Ferret Boy by Sue Lawson

Format: Novel
Extent: 256 pp

Overview
Joshua tells the story of how he accepts a bet with the school bully, Scott Mooney. He agrees to race his pet ferret, Bucks, in the Hartley Ferret Derby. Unfortunately, Joshua knows very little about how to train a ferret to race.

Gramps comes to the rescue, to help Josh train Bucks for the big race. It all looked very rosy for Josh, but Gramps suddenly becomes ill with a stroke and Bucks becomes pregnant. Josh learns to deal with these trying times and still resolve his bet with Scott Mooney.

Through reading about Josh’s problems, readers discover important messages about life, through the relationships we have with our family and friends. This realistic novel has a delightfully humorous storyline suited to upper primary students.

Read a review of Ferret Boy on Aussiereviews.com: http://www.aussiereviews.com/article1291.html

Author Profile

Sue Lawson lives with her husband, daughter and rather scruffy Cairn terrier in Colac in Western Victoria. She has worked as a primary teacher, shop assistant, ticket seller, swimming teacher and radio announcer. Sue has a passion for writing, reading and children. She spends time visiting schools and running workshops. She has written three novels: Dragon’s Tear, Ferret Boy and Tessa; and the picture book, My Gran’s Different.

Find out more about Sue Lawson on the Internet.

http://www.scholastic.com.au/Profiles/ProfileDisplay.asp?ProfileId=428

Focus Questions

• How does Scott Mooney bully the children at school? (p 15) What similar/different experiences have you had? How does this help you understand the characters?
• Why do people give nicknames? Discuss the reasons behind the nicknames of different characters in the novel? (p 20)
• How does the author use nicknames and everyday events to create humour in the story? (p 34)
• Is a dare part of the bullying by Scott Mooney? (p 40)
• How does Gramps make Josh feel special? (p 51)
• Why was Josh so upset at visiting the hospital? (p 76)
• Why was Josh’s mum, so proud of him? How did he make a difference with his grandpa? (p 84)
• Why is Josh avoiding visiting Grandpa? Why is he afraid? (p 110)
• Why do Josh and Matt ‘wind’ each other up? (p 129)
• Is Scott Mooney cruel in his ferret training methods? Why/Why not? (p 157)
• Should Josh be honest in enrolling Eddie instead of Bucks for the Ferret Derby? (p 204)
• Why did Josh really give Crusher back to Mooney? (p 255)
• Do you think Josh will be bullied by Mooney again? (p 256) What does this book tell us about bullying?
• Why did Sue Lawson choose this setting for *Ferret Boy*?

**Assessment**

**Self-assessment rubric:** As a class, students brainstorm a set of criteria that they wish to assess. Criteria could include the following:

- place the series of events in chronological order
- identify the different settings used by the author
- use different forms of writing including recounts, conversations, plays, poetry, songs, job descriptions, jokes, interviews, invitations, menus, scripts, letters, emails and diaries
- identify the introduction, complications and resolutions used within the plot
- discuss the different points of view presented in the text
- identify with the characters by relating it to their own real-life experiences
- recognise the different themes and issues used by the author
- determine how characters resolve their problems
- locate and research information using different sources including learning technologies
- discuss ways the author has used language to convey feelings such as happiness, humour, suspicion and embarrassment
- compare different texts written by the same author.

**Mind mapping:** Create a mind map of events, characters and settings and show how they are linked in *Ferret Boy*.

**Opinion survey:** Students answer questions relating to the text. These could include:

- Did you like *Ferret Boy*? Why/Why not?
- What do you think was the funniest part? Why?
- What was the most important part of the story for you? Why?
- What important themes/issues did Sue Lawson discuss in her book?
- What did you learn from reading the book that you didn’t know about before?
- Would you like to read more humorous texts or Sue Lawson’s other books? Why?
- Would you recommend this book to another person? Why? Who?
Peer assessment on use of oral skills: Create a class list of criteria to assess each performance. Discuss what skills are aimed for, so that students know what is expected of them. Skills could be displayed on a reporting sheet upon which peers can jot down notes about the performance. Select a specific skill to focus on during the peer assessment (this often makes it easier to begin with). Include such skills as:

- used expression in their voice
- controlled the volume of their voice.
- looked directly at the audience using eye contact
- answered questions in detail
- kept on track with the talk
- used a variety of sources for their information
- used charts or props to support their talk
- used technology correctly (tape recorders, videos, video cameras).
Activities

READING

Small-group activities

1. Locate websites on ferrets with information to support research tasks. For example, visit http://www.petaquarium.com.au
2. Make a diorama of the ferrets’ shed and tunnels or the Hartley Ferret Derby Day setting.
3. Compile a plot profile of the main events of the novel.
4. Role-play an interview with TV or radio reporters discussing the results of the race.
5. Act out the final race between Josh, Scott, Lillie and Macca.
6. Create a graph of the exciting or humorous events in the book. Also look at the low events, such as bullying, Gramps getting sick and visiting the hospital.

Whole-class activities

1. Why are ferrets so stinky? Predict, research and draw conclusions.
2. Make a glossary of the key words such as: sable (p 32), flank (p 51), expulsion (p 70), stroke (p 73), ICU (p 80), hob (p 47), business (p 48), kits (p 185), harness (p 170), marquee (p 194), lure (p 220), fretted (p 256). Use a dictionary to locate meanings and write a sentence explaining each word.
3. How has Sue Lawson used humour in the novel? Discuss the use of nicknames, funny characters, escapades and family events.
4. What is bullying? What made Scott a bully? What did he learn from losing the race?
5. Compare the similarities and differences between Joshua’s life and Scott’s life. Does this have an effect on the way they act towards others?

Individual activities

1. Create character profiles for Josh, Scott, Gramps, Budgie Woman, Repco and Baz the Bearded Wonder. Include physical characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.
2. Retell one of the main events as a cartoon strip using speech bubbles.
3. Construct a story map of the main events of Ferret Boy, including characters and the different settings.
4. Create a brochure promoting the Hartley Ferret Derby. Include places to visit, times of races, attractions and prizes. (pp 33, 240–56)
5. