

Josie Mack and the MEGA Division

AUTHOR

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ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

One night, a wombat knocks at Josie's window. She thinks her lifelong wish for a pet has come true! But Ursula the wombat is on an important mission for the Fellowship of Underground Nocturnals (the FUN). The FUN need human help to solve their wildlife woes. They want Josie and Ursula to join the FUN's mysterious MEGA Division, which means they'll receive a mega-helpful power. Can Josie and Ursula prove they're the team the FUN is looking for? Or will joining the MEGA Division be a mega mistake?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bethany Loveridge is an author-illustrator, film and art teacher, and lifelong bookworm. She's been in trouble for daydreaming and doodling since she could dribble and has dreamt of having a book of her own for almost as long. Bethany lives in Queensland, Australia with her trivia-loving husband and two creative kids. Her nonno really did raise tens of thousands of chickens in long tunnel sheds and one of her favourite pastimes was climbing the mulberry tree (preferably in mulberry season). *Harper Wells: Renegade Timeline Officer* is the first story in the Wollemi Trilogy and Bethany's debut book.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jade Goodwin is a children's book illustrator based on Wonnarua Country in the Hunter Valley, NSW. Since 2022, Jade has illustrated 23 published books, with another ten (and counting!) currently in progress, including picture books, chapter books and junior fiction series. Jade believes in making art that feels warm and accessible and dreams that her illustrations spark curiosity, courage and a love of stories. When she's not drawing, you'll find her drinking coffee, planning her next project, or being "assisted" by one or all of her three mischievous studio cats.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Environment
- Recycling
- Consent
- Domesticated animals and wild animals
- Conservation and animal endangerment

CURRICULUM LINKS

- *Australian Curriculum*
 - Year 3 - English: AC9E3LA01, AC9E3LA09, AC9E3LE02, AC9E3LE03, AC9E3LY03, AC9E3LY04
 - Year 3 - Science: AC9S3U01
 - Year 3 - HASS: AC9HS3K05, AC9HS3K07
 - Year 3 - Health & Physical Education: AC9HP4P04
 - Year 4 - English: AC9E4LE02, AC9E4LE03, AC9E4LY05, AC9E4LY06
 - Year 4 - Science: AC9S4U01
 - Year 4 - HASS: AC9HS4K05, AC9HS4K08
 - Year 4 - Health & Physical Education: AC9HP4P04

STUDY NOTES

KNOWLEDGE AND LITERAL UNDERSTANDING

Pre-reading questions

- Give the students a moment to analyse the cover and ask them if there are any interesting details they can see. What makes these details interesting and what do they think it will mean within the book?
- Read the back cover blurb and discuss. Ask what themes they think might be prevalent in the novel. Ask what other books it reminds them of.
- Talk to students about the differences between wild animals and domesticated animals. Can wild animals make good pets? Why or why not?
- Have a discussion about native animals in the region. Do any native animals live closeby? What should we do if we find an injured native animal?

After reading

- Do you relate to any of the characters? Which one and why?
- What is your first impression of Josie? What about Ursula?
- How does Josie change over the course of the story? Does Ursula change too?
- What do you think about the situation that Josie finds herself in? Are Josie and Ursula able to pull through the challenges they face?
- Josie really wants a pet, and even asks a wombat at the zoo if it will be her pet. If you had a pet wombat, how would you take care of it?
- Bucky is a female platypus. Ursula warns Josie about male platypuses being venomous. Which part of the male platypus is venomous?
- Why do you think Josie and Ursula's missions take place at night?
- Josie is very accepting of Ursula, the talking wombat, and the other talking animals in the story. How would you react if you could suddenly talk to animals? Would you help them with their problems?
- Josie and Ursula talk about the MEGA division collar and how being ten times bigger than you already are would be scary. Do you think it would be scary?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

General

- What was your favourite part of the story? Why?
- How would you describe Josie as a character? What makes her interesting?
- What is the most important lesson Josie learns in the story?
- What makes the story uniquely Australian?
- If you could join the FUN, what kind of mission would you want to go on?
- List three reasons why it was important for a human to join FUN (Fellowship of Underground Nocturnals).
- How would it feel to go MEGA (physically and emotionally)?
- What choice would you have made about activating the MEGA tag? Explain your choice

- What might go wrong if the wrong person discovered animals could talk?
- Can you find two moments in the story when you would have felt scared if you were Josie?

