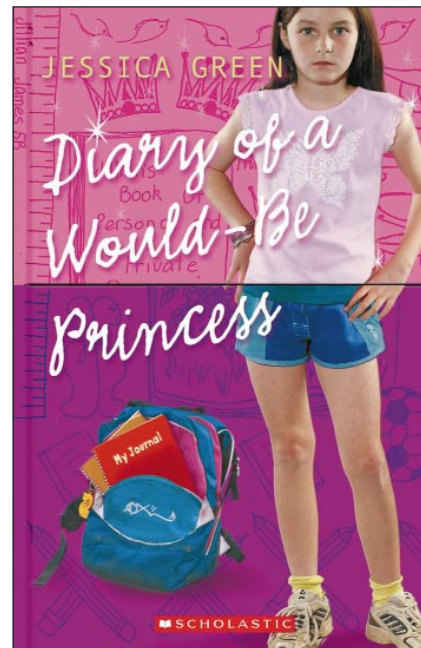


Diary of a Would-Be Princess

Written by Jessica Green



◀ The Back Story ▶ with Jessica Green

What was your reason for writing *Diary of a Would-Be Princess*? Who or what inspired you to write this book?

I teach in a small, rural school near Newcastle. I was trying to inspire my students to embrace the concept of daily 'five-minute writing'. Some of the children found this arduous and complained that they had nothing to write about. I told them it is possible to write about anything if you try, and to prove it I wrote a sentence about a poster on our wall, which said that ten ways to improve your reading were to read, read, read, read (ten times). I wrote in the first person and tried to think like a child. The kids responded and the story grew. I suppose the children at my school, my sons and daughter and the child I was, inspired me.

What processes or studies, if any, did you put into place to achieve the goal of becoming a writer?

I did the HSC and did well in the subjects where writing was a major component. Maths and Science were a write-off. Then I went to Teachers College and again did well in the language-based subjects. Being a painfully shy person, I found that I had difficulty talking with people but writing set me free to say what I wanted. Later, when teaching had driven a lot of my shyness away, I went to university part-time and again did well in English and Classical Civilisations. When my own children came along, I used to make up stories for them. I also used to model writing as part of my teaching. So although I did not do anything specific such as a course in writing, just about everything I have done in my life has been preparing me to start writing.

How did you personally plan when writing *Diary of a Would-Be Princess* – themes, plot summary, structure, characters, setting and style?

I started with the character, a sort of 'everychild', and the task she had, to write daily. The themes of friendship, personal honesty and bullying developed as the character grew. These themes are ever-present in the lives of pre-adolescent children and naturally crop up in my work and home.

What type of feedback about your book have you received from readers?

One of the most interesting things during the writing of this book was that almost every woman or girl who read or heard it commented that they thought I was writing about them, and they never felt anyone had ever known how they felt or thought before.

About the author:

Jessica Green

I grew up in West Ryde in Sydney with my widowed mother and my older brother and sister. I remember being in Year 4 at primary school and being praised for a composition. I didn't get praised much at school and therefore the praise for my words made me feel powerful. I resolved to write more and more. That was the start of my ambition.

I left home to take up my first teaching appointment in the Hunter Valley. I have been there ever since, having met and married my husband and raised my three children. I now live in

Newcastle and the kids, now 22, 19 and 15 are still at home with us. We have two cats, Felix and Fang, and two disreputable dogs, Fidel and Frodo. I love spending time with my family. I love reading, especially mediaeval murder mysteries and historical fiction. I also try to do botanical drawing in pastels.

Diary of a Would-Be Princess is my first published book. I wrote it about five years ago when I was teaching senior primary children. I had written a fantasy called 'Slaying Dragons' previously but had it rejected by several publishers. I put it aside to think about it but the book about Jillian James started growing.

Teaching Ideas ✓

Before Reading ✓

- Have students predict what the story will be about using the front cover and title.
- Discuss with students the function or purpose of keeping a diary. Encourage students to share their past experiences (if any) of keeping diaries. Talk about diaries in a historical context and how we can learn from people in the past who have kept journals, as in, for example, *The Diary of Ann Frank*.
- Talk with students about the process of writing. Encourage students to communicate and share ideas on how to make writing an enjoyable undertaking.

