The Feathers of Farwood and the Gripps Curse



AUTHOR
JAYNE MCINTYRE

SCIS: 5560824

ISBN: 9781764256704

RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary

SYNOPSIS

When Eva Feather's (very human) father is transformed into an owl by the dreaded Gripps, her mother whisks Eva and her sisters away to the mysterious Australian town of Farwood; a place where legends, tales, and whispers come to life. With the help of her new friend, Harvey, Eva races against the clock to find a cure for the family curse, before she loses her dad to his owlish form forever. Not to mention her own feathers are starting to show.

Eva faces the impossible: evading the Hunters, protecting her sisters, and breaking into Farwood's hidden archives to locate a magical book she isn't even sure exists. All the while Harvey has his own secret. Eva soon discovers the Feathers aren't the only Gripps-affected family seeking refuge in Farwood. Now it is up to Eva to find answers and reunite the town before it is too late.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jayne McIntyre holds a Bachelor of Journalism and works as a marketing manager on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. She was named Professional Business Woman of the Year finalist in the 2023 Sunshine Coast Business Women's Awards, is a member of the Queensland Writers Centre, and recently completed a Writing Residency at Varuna.
With famed Aussie author Ethel Turner (Seven Little Australians) in her family tree, Jayne lives and breathes imaginative stories to educate and inspire.
She was home-schooled on K'gari (then called Fraser Island) for nearly a year, during which time she developed a deep fascination for the island's natural environment. This wonder for the natural world combined with a love of words and magic inspired her debut novel, The Feathers of Farwood, which was shortlisted for the Text Prize in 2024. Growing up with Auslan as a second language (Jayne's brother is non-verbal), communication has always played an important role in her life. She incorporates this experience into her writing, and it's inherent to her voice. Mixing the everyday with a bit of whimsy, she aims to reflect modern Australian life with wordplay and a focus on the natural environment.
Jayne has a strong background in corporate writing, editing, design, workshop facilitation, and social media management, and is keen to participate in book reading events, school talks and other opportunities.

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Australian Curriculum Outcomes: English, Science, Media Arts
- Year 4-6

ENGLISH

- They read, view and comprehend texts created to inform, influence and/or engage audiences. They explain how ideas are developed including through characters, settings and/or events, and how texts reflect contexts.
- They create written and/or multimodal texts, including literary texts, for particular purposes and audiences, developing, explaining and elaborating on relevant ideas from topics or texts.
- Examine texts including media texts that represent ideas and events, and identify how they reflect the context in which they were created.

MEDIA ARTS

- Students explain how media languages and media technologies are used in media arts works they construct and/or experience. They describe how media arts works created across cultures, times, places and/or other contexts communicate ideas, perspectives and/or meaning. They describe how media arts are used to continue and revitalise cultures.
- Students use media languages, and media technologies and production processes to construct representations in media arts works for specific purposes and audiences. They present their work in informal and/or formal settings using responsible media practice.

SCIENCE

- They identify the roles of organisms in a habitat and organise food chains.
- Explain how the form and behaviours of organisms enables survival.
- Explain how changes in physical conditions affect living things.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Visual literacy: The cover art and title provide clues about the narrative e.g. animals, nature/natural setting, owls. Encourage students to contribute ideas about their initial thoughts/predictions and draw out points such as:
  - Genre – fantasy, adventure, magical realism
  - Characters (animals)
  - Owls
  - Animals – Australian?
- Have students read other books that feature animals as characters e.g. *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* series (Kathryn Lasky), *Warriors* series (Erin Hunter), *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Robert C. O'Brien), *The One and Only Ivan series* – Katherine Applegate? There are also examples of humans turning into animals (and vice versa) e.g. Animorphs series (K. A. Applegate) or magical examples from the Harry Potter series or Roald Dahl books. Extra: organise a bulk loan of these or similar titles for independent reading.
- Introduce or revise the literary term anthropomorphism: attributing human characteristics to non-human entities. Have students write a definition in their own words or jointly construct one for the classroom (learning wall or anchor chart). *Note any examples throughout reading.
- Chapter headings: Not all novels have chapter headings, but often they can add depth to the reading experience. Read the headings and discuss how they build interest, engagement or suggest ideas to the reader. Can readers predict or guess at some of the themes or action?
- Prologue: What is the purpose of a prologue? In this instance, it immediately builds interest and suggests mystery to the reader. Discuss how the author creates this i.e. what words or phrases. Introduce or revise the literary technique foreshadowing. Add a definition to classroom display.

DURING READING

Themes: Family, Loyalty, Courage, Resistance, Initiative, Nature, Self-belief, Friendship, Bigotry, Deceit, Treachery

Take opportune moments to stop and reflect on key points as the narrative unfolds. Here are some examples.

Pause and predict

- At the end of page 16 discuss: What do readers think so far? Put together clues e.g. bird references including verbs used.
- Continue with pp 17-20 and discuss any further thought.
- "'Though I bet there are times when your sisters really ruffle your feathe—' his grin faltered. Eva smiled back, surprising them both. 'More than you might think'" (p 31). What do readers think about Harvey?
- Who might the mystery man in the bookshop be? Why might there be a scratch in the windowsill where he has touched it? (p 97).
- "'Questions gnawed at her. Eva couldn't help but feel she was missing something. Something important.'" What do readers think Eva is missing?

Sketchnotes

- Have students make sketchnotes at the end of each chapter: Sketchnotes are rich visual notes created from a mix of handwriting, drawings, hand-lettering, shapes, and visual elements like arrows, boxes, and lines. For a narrative such as this which is rich in visual clues this is an ideal method.

Literary language detectives

- As they read, have students create lists or word banks of literary devices/language used e.g. metaphors, similes, alliteration, word play/puns:
  - Like a snagged fish (p. 2)
  - shaped like a bowler hat tipped politely (p. 2)
  - Even the scrap of tangled garden by the pebble path had woken up, as if the flowers had suddenly remembered how to bloom. (p. 3)
  - Envelopes showered from his bag, skimming the grass like startled doves. (p 4)
  - like a boobook looking for a hollow to nest in. (p 13)
  - After hours roosting in the eyrie, (p 16)
  - soft mechanical whirr came from the tiny cameras on either side of the entrance to Noxlot Hall, their round black shells turning in a slow, deliberate move like a cat rousing from an afternoon nap (p 164)
  - Eva's gut felt like a bucket full of eels (p 174)
- Collect the names referencing birds e.g. Catch the Worm Café, Lumen Road, Wingbend Hill, Roostwatch Tower, Mudlark Books & Bindery, Nightingales Bakery and Spoonbill Ice Cream Shop. Can students find more?
- Introduce or revise the term hyphenated descriptors. Formally: compound adjectives or phrasal adjectives, two or more words joined by a hyphen to function as a single modifying idea before a noun. Find more examples (there are many).
- Create lists of these. Extension: classify them into like groups.
- Focus on those related to birds: overly-dramatic plovers, trash-talking ibises, long-winded conversations, shuffle-like dance. Can readers create some more for birds they know?

Follow the breadcrumbs (Foreshadowing)

- A mouse reading? "The mouse sat upright on its hind legs, still as a statue, its rounded ears pricked like an attentive student" (p 40).
- "…until she spied the tip of a tiny pink tail disappearing 'I swear this town has a serious vermin problem.'" (p 69).
- "By the jug of dried rosemary stood a sleek, sandy mouse with a tuft of fur curled on top of its head" (p 132).
- Parvae Initia, Perpetua Potentia (p 148).

Making connections

Note examples, using quotes, for each of Text to Text, Text to Self and Text to World.

Text to Text: Acting superior to another - Harry Potter series: Draco Malfoy to Harry, Ron and Hermione.

- "'I'm glad I don't wear hand-me-down clothes,' Jessica Winthrop said, interrupting Mrs Twill's slideshow about life

in Farwood during the 1800s. 'Since my family is rich and important, we'd have been wearing silk and velvet.' Eva tightened her grip on the pencil and forced herself to pay attention to a slide about food preservation techniques . . ." (p 21).

Text to Self: Being the new one at a school or being different/the outsider, and feeling that you have no friends.

- Most students spent their break talking about who'd heard the newest Strix Beat Band song, or checking if they had enough money to buy a supersized Fudgepaw shake from Catch the Worm Café after school. But somehow, there were always those ready to wrinkle their nose at the new girl's lunch. Others snuck glances at her too-big eyes or smirked at the way her nut-brown hair settled like soft down around her ears... (p 6-7).

Text to World: Class distinctions, snobbery.

- "'Farwood's most notable families are the Bassfords, the Ackworths, the Kingstons, and of course, my own family, the Winthrops,' Jessica said, as she fastened two tiny pearl buttons on her finely woven navy cardigan. […] 'That's right,' said Mrs Twill, 'but let's not forget the many other hands who worked to shape the early settlement of Farwood" (p 36).

Vocabulary

- Collate any unusual or unknown words. Have readers surmise a meaning from context and check dictionary to confirm. Here are some examples:

Word	What I think it means	Dictionary Definition
Eyrie [p.12]		
Archaic [p. 36]		
Scaffolding [p. 36]		
Predator [p. 43]		
Fledgling [p. 43]		
Gizzard [p. 157]		
Membrane [p. 196]		
Immobilise [p. 197]		
(half-)piroutte [p. 201]		

Writing

- Eva and Harvey are the two main protagonists, have opposing backgrounds and families, and are keeping secrets from each other. Use the 5 senses to 'show don't tell' your readers what you want to share in each.
- Write a diary entry OR Write a Small Moment piece from either one's perspective that gives insight into their secret and how it might affect their friendship.
- Extra: Write about one of these from another character's perspective e.g. Jessica. What does she guess or know about them? How does she feel about them? How does this 3rd party's viewpoint differ from the person's own perspective?
- There are examples of posters warning about Gripps (pp 101-102). Create an infographic or poster, either digital or paper, that presents an opposing view on Gripps.
- Polo Feather is an Eastern barn owl. Australia has 11 species of owl. Choose one of these to research and create an information brochure on it (Canva has many templates).
- This is book one in a trilogy. What do readers will happen next? Write the opening paragraph or chapter of the

second book.

