

TEACHERS' NOTES

Linnet Hunter

Possum Magic

Written by Mem Fox

Illustrated by Julie Vivas

An Omnibus Book from Scholastic Australia

Outline

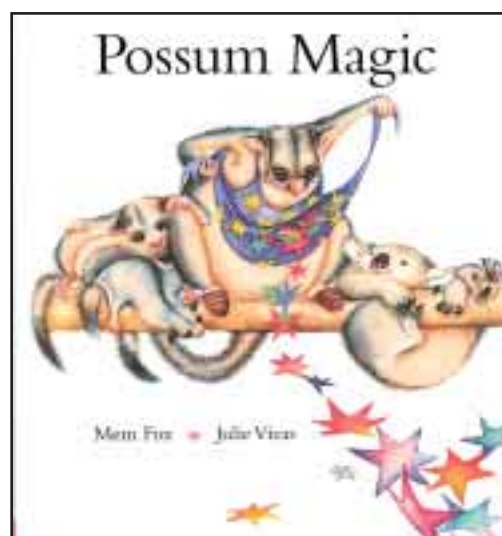
For 21 years *Possum Magic* has captivated and enchanted children and adults. Mem Fox's lovable characters, little Hush and Grandma Poss, and Julie Vivas' exquisite illustrations weave a story of pure magic. Continuously in print since it was first published by Omnibus Books on 31 March 1983, *Possum Magic* has been embraced as a timeless Australian tale and as Australia's most-loved children's picture book.

Possum Magic celebrates its 21st birthday on 31 March 2004 with brand-new editions. Julie has retouched and recoloured her illustrations, so that the images are now truer to the original artwork than ever before. The book itself has been redesigned and completely reset.

Suggested Levels K-2 (with application for older age groups)

Note to Teachers

These notes have been compiled to assist teachers in the creation of activities to help celebrate the 21st anniversary of the publication of *Possum Magic*. Most activities and ideas may be developed or simplified according to the needs of your class, but there are many areas of application within the primary curriculum from K-6.



Library Display

- Giant (invisible) Hush constructed from grey stockings climbing above the bookshelves
- All picture books featuring native Australian animals
- Fabric lamingtons made from dark cloth stuffed with paper and decorated with white woollen scraps stuck on to look like coconut
- Displays of recipes with pictures

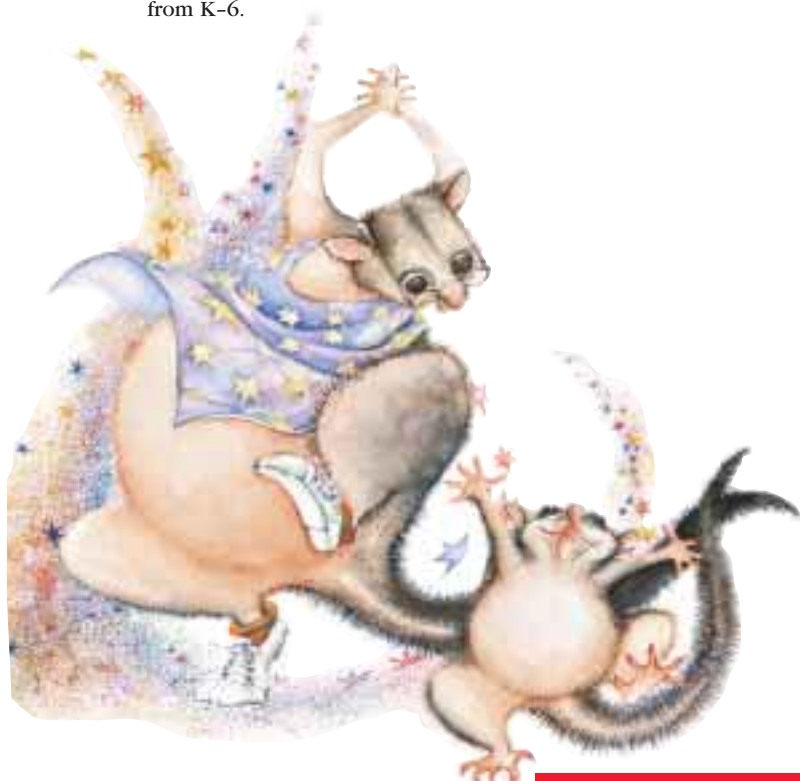
Library Classes


- Reading stories where magic goes wrong and must be mended
- A selection of books illustrated by Julie Vivas
- Other stories by Mem Fox
- What patterns can you find?

