



Season for Young People

Insights and Ideas

Diary of a Wombat Presented by Monkey Baa Theatre Company

Monday Morning: Slept. Afternoon: Slept. Evening: Ate. Scratched. Night: Ate. A typical day.

Don't be fooled. This wombat leads a very busy and demanding life. Mothball wrestles unknown creatures, runs her own digging business, and most difficult of all - trains her humans. She teaches them when she would like carrots, when she would like oats and when she would like both at the same time. But these humans are slow learners. Find out how one wombat - between scratching, sleeping and eating - manages to fit the difficult job of training humans into her busy schedule.



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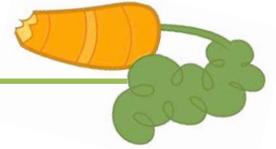
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About the Book - *Diary of a Wombat*



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About the Author - Jackie French

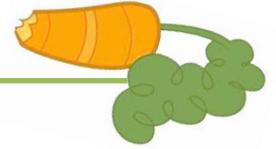
Jackie French is an Australian author, historian, ecologist and horary wombat (part time), 2014-2015 Australian Children's Laureate and 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. She has written over 200 books, and she has somehow still found the time to study over 400 wombats and been the (almost) obedient slave to a dozen of them. She is a patron of literacy programs across Australia with a wide experience in learning difference and methods, and their outcomes for students, as well as a passionate advocate for equal educational opportunity.

Pre-Reading Discussions

- As a class, look at the front and back cover of *Diary of a Wombat*. Ask students to share if they have seen a wombat in real life and take a few minutes to talk about what you know about wombats.
- Discuss: What do you notice about the wombat from this picture? What do you think this wombat has done? Can you tell us what wombats might like to eat? Can anyone predict what this story will be about? Where do wombat's live?
- Identify the author and illustrator.
- Ask the students to look at the pictures to see what the wombat in this story like to do and what they like to eat. Discuss the images: What do the pictures tell us about this wombat? Where does this wombat live? Does she have a family? What does this wombat like to eat? What does she like to do?

**DIARY OF A WOMBAT HAS
BEEN TRANSLATED INTO 23
LANGUAGES!**

About the Performance



There are 4 performers on the stage (not including puppets):

There are 3 actors in the show, and one cellist playing music live on stage. The wombat Mothball appears on stage as a puppet.

There is barely any spoken dialogue:

The book is written as a diary, which is not usually a spoken form of text. It is also a diary as if written by Mothball the wombat – and wombats cannot speak (as far as we know...) So, in the production, instead of giving the wombat the ability to speak like a human, the cello music becomes Mothball's voice, and the human characters speak. They do not say very much, though! Much of the text, emotion, atmosphere and story are created by music, and other theatrical elements.

The wombat's "voice" is a cello:

Mothball's character is represented by a puppet, but her "voice" is characterized by a musical instrument called a cello. You will also hear the actor operating the puppet make sounds with her voice such as grunting or breathing, and the actor is wearing a microphone to amplify these sounds.

There are some surprises in the set design:

During the show the audience may spot some of the surprising and interesting things that the set can do, and some surprising things that happen with the puppets. There are moving elements to the set, such as parts that revolve to show a change of place. Perspective and scale are also manipulated through use of puppetry and through the set design. It may be useful to discuss with your students how time passing and changes in setting can be created on stage by changing costume, lighting, sound, set configuration and/or music.

Using movement to tell a story

Movement and physical action can be powerful storytelling tools on the stage. Given there is barely any dialogue in this play, try giving students movement activities to give them some experience of storytelling without words prior to seeing the show. To extend their imaginations further, students perform these tasks as if they are wombats.

In order to build movement that tells a story give students a series of movement tasks to perform. You can then add emotion to the task, and that emotion should change and develop so it is not the same at the beginning as it is at the end (which creates great parallels for storytelling structure as well, especially complication/resolution). Some example tasks are listed below, as well as some simple props to help with their storytelling. Give them the simple prop indicated and remind them they can also use the prop as something it is not - for example, a doormat can become a car seat and so on. Students should devise short scenes and tell a story without words.

Task: Get the humans to feed me oats, not carrots

Prop: A metal bowl

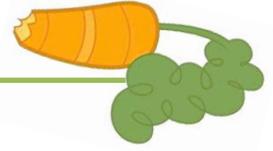
Task: Win a battle with a strange, furry creature

Prop: A doormat

Task: Work on a new hole

Prop: Flowers

Wild Animal Characteristics and Daily Life



Lesson by Amanda Roche.

