



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary  
(ages 9–12)

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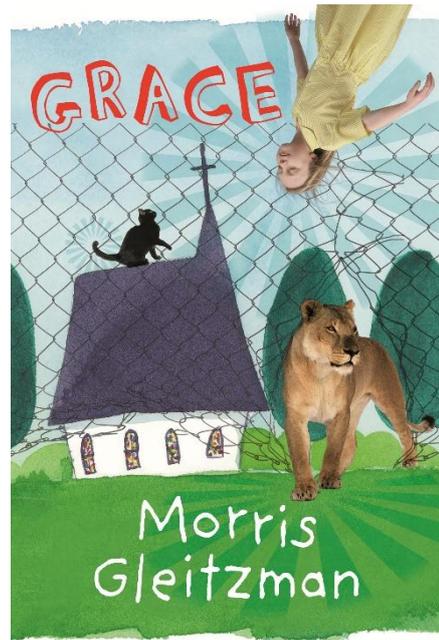
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## Grace Morris Gleitzman

## PLOT SUMMARY

In the beginning there was me and Mum and Dad and the twins.

And talk about happy families, we were bountiful.

But it came to pass that I started doing sins.

And lo, that was when all our problems began.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Morris Gleitzman grew up in England and came to Australia when he was sixteen. After university he worked for ten years as a screenwriter. Then he had a wonderful experience. He wrote a novel for young people. Now, after 38 books, he's one of Australia's most popular children's authors.

## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

Survey the class to find out which of Morris Gleitzman's books they have already read. Collate this into a class list.

1. How would you describe Gleitzman's writing style? Can you categorise Gleitzman's style? Consider aspects such as characters, plots, themes, genre, literary style.
2. This may lead on to a more comprehensive author study (see: After Reading the Novel – Author Study).
3. What do you expect from the title? Why do you think Gleitzman has used such a title?

## DECONSTRUCTING GRACE

When Grace 'starts doing sins' she is not at all sure *why* these things are sins – after all, she is just doing what her Dad has taught her ('to be true to my views' p.8), her family's 'favourite thing' ('Asking questions and thinking about the answers.' p.15).

But no matter how she tries to explain herself, things keep getting worse and it seems everything she does, from her school project to helping "outsiders" at the scene of an accident, serves to anger the Elders even more.

The "Elders" are the authority figures of the church to which Grace and her family belong. It is a church of many rules, enforcing the strict laws of a God with whom Grace has a much warmer, more understanding relationship. Grace's different beliefs and desire to be so truthful have major repercussions for her father to whom she is very close. He has chosen a dangerous or uncomfortable path in many ways by encouraging Grace to be open-minded and reflective. His family has obligations to a church which expects conformity, demands adherence to gender roles and regulations – and knows only its worthy, obedient eleven thousand four hundred and twenty two "insiders" have a place in Heaven!

But the way Grace and her Father are going, that number looks like diminishing. When Grace's father is expelled from the Church, it sets off a dramatic and emotional chain of events with the ever resourceful and persistent Grace going to any and all lengths to try and keep contact with her

Dad and reunite the family. Uncle Vern, Grandpop and Mr. Gosper dole out harsh then harsher punishments, ineffectively attempting to make a point and save this poor disobedient child from the unholy influences of her free-thinking Father.

Mum is virtually powerless given she has already "lost" her husband and faces the threat of losing her children if she too rebels against the traditions of her upbringing. Luke and Mark, Grace's little brothers, do plenty of "smiting" with plastic swords, which doesn't help much, while her friends, Delilah and Liam, commiserate with considerable woe about Grace being 'so totally judged'.

Grace isn't entirely on her own though. A few twists of fate (or maybe divine intervention) in the form of a junkyard owner, Mr. Denny, his sensitive son Kyle and a strange visiting kitten lead to salvation – not quite the kind the church Elders have in mind but definitely a 'salvage' operation. But just as things are looking up, Grace's negotiations with God reach a crisis point and she undertakes an ordeal that almost sees her testing out the mathematical beliefs about numbers who'll get into heaven!

