Christmas Wombat

Jackie French & Bruce Whatley

ISBN: 9780732291716 (hbk.)

Published October 2011

Classroom activity guide by Catherine Hainstock



About the Book

Christmas comes but once a year and it's just as well for Santa's reindeer who have to fight with Mothball for the carrots left out for them by the local children. And when Mothball takes an unexpected sleigh ride, it's

not just Santa who faces the prospect of getting stuck in the chimney.

Christmas from a wombat's eye view is always going to be interesting—especially when that

About the Author

Jackie French's first novel Rainstones was published in 1992 and since then she's published over 130 books. Jackie has won literary awards and children's choice awards, both nationally and internationally. Her books appear regularly on the Children's Book Council awards lists and several of her stories have been turned into plays. Jackie generously provides lots of background information and insight into her writings on her website http://www.jackiefrench.com/

Her most well-known book, Diary of a Wombat, has sold hundreds of thousands of copies; Christmas Wombat is the third collaboration between Jackie and Bruce about Mothball's antics.

These notes are for:

• K − 6 (Primary)

Key Learning Areas:

- English Literature
- English Literacy
- Visual Literacy
- Geography
- Science Understanding
- The Arts
- Health
- ICT

This book explores:

- Christmas traditions
- Travel/Places
- Animals
- Food

wombat is Mothball!

About the Illustrator

Bruce Whatley is one of the best known author-illustrators of children's books in Australia and has brought to life more than fifty books with his humorous and endearing illustrations. His first book, *The Ugliest Dog in the World*, was published in 1992 and in 1993 was nominated and recognised in the Children's Book Council awards along with his second book, *Looking for Crabs*. His work continues to attract awards.

Bruce currently lives in NSW with his wife (one of his co-authors) and finds his life and family rich sources of inspiration.

To the Teacher

These notes and activities are generally suited to years K-6 but could be used more widely. Please select and adapt according to your students' needs.

Some websites have been linked to these classroom activities, but your school library or public library will have wonderful resources, too. Help students develop their information literacy skills by discussing other possible sources/places to access information.

Teaching Notes and activities for *Diary of a Wombat* and *Baby Wombat's Week* can be found at:

http://www.harpercollins.com/harperimages/ommoverride/diary%20of%20a%20wombat%20 notes.pdf

http://www.harpercollins.com/harperimages/ommoverride/Baby Wombats Week.pdf

Getting Started

Query students' prior knowledge to assist their understanding of the book. Accept any predictions and appropriate discussions points.

- Look at the cover. What might the story be about? What made you think this?
- What kind of book do you think it's going to be? (eg. mood, story pattern) What made you think this?
- Does this book remind you of any others you have read? (Students may already be familiar with *Diary of a Wombat*.)
- Did you think of any questions as you looked at this cover? Have students share them then review after the reading for answers. (Help students to look for and distinguish between direct answers and inferred answers.) If any questions were unanswered, have a class brainstorm for possible ways to find an answer (eg. contact the author, look in other books etc.)

Reading the Story

- During or directly after reading, ask general comprehension questions to ensure children understand the story, especially why the carrots were left out and why Mothball battled the 'strange creatures' for them.
- Compare *Christmas Wombat* to Jackie and Bruce's *Diary of a Wombat*. How was this story similar? How was it different? (Compare text and illustrations.)
- When did this story take place? How do you know this? (You may also want to explore a picture book version of the traditional *T'was the Night before Christmas* story by Clement C. Moore.)
- If you were telling your friends about *Christmas Wombat*, what would you tell them? Are there any parts you wouldn't tell because it might spoil the story for them if you did?
- Were there any parts (story or illustrations) that particularly caught your attention? Anything you would have liked more of? Which part did you like the best? Why?
- Who was telling the story? How do we know this?
- The pictures show us a different view of what's happening to Mothball's version of the story. Find the pages where this is especially true and discuss the differences. Why do you think the author and illustrator did this? (Help students to see how it creates the humour in the story.) What other things did the author and/or illustrator do to make this story humorous?
- What difference would it make if someone else told the story? Try writing and drawing the story as if the reindeer were telling it, or perhaps a different animal taking the place of Mothball. What might you do as illustrator/writer to make the story humorous?

Themes

Christmas traditions

- Find as many Christmas traditions as you can in the book. What is a tradition? Why
 do we do these things? Discover the origins of some of our Christmas traditions. You
 can start your search here: http://www.whychristmas.com/ Look under Christmas
 customs.
- Different countries have different Christmas traditions or different days of celebration.
 Explore traditions and adopt one or more for your classroom. Start exploring here:
 http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/
- Share any special holiday traditions you and your family may have with your classmates. Show them how to do it or draw a picture then explain it to them.

- Traditions have to start somewhere! Invent a new class tradition for Christmas and make a story or a book (try an eBook using Photostory or similar) to explain it to the next year's class. Take photos of your class celebrating with this new tradition.
- What do you and your family do on the night before Christmas? Or what might you like to do? Share.
- Can you recall the names of all of Santa's reindeer? Rudolph has a red nose, but have you ever wondered how Santa tells the other reindeer apart? Imagine what these differences might be. You may even want to invent a story like Rudolph's about how one of the other reindeer is different.

