

Bobbie Dazzler  
Margaret Wild / Janine Dawson

## TEACHER NOTES

By Janet McLean

Title: Bobbie Dazzler

Author: Margaret Wild

Illustrator: Janine Dawson

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Author: Margaret Wild** was born in South Africa and came to live in Australia in 1972. She worked as a journalist, and then for 16 years as a children's book editor, writing only in small snatches, or at night when she had the energy. She now writes fulltime. Margaret is the author of many popular children's books, including, *Fox* (illustrated by Ron Brooks), *The Pocket Dogs* (illustrated by Stephen Michael King), *Babs The Baby And Fog The Dog* (illustrated by Donna Rawlins), and many others. Margaret's books have received many awards over the years. *Fox* won the Picture Book of the Year in 2001. *Seven More Sleeps* (illustrated by Donna Rawlins) was a CBCA 2005 Honour Book. Margaret's young granddaughter inspired her to write *Bobbie Dazzler*. She says,

*"It's been many years since I've hopped, jumped and skipped – but through my small granddaughter, Olivia, I'm rediscovering these joys. I draw the line, though, at standing on my head. So the idea for Bobbie Dazzler came from me observing Olivia's pleasure as she mastered balancing, doing somersaults and attempting cartwheels. The splits defeated her, however, so I wrote a story for her instead."*

**Illustrator: Janine Dawson** was born and grew up in Manly, Sydney. Janine says she was always a drawer, but never took it seriously. However, after an initial career in theatre she switched to animation after hearing a talk about it at the Sydney College of the Arts. So began a love affair that has lasted more than 20 years. In 1991, Dawson

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began illustrating children's books. Among the many books she has illustrated are the highly successful Lily Quench series by Natalie Jane Prior, Carol Ann Martin's *Dulcie & Dud* stories, *Junkyard Dogs* by Margaret Balderson and *Pudding & Chips* by Penny Matthews. Janine still lives in Manly with her daughter, Rosie, her cats and some very nervous fish!

### **SYNOPSIS**

Bobbie, the wallaby, dazzles her friends, Koala, Wombat and Possum with her extraordinary whirls, twirls, jumps and somersaults. But she can't do the splits. Koala, Wombat and Possum try to console her. They say, "Never mind," But Bobbie does mind – a lot. But she won't give up, and keeps on practising. Until, one day, much to her delight, she succeeds. Koala, Wombat and Possum are inspired by Bobbie's determination. And after *lots* of practice, they all learn to do the splits, too. A warm, simple story about perseverance and friendship.

### **WRITING STYLE**

*Bobbie Dazzler* has a sequential, rhythmic, cumulative plot. In each of three sequences five of Bobbie's accomplishments are detailed – '*Bobbie could jump. And bounce. And skip. She could hop on her left leg. And on her right leg.*' Followed by a problem – '*But she could not do the splits.*' - a comforting word from one of her friends. '*“Never mind,” said Koala*' And finally, Bobbie's response – *But Bobbie minded. A lot.* Then, the pattern and pace of the story changes. Bobbie makes a decision, prepares herself, and achieves her goal: "*Look!*" *she said. "I've done the splits!"* There is an anti-climax when Bobbie gets stuck, and a warm and satisfying conclusion with all of the friends learning to do the splits. The text includes a wonderful assortment of 'movement' words: *hop, jump, balance, whirl, twirl, somersaults, and handsprings*

### **ILLUSTRATIONS**

The wonderful illustrations complement and extend the meaning and mood of the text. Janine Dawson used pen and ink and watercolour in this book. She has created four delightful native animal characters. She says,

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*“When I was doing Bobbie I trotted off a few times to Taronga Zoo here in Sydney and sat down with my sketch book in the native animals enclosure. There were a few magnificent big red Kangaroos, but the ones I was really taken with were the little red-necked wallabies, so that's who Bobbie ended up being.*

The lavish use of white space on each page focuses attention on what the characters are doing, and how they are feeling. Compare pictures of Bobbie’s exuberance and her disappointment. Look at the picture of all of the animals looking out at the sunset – the simple image of Koala’s hand gently resting on Bobbie’s back – caring, warm, no need for words. While the illustrations don’t include detailed backgrounds they do show a range of native plants from the bush in the headland in Sydney where Janine used to play when she was little, and where she still goes a lot for bushwalks.

### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Bobbie loves moving in lots of different ways. Have a movement session with jumping, bouncing, hopping, twirling, whirling, balancing – and all the other feats that Bobbie has already mastered. Accompany movements with a song, percussion instruments, recorded music, eg. *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saens, or a chant, eg: *Bouncing, bouncing here and there. Bouncing, bouncing everywhere.* Include other ways of moving, eg. Dawdling, creeping, shuffling, sliding, rocking, rolling, waddling.
- Bobby Dazzler lends itself perfectly to shared reading. Pace the reading / telling of the story so that the children can join in as they become familiar with the story pattern.
- Dramatise the story. Consider how to portray the emotional content through words, body language and facial expression – the joy and exuberance of achievement, the letdown and disappointment of not succeeding, and the triumph of eventual success. Discuss how Bobbie’s friends show that they care, and consider ways to express this.
- Talk about how Janine Dawson went to Taronga Zoo to draw animals from life. What does she learn about drawing animals by watching them in their own habitat? Eg: the way they move, sit, or lie down.

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- Janine Dawson says, *I especially loved how they would sit on their tails like on the page the second time when she 'minds a lot.'* Look at this picture. Talk about how she has captured how Bobbie is feeling – rounded back, the look on her face, the way she is holding her paws. Have a drawing session where children can draw from life – using animals or people. Talk about using a drawn line to show movement and mood.
- Dr Seuss, E. H. Shephard, and Australian artist, Norman Lindsay are among the illustrators who have influenced Janine Dawson. She says, *“The Koala is my humble tribute to the beautiful Koalas drawn by Norman Lindsay. To my mind he is the master of drawing koalas.”* Find books illustrated by these artists. Compare and contrast their illustrating styles. Look carefully at Norman Lindsay’s drawings of koalas. (He also draws lovely cats).
- Janine Dawson says, *‘There are so many lovely children's book out with gorgeous wombats I'm afraid mine couldn't match up with them (especially the lovely Bruce Whatley ones!), but I did my best...’* She adds, *‘A footnote to children would be, even if you don't think you're up to the task, just do the best you can.’* Talk about persevering, doing lots of rough sketches, discarding lots of ideas, and being happy with the best you can do. Allow lots of time to practice drawing.
- The plants in the pictures are typical Eastern Australia coastal plants. They include: the Native fuchsia, sympathy flannel flowers and bottle brushes, grasstrees and hairpin Banksias ... except for the Kangaroo Paws, and, on the opening page, a Sturt's Desert pea. Find other books with photos or illustrations of Australian native plants. Identify the plants depicted in *Bobby Dazzler*. Find out which State the Kangaroo Paw, and the Sturt’s Desert Pea originate from.
- Talk about how the background pictures extend the story. Consider the delightful, funny depictions of Koala, Wombat and Possum playing cards, having a picnic, and scoring ten out of ten for Bobbie’s splits.
- Find out more information about red-necked wallabies, koalas, wombats and possums.