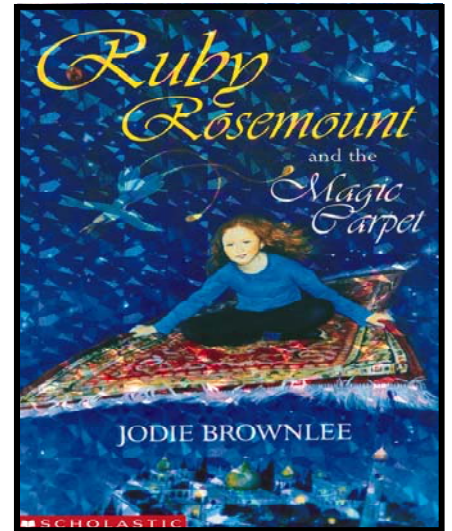


TEACHER'S BOOK NOTES

Ruby Rosemount & the Magic Carpet

Written by Jodie Brownlee



The author: Jodie Brownlee

Jodie Brownlee was born in Wollongong, NSW, in 1967. After leaving school she travelled overseas, and following that she worked variously as a hairdresser, bar-tender, contract painter, artist, waitress, researcher and Greenpeace photographer. She now works as a freelance web designer. She and her partner have made their home in Far North Queensland, but Jodie still indulges her passion for travel as often as she can.

Jodie started writing for children as a result of monthly meetings with friends and colleagues at 'an artsy pub' in Sydney. The meetings revolved around story-telling sessions and games of boules. Jodie says, 'These sessions became very important to me and I found myself putting a lot of effort into the monthly instalments of my story. All through the month these amazing ideas just kept springing out of nowhere, and the adventures of Ruby Rosemount began to take shape.

'I enrolled in a correspondence creative writing course through the Australian College of Journalism, then began to write Ruby Rosemount and the Magic Carpet whenever I could grab a moment. This was difficult because my life in Sydney was a whirlwind of business and social obligations. I was director of my own web design business at a time when the industry was growing at an amazing rate. My partner had also begun consultancy work and we were both trying to squeeze more than 24 hours out of each day. After a while we saw the craziness of it all and moved to Far North Queensland to escape the frenzy. It was here that I finally finished writing my first book.

'I don't have any profound reason for writing Ruby Rosemount and the Magic Carpet other than that I attended a Persian carpet auction and imagined them all to be magic carpets. I guess that was the initial spark.

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The author: cont...

Then I reflected on the stories of the Arabian Nights and wondered why nothing similar had been written since then. I decided that if I was to write a story I would write it about all the things that I loved as a child - magic, genies, mirages, oases, labyrinths, dungeons, palaces, towers, and higgledy-piggledy little villages. I also liked the idea of a quest with some mystery and splashes of humour. I started with these ingredients floating around in my head.'

Synopsis

The story opens with Ruby's grandmother, Zola McQuirky, writing to her daughter Ann to let her know that she is giving Ruby a 'special gift' for her twelfth birthday. Zola, although we don't know it yet, is the link between Ruby's everyday world and the magical world of the oasis; for Zola is actually a genie, sister of the King of the genies.

Ann Rosemount is determined to have nothing to do with her mother's genie family. She has changed her name from Heavenly Honeyblossom Moonbeam McQuirky to plain Ann, and she has made sure her daughter Ruby knows nothing of her relatives. To this end, afraid that Ruby might discover the magic carpet Zola keeps there, she forbids her daughter to go into the attic alone.

Meanwhile, in a faraway oasis, the government is about to be overthrown by a military dictator, General Dreg, in cahoots with a lawyer named Horas. Horas, as we discover later, is an evil genie who has had his powers stripped away by the genies' Charm Police. Together Dreg and Horas assume command. Dreg's soldiers imprison those rightfully in charge - and anyone else in the palace at the time. Watching fearfully from behind a potted plant is a boy named Jaffa, whose brother Ali is among those taken to the dungeons. Jaffa escapes thanks to a soldier, Habibi, who does not support the new regime. Habibi shows him how to escape from the palace through a labyrinth.