Library Skills

- Learning how to search contents page/index/encyclopedias for information on Australian animals
- What are the key search terms for finding information quickly and effectively on the Internet?
- Create a pathfinder for a younger class, to help them research this topic

(See over for more Research Skills activities.)





Key Learning Areas Learning Outcomes

- 1 Listen to and produce brief spoken texts that deal with familiar ideas and information.
- 2 Use speaking and listening appropriately for classroom situations.
- 3 Use some basic linguistic structures and features when speaking or listening in a variety of classroom situations.
- 4 Compare experience and knowledge with information and ideas in texts.
- 5 Use a range of sources of information to make meaning from texts.
- 6 Listen to and produce predictable spoken texts that deal with familiar ideas and information.
- 7 Vary speaking and listening for familiar situations.
- 8 Vary speaking and listening for a small range of contexts, purposes and audiences.

- 1 Read and respond to simple texts with familiar content and predominantly oral language structures.
- 2 Use some basic linguistic structures and features when reading.
- 3 Read and respond to short texts with familiar ideas, information and vocabulary; predictable structures and frequent illustrations.
- 4 Identify the ways in which texts are constructed by authors and others.
- 5 Distinguish between texts that represent real experiences and those that represent imaginary ones.
- 6 Identify the meaning of simple symbolic representations in texts.

- 1 Use conventional written symbols for expressing ideas and information.
- 2 Identify the purpose of own and others' writing.
- 3 Identify and use some basic linguistic structures and features of written language so that writing can be readily understood by others.
- 4 Write short sequenced texts that include some related ideas about familiar topics.
- 5 Write texts that convey intended ideas and information, using a small range of text types.
- 6 Use several strategies for selecting resources and locating and recording key information found in texts.

English

Speaking and Listening

- Tell your teacher everything you can remember about the story so that he or she can write it on the board. Place all the events on the board in the order they happened in the story.
- What are some of the ways Grandma Poss tries to solve the problem of Hush's invisibility?
- Would you like to be invisible? What sort of things might you like to do while you were invisible? (See writing section for story extension of this.)
- How did you feel while you were listening to the story? Which part of the story made you feel sad? Find the page. What colours did Julie Vivas use on this page? Where else in the book can you find these colours? Why might they have been used here?
- Which parts of the story made you feel happy? What colours were used on this page? What colours make you happy?
- Tell your classmates about something that happened to you that made you feel happy or sad.

Reading

- There is only one word in *Possum Magic* that is written in capitals. Why do you think the word is written this way?
- Only one animal in *Possum Magic* has things that do not belong to a wild animal. Which creature is it? Why do you think the picture book creators might have given the animal special objects?
- What kinds of Magic were in Grandma Poss's books? What do you think it means when the author writes:
'Don't worry, Grandma,' said Hush. 'I don't mind.' But in her heart of hearts she did.
- Grandma Poss tells Hush that the secret to making Hush visible again has something to do with food. But not possum food, people food. Read *Solo Bush Babies: Possum* and discuss the foods possums love to eat.

Writing

- Write out a recipe for any of the foods featured in *Possum Magic*.
- Make the food in class or at home with the help of your teacher or family and bring it to school to share.
- Create a story about a magical power. You can choose only one. Include why you chose that power and what you would do with it.
- As a class make a list of some important events that occurred in 1983. Ask your parents and grandparents to help you make a list of all the things that happened in your family in 1983 that were important to them.
- Choose a country. Make a travel itinerary showing all the places you would like to visit and explain why.
- Write a letter to your local wildlife park or wildlife volunteer carer. Ask how he or she looks after injured animals.
- Make a chart for your classroom showing one animal and list instructions on how to care for it if it is injured.



Visual Arts

Key Learning Areas Learning Outcomes

- Collect Australian coins and rub them with a soft lead pencil to create pictures of the Australian animals featured on these coins.

Use the photocopier to enlarge the pencil rubbings.

Cut the images out and glue them to cardboard. They can be hung from the ceiling to make mobiles.

- Look carefully at the artwork in *Possum Magic*. What do you notice about it?

Julie Vivas used watercolour, which allows lots of the white paper to show through and gives the paintings a feeling of lightness. Look at the very fine lines she used to create the feeling of animal fur and feathers. What size paintbrush might she have used?

Look closely at the technique she used to make Hush appear invisible, but so that we could still see her.

Create your own version of this with an animal that is not already used in the book. Make one drawing showing the visible animal and one of the invisible.

- Using pictures from magazines, scraps of fabric, drawings or other found materials, create a collage of a page opening from the book.
- Julie Vivas was working as an artist when she began the illustrations for *Possum Magic*. Discuss with your class what you know about the difference between the work of an artist and that of an illustrator. Find as many examples as you can of the work of other artists and illustrators and display them.

