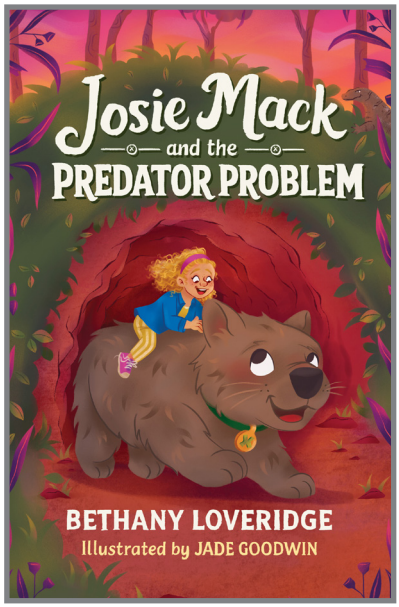
Josie Mack and the Predator Problem (Josie Mack #2)



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary

SYNOPSIS

Nine-year-old Josie and her wombat friend Ursula have become the Fellowship of Underground Nocturnals (the FUN's) most exceptional team, especially now that Ursula can go mega-sized with a press of her MEGA tag. But the FUN's leader - a tawny frogmouth named Pod - is missing, and an apex predator named Venus has joined the fellowship. Could the two things be related?

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. *Harper Wells: Renegade Timeline Officer* was Bethany's debut book in 2025, and the first in her Wollemi Trilogy. You can find her hanging with the animals at Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary.

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 and teamwork
- The environment and conservation
- Predators and prey
- Domesticated animals and wild animals
- Animal endangerment

CURRICULUM LINKS

Australian Curriculum v9

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

- 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 Urusla able to pull through the challenges they face?
- If you had a pet wombat, how would you take care of it?
- 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?

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?
- How would it feel to go MEGA (physically and emotionally)?
- What choice would you have made about activating the MEGA tag? Why?
- 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 and teamwork

- Josie is small, but she is a very important part of the MEGA Division. What can Josie do that Ursula can't?
- Why is it good to be on a team where everyone is good at different things?
- 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?
- 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?

Environment

- Why is the night sky and a lack of artificial light (light pollution) so important for a group like the Fellowship of Underground Nocturnals?
- Josie and Ursula clear away an illegal bike trail and pick up balloons from the beach. Why are these things harmful to animals and the environment?
- How do problems in the environment affect animals? What about humans?
- How did Josie and her friends help improve the environment?
- What are some small things you can do every day to help the environment?
- Why do you think the FUN group works at night?

Predators and prey

- In your own words, what is a 'predator' and what is 'prey'? Find an example of each in the story.
- The animals are worried that Pod the frogmouth has gone missing - and some even fear that Venus the perentie has eaten him. What do you think has really happened to Pod? What clues make you think that?
- Venus is a perentie, which is Australia's largest monitor lizard. Why do you think the other animals are automatically suspicious of her? Is it fair to judge her based on her size and species?
- How does Venus's behavior in the story compare to what the other animals expected an apex predator to do? Did she surprise them?
- Think about the word "predator." Does it mean an animal is "mean" or "evil"? Why is being a predator just a necessary job in the wild?
- What would happen to a habitat if we removed all the apex predators (like perenties or wedge-tailed eagles)? How does a predator keep nature in balance?
- Why is Tilly so upset about what her cat, Oscar, has been doing?
- How do the roles change in a food chain? Can an animal be both a predator and a prey?

Domesticated animals 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 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?

- 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?
- What can you do to help protect Australian animals?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Posters for the planet

- Inspired by Josie, Tilly and Gray, design a poster that encourages people to protect a local animal or natural place. Include a clear message, an eyecatching illustration and at least one interesting fact. For an extra challenge, hide a small frog somewhere in your design, just like Gray does in the story!

Get to know a native animal

- Choose one Australian animal featured in the story, such as the northern hairy-nosed wombat, bilby, perentie, tawny frogmouth, echidna, platypus, bettong or bush stone-curlew. Research the animal and present three interesting facts to the class. Find out where it lives, what it eats and whether it is endangered. If it is threatened, explain what is putting it at risk and how people can help protect it.

Make a food chain

- Create a simple food chain using animals from the story, along with any other animals you know. Show how energy moves through the chain by drawing who eats whom. For example:
  grass → grasshopper → frog → snake
- Label the predators and prey in your food chain. Compare your work with classmates and discuss how each living thing plays an important role in the ecosystem. Display your completed food chains around the classroom.

Life-cycle wheel

- Like the life-cycle poster in the story, create a lifecycle wheel for an animal that changes as it grows. You could choose a green tree frog (egg → tadpole → froglet → frog), a butterfly (egg → caterpillar → chrysalis → butterfly) or another animal with a life cycle you know. Label each stage and add illustrations or colour to make your wheel informative and engaging.

WORKSHEET: WHO EATS WHO? FOOD CHAINS AND PREDATORS

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

MATCH THE WORDS

Draw a line to match each word with its correct definition.

Word	Definitions
Predator	An animal that eats both plants and animals.
Prey	A series showing who eats whom in nature.
Food chain	An animal that hunts and eats other animals.
Apex predator	An animal that is hunted and eaten by another animal.
Nocturnal	An animal at the top of the food chain with no natural predators.
Omnivore	An animal that is active at night.

BUILD A FOOD CHAIN

Put these living things in the correct order.

Write the following words in boxes and draw arrows to show who eats whom:, grass, pet cat, grasshopper, garden skink.

MAKE YOUR OWN FOOD CHAIN

Choose an animal from the story and create your own food chain below.

PREDATOR, PREY OR BOTH?

Tick the correct box for each animal.

Animal	Predator	Prey	Both
Grasshopper	☐	☐	☐
Moth	☐	☐	☐
Garden skink (lizard)	☐	☐	☐
Green tree frog	☐	☐	☐
Pet cat (Oscar)	☐	☐	☐
Perentie (Venus)	☐	☐	☐

MEET A NATIVE ANIMAL

Choose one Australian animal from the story.

My animal: _____

What does it eat?

_____

_____

One cool fact about it:

_____

_____

_____

Draw your animal here!

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