Back in the real world, Ruby has received via the Mail Wind a rain-spotted, partially legible letter from her grandmother that gives frustratingly confusing information about her twelfth birthday present and meeting her relatives. Disobeying her mother, she goes into the attic, discovers the magic carpet, and suddenly finds herself flying over the ocean to the oasis. When she lands she hides the carpet under sand (to its great disgust) and walks into the village, seeking a friend her grandmother has mentioned in her letter. She comes upon a small carpet shop and there she meets Jaffa, nephew of Uma, who is an expert on carpets. Uma, who turns out to be Zola McQuirky's friend, has been expecting Ruby's arrival. But while Ruby is in the village a soldier steals her magic carpet and sells it to Horas, who stores it in an enchanted treasure vault at the palace.

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Synopsis cont...

Uma introduces Ruby to her relatives, the genies, and Ruby discovers that their lighthearted, fantastical world also has a dark side: young genies are disappearing, and the Charm Police fear that they are being sold on the black market to be turned into Power Potion – a potion that gives those who drink it the power of genies, including the ability to cast Charms.

Ruby is invited to stay with her extraordinary relatives. She makes firm friends with the genie princess Avalon, who has been following her, in the form of a blue bird, ever since she arrived in the oasis. Next morning, on her way to Uma's for breakfast, she rescues a young sand spriggan, Wigglet, who has been shot by Dreg's soldiers, thus earning for herself the undying loyalty of his father, Milligan, and the spriggan clans. Later Ruby, Jaffa and Avalon enter the palace through the labyrinth to extricate the magic carpet from the enchanted treasure vault. They succeed, but it's a dangerous operation, and Jaffa, struck by a Charm cast by Horas, is caught and imprisoned.

Ruby and Avalon are now on a mission to rescue Jaffa from the dungeons. Ruby asks for help from the genies, but the Queen tells her that the Genie Code of Peace prohibits their interfering in human affairs. Determined to achieve the rescue on her own if necessary, Ruby takes lessons from Uma on how to control her magic carpet. It's not easy, for the carpet, strong-minded and very aware of its own amazing beauty, has a mind of its own.

Aware of Jaffa's connection with the magic carpet, Horas is determined to find out more from him. He has Jaffa brought to his office, tortures him with Charms in an attempt to find out where the carpet is, and then leaves him for dead. Managing to untie himself, Jaffa once again escapes through the labyrinth.

Horas desperately needs the magic carpet to increase his powers. Already he has a deadly secret: he has been buying Power Potion, the power-giving potion made from genies. Horas hates genies, and will stop at nothing to destroy them all and take their power for himself. The carpet will help him to do this, for it has the power to help its owner achieve his or her true potential.

Ruby and Avalon fly the magic carpet to the palace, intending to save Jaffa. They don't find Jaffa, but they discover and rescue Jaffa's imprisoned brother Ali and also the former soldier Habibi, who has been captured as a spy. With Habibi's help they disguise themselves as soldiers, hoping to blend in with the other soldiers long enough to find Jaffa. Nimbus, another genie, joins them. In Horas's office they find Jaffa's broken glasses, and fear the worst.

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[Synopsis cont...](#)

Revolt is brewing as the villagers, led by Habibi, plan to overthrow the despotic rule of Dreg and Horas. Still disguised as soldiers, Ruby, Nimbus and Avalon go back into the palace, determined to make another attempt to find Jaffa.

Horas now has the power to create his own Power Potion: by using a Stun Charm he is able to explode a genie into a puff of smoke which he can collect in a bottle. Recognising Nimbus and Avalon as genies, he manages to trap both of them in turn. Ruby flies her magic carpet to Horas's office, and, in despair, trades it for what remains of her friends. Leaving the carpet with Horas, she takes the precious bottles back to the mirage where they may be reconstituted as genies. On the way she is tripped by a spriggan. The bottle containing Avalon's mist is shattered, and Ruby cuts her hand on the broken glass.

It seems impossible now that Avalon can ever be revived. Avalon's parents, the King and Queen, are so deeply affected by what is happening that they agree to join the fight for freedom. The spriggans, too, resolve a squabble with the genies and promise to do what they can to help.

