



My Uncle Gus the Garden Gnome

Written by Jackie French

Illustrated by Stephen Michael King

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Synopsis

Tom has the happiest family around. Dad is Senior Bogeyman for the entire east coast and Mum is First Assistant Tooth Fairy. Tom loves being around Fra and his best friend, Mog, a large and hairy ... well, no one is quite sure what Mog is. And then there's Uncle Gus – everything seems to be right when Uncle Gus is around.

But Tom soon finds out what happens when you don't take the daughter of the Most Powerful Witch in the World to the school dance. Bad luck! A meal of mutant spaghetti, a magic carpet ride through a sewerage channel, and an unwelcomed visit from Kitty-Kat the sabre-toothed tiger has turned Tom's world upside down.

Ages: 7–10 years

About the Author

Jackie French is a full-time writer who lives in rural NSW. She writes fiction and non-fiction for children and adults, and has columns in the print media. Jackie is regarded as one of Australia's most popular children's authors. In 2000, Jackie won the Children's Book Council's Younger Readers' Award for *Hitler's Daughter*. In 2002, she won the ACT Book of the Year Award for *In the Blood*. Her bestselling picture book *Diary of a Wombat* was named an Honour Book in

the 2003 CBC Awards and won the ABA Book of the Year, as well as numerous other awards in Australia and overseas. Most recently, *To the Moon and Back*, co-written with her husband Bryan Sullivan, won the 2005 Eve Pownall Award for Information Books.

About the Illustrator

Stephen's first picture book, *The Man Who Loved Boxes*, was nominated for the Crichton Award for illustration, was the winner of the inaugural Family Award and was selected for Pick of the List (US). He has since illustrated over 20 books, and has been shortlisted five times for the Children's Book Council Awards. In 2002, he won both the YABBA and Koala children's choice awards for *Pocket Dogs*.

All About Wacky Families

Jackie thinks that all families are wacky ... in their own way.

- How is your family different from other families?
- Is everyone in your family human? Can an animal really be a member of a family?

All About Garden Gnomes

- What or who are gnomes? List some of their characteristics in point form and then draw or paint a picture of one.
- Gnomes are associated with helping gardens grow. Do you think this is why people started making garden gnomes? Write a story about the history of the garden gnome.
- Some people or groups such as the 'Garden Gnome Liberation Front' steal garden gnomes and send them on a holiday around the world. Where would a garden gnome like to go for a holiday? Write a story about a garden gnome's holiday and/or draw a picture of a gnome on holiday.

Activities and Discussion

1. List all the things that happened to make Tom think that he was under a bad luck spell. (pp. 6, 14–15, 33, various) Have you ever felt that you were having a run of bad luck? Tell the class about a time when you had bad luck.
2. What was the 'spaghetti' that Tom's dad cooked for dinner? (pp. 22–24) In some cultures, foods are eaten that we might consider unusual. For example, the French eat snails and frogs' legs. Using books and the Internet, find some other unusual foods that are eaten around the world. You might like to hold an international food day, where everyone can bring a dish to share with the class.

3. Why do you think Fra's true identity isn't revealed until page 35? Before this, the author drops clues to alert us that Fra is no ordinary girl. Can you find these clues? (pp. 8–9, 12–13, 17, 31–32) In what ways does Fra resemble a 'typical' ghost? How is she different? Write your own ghost story, but try to give it an unusual twist.
4. Explain why Kitty-Kat, the sabre-toothed tiger, wasn't scared of Tom's dad. (pp. 40–41) Tom was afraid of Kitty-Kat. (p. 40) Have you ever been afraid of something? Did you try to overcome your fear? How? Suggest some practical ways of dealing with fears and anxieties.
5. Why did Grizella refuse to accept Tom's apology? (pp. 51–52) Do you think Tom should have explained to Grizella from the start why he couldn't take her to the dance, instead of making excuses? Discuss some excuses people use to avoid unwelcome situations.
6. What did Grizella like about Tom? Why didn't she like the other boys at school? (pp. 68–69, 85) What qualities do you like or admire in other people?
7. How did Grizella behave around her mother? Why did Tom and Fra feel sorry for Grizella? (pp. 82–84) Is The Most Powerful Witch in the World a good parent? Why or why not? Grizella could have anything she wanted, simply by wishing. (pp. 100–101) If you were Grizella, what would you wish for?
8. Uncle Gus suggested fishing from The Most Powerful Witch in the World's moat, even though there weren't any fish. What was the point of this? (pp. 95, 102–105) Survey the class to find out what activities people do in their spare time. Is it important to have interests or hobbies? Why?
9. When did The Most Powerful Witch in the World realise she was happy? (pp. 104–105) What other words mean 'happy'? What makes *you* happy? Do you think that happiness comes from making others happy?
10. How did Tom manage to take Fra to the dance? (p. 113) Tom hoped that one day he would be able to marry Fra, perhaps by going back in time ... (p. 116) Write a sequel to the story in which Tom fights the assassins and rescues Fra before she is murdered.