are some of the machines young people have created? Which do you like best? Why?  
  
What is the most useful or fun machine you can imagine? Create a design for either of these, then present it to the class as if you were a guest on *The New Inventors*.
- On page 34 Gags and the narrator play “Billy Goats Gruff”. Look up this fairytale in a book. Then, in small groups, write a play based on this story and present it to the class.
- Gags and the narrator play a number of different games at the park. What are some of the games you play? Try to think about games you made up yourself rather than board games or computer games.
- In the third section of the book, the narrator and her family go on holiday. Write and illustrate a story about a holiday you went on. Try to focus on an event that happened during the holiday – perhaps something exciting or unexpected?
- Read the description of the beach on page 58. Write your own description of a place which makes you feel happy. Try to use interesting adjectives and focus on a range of senses to make the reader feel like they are there.
- What is similar about the way the three stories in the book begin? Why do you think the author has done this? Write a fourth section to the book using a similar beginning and featuring the same characters.
- October 1st is International Day of Older Persons. Reflect on your own relationship with a grandparent, older relative or older friend. What are some of the things you enjoy doing with them? What are some of the good things about your relationship? Make a card for this person thanking them for their involvement in your life and give it to them on October 1st.

### CATRIONA HOY ON *OUR GAGS*

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“It’s very tiring having a new baby, especially when you already have a little toddler. It sometimes feels like all a mum does is feed and sleep! It certainly felt like that to me. My own mum was terrific. She came in like a whirlwind and picked up shoes and clothes, vacuumed, dusted and sorted out toy boxes. She managed to turn everything into a game and was great at climbing around playgrounds, pretending to be a shark or all sorts of things. I used to feel tired just watching her.

We call my mum “Gags” because when my daughter, Caitlyn, first started to talk, she couldn’t say Grandma so she said “Ga Ga”. So we all started calling her Ga Ga. Eventually when she got a bit older, we changed it to Gags, which sounded a bit cooler! Sometimes my husband called Gags “the Gags Machine” because she would come in and take over the house like a wild cleaning robot. Most of the things in the book really did happen, but I did make up a little bit. Our whole family is in this story, even Leisha our dog!

I really like this book because it was such fun to write and in a way, it’s a big, big thank you to my mum for everything she does – a sort of Mother’s Day card that everyone can share! But it’s not at all soppy because we’re not a soppy family, more of a messy, fun sort of family, I like to think.”

### ANNABELLE JOSSE ON *OUR GAGS*

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“I enjoyed illustrating *Our Gags* very much, because when I first read the story, it brought back many personal memories that triggered lots of images in my head. Then it was easier to draw these images on paper.

I am a mother of three children, so I could understand the narrator’s mother and how tired and overwhelmed she felt. There is a lot to do to look after young children; I know about the toys scattered around the house, the piles of dirty clothes in the laundry and the unwashed dishes in the kitchen.

The narrator in *Our Gags* is a lot like my older daughter, Sasha, as well. Sasha is very patient when she needs grown-ups for help or play, but sees that they are busy with other things. She also loves her younger sisters, even if they are a bit of a handful at times. I know a “Gags” too – she is my husband’s mother. She loves children and has had three of her own, and nine grandchildren (so far). When she visits, she is always busy cleaning, cooking and playing with the kids.

Illustrating stories is always a pleasure for me, but it is especially enjoyable when I can relate to it like this in a very personal manner.”

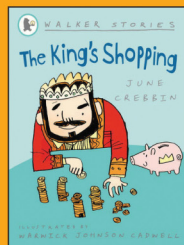




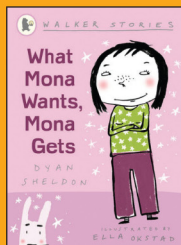
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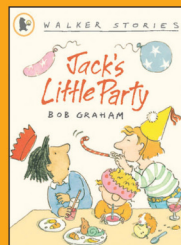
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Illustrated  
by Warwick  
Johnson Cadwell



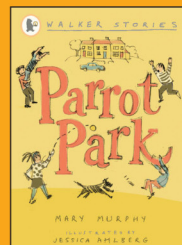
By Dyan Sheldon  
Illustrated by  
Ella Okstad



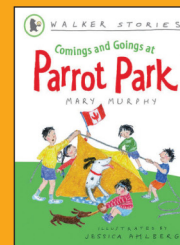
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Mara Bergman  
Illustrated by  
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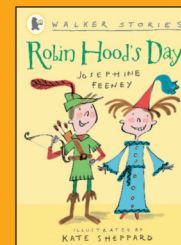
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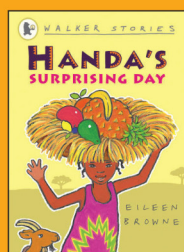
By Mary Murphy  
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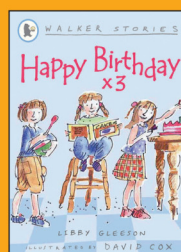
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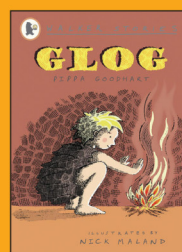
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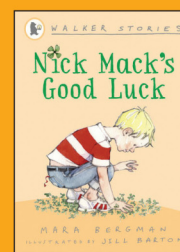
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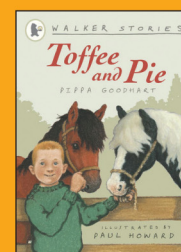
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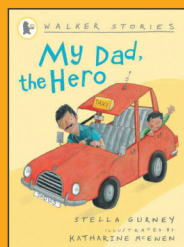
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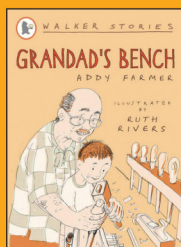
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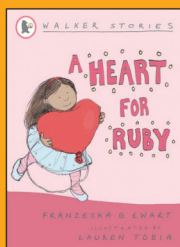
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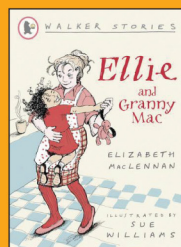
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McEwen



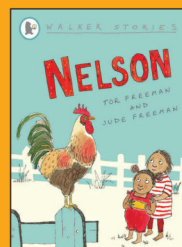
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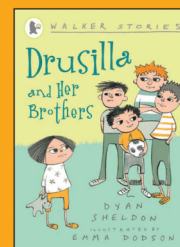
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Ewart  
Illustrated by  
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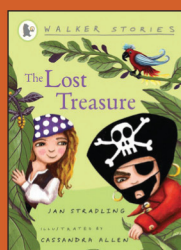


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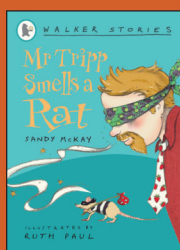


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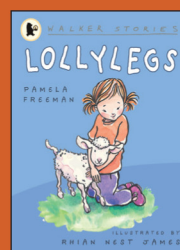
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Cassandra Allen



By Sandy McKay  
Illustrated by  
Ruth Paul



By Pamela Freeman  
Illustrated by  
Rhian Nest James



By Catriona Hoy  
Illustrated by  
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