



# Teachers' Resources



## PLOT SUMMARY

Millie and Stella both love books, so when they find out their school is getting a library van in the shape of a ladybird, they couldn't be more excited. Best of all, they've applied to be the first librarians. But Gwyneth is determined to get the job no matter what . . . and Gwyneth always gets what she wants.

As if that wasn't enough, gates are mysteriously being left open in their ponies' paddock! Millie and Stella are getting the blame, and the girls must figure out who is behind the mischief before their beloved ponies are put in danger.

Join Millie and Stella for a week of friendship, adventure and a little bit of mystery . . .

## RECOMMENDED FOR (ages 9+; years 4 to 8)

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### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English; SEL; Art
- General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding

### REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- An uplifting, inclusive, gently humorous series that celebrates friendship, family, creative ways of learning and a love of animals, food and books.
- The author is a passionate advocate for neuro-diverse experiences

### THEMES

- Belonging and identity
- Family and friends
- Libraries and books
- horses and pets
- neurodiversity
- resilience

### PUBLICATION DETAILS

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## Millie and Stella Best Friends Forever: The Lost Ponies

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josephine Moon was born and raised in Brisbane and started in Environmental Science before completing a Bachelor of Arts in Communication and then a postgraduate degree in education. Twelve years and ten manuscripts later, her first novel *The Tea Chest* was picked up for publication and then shortlisted for an ABIA award. Her bestselling contemporary fiction is published internationally. Her books include *The Tea Chest*, *The Chocolate Promise*, *The Beekeeper's Secret*, *Three Gold Coins*, *The Gift of Life*, *The Cake Maker's Wish*, *The Jam Queens* and *The Wonderful Thing About Phoenix Rose*.

**Josephine is a passionate advocate for neuro-diverse experiences and is available for school visits.**

<https://josephinemoon.com/book-jo-to-speak/>

She lives in the beautiful Noosa hinterland and has a tribe of animals that seems to increase in size each year. She wouldn't have it any other way.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jedda Robaard is an Australian author, illustrator and designer, based in Southern Tasmania, Australia. She is known internationally for her sweet and whimsical style of illustration.

Jedda studied as a commercial artist in 1992 and after an initial career in graphic design moved her focus to illustration. She has been illustrating and writing children's books since 2011 and has over 50 books published, many of them award-winning, including *The Littlest Penguin*, winner of the Environment Award for Children's Literature. Her books are sold internationally and have been published in many languages.

### AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

These books started with my love of horses, animals and writing. I really wanted to write a pony story, but the original idea kept growing and changing over many drafts and many years. Finally, all the pieces came together with this great friendship between Millie and Stella, their wonderful families, a variety of animals, and then the

progressive Dappled Falls School, which is the dream school I wish I'd been able to go to when I was young.

### Writing Style

*The Lost Ponies* is a perfect example of narrative writing (fiction/novel) for use in the classroom – an enjoyable way to help readers understand the tools that fiction authors use to do more than just communicate information (in particular, to explore characters, conflict, and settings).

Readers can learn how fiction authors use:

- Description, dialogue and described thoughts, and how the 'narrator' of the story might explain to the reader what is happening, using vivid details and various literary devices.
- Concepts such as voice, perspective, tense, tone and atmosphere/mood.

*The Lost Ponies* contains an example of article writing and is a great jumping off point to explore other narrative and non-fictional writing styles.

It fosters a deep love of books, libraries and reading.

### Questions and activities

1. **VOICE AND PERSPECTIVE** The book is written in the 'third person' (you can identify this by the use of pronouns like 'they', 'him', 'her' or 'it'). However, the chapters alternate between the two different 'perspectives' of the two girls. In one chapter the author will describe what Millie is seeing and thinking and follow what she is doing. The next chapter will follow Stella. This is called the 'intimate third person'. What do you notice about how the two perspectives are different and how does the author achieve this difference?
2. Think of a short fun/action-packed event from your life and write the story of it in two halves, each from the perspective of two people in the story (in the 'intimate third person').



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- Now try to change those perspectives to the 'first person' (telling the story in the 'voice' of the characters – you will use pronouns like 'I' and 'we').
- TONE** is the mood created by the style and voice. The author's tone is uplifting, informal and gently humorous, with beautifully described settings and lots of detail about colour and sounds and smells. Read the descriptions on pages 9 and 10 of the book. Think of your favourite place to be and describe it using all your senses and focussing on why you love it.
- The author focusses with empathy on how the characters are feeling and we feel comforted and safe in their company. Even the less kind characters are written with compassion. Could the story of Millie and Stella be told in a different tone?

