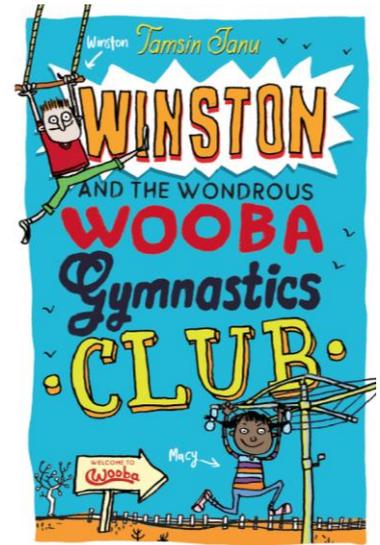


# Winston and the Wondrous Wooba Gymnastics Club

Author  
Tamsin Janu



## Synopsis

Nine-year-old Winston has lived in Woobawittawoo (commonly known as *Wooba*) with his mother for his whole life, and is very happy to have done so. But Macy, Winston's brand new soon-to-be-stepsister, doesn't want to leave Dubbo, and is not so pleased to find herself in a town smaller than her old school. Winston likes Macy, and her father Jim, but he also loves his home and is determined to find a way to help Jim and Macy love Wooba too. So when he discovers that Macy is a dedicated gymnast who aspires to compete in the Olympics one day, Winston decides that the best way to endear her to her new home is to start a gymnastics club in Wooba. Starting a gymnastics club in a tiny town four hours drive from Dubbo is no easy thing, but Winston and Macy are determined to succeed, and when Wooba's main tourist attraction (The Big Bread) collapses, the children and their friends rise to the challenge of using their newfound gymnastics prowess to help save The Big Bread, and the tourism it brings to their town. A delightfully unassuming yet determined main character, Winston is both endearing and inspiring. Undaunted by the problems he faces, he meets all the challenges that life is throwing in his path, and along the way he manages to not only help his community, but also wins the loyalty and affection of his loud and equally determined new step-sister. *Winston and the Wondrous Wooba Gymnastics Club* is a delightful tale of family, of community, and of persevering in the face of difficulties to fight for what you know is important.

## About the Author

**Tamsin Janu** was born and raised in Sydney. When she is not writing, Tamsin is practising Law. Her first novel, *Figgy in the World*, was written after a three-month stay in Ghana in 2009. It was joint winner of the Patricia Wrightson Award for Children's Literature in the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards and shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards and the Readings Children's Book Prize in 2015, and won the Children's Literature Award in the Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature in 2016. Both sequels, *Figgy and the President*, and *Figgy takes the City*, were shortlisted for the 2017 and 2018 Prime Minister's Literary Awards and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Her most recent novel, *Blossom*, was also shortlisted for the 2018 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Her novels have been inspired by her travels, and the people she meets along the way.

## Themes

Friendship; family; gymnastics; community; belonging; determination; self-confidence; perseverance; acceptance of difference; small towns.

## Writing Style

Written in the first person from the point of view of Winston, the nine-year-old protagonist, the viewpoint is consistently from his perspective, and other people's thoughts and motivations are all explored exclusively through dialogue with Winston, or via his introspective ruminations on the topic. The language used is modern and colloquial, appropriate to both the intended readership and the age of the protagonist and his friends. The narrative structure is chronologically straightforward, with plot-tension coming from the uncertainty of the progression of current events and character interactions.

## TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class discuss the title and cover of the book. What can you learn from the cover, and what do you hypothesise that the story might be about?
- 2) The author has chosen a title for the novel that relies heavily on alliteration. Think of an alliterative title for a story featuring the name of your home town, and an alliterative title for a story featuring your name as well as the name of a real Australian suburb or town.
- 3) Winston likes to calculate the price per gram of the chocolate bars, and on page 4 says that the large block is 20c per gram, while the smaller block is 29c per gram. Calculate the prices of a 50gm block, a 150gm block, and a 250gm block of chocolate at both these prices. Record your results in a table. Visit your local shops and research the prices and weights of the different blocks of plain chocolate for sale. On returning to class, calculate the price per gram of the chocolate for sale where you live. Is it cheaper or more expensive than the chocolate Winston can buy? Why do you think there is this difference? Record your results on your chart, and in pairs or small groups brainstorm and experiment with different ways to display your data visually. (Hint: graphs are always a good place to start.)
- 4) Using the information you collected in activity 2, calculate how much chocolate you could buy if you walk into your local store with \$2. Remember, you can only buy the sizes of bar that they actually have for sale! In pairs or small groups discuss the different ways that you can get the most chocolate for your money. Present your plan to the class, and compare everyone's solutions.
- 5) Winston's home town is commonly referred to as Wooba, even though it is actually called Woobawittawoo. What other Australian towns and places can you think of that are commonly referred to by a shorter version of their actual name?
- 6) Wooba has approximately 450 people living there – and Macy says that her old school had that many students! How many students are there at your school? How many people live in your town, city, or local community? In small groups think of as many advantages and disadvantages to living in both large and small communities as you can, and to attending a very large, or very

small, school. Write a two minute speech sharing what you would find difficult if you moved schools to one which is much smaller or larger than your current school, and what you like best about the size of your current school. Present your speech to the class, or at an assembly.