Friendship

- What makes Josie, Tilly, and Gray good friends?
- How do Josie's friends help her solve problems?
- Why is it important that Josie shares her ideas with others?
- Would you consider Josie and Ursula friends or do they just work together?
- How does Josie show she cares about her friends?
- Why was Ursula worried about Josie getting in the water with Bucky? Find three instances where Josie asks for help from a friend to solve a problem.
- Josie and Ursula demonstrate moments of bravery in the story. In what ways is it easier to be brave when you have the support of your friends?

The environment

- Why is it important to take care of the environment?
- How do problems in the environment affect animals? What about humans?
- What problems were caused by the rubbish near the creek?
- How did Josie and her friends help improve the environment?
- What are some small things you can do every day to help the planet?
- Why do you think the FUN group works at night to protect nature?

Recycling

- Why is recycling important for animals and the environment? What items in your home can be recycled?
- Do you know how rubbish is processed? Discuss the cycle of rubbish disposal and recycling as a class.
- How did the characters deal with the mess from the skip bin?

Consent

- Why didn't Ursula want Josie to pat her at first?
- Why is it important to ask before touching an animal?
- How can we show respect for other people's or animals' boundaries?
- What could happen if we don't listen when someone says "no"?

Domesticated and wild animals

- What is the difference between a pet and a wild animal?
- Do you know the term 'domesticated animal'? What does it mean?
- What animal wouldn't you like to see mega-size?
- Do you think the animals of the Council of the FUN would all get along? What other Australian animals would you invite to the Council?
- Why wasn't Josie allowed to keep a wombat as a pet?
- Why should wild animals stay in their natural habitats?
- How should humans behave when they see wild animals?
- Can you think of animals that are safe as pets and ones that are not? Why?

Conservation and animal endangerment

- What dangers did the animals face in the story?
- Why is it important to protect animals like the platypus and curlew?
- In what ways is caring for animals and their habitats important for us to do?
- How does caring for animals demonstrate empathy and kindness?

- How did Josie help save animals during her missions?
- What might happen if people don't protect endangered animals?
- What groups or actions help protect wildlife in real life?
- Have you ever seen a spill or mess like the one Ursula showed Josie near the creek? Who was responsible for making the mess you saw? Who should clean it up?
- What are some of the problems with rubbish being thrown in our waterways? What can you do to help protect Australian animals?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

MEGA you!

- Students imagine what it would be like to be ten times taller than they are now. They draw a picture of themselves at MEGA size in their everyday environment (school, home, playground).
- Consider: What would be easy? What would be difficult? How would you feel being that big?

Australian animal art

- Using reference images, students draw and colour an Australian animal featured in the story (e.g. wombat, platypus, curlew).
- Encourage students to include details such as habitat, textures, and key features.

Helping wildlife poster

- In groups, students research what to do if they find an injured native animal.
- They create an informative poster that includes:
 - Who to contact
 - What to do (and what not to do)
 - How to keep themselves safe
- Extension: Display posters around the classroom or school.

Visit or virtual excursion

- Students explore a local organisation that protects native animals (e.g. a wildlife sanctuary or rescue group).
- Afterward, students reflect:
 - What did you learn?
 - Why is this work important?
 - How can people help?
- Consider places like Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary as options to visit.

Lift the problem!

- Inspired by Tilly's pulley idea, students design their own way to lift or move a heavy object. They draw and label their design, explaining how it works.
- Extension: Build a simple model using classroom materials.

Create a FUN mission

- Students invent a new mission for the Fellowship of Underground Nocturnals. They decide:
 - Which animal needs help?
 - What is the problem?
 - How is it solved?
- Extension: Write the mission as a short story or comic.

Class clean-up challenge

- As a class, students take part in a supervised cleanup of the school grounds. Afterwards, discuss:
 - What did you notice?
 - How did it feel to help?
 - Why is it important to take care of shared spaces?

Posters for the planet

- Students choose an environmental issue they care about (e.g. littering, protecting animals, clean waterways) and design a persuasive poster. They should include:
 - A clear message
 - Helpful facts
 - Eye-catching visuals
- Optional: Hide a small image (like Gray's frog) in their design.

Animal features investigation

- Students observe and compare features of a northern hairy-nosed wombat and at least two other Australian animals from the story. They record:
 - Physical features
 - Habitat
 - Special adaptations
- Extension: Present findings as a mini-report or labelled diagram.

Would a wombat make a good pet?

- Students create a pros and cons chart about having a wombat as a pet.
- Consider: What do wombats need to survive? Would they be happy living with humans?