Materials: Photos of the wild animal you describe and enact with your students; *Diary of a Wombat* book by Jackie French; Paper and pencils

Objectives:

- TSW discuss and name characteristics and behaviors of wild animals that live near them and how these characteristics help it survive.
- TSW physicalize movements and behaviors of a chosen wild animal.
- TSW imagine and write about the daily life of a chosen wild animal, using *Diary of a Wombat* as a template.

Class discussion/brainstorming: 5 minutes

- What is a wild animal? How is a wild animal different than a pet?
- As a group, ask students to list wild animals that may live around their school or backyards, or start with a pre-made list: Squirrels, Possums, Birds, Rabbits, Snakes, Raccoons.
- What are some things that all of these animals do? (sleep, eat, drink, create shelters, reproduce, hunt or forage - consider making 'forage' a special vocabulary word)
- What are some things that some of these animals do which others do not?
- For older or advanced students, discuss animal classifications here. For younger students, what does a squirrel do that a snake cannot do?
- Talk about specific animal characteristics, and what that means.

Describing Animal Characteristics and Habitats: 10 minutes

- Choose one of the animals from your list to explore in more detail. Suggestion: choose a mammal (for purposes of aligning more closely to the *Diary of a Wombat*), one that students know something about, and one that would be fun to explore physically. Have at least one photo of your chosen animal to show students, or better yet, a short video showing that animal's behavior. For the sake of this lesson, I will use Squirrel.
- Ask the class to answer the following questions aloud, with help as needed. Document answers in a space all can see. (Differentiation: Older students may be given a handout with these questions and work in small groups to answer them. Younger students may need to hear and see a short description or illustrated story of the chosen animal first.)
 - Where does this animal sleep? Does this animal usually sleep in the daytime or nighttime?
 - What does this animal eat? How does this animal find its food?
 - What human foods might this animal like or be similar to something humans eat?
 - How would you describe this animal's body? List 3-5 descriptive words for each animal.
 - How does this animal move around? What parts of its body help it move and get what it needs to survive?
 - How would you describe how this animal moves and acts? List 3-5 descriptive words for each animal.
 - What are some things this animal does when it's awake?

Warm Up Activity -- Physicalize it: 5 minutes

- In a defined open space, and with instructions not to touch anyone or anything, invite students to silently move through the space like a Squirrel (or the animal you chose). While they are moving, remind students of that animal's characteristics by reading the descriptive words they listed.
- As students continue to move through the space, give them these prompts:
 - Think about the speed your animal moves – fast, slow. How does it move when it is excited? Afraid? Looking for food? What would it do if it saw a person? How would it get to the place where it sleeps?
- You may want to look for students who clearly show characteristics and have the rest of the class pause and observe them moving.

Listening and Responding – *Diary of a Wombat*: 10 minutes

- Read *Diary of a Wombat* by Jackie French. Afterward, ask some or all of these questions:
 - What does a wombat eat in the wild?
 - What foods does it like to eat that are human foods?
 - What did the wombat do before it met humans?
 - How did the wombat’s life change when it got human neighbors?
 - Where does the wombat live?
 - What does a wombat do to make its home?
 - How does a wombat’s body help it make its home and find food?

The puppet of Mothball that you will see on stage is large, and it is worthwhile informing students that the puppet wombat is larger than a real-life wombat.

Responding and Writing – *Diary of Your Animal*: 10 minutes

- Whole class discussion: This book was a diary written by a Wombat, which is an animal that lives in Australia. If we made a diary for a squirrel (use animal you focused on here), what would the squirrel be eating? Where would it live? What characteristics of the squirrel would help it get food or make a shelter? What would it do in the daytime? In the nighttime? What might it want from humans?
- Divide students into small groups and provide pencil and paper. Each group will write a short “Diary of a Squirrel” for three days. On each of three days, the squirrel will need to eat, and do at least two other things.
- In what ways will each day be the same? In what ways will each day be different?
- You may choose to have one student in each group write the diary and others draw pictures, or have each student write a diary. Give a handout with the three days written on it and plenty of blank space between, or have them write day one, day two, day three (or days of the week).
- Before you move to the next activity, be sure each group reads their animal diary aloud or to themselves.

Embody: 3 minutes

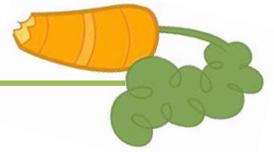
- Ask students to stand up near where they are working. On the count of three, have them all make a frozen pose of their animal.
- Then, ask them to choose one thing that happened to their animal on day one and make a frozen pose. Have students hold their pose but look around the room and try to see what happened in the other animal’s lives. Repeat with day two and day three.

Closing Reflection: 2 minutes

- Explain that some actors in Australia created a play for the stage based on the book, *Diary of a Wombat*, which you are going to see. In the play *Diary of a Wombat*, the performers use puppets to show the animal, but you also see the performers too. Close your eyes and imagine a puppet of your animal. If you saw a play that was the diary of your squirrel, what would it look like?

Extension: *Diary of a Wombat* is one book in a series of stories by Jackie French about Mothball the wombat. Look into the other stories and consider creating different diaries for different holidays or events.

The Sounds of Music



Activities by Monkey Baa Theatre Company.

How do you voice a wombat on stage? From day one, Monkey Baa Director Eva Di Cesare knew that Mothball's "voice" would be portrayed by a cello. The tone and range of the cello is a wonderful fit for the mischievous character. Composer Oonagh Sherrard is a cellist who wrote the music for *The Diary of a Wombat* performance.

The cello is a string instrument. It is lower than both the violin and the viola, but higher than the double bass. The cello has four strings. Sound is made by playing the strings using a bow, or by finger-plucking the strings.

Responding to Music

- Play recorded music (or live, if you can!). Some music suggestions to use include Peggy's Minute Rag by Elena Kats-Chernin, Russian Rag by Elena Kats-Chernin, Music for Children Opus 65 by Sergei Prokofiev, or bassoon music by The Bassoon Brothers
- Ask the students to respond to the music as if they are Mothball the wombat. Use movement only to depict the wombat. Add vocal sound effects, but no words.
- Allocate one page of *Diary of a Wombat* for each student to read aloud, stopping at every punctuation mark. Each time there is a punctuation mark, play the music and have the other students move as wombats.
- Next, ask the students to work in small groups to create performance pieces based on the book and accompanied by the recorded music. Assign a page or a situation for each group. Ensure the scenes have a beginning, middle and end. The students are still not to use spoken words.
- Give the students time to rehearse their scenes in small groups, then share their scenes while the music plays as accompaniment. It can also be interesting to watch the scenes with no music and make comparisons.



Percussion Soundscape

- Using various percussion instruments like shaker eggs, tapping sticks, wrist bells, maracas etc., show these instruments to the students and discuss each one and its sound.
- Draw connections between the instruments and sounds from daily life. What do the instruments sound like?
- Task the students with creating a soundscape from a reading of *Diary of a Wombat*. Have them choose key moments that require sound effects and have them match these moments to percussion sound effects. Write down when to make sounds and when it fits in with the text.
- Match the timing of sounds to the narration. Communicate with gestures when the sounds should stop and start, etc. Rehearse and prepare the sounds, while a student or teacher reads the book aloud, acting as the narrator.
- Take turns being the conductor. Perhaps you can even create a written record of your class composition by devising a written code for the music. Work towards performing the whole text, with sound effects, without stopping.

Creating a Wombat-Friendly Garden



From <http://www.jackiefrench.com/copy-of-a-tithe-garden>

How to know if you have a friendly garden:

- Go and sit in the garden. Take a deep sip, a deep sniff (gardens smell good) and look around.
- Are there flowers? Are insects fluttering around the blooms?
- Do you hear birds when you wake up in the morning? And as the night thickens and the dew begins to fall?
- If you were the size of a blue wren would you feel safe in your garden?
- If you were a pregnant frog or dragonfly, is there somewhere you could lay eggs?
- If you were an animal would you think your garden was fun?
- Does your garden feel right?

How to have a garden filled with wildlife

Some strategies include:

- Grow native fruits that animals prefer.
- Net and prune fruit trees till they are above animal reach, then reuse the tree guards elsewhere.
- Grow roses up fruit trees instead of on bushes - this keeps the roses from the animals and deters them from eating the fruit.
- Grow fruit in thickets, instead of neat lines - this makes it less attractive to birds, and is far more drought and frost resistant.
- Study which plants wombats (or other wildlife) prefer - this will vary from season to season. (For example, wombats will eat green apples some seasons, but ignore them in others.)