- 7) Wooba has The Big Bread as a tourist attraction, because it is in the middle of a wheat-growing area. If your local area was to build a 'big thing' to celebrate a distinct feature of the region, what form do you think that it should take and why? If your town already has a 'big thing' tourist attraction, do you think that it accurately reflects the area, or do you think that it should be changed to a different type of 'big thing'. Draw a design for a 'big thing' that you think your community should build to attract tourism.
- 8) When Macy stands up at the town meeting and says that they should build a gymnasium, Winston is impressed by her passion. Think of a building, facility, or activity that you care about enough to stand up for like Macy did. What is it, and why do you think it is important? You might choose something that already exists in your community that you would be passionate about regaining if it was gone, or something that you feel your community lacks like Macy and the gymnasium. In pairs or small groups, write a brief media release advocating for the creation or restoration of your chosen amenity, being sure to include at least five ways in which your community would benefit from its existence.
- 9) Tourism is very important to Wooba. When tourists visit a town they bring money to the area and local businesses and the economy all benefit. As a class brainstorm and think of as many activities and attractions in your local area that might entice tourists to visit. In pairs or small groups create a tourist brochure promoting your local area. You will want to mention: things you can do, things you can see, places to stay, and places to eat. Be sure to include a map of your local area, with a key that shows the different activities and attractions you mention in your leaflet.
- 10) Watch a video of a gymnastics competition.
  - Can you identify the different apparatus that the children use in the book?
  - Which apparatus do you think looks the easiest?
  - Which apparatus looks the most difficult to master?
  - Which apparatus would you most like to learn, and why?
  - Which routine looks the most impressive, and why?
  - Try and identify the different things that the judges might be looking for. (Use Winston's list on page 174 to help you.)
- 11) The children can't practice for the boys gymnastics events, because the school playground equipment doesn't have anything that they can use for the pommel horse or rings. If you wanted to practice gymnastics on your school playground, what events could you practice for and what equipment would you use for each event?

12) When the Wooba Gymnastics Club first starts, Macy is the only person who knows anything about gymnastics at all, and has to teach the other children as well as practicing herself. Teaching someone else a skill is different from knowing how to do it yourself; in small groups, take turns teaching two or three of your classmates a skill that you have, which they don't. It might be how to do a cartwheel, how to play a simple tune on a musical instrument, how to draw a cartoon cat, or just plain silly like how to fake burp! Individually, write a half page reflecting on your experiences teaching your skill. Some things to include in your reflection are:

- What skill were you trying to teach?
- How easily did your students learn your skill?
- What did you find easy about the exercise?
- What did you find difficult to teach?
- What did you expect when you started, and was it the same as what actually happened during the activity?
- What was the most frustrating part of the activity, and why?
- What was the most rewarding part of the activity, and why?
- What, if anything, would you do differently if you had to teach someone else the same skill in the future?
- What, if anything, would you do the same if you had to teach someone else the same skill in the future?

13) For some children's sports, boys and girls play together on the same team, but for some sports they play on different teams. In the story, Winston finds out that with gymnastics, not only do boys and girls compete on different teams, but they also do different events! As a class discuss why boys and girls (and men and women) might compete separately in some sports, and whether you think this is fair or unfair. What are the benefits and downsides to mixed teams and events as opposed to single-gender ones? Divide into smaller groups and hold three debates arguing for or against sporting competitions being gender-segregated at a) the primary school level, b) high school level, and c) adult level. Be sure to include examples from several different sports to support your arguments.

14) Winston does not want to leave Wooba and move to Dubbo, and Macy didn't want to leave Dubbo (and her gymnastics club) and move to Wooba. Moving to a new place and starting in a new school can be difficult even if unlike Macy you can still do all the same activities in the new place.

- As a class discuss what it feels like to move to a new place, and how you would feel if you found out that you had to leave your home and go live somewhere completely different.
- Think about all the different challenges that people who have to relocate face, and what we can do to make new arrivals in our community feel happy and welcome there – it doesn't have to be as big a thing as starting a new gymnastics club for them, but can be as simple as asking them how they are going.
- Based on your class discussion, as a class create a series of posters featuring ways to welcome and include people in your community and display them around the school.

- 15) When Macy is scared of what other people will think, Winston tells her that the important thing is to do her best, and not worry about what anyone else thinks (page 197.) As a class, discuss the different ways in which people can let fear of others' opinions influence their behaviour. Brainstorm to think of some things that we can tell ourselves when like Macy, we are finding ourselves worrying about other people's opinions too much. Use the results of your class brainstorming session to create posters showcasing encouraging self-talk everyone can use to help them feel more confident and secure in their own decisions.
- 16) At the end of the story, Macy and Winston find out that Wooba is going to get a grant to build and run a community centre. The community centre will cater to sports, crafts, games, art and writing workshops and maybe even have a gymnasium. If your local area received a grant to build and run a community centre, what types of facilities and activities would you most like to see it have?
- Individually, or in pairs, design your ideal community centre.
  - Be sure to include spaces for the different activities that you think members of your community would enjoy, as well as multi-purpose spaces that can be used for more than one thing.
  - Share your draft design with a friend, and help each other refine and improve your ideas.
  - Think about such things as accessibility, parking, and public toilets when you create your design.
  - Once you are happy with your design, create your final floorplan of the layout, and an artist's impression of one aspect of the building.
  - Write a two to three minute speech that shares the main features of your centre, and outlines the reasons behind your decisions to include these features.
  - Combine your speech, your floorplan, and your artwork to create an audio-visual presentation promoting your new ideal community centre.