- 1 Communicate ideas when making and presenting visual arts works.
- 2 Communicate personal responses to own and others' visual arts ideas and works.
- 3 Make informed decisions about effective ways of using visual arts elements in making and presenting visual arts works.
- 4 Make and present visual arts works, using a range of visual arts elements, skills, techniques and processes.

Science

Draw the animals featured in the book and name them. Pin the pictures up around the room as the basis for a unit of study on each animal.

Choose four different animals and make a poster or Power Point presentation showing:

- areas in which they live
- habitat
- diet
- endangered status
- predators (if any).

Look in the library for *Solo Bush Babies: Possum*. This tells the story of a lost baby possum. It includes many facts about possums. After sharing the book as a class, the students could make a list of all the items needed when caring for a baby possum.

Students could work in small groups to create an instructional poster on how to care for a baby marsupial.

- 1 Describe, using appropriate language, scientific explorations of the chemical, physical and natural world.
- 2 Describe environmental factors that affect the survival of living things.
- 3 Identify the main structural features that work together to form systems in plants and animals.

Research Skills



Mem Fox was born in Melbourne and grew up in Zimbabwe, where her parents were missionaries. In the mid-1960s she went to London to study drama, returning to Australia with her husband Malcolm in 1970. Passionate about all things Australian, Mem wanted her daughter Chloë to read about her own culture in Australian picture books. She was shocked to find few in print, and so wrote the story that eventually became *Possum Magic*. Since its publication in 1983, she has written many other successful picture books, and is one of Australia's best-loved authors for children. Mem travels extensively to promote books and literacy. In between times she writes for publishers in Australia and America.



Julie Vivas was born in Adelaide and moved to Melbourne and then to Sydney with her family, where she studied interior design at the National Art School. She began to draw as a child, developed her pencil and watercolour work at art school, and later worked in an animation studio. She spent three years in Spain, eventually returning to Sydney to live with her husband Luis and daughters Ana and Kate. Her first book was *The Tram to Bondi Beach* by Libby Hathorn and her second was *Possum Magic*. Since 1983 she has illustrated many other beautiful books including *The Nativity*, *Let's Eat!*, by Ana Vivas, and *I Went Walking* by Sue Machin.

Twenty-one years ago *Possum Magic* was published for the very first time. Since then Australia has experienced huge changes in the pace of life, daily technology and fashions. These activities explore those differences, and provide an opportunity for students to focus their research skills around the connection with a famous Australian picture book.

- Ask parents to provide a personal photo taken in 1983 or as close to this as possible. If they do not have a photo, ask them to describe how they looked and draw a picture of them. This would use the same structures as a Guess the Baby competition. Children could guess who is who.
- Find five different things that may have been fashionable in 1983 but which are not fashionable now. It might be furniture, household appliances, clothing, make-up, music or anything you like.
- What might these items look like in another 21 years' time? (This seems a simple question, but to explore it may involve research into trends such as electric/solar vehicles.)
- A sequencing poster could be created showing the item, its 2004 replacement and the student's prediction for its appearance in 2025.
- Create an exhibition of objects that date from around this time. Perhaps set up a kitchen with household objects, or a bookshelf with books from that year (eg the CBCA prizewinners); and tickets from special events, scrapbooks with newspaper headlines and so on.
- Search for information on the most popular games and toys for children in 1983 (eg when was the Gameboy invented?)
- Explore the Web to find Australian stamps released in 1983. Make a poster explaining what event each stamp related to. Students can draw stamps if examples cannot to be printed off.
- The first Space Shuttle walk occurred in 1983. What is the quickest and most effective way to find reliable information regarding this event?
- In 1983 IBM released the first personal computer (PC) in Australia. What did people think of computers then? What were some comments made at the time about what the future of computers was likely to be?

Imagine you are living in 1983 and are going to create a time capsule to be opened in 21 years (or 100!). What events would you record? Using the information and items from your research into the areas above, make a 1983 time capsule. This could be done in small groups and displayed in the library when finished.

Below is a list of questions to guide you in finding extra details.

- Q Who was the Prime Minister of Australia in 1983?
A Bob Hawke
- Q Which team won the AFL premiership?
A Hawthorn
- Q Which team won the Rugby League premiership?
A Parramatta
- Q What major international sporting event did Australia win?
A The America's Cup
- Q To the closest million, what was the population of Australia?
A 15 million
- Q What event occurred in the Northern Territory?
A The first elections
- Q What happened in South Australia and Victoria?
A Ash Wednesday bushfires