A Note on Fences

No fence stops a wombat. If they can't push through it, they'll dig underneath. Wombat holes will negate weeks of fencing.

Wombat Damage

Often wombats are blamed for eating grass or causing erosion that is really the fault of rabbits. The amount of damage a wombat does is subjective. One farmer may see half a dozen holes in their netting fence as a calamity; another may see it simply as a nuisance. Wombats tend to do very little harm economically.

The easiest solution to wombat damage is to install a wombat gate. Wombats are creatures of habit and will keep using the same hole - and will push through anything blocking their way rather than try to dig a new one. You can swing a wooden gate and wire if you like - or try an easier though uglier solution with an old car tire filled with fencing wire. (The rim will keep the wire in, and the wire is usually too prickly for a wombat to press through.) Tie the tire to the top of the hole. It'll block rabbits and lambs, but a strong wombat will be able to push through it easily.

Some Ways to Encourage Wombats

- ✓ Establish shelter belts, keeping belts of bush around dams, wet gullies, springs and watercourses - these will help stop erosion and water fouling as well as provide shelter and habitat for wombats. Also leave belts of bush on rocky areas, around fence lines, tops of hills, steep land, etc.
- ✓ Avoid barbed wire and don't burn your pasture to destroy weeds.
- ✓ If you really care about your wombat population, try to have a cleared space near any fences next to a road. Many farmers leave a belt of trees next to these fences. Wombats congregate there and are killed by traffic. Have your green belts somewhere else, on internal fences, not external ones.
- ✓ Pay rent to wildlife - accept it is their land too. The world would be boring if it was inhabited only by humans and their pets.

Additional Activity Ideas

- Discuss the owners' feelings portrayed through Bruce Whatley's illustrations. How must they feel about the shredded doormat? The perfect dustbath? The hole in the door? Rewrite the diary from the family's point of view. Try to keep the events unchanged. Choose an appropriate title.
- Explore other stories about wombats!
 - *Diary of a Wombat* is the first book in a series of stories about Mothball the wombat! Check out Jackie French's other stories about the playful marsupial.
 - *Found you, Wombat* by Vicki Churchill
 - *Wombat Down Below!* by Jill Morris
 - *The Wombat Who Talked To The Stars* by Jill Morris
 - *The Wombat: Common Wombats in Australia* by Barbara Triggs
- In literary texts, dialogue plays an important role in character development. However, there is no dialogue in *Diary of a Wombat* (from Mothball). Analyze the text to glean information about Mothball. How has Jackie French developed Mothball's character without the use of dialogue?
- Review the use of punctuation in the story, i.e. capital letters, colons and full-stops. Introduce the Colon and explain its function, purpose, and how it is used (e.g. for lists). Model the use of a Colon using an example of my daily routine during the week and ask students to create a list of their morning routine before school that also incorporates the use of a colon.
 - ✓ Early Morning: Wake up, prepare children for school and myself for work, drive to work
 - ✓ Morning: Teach in the classroom
 - ✓ Lunchtime: Meet with children and eat my lunch
 - ✓ Afternoon: Finish teaching, collect children from school and drive home
 - ✓ Evening: Prepare and eat dinner and then get the family ready for school the next day, read stories and bed.
- In *Diary of a Wombat* Mothball is somewhat destructive. Drawing on her antics, what solutions could prevent Mothball from destroying the garden and the house? Ask students to come up with an invention that would keep Mothball from destroying the garden and the house.
- Write an instruction kit on how to care for a wombat, including a booklet, poster and a list of DOs and DON'Ts.
- Have some fun writing a WOMBAT acrostic poem about the lovable Mothball.
- Kangaroos, opossums, koalas, sugar gliders, wombats, and Tasmanian devils, are all common examples of marsupials. One feature all marsupials have in common is a pouch. Have students research the different types of pouches that marsupials have, then construct three-dimensional models to illustrate each type of pouch. Students will learn that pouches are not "pockets" as they are often portrayed in storybooks, and in fact, wombats have pouches that are considered backward facing, so that they don't cover their babies with mud while digging!
- Down Under Map – An interesting thing to consider about maps in Australia – they often have maps printed with South at the top – so that Australia was near the top and in a prominent position instead of at the bottom. You can make your own version of an Australian map by tracing over a "traditional" map onto a big piece of butcher paper and then labeling the countries yourself, writing so that Australia is at the top, not the bottom. This is especially fun to explore and talk about when you hang a "down under" map next to a "traditional" one.