



## **My Gran the Gorilla**

Written by Jackie French

Illustrated by Stephen Michael King

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### **Synopsis**

TJ's gran has hairy legs and arms. She also makes the best banana cake in the universe, as well as baked bananas, choc-coated bananas and Roast lamb Surprise (which is mostly bananas) too. In fact, there is only one little problem about having a gorilla for a gran. And the little problem's name is Linda.

What will cool clever Linda think when she finds out who TJ's gran really is? And what will she think of a pet who's a slimy Giant Skateboarding Slug called Egbert? Will she still want to perambulate with TJ?

But then again, perhaps Mr Pifflewhiskers, their teacher, is not what he seems ... When wombat poachers come to Gobbledygook it's up to TJ and Gran, with help from Linda and Egbert – and a surprise discovery – to save the day. Join TJ and his gran the gorilla in another exciting adventure in the Wacky Families series.

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

*But normal families didn't swing through trees, TJ reminded himself. And at all costs Linda had to think they were normal!* (page 47)

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

- Why is it so important to TJ that his family appears to be normal?
- From your reading of the book (and others in the series) what have you learnt about families?
- Is there such a thing as a 'normal' family?
- What characteristics do happy families have in common?
- Does a family have to be 'normal' to be happy?
- What do you think is special about your family?
- Is everyone in your family human? Can an animal really be a member of a family?

## All About Gorillas

TJ's gran is a gorilla.

- Can gorillas really speak in sign language? Look up all you can find about gorillas.
- Do any other animals speak sign language? What other ways do animals communicate to humans? How do they communicate with each other?
- How many words do you think a dog can understand?
- What countries do gorillas come from? Are there any native to Australia?
- What do gorillas eat in the wild?

## Sign language and other forms of Communication

- What is sign language?
- Who needs to use sign language today? Do you know anyone who can speak it?
- Go to the library or search the Internet to find more information about sign language. What do you think would be the six most important things to be able to say in sign?
- How did TJ communicate with a) Gran, b) Egbert and c) the wombat? (pages 2, 10, 36)
- Communication doesn't necessarily involve the spoken word. List all the ways in which people communicate with each other. How has technology influenced the way we communicate?

## Activities and Discussion

1. What are Egbert's annoying habits? (pp. 1–6, 11, 41–2) Invent a strange creature of your own. Describe its unique features and draw a picture of it.
2. Which well-known story has Jackie French adapted to explain how TJ came to have a gorilla for his grandmother? (pp. 3, 8–9) Choose another familiar story or fairy tale and re-write it setting it in the present time.
3. At first, why was Linda suspicious of Mr Pifflewhiskers? (pp. 16–18) In your opinion, is he a good teacher? What qualities are important in a teacher?
4. When TJ and Linda fell into the poachers' wombat trap, what did they do to try and escape? (pp. 57–58, 60) What would you have done in this situation? Explain how poachers operate. Why were the poachers in the story trapping wombats? (p. 81) Which animals are often targeted by poachers?
5. How did Mr Pifflewhiskers explain away those things that had made Linda suspicious of him? (pp. 70–72, refer 16–17) Mr Pifflewhiskers turned out to be a customs officer. What do customs officers do? Why is this job important?
6. Why had Linda's family kept Pop's existence a secret? (pp. 76–77) What do you think should happen to retired circus animals? What are the good points and bad points of training animals to be circus performers? Prepare a class debate on this topic.
7. Explain how Egbert's secret weapon foiled the poachers. (pp. 84–85) If you could have a secret weapon for use in emergencies, what would it be? Describe your secret weapon and how it works. Write a story in which your secret weapon saves the day.
8. Once Gran's and Pop's identities were out in the open, how did the townspeople react? According to Very Big Sean, what was the only thing that mattered in Gobbledegook? Do you think city people would have reacted in the same way as the Gobbledegook locals? What are some of the advantages of country living compared to city living, and vice versa?