Morris Gleitzman's story is not intended to be a criticism of organized religion in general or an attack on Christianity. He points out in his end note that while not a practicing Christian, he cherishes the values and positive examples of Christianity he experienced in his own childhood. Indeed the story is told with great humour and sensitivity, exploring rather than judging the issues faced by a very thoughtful young girl in a strong lead role.

Grace enables us to see the hypocrisy and rigidity of many adults in her world whose actions are the antithesis of what she believes in – not that she is always cognisant of this fact, as she is generally bewildered by the behaviours of those she is meant to respect and obey. Her capacity for genuine Christian charity and compassion stands in stark contrast to the attitudes and actions directed at her.

Yet Grace is always able to find redeeming qualities in her critics and even to feel considerable sympathy towards them. Grace's ability to look beyond the way things are, to try and understand the truth behind the reality, enables her to appreciate the difficult situations her detractors may be in and understand the negative impact of this on their own lives.

Grace's experiences test her faith to the limit and she endures several "ordeals" with results that she fears have led to 'a serious loss of God'! Not so. She continues to find positive and proactive ways to handle everything – thanks mainly to some other significant adults who offer quite different role models.



In the end, her faith is very comfortably intact and her all-important friendship with her God remains at the centre of her life.

Could all the opposing forces, views and desires in this story be addressed so that everyone is happy? Maybe that is just not possible. Grace, however, does find peace. With her family reunited and some big changes in their lives, there is happiness and certainty in a place that truly does comfort, welcome and accept – plenty of questioning allowed!

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

There is much to be examined and analysed in *Grace*.

### Questions

- Name the key characters in the story and list 3 character traits of each. Choose traits you think illustrate the kind of person each one is (E.g: persistent, determined, stubborn, optimistic, open-minded, kind).
- Describe what happened after the two car accidents - the 1st in Chapter 4 in the school minibus, and the 2nd in Chapter 26. In what ways did they:
  - Make more problems for Grace?
  - Create a turning point in the plot?
  - Help solve some of Grace's problems or help her out of predicaments?
- Define the words below in your own way or using a dictionary: Grace, faith, belief. What are some of the ways these words are defined in the story? (e.g: the main character's name; beliefs and faith about different things for different people - not just about God.)
- Describe the "Church" that Grace's family belongs to. Outline some of the main rules and explain the expectations of the Elders. (What roles do women and men have? Where must people live? What beliefs exist about people "outside" the church?)
- "Oh Lord we shamefully acknowledge a disobedient and disrespectful child amongst us." (p29)
 

Review this scene and chapter to write in your own words how you think Grace must have felt in this situation. Try to capture the range of emotions that swept through her (e.g: was she surprised or ashamed? Did she understand or reject the accusations?)
- Provide some examples of 'hypocrisy' or double standards of the adults in this novel – where one thing is "preached" or espoused but the actions or words of the adults do the opposite. Cite page references and explain or outline 3 – 5 examples of this. You can expand on your work by explaining your views about this behaviour or where you see examples of hypocrisy in real life or in the world around you.
- Examine the concept of "Fear" in this story. Compare the fears of Grace's Mum, her Dad, Grace and her little brothers. Contrast these fears with those of Grandpop, Uncle Vern, Mr Gosper and the Church Elders. Are they the same in any way? How do they differ? What do you think is behind the different fears these characters have?
- What motives did Kyle and Mr Denny have for helping or even just listening to Grace? How and why did these motives change over the course of the story?
- "My family was a bit different in our church because we didn't have other church members living next door. Our neighbours were all outsiders. Our place was surrounded by the outside world." (p3)
 