How does Josephine Moon's writing differ to another author you know well – try to think of someone with a very different tone, like Andy Griffiths, Roald Dahl or even Dr Suess! What differences do you notice? Find your favourite part of the story and retell the scene in the tone and style of another writer.

- DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE** Think about how the author uses descriptive language to create atmosphere and describe how characters are feeling.  
Think of quotes like *She tried to catch her breath, but it was like all the air had gone.* Or *The ponies lifted their heads from the grass and trotted over, their ears pricked forward, their feet making lovely swishing noises through the long grass . . . It reminded Millie of splashing through water in summer.* Or *Books . . . were like friends to her.* What do each of these similes and comparisons do to enrich the story? What is your favourite metaphor, simile or comparison in the book? Discuss how it creates atmosphere and mood.
- Write a scene of your own using metaphors and similes to build atmosphere and mood.
- TENSE** Discuss what tense is used in the storytelling. What is another way this story could have been told? Take your favourite paragraph from the book and re-write it in a different tense.
- THEMES** What do you think are the major themes of the book?

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### English

#### Questions and activities

- Is the race to find the ponies exciting? Read this section and think about what made it exciting. Discuss.
- The Lost Ponies* has a traditional mystery structure with suspicion falling on several people throughout the story. Who did *you* think unlatched the gate? *When* did you decide 'who dunnit'? What clues in the story did you use to make that decision?
- Who was your favourite character in the story? Did you relate more to Stella (with her confidence and act-first-think-later style) or Millie (with her more thoughtful approach)?

Discuss with a group and build a 'word bank' of ways to describe their characters. Create a 'compare and contrast' table of their strengths and weaknesses. What is different? What do they have in common?

Discuss how they support each other and how they use their differences to help each other. Remember to build on each other's ideas, asking specific questions and elaborating on the comments of others.

- Now that you know the characters so well, use, adapt or experiment with them to write an imaginative fictional scene with them as the main characters. It might be a story, a poem, a play or a comic with dialogue.
- Pretend you are a reporter interviewing either Millie or Stella about their adventure finding the missing horses or the mystery of the unlatched gate (for the *Dappled Falls Gazette*). Find a friend to play the character you are interviewing. They can answer the questions while you take notes.
- Find and read an example of a short news item from your local paper and read Gwyneth's article for the *Gazette*. Now write your own short article based on your interview above.

Be aware of the tone of the writing needed (is it informational or opinion-based?) and think about the audience you hope will read it. Does your article have a point to make, like Gwyneth's, or is a more informative? Include quotes from the interview or paraphrase at least one thing that has been said.



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You can use direct questions and talk directly to the reader (as Gwyneth does) if you like.

7. 'Literal meaning' is what is stated and 'inferred meaning' is what is meant. Sometimes they are different. Sometimes you need to draw on context to figure out the inferred meaning. For some people this is easy and comes naturally and for other people it is harder.

When someone is speaking, 'tone' and 'body language' can tell you what is being inferred – sarcasm and facial expressions are examples of context that helps you understand what's being meant.

Millie finds tone and body language difficult to read and knows she needs to work hard to interpret them. For example, she checks Stella to see if there's any inferred meaning on page 13, and correctly interprets the scene on page 96: *Gwyneth cast a glance sideways at Darshan and smirked. 'How . . . adorable,' she said, in a tone of voice that suggested that she really thought it was pathetic.*

Can you think of an example from your life of having to figure out the inferred meaning? List what the literal meaning was, what the inferred meaning was and why you think this.

For more, see SEL question 6 on page 5.

8. Stella and Millie and Phoenix, even Gwyneth and her friends, all really love animals. Write a persuasive text either agreeing or disagreeing with the position that 'animals are better friends than people'.
9. Millie and Stella both desperately want to be the librarian. Which of the jobs in the ladybird library would you like to have? Choose one and write an application for it in whatever style suits you.
10. *The feel of the books cheered her. They were like friends, waiting to start a conversation.* Millie finds books calming and exciting. How do you feel about books?
11. What is your favourite book and why? Find and read an example of a positive book review. Write your own short book review of *The Lost Ponies* and share with the class.

## Social Emotional Learning

The two very different characters of Millie and Stella and how they deal with and learn from the challenges they face are a perfect place to start discussions around:

- Self-awareness (including embodied emotion)
- Self-management
- Social awareness and positive relationships
- Self-esteem
- Ethical decision making and respect for difference
- Positive experiences of neurodiversity and the strengths and challenges of neurodivergence.