Activity

Diary design

Design a cover for a journal or diary you will keep for a term. Include something about your personality and give it a title which relates to you – 'The Diary of a Would-Be...'. Examples could be 'Diary of a Would-Be Superhero', 'Diary of a Would-Be Actress', or 'Diary of a Would-Be Doctor'.

During reading ✓

- During the reading of this book use a variety of reading methods. Read some of the book as a whole class, some in small reading groups and some as an individual reading task. Look with the students at the way the book is broken up into terms and days instead of chapters. Discuss the effect this has on reading. Before students read aloud to the class reinforce the importance of reading with appropriate enthusiasm, as well as being articulate.
- Discuss with students the events that occur in the book using the following questions as a guide.
 - Do you think there was value in Jillian keeping a diary? What is achieved in the process of writing down your thoughts?
 - What does Jillian take from her mother without asking? Have you ever taken something from your parents without asking?
 - Have you ever been grounded? Did you agree with the punishment? If not, what would have been a more suitable punishment?

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

■ At Jillian's school there are different groups, and many students experience peer-group pressure. Engage students in discussion of peer-group pressure. What is it? Is there peer-group pressure or bullying at your school? What are some ways of dealing with it? Identify three people students could talk to if they were being bullied.

■ The teacher in the book sets the students a project to write about a role-model. Discuss with students the type of role-model the students in the book selected.

Activities

Life graph

Over a 10-day period make a life graph like Jillian James (p8). Set the range for your feelings for each day from Great to Lousy.

Extraordinary ordinary objects

Find five ordinary things around the classroom and write about them. Take one minute for each. Repeat this activity using humour or tragedy to write about these common objects.

Alliteration

Look at page 59 to revise alliteration. Pull a letter of the alphabet out of a hat. Write an interesting sentence using alliteration for your chosen letter. Illustrate your sentence and combine it with others to make it into a class alliteration book.

Maths and Science can be fun!

The author tells us that she loved English but that Maths and Science were a 'write-off'. Write down some ideas to help someone enjoy Science and Maths. Share your ideas with the class and send them to the author!

Role-model

Think of a person who is a positive role-model in your life. It may be a family member, friend, celebrity or sports person. Write a brief paragraph about them stating who they are, why they are a role model and what qualities make a good role-model.

After reading ✓

■ When the book has been read discuss it with the whole class. Generate discussion using the following questions as ideas.

- Did you enjoy this book? Why/why not?
- Would you like to read any more stories from this writer?
- Would you write a diary in the same way knowing someone was going to read your thoughts compared with it being completely secret?
- The author Jessica Green says she was painfully shy. Why do you think writing could help a shy person?
- Did you relate to the narrator in the story? In what ways?
- What questions would you like to ask the author Jessica Green?

Activities

Write, Write, Write, Write, Write . . .

Over the term, keep a diary using a similar set-out to *Diary of a Would-Be Princess*. Use the cover you created earlier and write down your daily thoughts. Make it a five-minute daily activity.

Friendship

One of the book's themes is friendship. Design a poster to advertise for a good friend. List the qualities of a good friend somewhere on the poster and decorate it.

BEHIND THE BOOK TEACHER'S NOTES

Movie stars

Choose a section from one of the school terms in the book. In small groups perform this section of text as a short play for the class.

Pets that start with 'F'

The author says she has two cats, Felix and Fang, and two disreputable dogs called Fidel and Frodo. Write a letter to Jessica Green with some name suggestions for her next pets. Write the type of pets they are and give them names that begin with 'F'.

Literature study

Use the following discussion starters to help students understand more of the ideas in *Diary of a Would-Be Princess* and to encourage responses.

- What are some of the book's themes? Could you relate to any issues that cropped up in the story?
- How does the author introduce and develop different emotions in the story related to family and friendships?
- How do you think the lack of illustrations affects this book? What do the small diagrams add to the book?
- Was Jillian James a likeable character? How did her character develop in the story?
- Do you think boys would enjoy this story? What parts do you think they would most like or dislike?
- What do you think the author hoped to achieve in writing this book?

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