

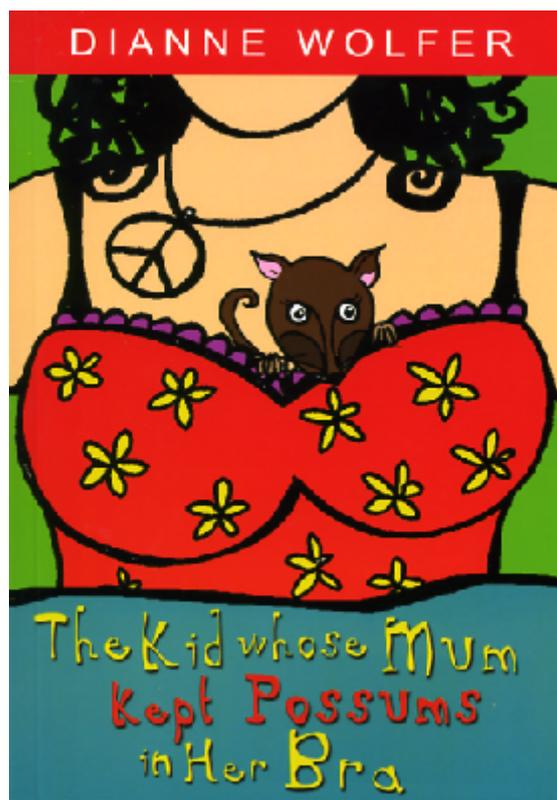
The Kid whose Mum Kept Possums in Her Bra

Written by Dianne Wolfer
Illustrated by Adrienne Zuvela
Published by Fremantle Press, 2006

Teachers' Notes

Synopsis

The Kid whose Mum Kept Possums in Her Bra is about a girl, Mon who is becoming more and more embarrassed about her hippy mother. Her mum's clothes are embarrassing, her car is embarrassing, her job is embarrassing. Worst of all, Mon's real name, Harmony is very embarrassing! Things reach disaster level when Mon's mother sneaks a possum into the class pet show. This results in chaos and Mon decides there has to be some changes. But in the meantime a fierce storm develops and Mon sees her mother in another light.



How the Story Began

The Kid whose Mum Kept Possums in her Bra began when I was visiting my mum in my hometown, Albury. Mum and I were walking down the main street when Mum saw her friend.

'Hey what's down your bra today,' Mum called (loudly!).

They laughed while I looked around hoping no one I knew was nearby.

Mum's friend continued walking and I asked what was behind the strange comment.

It seems Mum's friend was a wildlife carer who was looking after a newborn possum. The possum needed to be kept at body temperature and usually slept snuggled in a pouch by the fire. But Mum's friend wanted to go out to her School for Senior's Art class. She was worried that if she left the possum home, the fire might go out and the possum could get cold and die.

So guess what she did!!!!!!

Themes and Discussion Points

On one level, *Possums* can be used to initiate discussions about sustainability, caring for our environment and the stress our modern lifestyle places on native animals. On another level, the story is about individuality and accepting differences.

Illustrations

I love Adrienne's illustrations - the cover is so bright and catchy - it's one of my favourite covers. On page 17 the text doesn't exactly say what happens to Rosanna's guinea pig, so I liked the way Adrienne added more tension to suggest its fate. I also loved the combi van on page 28.

Extension Ideas

- Maybe you could organise your own pet show.
- Invite a local wildlife carer to come and visit your class. Perhaps they could bring an animal along (explain beforehand that native animals get stressed very easily. Children will need to be very calm and quiet).
- Research animal rescue centres on the Internet - there are some addresses at the back of the book to get you started.
- Go on an excursion to a wildlife refuge or the marsupial section of the zoo. Sketch or watch a particular animal. Maybe your class could have a fundraiser and 'adopt' an animal for a year. Marsupial baby formula is very expensive and most refuges need all the help they can get.
- Choose one animal to research - find out how to care for it, its special needs, how it lives in the wild, what threatens its survival...
- Research issues affecting local wildlife - reduced habitat, water resources, feral & introduced species...
- Choose an issue that interests you, list factors about it and organise a class debate.

Maths Ideas

- Harmony's mum works in a health shop weighing herbal teas and honey etc. Visit a health shop (or brainstorm what they might sell), then make a list of foods to weigh. Make predictions about sizes of containers for 500grams of different foods. Why would the shop person have to weigh the jar before filling it? Bring in a selection of scales from old-fashioned to digital. Test your theories.
- Weigh and measure ingredients to bake something healthy.

English Ideas

- List as many native animals as possible. Encourage children to choose one, brainstorm everything they can about it. Then they could write a poem or song about their animal.
- Make wildlife posters - about particular animals or about a local sustainability issue.
- Write an alternative blurb.
- Create another title.
- Write another chapter that continues after the book ends. Perhaps write it from another point of view (Mum, Storm, the possum)
- Make a list of things you'd like someone (a parent/sibling) to change.

- Research names - make a list of unusual names.
- Find out what your own name means.
- Make a quiz of celebrities and the wacky names of their babies (Taj Mahal Lotus, Scarlet Peaches, Jezebel Tallulah)
- How have names changed in the past 100 years?
- Guess the old-fashioned occupations of some surnames: Smith, Baker, Shepherd, Mason, Wolfer (!)
- What about names like Williamson, Johnson, Davidson, Goodman - how do you think they came about?
- What is your favourite name? Why?
- Read other possum/marsupial books (*Possum Magic*, *The Muddle-Headed Wombat*, *Wombat Divine*)