## Questions and activities

1. Millie and Stella are aware of and respect each other's different ways of doing things. Can you find three examples of their respect for each other in the story?
2. Think about the statement: Millie is Autistic and she uses her different way of thinking about the world to come up with creative solutions to problems. She and her teacher have created ways to make sure she can channel any nervous energy in class. She has become very knowledgeable in her 'special interest' subjects and can use her ability to 'hyperfocus' to her advantage at school.  
Can you find examples in the story that support each of the above points?
3. Think about the statement: 'There are particular challenges that come with being Neurodivergent in a world set up for Neurotypical people.'  
Can you find four examples in the story of how the world of socialising, mainstream school and after-school activities might be more difficult for Millie than it might be for Stella?
4. Millie and Stella's families are very different, but both girls are loved and supported in ways that suit them. Draw each of the girls and write their family members around them.

Write down any any family activities or routines mentioned in the book. Do you have family activities and routines that you enjoy at home?



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- Can you find two examples of the girls having 'big' feelings in the book. Do they always act on their feelings immediately? Do they have ways of regulating their feelings and behaviour? Find examples in the story and discuss. Think of things like: being aware of the body, self-talk, breathing, acknowledging the feelings, talking to a trusted person, animal therapy, releasing tension with movement, going to a calm place, taking nature breaks and brain breaks.
- Stella is a little bit mean to Gwyneth on page 97. *A hot rush of anger shot up Stella's spine, and she glared at Gwyneth. 'Are you feeling better today?' Gwyneth's smirk disappeared. 'What do you mean?' 'You were obviously exhausted yesterday after all the baking. You looked terrible. I thought you were about to collapse just as Phoenix took the platter from you.'*

Read the explanations of literal and inferred meaning on page 4 of these notes. Explain what was nasty about the interaction above. Why you think it made Stella feel 'yucky', even though the words she said could be interpreted as concern?

Why did it make Gwyneth's smirk disappear and what do you think the feeling was that Stella 'couldn't quite name'?

- Dappled Falls is a school that tries to understand and talk about why someone might do the wrong thing rather than punish them. Can you think of an example of a teacher putting this philosophy into action in the book? Discuss.
- Gwenyth and Mrs White both behave in upsetting ways towards Millie and Stella. Can you think of any reasons why they might have behaved in these ways? What could they have done to better manage those feelings?
- How do you feel about Gwyneth at the beginning of the book compared to the end of the book? Has it changed? If so, why?
- How do the animal characters support the human characters of the novel and help them feel better or happier or more secure? Draw Blue, Barney and Sparky and create an infographic around each of them, writing down your responses.
- Read the lovely scene between Millie and her pony at the beginning of the book. Why do you think she finds Barney so calming?

Have you ever met or imagined an animal/pet that makes you feel that way? Do you think that animals

are easier to understand than people sometimes? Do they need different things from us than our friends? Do they show their love in different ways? Write down your thoughts.

Based on your thoughts above, write a diary entry about a person and their animal friend and how they have helped each other that day (the characters can be real or imagined).

- Food and baking are an important part of this story. List two examples of baking in the book. How are they different and how do they reflect the very different personalities and parenting styles of Grandpa and Gwyneth's mother.
- Do you have something that you bake or cook with a family member or friend? What is it? Bring in the recipe to show the class or write a description to share.  
Plan, create, rehearse and deliver a speech talking about a special memory associated with cooking or eating that recipe.
- Do you have a 'Big Life Wish List' like Stella? Write ten things that would be on that list and tell us why.
- Do you have a favourite activity you do with friends? Do you have hobbies or interests that bring you and your friends closer, like Millie and Stella?
- Some books aim to leave you with a message as well as enjoy the story. What is the 'moral of the story' or the message here? If you wrote a book, what would be your message?

## Art

### Questions and activities

- The artwork by Jemma is in a watercolour style – with linework and 'wash'. Think about the statement: 'The style of the artwork suits the style of the story and writing.' Can you think of three arguments for why this is true?
- You can learn to draw a penguin with Jemma Robaard here:

<https://www.facebook.com/betterreadingkids/videos/how-to-draw-a-penguin-with-jemma-robaard/672369450109066/>



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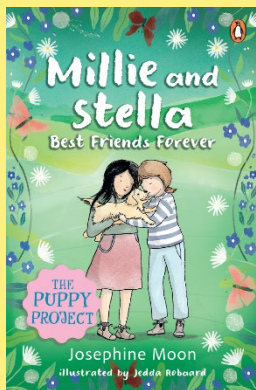
## KEY QUOTES