When the battle between the soldiers and the villagers erupts, there is a curious turn of events: the soldiers hear Dreg's voice (really the disguised voice of Lola, a genie) ordering them to throw down their arms. Unseen spriggan hands also grab their guns and throw them away. As the battle turns to complete confusion, Horas accuses General Dreg of incompetence, and the General realises at last that Horas has used him and his soldiers to gain power. Horas humiliates Dreg in front of his army and leaves him powerless.

Now that he has the magic carpet, Horas is all but invincible. Only one person can oppose him. When Ruby was cut by the bottle containing all that was left of Avalon, some of Avalon's genie powers were transferred to her. Now Ruby, alone, takes on Horas.

Can Ruby defeat Horas? Will the carpet do the bidding of its new owner, or does it feel that Ruby is still its rightful owner? And is Jaffa alive or dead? All these questions are answered in the last exciting chapters.

It turns out that Ruby, despite her mixed ancestry, is a powerful genie like her grandmother Zola. In the last battle she does something almost unheard of: she reflects a Charm cast on her by Horas so that it rebounds on him, blowing him to smithereens. With Dreg disabled by Horas and Horas now vanished, the oasis is free again.

The magic carpet, singed by the flames of battle, returns to Ruby; and Jaffa, to Ruby's delight, is

[Synopsis cont...](#)

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Synopsis cont...

alive and unharmed. Only Avalon's life still hangs in the balance. But when Ruby begins her long flight home, a blue bird alights on the carpet beside her and turns into her genie friend. Now at last Ruby can look forward to seeing her home and her mother again.

Themes and Ideas

Jodie Brownlee writes:

'I wanted to explore the theme of war and peace. Peace is obviously desirable, but should we abstain from war at all costs, even if it means allowing a tyrant to be cruel to others? Should we only become involved as a matter of self-defence? Should we also become involved when people of our own kind are at risk? Or should we stand up for the rights of everyone and become involved whether it is a human, a genie or a spriggan that is being treated cruelly?

'I also wanted to explore the idea of overcoming your fears and doubts and finding an inner strength to achieve great things. Things you never thought possible. I wanted the reader to identify with Ruby's hopes and fears, and then discover that, with a little courage and determination, there is an inner strength to be drawn upon which helps you to achieve whatever it is you want to accomplish.

'Then there were some other themes that emerged all by themselves:

- **The importance of friendship.** First Avalon and Jaffa risk their lives to help Ruby retrieve her magic carpet; and then Ruby must risk her life and sacrifice her magic carpet to save her friends.
- **Strength in numbers.** The spriggans, the genies and the humans are not on friendly terms, but they share a common enemy. When they set aside their differences, their united force is enough to conquer Horas, the General, and the army. Diplomacy is paramount in achieving this alliance.
- **Alternatives to war.** Fighting violence with violence is not the only option. Using your brain to come up with creative solutions can often bring about the desired outcome without an all-out war'

The social structure of the oasis

As the setting for her story, Jodie Brownlee has created the oasis, a carefully structured world in which human beings live together with genies (whose home is a mirage) and spriggans, small, ugly sprites that live in different clans throughout the area: as Jaffa tells Ruby, when they are trying to make their way through the labyrinth under the palace, 'The River Clan live along riverbanks, the Desert Clan live outside the oasis beneath the sand of the desert, the Hill Clan live in the hillside by the village, and the Labyrinth Clan live down here' (page 110).

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Themes and Ideas cont...

The oasis itself is a beautiful, lush area of palm trees bisected by a river that flows from a waterhole. At one end of it is the village, which is based on the sort of villages that exist in Arabian countries: it is surrounded by a wall and 'stepped into the hillside so that the flat roof of one house served as a terrace for the one behind it. The buildings seemed to be carved from the desert itself: sand-coloured walls with small windows that opened to reveal dark interiors' (page 38). A little distant from the village is the palace, the seat of government, which appears, with its onion-shaped roofs tiled in gold, like a magical building from a fairy story.