AFTER READING

Characters

- There is a relatively small cast of significant characters in this narrative.
- Discuss the concept of character traits using the STEAL categories: Speech, Thoughts, Effects, Actions, Looks. Use higher order questioning to elicit character appraisals (more suggestions freely available online)in a class-wide or small group discussion. Choose from Eva, Harvey, Jessica, Harriet, or own choice. Apply the STEAL format to create an analysis.
- Alternatively, create an 'autopsy' poster for your chosen character. Find instructions online or see examples.
- Draw up lists of the most mentioned and classify e.g.,

Primary	Secondary	Incidental
Eva	Harriet	Mrs Twill
Harvey	Jessica	Mayor Winthrop

- Construct a character web to show the connections between primary, secondary and incidental characters.
- Choose one of the main characters and find three to five external personality traits that are stated by the author directly through description. Then look for three to five internal personality traits that first are learned by the reader through a character's words, actions or behavior throughout the novel. Record them in a table:

External Personality Traits	Internal Personality Traits

- Now use this information to compare with self (or someone you know) for similarities and differences. A Venn diagram or similar could be useful.
- A character arc reflects the subject (usually the protagonist) facing challenges, making mistakes, overcoming obstacles, learning and eventually growing into a better person (although sometimes the arc is negative!). Readers should be able to identify this particularly with Eva. Explore the conflicts faced, their overall role in the narrative as well as their traits. Use quotes or examples e.g., A graphic organiser can be helpful here.
- Create a list of the sympathetic characters. What is meant by this term (introduce or revise)? Construct a definition for the learning wall. Which characters would be considered unsympathetic e.g. Lyall?
- Introduce or revise the term 'trope'. There are various villain tropes. Discuss these different types and have readers decide which is the best fit for Lyall.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Subterfuge/Bending rules/Truth telling: There are incidents when characters bend rules, do not speak the whole truth or omit all the details, e.g. 'The following Thursday, Eva lied to her sister. have to get stuff for Mum, you go ahead without me.' (p 30).
  - Were these actions justifiable in the context of the circumstances?
  - Can students think of other circumstances when this is so?
  - Formulate this as a topic for a class debate
- Fake News: Manipulation by the media is a huge concern in our society and globally. Consider this quote: "'This is exactly the type of trash Mum was talking about when she told us not to read the newspaper,' Eva said. 'I wish I hadn't bothered to pick it up.' 'Look,' said Harriet. 'There's another article here about some woman who saw a

suspicious-looking platypus in the creek by her house! It's by the same reporter, Jeremy Ackworth'" (p 131) or the newspaper article pictured (p 130). Explore this topic through some learning activities such as those provided by Crime Stoppers Australia (more resources listed below). Ask: Have readers seen or heard about other examples of this?

- Consider these quotes and conduct a Socratic seminar, class discussion or a class debate, whichever is more applicable:
  - "'I guess so,' Eva shrugged. 'I didn't see any flaming pitchforks, but they didn't need them. After all, that's how the story goes, right? One day, The Gripps arrives, followed soon after by the Hunters, who do everything they can to chase the Gripps' family from their home'" (p 67).
  - Eva desperately hoped that in the Grand Archives, they'd finally find what her family needed—not the usual wand-waving sort of magic, but something much older, like the earthly magic that prickled beneath Eva's skin every time she walked through Farwood Forest. The kind that sang through the treetops, threading animals, people, and the land together in ways few could ever understand (p 71).
- Harvey describes Eva's father as a 'top-of-the-food-chain' predator. Lyall, as a monitor lizard is most definitely an apex predator. Research monitors and other native predators, and rank them in order of their potential/danger just as the Gripps Level classifications table ranks in order of risk (p 236).

ACTIVITIES

- Create a shoebox diorama or a digital representation of one of the significant locations e.g. Eva's eyrie, the underground secret room.
- Create individual summaries and reflections on the novel with Bloom Balls. There are many freely available templates and guidelines for these.
- Art activity: Paint/draw/digitally create using the description/s e.g. 'Farwood Forest rose like a watercolour landscape on the far side of the hill, smudges of olive and sage deepening to emerald before melting into violet dusk along the horizon' (p 10) OR 'Eva loved the house—had loved it from the first moment she saw its patchwork windows and wonky bowler-hat-wearing roof. Its views of the tumbling ocean beyond (far too treacherous to swim in) captured her, as did the cosy fireplace in the kitchen downstairs, even when it spat out small bits of brick' (p 14).
- Paired activity: Choose either the forest, the town, Noxlot Hall or own choice, and create a map or plan. Take turns to give your partner the next instruction, using description from the text to inform you. Compare all the finished maps in a gallery walk.
- Create a chalk pavement one-pager summary (paired or small group activity) and share with peers (ideas and examples can be found online).
- Head outside and get as close to 'nature' as possible: you may have adjoining parkland or even use the school oval. Have students record the sights and sounds but also their feelings of and about nature in their own environment.

Teachers Notes prepared by Sue Warren. Copyright 2026 © Scholastic Australia Pty Limited.