- *The pony lifted his head from the grass and nickered a low greeting to her, as he always did. She smiled, as she always did. She tucked her hands beneath his rug, warming her fingertips. She breathed in his horsey smell, which was so familiar and calming.*
- *Stella guided Sparky to walk as close to Barney as possible so she could lean over and wrap her arm around Millie's waist, their stirrup irons clanging against each other. Millie wrapped her arm around Stella's shoulders and they rode together like that for as long as they could.*
- *'The Dewey Decimal System,' Gwyneth said, her tone dripping with something that gave Millie a bad taste in her mouth. It was like the wooden ice block stick, when she gave it a final lick. It tasted so bad that it took away all the joy of eating the ice block in the first place, and she wished she hadn't done it.*
- *Millie reached for a cushion and hugged it to herself as Gwyneth's words continued to rattle through her bones.*
- *The feel of the books cheered her. They were like friends, waiting to start a conversation.*
- *'We're going to find them,' Stella said. She sounded certain but also wobbly. Millie knew there was fear in her voice, lurking behind the confident way she delivered the words.*
- *Pepper plunged down the embankment. Millie's belly swooped like she was trapped on a scary carnival ride. For a terrifying moment, her legs lifted off from Pepper's back and she was sure she was about to tumble off backwards.*
- *Don't panic, Sparky, Stella thought immediately, but panic was already alive. She could hear it in Millie's voice. And she could feel it in herself, in the way her breathing was quickening and her thoughts were scrambling. It was weird how people seemed to say 'don't panic' after someone had already started panicking.*



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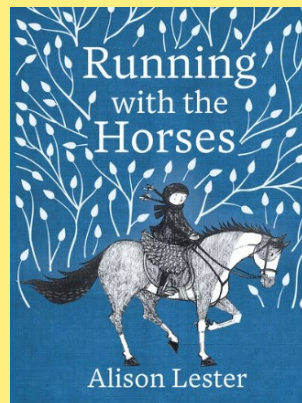
## Further reading from Penguin Random House



*The Puppy Project*  
by Josephine Moon,  
Jemma Robaard

Millie and Stella have wanted a puppy for the longest time. So when Fergus, an adorable assistance dog in training, needs their help, they're up for the challenge. But it's harder than it looks and the cheeky puppy has his own plans about what to learn. Meanwhile, their class is allowed to choose their own project, and the girls know exactly what they're going to do. It couldn't be more perfect! Until Gwyneth declares war on their project, and everyone knows that Gwyneth always wins . . . doesn't she?

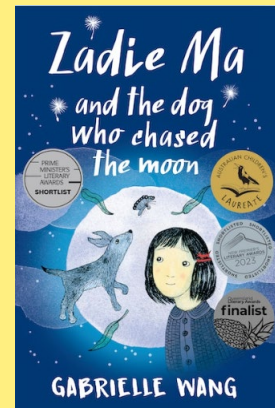
*Join best friends Millie and Stella for a few weeks of friendship, fun and a lot of puppy chaos . . .*



*Running with the Horses*  
by Alison Lester

Nina lives with her father above the palace stables at the Royal Academy of Dancing Horses. She loves watching the famous white stallions as they parade for the crowds, but her favourite horse is a mare called Zelda – an old cab horse Nina often pats on her way home from school. When Nina's world changes dramatically, she and her father have to flee from the city. Their journey over the mountains with Zelda and the stallions seems impossible, with danger at every turn. It will require all of Nina's bravery, daring and faith in an extraordinary old horse.

*A full-colour edition of this unforgettable story of courage, adventure and friendship.*



*Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon*  
by Gabrielle Wang

Zadie Ma has a special talent for telling stories and her dearest wish is to have a dog of her own. When she starts to write the story of a poor unwanted dog called Jupiter, who's just waiting to be rescued by a loving girl like Zadie, it seems that her story is about to come true. But once Zadie has found Jupitar, can she keep him? Will her story have the happy ending she dreams of?

*From the Australian Children's Laureate for 2022–23 comes a heartwarming story set in postwar Melbourne about courage, friendship, the magic of stories and one girl's unwavering love for her dog.*



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## Order form

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
<i>The Lost Ponies: Millie and Stella Best Friends Forever</i>	Josephine Moon	9781761346484	Year 3 plus	\$16.99		
<i>The Puppy Project: Millie and Stella Best Friends Forever</i>	Josephine Moon	9781761346507	Year 3 plus	\$16.99		
<i>Running with the Horses</i>	Alison Lester	9781760892760	Year 3 plus	\$16.99		
<i>Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon</i>	Gabrielle Wang	9781761046513	Year 3 plus	\$16.99		
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