In a quiet valley at the far end of the oasis is the mirage, home of the genies, which disappears when intruders come near: 'Ancient palms grew tall and close together, and moonbeams only touched the ground here and there, forming little pools of light. Faint music reached their ears, and then the twinkle and gleam of lanterns came into view, bobbing from light-filled coloured tents. In the darkness around it, the whole scene seemed dreamlike' (pages 68-69).

The three races that live in the oasis - humans, spriggans and genies - barely co-exist. The humans, mostly hard-working artisans struggling to make a living under the repressive rule of General Dreg and Horas, are practical but insensitive, with little time for either spriggans or genies. When the genies arrive to help the humans overthrow the dictators, a man with a hoe says, 'I don't know why we're involving the genies. Bird-brained featherheads, the lot of them' (page 194). Earlier, when Ruby first enters the village, she is warned off by the bad-tempered owner of a café which bears a notice saying 'NO GENIES ALLOWED', and when Ruby protests that she's not a genie, he simply retorts 'Your sort aren't welcome here' (page 39).

If humans regard genies as idle airheads with peculiar ways and strangely coloured hair, both humans and genies are contemptuous of the spriggans: 'Some genies don't like them because they're filthy and have bad habits,' Avalon explains to Ruby (page 90). The spriggans' 'bad habits' - tongue-poking, bottom-wagging, and singing loud, scornful songs about humans - don't endear them to their fellow oasis-dwellers; but the spriggans themselves feel very ill-used. When Ruby and Avalon return the wounded Wiggle to his father Milligan, leader of the spriggans, the latter mutters to himself: 'Spriggans must do something ... too small to fight back ... bullied about ... no one likes spriggans ... genies look down their perfect noses at us. Humans call us names. Soldiers shoot us ...' (page 94).

Ruby, Jaffa and Jaffa's aunt Uma cross the boundaries between human and genie, genie and spriggan. Uma is welcome at the mirage and is on friendly terms with all the genies, particularly the King and Queen, who are Ruby's great-uncle and great-aunt. Ruby, with her compassionate nature, inspires the loyalty of the spriggans by her willingness to defend them and especially by her rescue of little

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Themes and Ideas cont...

Wigglet from the cruel soldiers. Jaffa, Avalon and Ruby all work together to make a magical healing salve for Wigglet's wounds.

The genies are shown as pleasure-loving, peaceful, flower-wearing and fond of bright colours and spectacle. It's easy to see them as some sort of fantastic race of hippies. In their world the unusual is commonplace; normally inanimate objects have a life of their own, and there's a dreamlike, drifting quality to existence. Nobody works, and nobody has to eat (although they drink lots of tea) and wishes are immediately gratified by the use of Charms. Genies can float and fly; they can change their appearance in the twinkling of an eye; and they can transmorph into birds in order to fly about incognito (Avalon is a blue bird, loud Lola is a pink one with a big beak, and Nimbus is a sort of yellow canary). However, genies are also suspicious of strangers and unwilling to help non-genies. Their much-vaunted Genie Code of Peace is not quite as high-minded as it sounds: it's also an excuse not to get involved.

The animosity between spriggans and genies comes to a head when a spriggan causes Ruby to stumble and drop the bottle containing what remains of Avalon, vaporised by Horas's Charm. Milligan's attempt to repair the damage by offering the King the services of the spriggans is met with contempt: 'The King screwed up his nose as if there was a bad smell under it. "What is this ugly creature doing in the healing tent?"' (pages 213 -14) Only when the King finally manages to apologise can the two races work together to solve their common problem.

Fantasy Elements

Ruby Rosemount and the Magic Carpet succeeds as a fantasy because, in the tradition of books like the Harry Potter series, it combines a believable reality with elements that are pure, outrageous fantasy. Ruby is a very grounded child: practical, courageous, with a nice sense of the ridiculous and a sturdy self-belief, although she has occasional lapses of confidence. Jaffa, too, is an entirely credible boy - polite and cheeky by turns, brave when it matters, smart enough to get himself out of trouble. When these children are touched by magic, they don't lose their reality, and thus the magic itself becomes credible. Similarly, Uma, Jaffa's aunt, brews ordinary tea and cooks flat bread and stuffed aubergines; but her kitchen also contains magical ingredients like inkaperkles and hoolygooly oil. Her books are ordinary on the surface, but the pages may be self-updating. What seems everyday may well have hidden powers - like the magic carpet itself.

