



# TEACHERS' NOTES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper Primary (ages 9–11; years 4 to 6)

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- This is a gorgeous summery story about family, friends and a little bit of magic.
- Key messages about responsibility, looking after others, and family dynamics
- First children's book by bestselling and award-winning Australian author Monica McInerney.

## THEMES

- Family and Friends
- Magical realism
- Summer holidays

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia  
Illustrations © Danny Snell

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

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## Marcie Gill and the Caravan Park Cat

Monica McInerney  
Illustrations by Danny Snell

## PLOT SUMMARY

This heartwarming story by award-winning and bestselling author Monica McInerney will delight readers young and old.

Marcie Gill hasn't had a great start to the Christmas holidays. Her parents aren't talking to each other and the family business – the Snorkel Bay Caravan Park – is in financial trouble. Her younger brother will only talk about his 23 goldfish and her sister is obsessed with tennis. To make matters worse, her gran is in the hospital after a bad fall and won't be home for ages.

But then something magical happens. Something that involves a Christmas competition, a black cat called George and a wishing stone. Marcie is about to discover that if you wish hard enough, dreams can come true.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monica McInerney is a shining star of Australian fiction and is the author of many internationally bestselling novels and a short story collection for adults. Her novels include *The Godmothers*, *The Trip of a Lifetime* and *Those Faraday Girls*.

Monica grew up in a family of seven children in the Clare Valley of South Australia and has been living between Australia and Ireland for thirty years. *Marcie Gill and the Caravan Park Cat* is her first book for children.

## AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Monica says:

I learned to read as a four-year-old and I can still clearly remember the joy I felt when I first fell into fictional worlds, in books by Enid Blyton in particular. It was as if I was right there beside the characters, living their adventures. I especially loved it when magic popped up.

I have 18 nieces and nephews and many of them have been guinea pigs for my earlier (unpublished) children's stories (usually starring each of them in different roles.)

When I first started writing *Marcie Gill and the Caravan Park Cat*, I knew I wanted to include all the ingredients I loved in my childhood reading: family, friendship, fun, drama and adventure – with the addition of a generous sprinkling of magic.

I loved writing ten-year-old Marcie Gill's character – she is (very) earnest, (overly) curious, (usually) kind but she (definitely) has a temper too, which gets her into trouble. As a lifelong cat lover, I also had great fun with George the cat. Midway through the final edits, I adopted a rescue kitten we named Nicholas. He (uncannily) resembled George, with his black fur and very green eyes. I did most of the final tweaks with Nicholas curled up beside my laptop computer.

My adult novels all have international settings, but for *Marcie Gill*, the action takes place in the fictional Australian town of Snorkel Bay, in the family's caravan park. To write those scenes, I recalled childhood holidays by the beach, hot Decembers and the build-up to Christmas.

I loved writing the scenes with all three generations of the Gill family too. There are tensions to be eased, problems to be fixed, they are all worried about Gran – but I wanted to show their love and support for each other too. I'm the middle child of a lively family of seven, with three brothers and three sisters, so I had lots to draw on for the scenes between Marcie and her tennis-mad big sister and fish-obsessed little brother.

I hope young readers will feel like they are right there in the Snorkel Bay Caravan Park, alongside Marcie, George, Gran and all the Gill family, enjoying their adventures and watching the magic unfold.

### Questions

1. Monica talks about loving books and reading from an early age. Can you remember the first book you enjoyed and fell in love with? Do you still have a copy at home? Or can you find that book in the school library? What do you think of this book when you read it now that you're older? Why do you think it makes you feel this way?
2. From looking at Monica's note on her inspiration – which elements of the story of *Marcie Gill* do you think she borrowed from her own life? If you were writing a story, what would you include from your own life? Are there things you would leave out?
3. Can you think of other novels that are set around a time of celebration like Christmas? What does this add to the novel? How do you think the story would be different if it was set at a different time of the year?

### Activity

- Monica used her memories of childhood holidays to inform her writing about the Snorkel Bay Caravan Park. Write a description of a holiday you have taken. Use this as the starting point to write an outline for a short story. (Don't forget to choose a particular time of year or perhaps a special event as the backdrop for your story.)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Danny Snell lives in Adelaide where he has worked as an illustrator for over 20 years. In that time, he has illustrated over a dozen children's picture books. Working in a variety of media and with a focus on simple compositions, he brings a gentle whimsy to his book characters and settings.

Danny has won a number of awards for his books, including CBCA Notables, and the CBCA Eve Pownall Award for Information Books in 2014.



## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Study the cover of the book. After looking at the illustration, what do you think the story will be about?
  2. The illustration is just one element that makes up the front cover – what are some other elements that create the full cover?
  3. The designer of the book has used a yellow border – do you think the cover would look as effective if the border colour was green or blue? Or a different colour? Why or why not?
  4. What does the cover tell you about the setting of the book? Are there other things you can learn about the story from just looking at the cover? For example, what time of year is it? Where do you think the main character lives?
  5. Read the blurb on the back. Why do you think short, simple sentences were used to tell people about the story?
  6. Read page 1 of the book. Look at the third mysterious thing that happened to Marcie. What do you think the secret could be regarding George the cat?
4. Gran was given a bunch of fake flowers by her husband, Marcie's grandad. (pp. 39-40) He then went on to plant the rose gardens around the caravan park. What do you think the roses symbolise to Gran? What do they mean to the rest of the Gill family?
  5. Marcie's dad was the victim of a financial scam and lost all their savings. (pp. 57-58) He thought he was doing the right thing at the time, but it all went wrong. Have you ever done something for the right reasons but it went wrong? Are there things you can do to prevent these types of mistakes from happening?
  6. At the end of the story, Marcie realises that her brother and sister also have a special relationship with Gran. (p. 211) Why do you think Marcie hadn't realised this before? Do you think this revelation will change the way she interacts with her siblings? Why or why not?

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

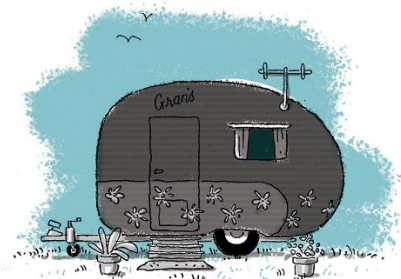
### Family

#### Questions

1. The Gills live on the grounds of their caravan park. (p. 2) Do you know anyone who lives in a caravan park, or somewhere else that is not a house or flat?
2. Marcie thinks that her family has obsessions (p. 2): Jemima is obsessed with tennis, Fred is obsessed with fish and Marcie is obsessed with asking questions. Do you think anyone in your family has an obsession? What is that obsession? Why do you think an obsession could be both a good and bad thing?



3. The Gill family have a very strict rule about not going to the beach alone. (p. 4) Does your family



#### Activities

- Draw a family tree for the Gills. Include friends as well as immediate family. Then draw your own family tree and compare the two. Are there many differences? Are there many similarities?
- Marcie bakes a birthday cake for Claude (with Jemima's help!) and she has to make up her mind about having a theme or not. (pp. 96-97) Design a birthday cake for a friend or family member. Think about what type of cake you would make, and also what type of theme or decorations you would choose. What are your reasons for making some of these decisions? Draw the outside of the cake, as well as the inside, using a cross-section diagram.
- Marcie is worried about her mum and dad and the financial problems at the caravan park. She tries several times to help them by entering the

competitions and exposing the dodgy plumber. Can you find other places in the story where the Gill siblings help and support each other? Find evidence of this in the text.

- The Gill children are good at different things: Fred is good at looking after his fish and drawing; Jemima is good at tennis and baking and Marcie is good at asking questions, looking after George and writing lists. What are your talents? Write a list of all the things you are good at. Compare your list with other students in the class. Are there many things that double up?
- Marcie gets really angry and loses her temper with Jemima and Fred. (p. 166) Re-write that moment from either Jemima's or Fred's point of view. (Don't forget to include how that character is feeling and what they're thinking at the time.)

## Friendship

### Questions

1. At the start of the story, Marcie is sad because her friends have gone away for the holidays. Have you ever been in this situation? What did you do? Did you make a new friend like Marcie did?
2. Claude is very shy when he first meets Marcie. Do you know anyone who is shy? What does Marcie do to put Claude at ease and make him feel less nervous? Are there other things she could have done?
3. Marcie is very close to her gran and misses her a lot. Even though they are related, would you say that they are also friends? What do you define as a friendship? Do you have relatives that you also consider friends?

### Activities

- Choose five characters from the story and write their names down. Beside their names, describe the personality of that character. Use the following words as a starting point: shy, outgoing, funny, happy, impatient, cheerful, thoughtful, calm, nervous. Feel free to add more words. Do you think that more than one word applies to each character? Are there characters that share the same word/s? (Worksheet 1 on p. 7 could help with this activity.)
- How do you help your friends when they're feeling nervous, shy or worried? Create a mood board of all the different ways you can help people when they need a bit of support. (Divide your mood board into 'things you can say' and 'things you can do'.)

## Magic

### Questions

1. The wishing stone provides the story with a little bit of magic. Do you think the use of magic works well in this story?
2. Marcie and Gran have experienced and believe in the magic of the wishing stone, but Jemima and Fred don't believe in the magic. What are some ways the author has used to make the wishing stone feel real? For example, has she used particular words or descriptions to explain its magical properties?
3. How much do you think the wishing stone is responsible for fixing Marcie's problems and making things okay? To what extent was Marcie responsible for solving her problems by her own actions and decisions? Or do you think it was a combination of both these things?

### Activities

- Are there rules connected to the wishing stone and its magic? Find evidence in the story of how the wishing stone works.
- Have you read other books that include magic in a realistic contemporary setting? List books that use magic in a similar way. How are these books similar or different to *Marcie Gill and the Caravan Park Cat*?

## KEY QUOTES

1. *'[Marcie] made sure George's bowls of food and water were full. She plumped the red cushion in his old blue basket under the little table in the living room area, as she'd seen Gran do. She also made sure the cat flap in the caravan door was working properly.'* (p. 5-6) Marcie is responsible for looking after George while Gran is away. Have you ever been responsible for a pet? List the things you need to do to look after a pet. If you haven't looked after a pet before, choose one and imagine what you'd have to do to keep it happy and healthy.
2. *'As Marcie came in, he opened one green eye and then the other green eye. Then he stretched one front leg, then the other. He half stood up, stretched one back leg, then the other.'* (p. 19) How different would the story be if George was a pet dog or a budgie instead of a cat? What would change in the story? Pick a section of the story and rewrite it as if George was a different type of animal.







3. *'It was Saturday morning. Judging Day had arrived. So had a heatwave. The air was hot and sticky. There wasn't even a sea breeze.'* (p. 162) The author has used short sentences in the paragraph opening chapter 20. What effect has this had on the tone of this chapter? Do you think it would be different had the sentences been connected in a more flowing way? Why do you think the author made the decision to use short, sharp sentences here?

## ILLUSTRATION AND DESIGN

Many different people help to make a book. Two of these people are the Illustrator and the Designer. The Illustrator is the person who creates the artwork for the cover of the book and the internal illustrations. The Designer is the person who selects the type for the front cover, lays out the illustrations and artwork and creates decorative elements inside the book.

### Questions

1. Illustrator Danny Snell has created a series of pictures throughout the story. What do you think of the style of the art? Do you think it suits the story?
2. Why do you think only one colour is used for the internal illustrations in the book? Do you think the book would have a different feel if another colour had been used? For example, red or purple or yellow?
3. Look at the chapter openers and the different illustrations used on these pages. Why do you think these images were chosen? What connections do they have with the story? Can you think of any other images that could have been used? (Use worksheet 2 on p. 8.)
4. Besides the illustrations, what parts of the internal pages have been designed in some way? For example, text breaks or use of colour.
5. Drawing and art are big parts of the narrative – Fred is obsessed with trying to draw his fish for the competition and Marcie is also trying to enter the poster competition. Why do you think the council decided to make the competition a drawing competition and not a music, multimedia or dance competition?

### Activities

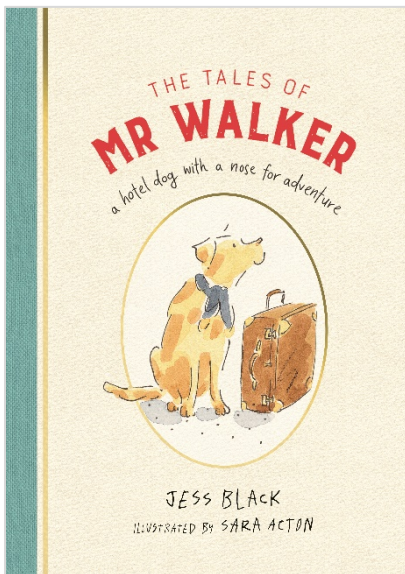
- Once you have read the story, create your own cover design and artwork for the book. Feel free to use a different layout and typeface than the actual book. You could also play around with different types of blurbs on the back cover.
- Recreate one of Fred's fish illustrations that he worked on for the competition. Use as much information as you can from the text to inform your artwork.

## GENERAL ACTIVITIES

1. Create an imaginary competition that you could hold in your community. Make sure the purpose of the competition is connected to the area you live in. (Just as the 'Sun, Sand, Surf and Sea' poster competition was connected to the beachside community in Snorkel Bay.) Create a poster that could be used to promote your competition within the community. Don't forget you'll need to include a closing date, a prize, the purpose of the competition and also any rules that might apply. (For example, an age cut-off.)
2. Draw a map of the Snorkel Bay Caravan Park and the surrounding area. Don't forget to include important features like the ocean, Gran's caravan, the rose gardens and Marcie's house.
3. Claude is named after the famous Impressionist painter Claude Monet. Research Claude Monet – or one of the other Impressionist painters – and present your findings to the rest of the class.
4. Draw a scene from the book in the Impressionist painting style.
5. Claude is named after a famous painter. In groups of four, discuss if any of you are named after somebody famous. (Or if any of you have a friend or relation named after someone famous or notable.) Discuss why you think your friend/family member was named after that particular person. Is that person still considered 'famous' today? Why or why not?
6. Reword the cover blurb into a paragraph form – you might need to add words to help the paragraph make sense. Read your blurb out to another classmate.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA

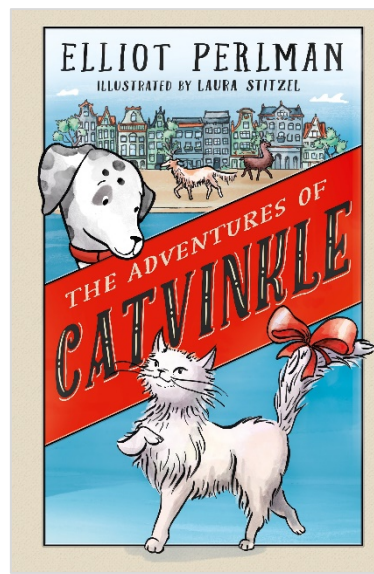


*The Tales of Mr Walker*  
by Jess Black & Sara Acton

Introducing Mr Walker – a hotel dog with a nose for adventure!

On a brilliant autumn's day, Mr Walker arrives at the grandest hotel in town. While things get off to a wobbly start, this charming labrador is determined to put his best paw forward. And it's just as well because the most unexpected adventures await . . .

*The Tales of Mr Walker* contains four delightful stories inspired by the real-life Mr Walker, a Guide Dog Ambassador who now calls Park Hyatt Melbourne home.

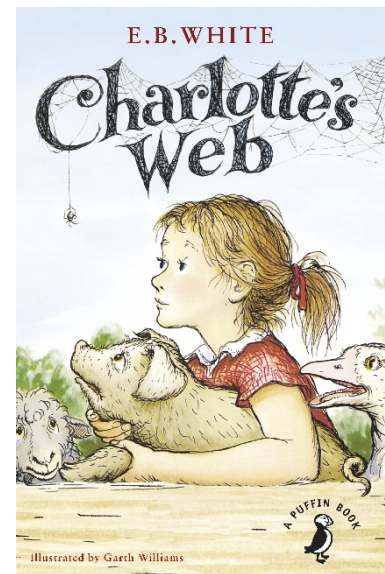


*The Adventures of Catvinkle*  
by Elliot Perlman & Laura Stitzel

When a pampered cat has to share her home with a lost dog, sparks are set to fly. To her surprise, Catvinkle starts to like Ula. She even tells Ula her three secrets. But a cat and a dog can't be friends – can they?

A tail-spin of a tale that will make you howl with laughter – and remind you that if you aren't open to adventure, you might never meet your best friend.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



*Charlotte's Web*  
by E. B. White & Garth Williams

This is the story of a little girl named Fern who loved a little pig named Wilbur and of Wilbur's dear friend, Charlotte A. Cavatica, a beautiful large grey spider.

With the unlikely help of Templeton the rat, and a wonderfully clever plan of her own, Charlotte saves the life of Wilbur, who by this time has grown up to be quite a pig. A time-honoured classic favourite.

## WORKSHEET 1: Character personalities



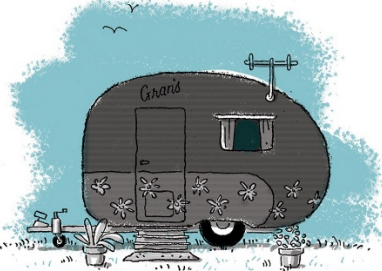

Choose five characters from the story and write their names down on the left. Beside their names, describe the personality of that character. Use the following words as a starting point: shy, outgoing, funny, happy, cheerful, impatient, thoughtful, calm, nervous. Feel free to add more words of your own.

Character name	Words describing the personality of the character
Eg: Claude	Shy Thoughtful Nervous



## WORKSHEET 2: Chapter opener illustrations

Write a paragraph about what each of the below illustrations symbolises in the story and why they were used as the chapter opener illustrations.

Chapter opener illustration	Connection to story
	
	
	
	



## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Marcie Gill and the Caravan Park Cat	Monica McInerney & Danny Snell	9781760894139	4-6	\$19.99		
The Tales of Mr Walker	Jess Black & Sara Acton	9780143793076	2-4	\$24.99		
The Adventures of Catvinkle	Elliot Perlman & Laura Stitzel	9780143786382	4-6	\$16.99		
Charlotte's Web	E. B. White & Garth Williams	9780141354828	3-6	\$14.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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