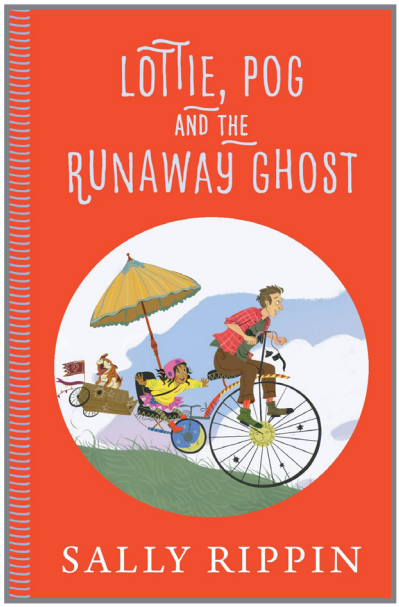
Lottie, Pog and the Runaway Ghost



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid Primary

SYNOPSIS

Lottie Baker has her dad, Bill, and her dog, Pog. That's more than enough family for any ten-year-old girl, isn't it? Besides, their house is already way too crowded without trying to squeeze anyone else in. But then Lottie meets a runaway ghost called Martha May Claringbold, who is not too young and not too old. Martha doesn't want to live in the graveyard anymore because it's dark and smelly, and terribly dull. She wants to live in Lottie's room because once upon a time Lottie's room was her room. And Martha may be just the one to help Lottie's secret wish come true.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Rippin is an award-winning Australian author who has written over one hundred books, including the popular children's series *Billie B Brown*, *Hey Jack!*, *School of Monsters*, and *Polly and Buster*.

Born in Australia, she grew up in Southeast Asia and China, where she studied traditional Chinese painting before becoming a full-time writer. She was the 2024-2025 Australian Children's Laureate and advocates for neurodiversity and literacy for all children. Sally lives with her husband and a small dog, but no ghosts (as far as she knows).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

- After reading the book as a whole, go back to the epigraph and research the poem it comes from, which is 'The Ghost-Seer' by James Russell-Lowell. Martha also repeats this rhyme on the mirror on page 151. How do the themes of this couplet and the poem as a whole relate to the book?
- Use another couplet from 'The Ghost-Seer' to inspire a book idea. Write a synopsis and the first chapter of your book.
- *While Lottie, Pog and the Runaway Ghost* isn't a horror story, Martha May Claringbold and her history exhibit ghostly traits. A 'trope' is a common storytelling device. As a class, research and brainstorm the ghost story tropes that appear in the book.
- When discussing super powers, Morgan chooses invisibility and Lottie chooses super intelligence.
  - How does this suit their personalities and their character development?
  - Choose other characters in the story – for e.g., Bill, Martha, Pog, Lydia, Carlotta, Charlie, Imelda, baby Barnaby and/or Annie – and decide what their super powers would be based on their character.
  - What super power would you choose for yourself? Does this suit your personality?
- How are the themes of 'found family' and 'families come in all shapes and sizes' explored in *Lottie, Pog and the*

Runaway Ghost?

- As a class, compare Lottie's family to Morgan's family. What makes them different? What makes them the same? What other kinds of family units are there?
- As a class, define the theme 'found family'. Using this definition, do you think Lottie finds her family in Lydia, Morgan's family and even the community on Whitman Street as a whole? Why or why not?

- *Lottie, Pog and the Runaway Ghost* is about the power of imagination. Through lounge-room camping, Lottie's fairytale bedroom, the sculptures in the yard, and even Lottie's wish, the reader is left with a sense that anything is possible.
  - Did you guess what Lottie's Wish of Loss and Longing was? What were the clues that Lottie's wish might not be what it seems?
  - Bill tells Lottie beautiful stories about Carlotta. How do these compare to the reality of what happened? Do you think Bill exaggerates these stories for Lottie? Why or why not?
  - In one of Bill's Moments of Inspiration, he created a Bill-cycle. "If you know what an old penny-farthing is, then mix that with a tricycle and parts of a cargo-bike, you might be close to picturing what a Bill-cycle looks like" (p 54). Have your own Moment of Inspiration, and make your own invention! It can be anything that brings happiness to your life. You can create a diagram or build a prototype using recycled materials.
- Whitman Street has a strong sense of place and community. Read pages 56–59. What emotions does Lottie feel when she greets the community? Write about a place that means something special to you. Does it have a sense of place? What do you see, feel, smell and hear when you're there? Are there people, or not?
- 'Bill always tells her: Comparison is the thief of joy, which Lottie understands to mean that it's good to appreciate what you have and not get stuck on what you don't'" (p 21).
  - This notion comes up multiple times in the novel. How does Lottie explore this idea as she discovers what really matters in her life?
- "'I didn't say I didn't believe you,' Morgan says. 'I just said I don't believe in ghosts. But I also don't believe you'd lie to me. So, if you say there's a ghost in that jar, and that's her in the photograph, then I guess I have to believe you. Just because I can't see something, doesn't mean it's not real for you'" (p 264).
  - No one else besides Lottie and Pog see Martha May Claringbold. Do you think she is real, or a figment of Lottie's imagination? What are the signs that she's real? What are the signs that she could be made-up? What do you think Morgan means by the above sentiment, especially the final sentence?
- Lottie and Lydia talk about science and the unknown on page 152: '"But you're a scientist!" Lottie says. "Why would you believe in ghosts?" "Well, science can explain a lot of things, but there's a whole realm of things it can't explain, or hasn't yet explained," Lydia says, smiling. She divides Lottie's hair into sections to tackle one bit at a time. "In science, you often come to realise that the more you know, the more you don't know."'
  - Do you agree with Lydia? Can you both believe in science and ghosts at the same time? Why or why not? How can these seemingly opposing ideas have more in common that we think?
- "'Lottie wonders what their street would have looked like a hundred and fifty years ago, when their house was first built. She knows there would have been no electricity and definitely no cars parked in driveways'" (p 288). The Sculpture House was built 150 years ago, which is also when Martha May Claringbold lived there.
  - As a class, research what the house might've looked like, inside and out, 150 years ago.
  - Using recycled materials, build a diorama which shows Lottie's house now on one side, and Lottie's house 150 years ago on the other side. Alternatively, you could choose a specific room, like Lottie's fairylit room on one side, and Martha's room on the other side.
- Martha May Claringbold talks in Cockney rhyming slang. Cockney rhyming slang replaces common words with rhyming phrases. List all the instances of Cockney rhyming slang in the book, and write what they mean. Which is your favourite, and why? Do you know other Cockney rhyming slang? Using what you know from the book, try to create your own Cockney rhyming slang.
- Discuss the similarities and differences between Lottie's parents. Bill, for e.g., lives in a ramshackle house, and Carlotta lives in pristine hotel room. Bill is happy to have baked beans for dinner, and Carlotta desires fine dining. What does this say about their personalities and their priorities in life?

- Choose a scene in *Lottie, Pog and the Runaway Ghost* and rewrite it from another character's perspective. Put yourself in their shoes. What would they think? What are the motivations behind their actions? Be as realistic and empathetic as you can be. You can adjust the dialogue, if you need to, but above all: Be creative! For example, you could choose Bill as he's introducing Lydia to Lottie. You could be Lydia as she reads one of Martha's messages or teaches Lottie to read. You could be Imelda helping Lottie with her ghost issue. You could be Morgan refusing to go into Lottie's haunted house. You could be Carlotta backstage seeing Lottie and Bill for the first time. You could even be Pog!

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