The fantasy of the genies is much more traditional: they exist within their own very special magic world, a world into which humans may enter, but of which they will never be a part. In their colourful, luminous mirage everything is constantly in a state of flux, and everyday rules do not apply.

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Notes for Teachers

The magic carpet

The magic carpet is a mainstay of traditional fantasy, especially in stories of the Arabian Nights, in which a cheap-looking carpet has the power to transport anyone sitting on it to wherever they wish. (The original magic carpet was that of King Solomon, who, according to the Koran, travelled with his entire retinue on a carpet powered by the wind.) Another popular object from the Arabian Nights is the magic lamp - also an unprepossessing thing - which, when rubbed, releases a genie who can grant wishes. Both the magic carpet and the magic lamp have featured in children's books over the years, and writers from E. Nesbit onward have found them useful devices around which to weave a story. Almost invariably the carpet first appears, like Ruby's carpet, in the child's own home or in some other familiar setting, and not in the oriental country in which it originated.

An important aspect of the carpet in *Ruby Rosemount and the Magic Carpet* is that the carpet must be given to its owner by the previous owner. It cannot belong to anyone unless it is given; and it must respect its owner if it is to achieve empathy with her or him. Ownership of this kind is often crucial in fantasy stories. Think of other stories that have a similar theme (eg the story of Arthur and Excalibur) in which the main character is chosen for a special role, and is made special by ownership of a powerful or magic object.

Literature and Language

- Read a version of the Arabian Nights stories containing the story of Prince Ahmed.
- Go to the library catalogue and see if there are any other books or stories that feature magic carpets.
- Being magically transported to a far-off place is a common theme in fantasy, especially in stories written before motor cars and air transport were commonplace. What other magical forms of transport are there? (Eg flying horses, seven-league boots, the flying car in *Harry Potter*.) Make a list, and find stories related to each item.
- Ask students to write their own story about a magical flying carpet (or any other magical form of transport).
- Ask students to make up their own rude songs in the spriggin style.
- Jodie has invented lots of words to describe things that don't exist in real life. Look at Uma's salve recipe on pages 96 - 97 and ask students to write a recipe making up their own words for ingredients.

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- Read the advertisements for magic carpets on pages 97 - 99, and ask students to invent their own carpets and write advertising copy extolling their special features. Read the advertisements for magic carpets on pages 97 - 99, and ask students to invent their own carpets and write advertising copy extolling their special features.

Geography and Culture

- In Chapter 4 of *Ruby Rosemount and the Magic Carpet* Jodie Brownlee describes in vivid detail the village in the oasis, especially the bazaar or *souk* (Arab market). Find out about Arabian cultures.
 - Jodie Brownlee has drawn the map of the oasis that appears in the front of the book. Ask students to draw their own map of the oasis.
 - Research oases. Why do they exist? How do they function?
- Jaffa has a pet camel called Babaganoosh, and hopes one day to enter her in a camel race. Research the importance of camels in desert countries (including Australia!).

Art

- *Ruby Rosemount and the Magic Carpet* features on page 24 a detailed description of the carpet. Ask students, using this, to draw a picture of Ruby's carpet.
- The dictatorship of General Dreg has clear modern parallels: think Saddam Hussein. In many ways Dreg is drawn, in the story, as a caricature of a dictator - exaggerated in many details. Students might draw a political cartoon featuring General Dreg, either taking over the palace or when defeated by Horas's Charm on page 222. (This is a great opportunity to study the humour of political cartooning!)
- Make up posters similar to those posted around the oasis to promote the new regime. Talk about propaganda, especially propaganda in posters.

Drama

- Take any exciting scene from the book and have the class act it out.
- Dramatise the confrontation between General Dreg and Horas. Ask students to take sides to argue who is the more effective leader.