Other Activities

• Edible Christmas Trees:

Have you ever noticed how inverted (upside down) ice cream cones look like Christmas trees? Use your favourite icing recipe (you could even colour it green) then add your favourite lollies/sprinkles/popcorn to decorate it. Make a list of things you'll need and get everything assembled before starting.

• Give a Gift: Scent of the Bush Potpourri

Wombats live in the wild in some parts of Australia and so would appreciate the smell of the bush as much as any Aussie. Why not capture that bush smell in a jar as a gift for someone special.

Materials:

1 x nice jar with lid per student (clean and dry inside) Spray paint for lid (silver, gold, green or red) and face masks for spraying

Gum leaves and/or gum nuts (gathered ahead and dried)

Bush essence essential oils

Glitter

1 x small zip-lock bag per student

Newspapers

Glue

Directions:

Distribute a zip-lock bag to each child. Allow them to fill it ½ - ¾ full with leaves/nuts. Help them to choose then administer 3 -5 drops of essential oil into the bag, close and shake. Store the bags for 1-2 days so the oils soak in. Allow students to add glitter and shake again to mix. Outside on newspaper, spread the lids for the jars. If students are old enough, assist them to spray the lids and let dry for an hour. Students may wish to further decorate the lid with ribbon or gumnuts glued to the top. Let them fill their jars with the nuts/leaves and screw the lids on. They may wish to wrap their presents before taking them home. To use: simply take off the lid and use as room freshener.

Travel and Places

- Can you identify the places Mothball visited? Look for clues in the illustrations. You
 may have to do a little research. Find the places on a map (or on Google maps).
 Trace the trip Mothball took on Santa's sleigh.
- Many people travel at Christmas time especially in Australia as it is during the summer holidays. Tell and/or draw about a trip you took at Christmas. Or imagine a trip you'd like to take—you could go anywhere! Try telling your story like Mothball did; use short sentences and tell only the important parts. Look at the other Wombat books in the series for ideas on how to write a humorous diary of your trip.

Other Activities

- Wombats travel light, but humans generally don't! Find out more about one of the places to which Mothball travelled. Using materials available, construct a miniature suitcase and things you would need to take on a trip to this place (make sure they can fit in the suitcase!). Share these with your class explaining why you chose the things you did.
- Play "The Suitcase Game". Choose one
 of the places Mothball travels to for your
 game. Some research and discussion
 ahead of time may be necessary if
 students are not familiar with the places.
- Get into a small group and try changing this action poem to suit a wombat's story. Which words would you change?

10 LITTLE ELVES

10 little elves jumping in the sleigh; one falls off and slides away. Santa calls the reindeer and the reindeer say, "No more jumping in Santa's sleigh.

9 little elves jumping in the sleigh; ... etc.

The Suitcase Game

How to play: The first person says, "I'm packing my suitcase to go to ... and in it I'll put ... "then the person says something appropriate for the journey/place.

The next person says the same as the first and adds something else to be packed. The game continues until someone forgets something (they are then out). The person with the best memory wins.

 Make a few props, practice acting out your new poem then capture it on video or perform it for another group.

Animals

Did you know wombats have square poo? There are other animals featured in this book as well as Mothball, the wombat.

• Identify the other animals featured in this book and find out more about them (eg. where they live, what they eat, who their enemies are, are they endangered, unusual facts). Design and create a set of Christmas tree decorations with interesting facts about one of the above animals (or an animal of your own choice) to help other people learn more about them in a fun and attractive way. You could decorate the class tree with them or give them away as gifts.

Wombats

All of the books in Jackie's famous wombat series were inspired by a real wombat named Mothball. You can read about the real Mothball on Jackie's website:

http://www.jackiefrench.com/wombat.html

- Learn more about wombats here:
 http://www.abc.net.au/schoolstv/anima
 ls/WOMBATS.htm and
 http://www.australiazoo.com.au/our-animals/amazing-animals/mammals/?mammal=wombat
- You might like to find Don Spencer's song "Dig, Dig, Dig (Like a Wombat)", learn the words and sing along. You can find all of Don Spencer's song lyrics on his website:
 http://www.donspencer.com.au
 You can listen to the song being sung by The Wayfarers on this site:
 http://www.we7.com/#/song/The-Wayfarers/Dig-Dig-Dig-Like-A-Wombat

Other wombat books by Jackie French

Diary of a Wombat (with Bruce Whatley)

Baby Wombat's Week (with Bruce Whatley)

A Wombat called Bosco

The Secret World of Wombats (with Bruce Whatley)

The Warrior: The Story of a Wombat

- Try your hand at folding an origami wombat (or maybe a whole family) from: http://www.moocowfanclub.com/activities/crafts/origami/wombat
- Check out the Wombat Foundation. http://www.wombatfoundation.com.au They are trying to save the Northern Hairy-Nosed wombat from extinction. You and your class may want to help by raising funds and/or awareness of their endangered status. Brainstorm to come up with plans for a fundraising campaign or an advertising campaign.

