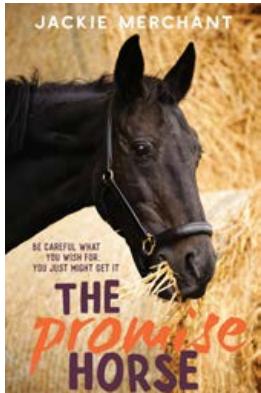




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## The Promise Horse

Jackie Merchant  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

Harry is tired of being the tall new kid with red hair, big feet and freckles; the one with the dead sister whose voice follows her wherever she goes. Everyone says she's imagining it, but she knows they're wrong. If she was making Sissy up, wouldn't she make her less of a pain? When Harry's wish for a horse comes true and Marksman comes into her life, she isn't sure that the impressive horse is the one for her. She doesn't need another challenge. But could he be just what she needs to learn the difference between standing out and standing up?

## Author Information:

Jackie Merchant has worked as a designer, art director and copywriter. She spent the majority of her childhood on the outskirts of Sydney, where, when she was 10, her parents bought an old run-down riding school. Even with no ponies at the time it was a dream come true for a girl with an imagination fuelled by ponies and horses. As an adult Jackie is lucky enough to share her life with 3 beautiful horses (Moxie, Percy and young Douglas) and one small adventurous pony (named Mrs Wilkinson) and several other animals. She currently lives in Tasmania. *The Promise Horse* is her debut novel.

## How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

**These notes are for:**  
• Primary years 3-6  
• Ages 8+

**Key Learning Areas:**  
• English

**Example of:**  
• Novel

**Themes/Ideas:**  
• Horses  
• Grief  
• Family  
• Bravery



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Discussion Questions and Activities:

### Before Reading

Before reading *The Promise Horse*, view the cover of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The tagline
- The publisher
- The blurb

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? Revisit your answer after reading the book – how close were your predictions to the actual novel?

### Exploring the text

What is the purpose of this novel (i.e. to entertain, to inform or to persuade)? How can you tell? Write a paragraph about the novel using only informative language that is unbiased. Write another paragraph using persuasive language to convince the reader to share your opinion of the novel.

What is Harry's reaction when she first meets Marksman in Chapter 5? What worries her about Marksman? Besides her reaction to his size, why do you think Harry reacts this way? Consider how much she had been anticipating that moment and how the reality may not have been what she expected.

Marksman is an Appaloosa, which is a particular breed of horse. As a class, make a list of any other horse breeds you know and/or research other breeds. Assign one breed to each student and ask them to answer the following questions about it:

- What colour/pattern can they be?
- What part of the world did they come from?
- What are they known for? (such as, do they perform particular jobs, compete, run wild, etc.)
- Are there any famous horses of this breed?

How does Mum feel about Harry riding Marksman? Her feelings are quite complicated as there are a number of factors at play, such as her desire for Harry to be happy, her desire to keep Harry safe and her grief from losing Sissy. Find several quotes from the text that explore Mum's thoughts and behaviour with regards to Harry keeping Marksman.

Find definitions to the horse vocab words in the list below. Add to the list with other horse vocab words you find throughout *The Promise Horse*,

- Gymkhana
- Halter
- Stirrups
- Gators
- Saddle
- Jodhpurs

*“Sissy was right: the other kids did try to be friendly. It was Harry who didn’t engage.”* Page 93

Harry finds it difficult to make friends at her new school, but later has the realisation that she wasn't engaging with potential new friends when they were being nice to her.

What are some actions a person can take if they are starting at a new school or with a group of people they don't know? Conversely, if you are in a group of people you know and a new person arrives, what could you do to make them feel welcomed? How does it feel when you are in a situation where you don't know anyone?

Even though Sissy has died, her voice remains in Harry's head, allowing them to have conversations. What do you know about the sisters' relationship based on their conversations in the book? How does Sissy's voice help Harry throughout the story? Why do you think the author chose to make this part of the story?

Harry's family is dealing with the loss of Sissy. Harry, Mum and Dad all deal with their grief in different ways and experience different emotions about Sissy. Briefly describe how grief is affecting each of these characters. What is grief? When can people experience it? Why do you think we feel grief? If you, a loved one or friend were dealing with grief, what could you do to help them?

Have a class discussion on traditional family roles, including the characteristics of each role and what relationship you would expect each role to have with the other. Consider questions such as:

- What are the responsibilities of a parent?
- How would you expect a parent to behave after a traumatic event?
- What role does trust play in a family?
- How does *The Promise Horse* play into or subvert these ideas of a typical family dynamic? What effect does this subversion have on you as the reader?



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Harry has a strong connection with Marksman and is surprised to find that Marksman responds to commands from Sissy. What do you think this connection between the three symbolises about the connection between Harry and Sissy?

Examine the relationships between Harry, Josie and Billy. Create a narrative timeline, plotting key passages from the book that show important parts in the development of these relationships. Such as, Josie turning up to Harry's house, Billy and Harry meeting at the gate, Billy arriving at Harry's house with Jack, etc.

What is bullying? Discuss the concept of bullying in reference to Billy. How does he bully others? How is he bullied himself? What is your school's policy on bullying? If you are bullied or you witness bullying, what should you do?

Even though Billy is mean to Harry, Lizzie still shows him kindness. She does this because she can see that he is not a bad person, he is just in a bad family situation. This shows Lizzie using empathy to guide her decisions. What is empathy? How can you encourage empathetic thoughts? What does this tell you about not making judgement about people?

What is the significance of Harry's dream in Chapter 19? How does this moment change Harry?

*"There was that word again, thought Harry. With a gentle stab it hit home like a message from Sissy. Brave."* Page 234

What does bravery mean to you? Have a class discussion on different ways you can be brave. How does Harry show bravery in the story, especially in the last few chapters?

*"They wouldn't be the same; they would find a way to be something new."* Page 259

Harry mentions her "old Mum" and "new Mum" throughout the book. Describe your impression of how Harry's mum used to be (before Sissy's death) and how she is now. How do you think Harry's family can work together to create a "new normal"? What do you think needs to change?

Write a book report on *The Promise Horse*. Write about what you thought of the book, using evidence from the text to support your evaluation. Make a recommendation about who would be interested in this book and draw connections to similar or related books.

## Creative Responses to the Text

Design your own cover for the book with new imagery and a new tagline that will persuade and interest people in reading the book.

A novel will describe the setting and action in words, allowing the reader to visualise using their imagination. A comic strip or graphic novel uses illustrations to show the reader the setting, action and character's emotions. Create a comic strip of a key scene from the novel.

Imagine that a movie was being made of *The Promise Horse*. In small groups, create a soundtrack to accompany some of the key scenes, thinking particularly about the mood you want to convey. You could either make a compilation of existing songs or compose your own musical pieces. Present your soundtrack to the class, explaining why you have chosen the pieces you have. Also choose your ideal cast for the movie and create a movie poster.

Imagine you are a journalist and write a newspaper report about the gymkhana. Use objective language and include only facts that a journalist would know. Interview some of the characters to include their side of the story.

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