Debate/discuss the advantages and disadvantages for children such as Grace and her brothers, who exist in a community within but separate from the rest of the community. OR Humour can be effectively used to highlight serious or contentious issues.
- The novel highlights many choices that different characters have to make. On a scale of easy/straightforward to extremely difficult how would you rate the following and why:
  - The dilemmas faced by Grace's Mum when her husband is expelled.
  - Miss Parry's options when trying to deal with Grace.
  - Grace's family's decision right at the very end.
  - Grandpop's actions in response to Mr Gosper or the Church's rules.
- Evaluate Grace's "ordeal" (chapters 19 & 20). What elements does she think her trial will need to prove her faith? How effective are her actions? To what degree would you describe her ordeal as "successful" in achieving her goals? (Think about the immediate outcome and the longer term outcome.)
- Prepare a case to defend Dad's actions. What has he done that you agree with or approve of and why? You might like to dramatise this or expand on the idea:



- Form a panel of characters from the novel to question Dad and assess his influence on Grace in positive or negative terms;
- Compose a soliloquy for Grace or her Mum to perform – maybe as a speech in church or as a letter to the Elders;
- A “rights tribunal” deciding on who has the right to pass judgment or whose rights have been infringed in any way.

## ACTIVITIES

- Demonstrate how Morris Gleitzman uses ‘biblical terminology’ or language in the style of a holy book. Find some examples to illustrate this and use chapter references and character names.

Grace, Chapter 1: “In the beginning...good luck was upon us...we were bountiful...And lo...”

Delilah, Chapter 4: “You are so going to be judged...You are so defiled”

Why do you think he does this? Do you find it effective?

- Select a word or phrase from below (or choose one of your own) & find a scene or situation in the novel that connects strongly with, explores or exemplifies it in some way. Illustrate your interpretation of the feeling or concept/s – in relation to the book OR to the something in your own world (e.g.: design an image, a symbol, a sketch, a collage from various sources or art work).
  - “Wrath is like anger, only worse.” (p 28)
  - Truth and lies
  - Tribulation
  - Gratitude
  - Freedom and/or will
  - Tolerance and intolerance
- Develop a list of Grace’s strengths as you find out more about her. If you were able to use some of her strategies, such as positive self-talk, or have her optimistic outlook, how could this help you in every day or more serious situations in your own life? You can answer this about yourself or choose a character from another story you have read or a current newspaper article. Think about the power or importance of “belief” in something or someone (not necessarily faith or belief in the religious sense) makes a difference.
- Propose a plan for Grace and her Dad that would help them to do what they want to do (that is to ask questions and talk about issues)

but also fit into the Church they are part of. Invent or formulate some rules that could work for both sides.

- Arrange a chart of 3 or more major “sins” Grace commits (e.g.: her project, talking to outsiders, answering back with her views). If you were to interview Grace, one of the Church elders and an objective “outsider” reveal how each of those people would view the “sin” and what each would suggest as an appropriate consequence (e.g: would it be a punishment, a fair public hearing, a second opinion or a good discussion?)
- Plan a marketing campaign that promotes Grace’s church. What aspects would encourage young people to sign up as members and how would you “put a spin on” the less appealing aspects – so you can’t actually lie but you can ‘play around’ with the truth!

## CHARACTER STUDY

### *Character study of Dad*

- Review the novel to find examples of his “teachings” or Grace’s “learnings” as a result of their conversations and happy relationship – what do these tell us about Dad’s way of thinking
- Think about Dad’s motivations – what forces have shaped him to date and why does he behave the way he does?
- Make some deductions about dad’s beliefs – how do they connect and contrast with Church beliefs?

### *Character study of a minor player*

Every character has something to contribute and is a vehicle for the author to add another dimension or layer to the story.

- Think about Nannie or the twins, Luke and Mark. What important elements of the story do they illustrate?
- Kyle and his Dad play a more significant role. Look at where they live (the junk yard), how they live and what their thoughts about God are. Explain the “salvage” idea – how does the salvaging they do every day compare with the tasks they do for Grace and her family?
- If you were to add another minor character, who would it be and what role would this person play. Why would your character make a difference?



## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### Difference

Grace compares the “stern-looking men in business suits, often with dandruff” (p35) with magnificent and elegant lions. The author seems to be making a point here that despite the grand posturing or high moral ground these people take, they are in fact, quite “normal” in ways that are common and ‘earthly’. Their simple failings and flaws are often observed by Grace (and outsiders) even though they consider themselves above or better than others (“That’s what’s wrong with our church these days, Elders who carry on as if they were God.” Dad, (p14)).

The notion of being different is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Investigate this aspect.

- Locate and describe examples of “difference” – people who are perceived to be different or who are behaving differently, why Grace is so different, the degree of tolerance or acceptance of difference.
- Collate some examples of characters who “think” they are different and that they are better than others doing very normal things or having very human responses in difficult situations (e.g.: Mr. Gosper in the car on the long trip!)

### **Analyse what the book has to say about other major issues such as:**

Belonging, Rights (Human or Parental or Religious), Truth, Salvation, Identity

- Can you define these key concepts?
- Give examples of real life situations that parallel Grace’s.
- What evidence can you find in the novel and in your community of people’s experiences seeking to find, gain or connect with these things?
- Are there other key concepts or major issues you feel are highlighted by the story?

### God

What role does Grace’s “God” play? How does she seem to view God? Think about all the things she asks for, tells him and expects of him.

- Chart and categorise or classify her interactions – e.g: practical (seeking help to make a plan), theoretical (giving her guidance or her grandparents help); personal (wanting protection or a sign) or social (sharing thoughts and feelings as if with a friend).
- How does her view compare with others’ views of God in this novel?

### **Take it further -**

Various religions place their “God/s” (known by different names) in different roles. Followers or Members of diverse religious groups all see

their relationships with their Gods – and other people’s - from a certain perspective.

- Do some “finding out”. Compare and contrast some of the beliefs/attitudes towards or placements of God in different churches or religions.
- Compare mainstream and alternative groups – what similarities or differences do they have in terms of the rules they ask people to follow?

## REFLECTIONS

1. As it was in the beginning (Chapter 1) so it is in the end (Chapter 30) that Grace is happily united with her family. But so much happens in between these points! Reflect on the experiences Grace has had.
  - What do you think are the most significant things she has learned?
  - Who was most changed by events in the story – in the short term and in the long term?
  - What did you learn from reading and thinking about the issues raised in this book.
2. How would you describe Morris Gleitzman’s approach to writing this novel – consider the issues and topics that he addresses. What techniques do you think he used to create his characters and draw out particularly interesting issues? Was there a message or a moral in your view?
3. Do you think Morris Gleitzman is successful in creating a character and a world that gives the reader a new insight or challenges the reader in any way? Explain your reasoning.
4. If you had the opportunity now to write or draw something in response to finishing the book, what would your central emotions be?

Would you:

- Write a poem from a character’s perspective or about a larger theme
- Create a song or piece of music that captures your feeling or the book’s mood at a certain point
- Craft a book review that recommended or “panned” it for certain readers



- Compose a letter to Morris Gleitzman with questions or commendations
- Sketch an image or design a symbolic statement that comments on a major theme
- Make a list of good ideas, intentions or inspirations it has given you!



## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Grace	Morris Gleitzman	9780143302612	3-6	\$19.95		
Bumface	Morris Gleitzman	9780140387971	3-6	\$16.99		
Doubting Thomas	Morris Gleitzman	9780143302612	3-6	\$16.95		
Extra Time	Morris Gleitzman	9780143307754	3-6	\$16.99		
Too Small to Fail	Morris Gleitzman	9780143306429	3-6	\$16.95		
Help Around the House	Morris Gleitzman	9780143793236	4-6	\$16.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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