Reindeer

You can learn more about reindeer here: http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Reindeer

- Learn to play a Christmas carol with the Reindeer Orchestra (computer must have Flash loaded) http://dingo.care2.com/cards/new/0422/Do-a-rain-deer.swf
- Make your own set of antlers. It's easy!

Materials:

Thick, coloured paper (brown plus another colour)
Stapler and or glue
Scissors

Directions:

With fingers spread wide, have children help each other to trace around their hands on the brown paper. Cut out the hand shapes. Cut a strip of the other

coloured paper (about 8 cm wide) then have children help each other to measure the length to fit their heads and staple in the right spot to create a headband. Glue or staple the hand cut-outs to the bands. Have the students refer to Bruce Whatley's illustrations to determine where the thumbs should go (front or back of the band) and where to position the antlers.

Get together with friends to make reindeer teams and invent some reindeer games.

Pigeons

One of the interesting things about pigeons is how they bob their heads when they walk. I wonder why they do that. You can find out interesting facts about pigeons on these websites:

http://www.abc.net.au/creaturefeatures/facts/pigeons.htm
http://www.ozanimals.com/wildlife/Bird/Pigeons,Doves.html

- Have a pigeon fancier come to your school and talk about his/her hobby
- Why not make Pigeon Finger Puppets (or a whole flock of them). (You can use the illustration provided as a template). Observe some real pigeons (maybe in your local park?) and copy their movements and habits with your finger puppets. If you can't find any real pigeons try searching online for pigeon videos.

Materials

Felt

Glue

Scissors

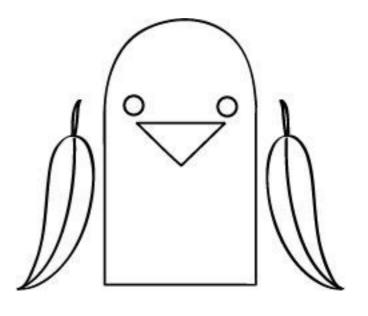
Feathers

Felt-tip marker (for eyes)

Wox

Directions

Cut out the template pieces, trace around them on the felt. Cut out two puppet bodies and one beak in a contrasting colour. Glue the beak on to the front piece. Draw the eyes with the marker. Squeeze or paint glue in a thin line around the sides and top of the back piece. Place one feather on each side in the wing position. Carefully place the front over the back, sandwiching the quill of the feathers in between the two layers. Wait for the glue to dry. Have fun!



• For other picture books with pigeons in them: try looking up author Mo Willems.

Toucans

You can start reading about Toucans here: http://www.theanimalspot.com/tocotoucan.htm

Learn a song about a Toucan (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKkG8Xbb8Fc)
 Invent some actions or dance steps to go with this song. Capture it on video or perform it for a group.

Polar bears

- Ever wonder how they film polar bears for television? Watch Animal Planet's Top Ten Polar Bear videos to learn not only about these magnificent creatures but the cool technology humans use to spy on them. http://animal.discovery.com/videos/polar-bear-videos/
- Find out more about polar bears at:
 http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/polar-bear/ and http://www.tundraanimals.net/

Carrots!

Mothball is a BIG fan of carrots. If you're a carrot-lover too, you'll definitely want to visit The World Carrot Museum (only possible online!). It contains lots of interesting facts, growing tips, experiments, craft and fun. http://carrotmuseum.co.uk/

 You can navigate the World Carrot Museum by using the Interactive Floor Plans: http://carrotmuseum.co.uk/groundfloor/groundfloor.html Children may need assistance to find their way around the site and to read some of the information. Areas with activities and reading levels most suitable for primary children are: http://carrotmuseum.co.uk/fun.html http://carrotmuseum.co.uk/trivia.html http://carrotmuseum.co.uk/experiment.httml

- There are carrot recipes aplenty. Try these simple ones then hunt through recipe books and sites for more. You may even want to put together a class cookbook filled with carrot recipes and facts. Make sure you taste test the recipes before including them!
- If you have a kitchen at school here's a simple recipe you can cook in the oven.

Oven-baked Carrot Fries

Preheat the oven to 200°C. Cover a shallow pan with non-stick baking paper.

Peel, top and tail carrots (go for ½ - 1 carrot per student). If they are long, cut the carrots in half then into sticks.

Carrot Pinwheels

1 cup grated carrot 1 grated apple ½ cup sultanas or currents (opt.) 6 slices fresh bread

Combine the grated carrot, apple and sultanas in a bowl. If desired, the mixture can be held together by mixing in a spoonful of mayonnaise or honey. Trim the crusts from the bread and flatten the slices until thin by rolling them out with a rolling pin. Spread the mixture evenly over the bread slices. Roll up tightly. Wrap and chill for at least 1 hour. Before serving, cut each roll in half on the diagonal.

In a mixing bowl, combine olive oil, salt pepper, and a few herbs like rosemary or thyme if desired. Tip the carrot sticks in the oil mixture and stir to coat.

Place the carrots on the pan in a single layer. Spread them out so they cook evenly. Sprinkle lightly with a bit of sugar if desired. Bake 20–40 minutes until browned on the outside and cooked through. Serve warm.

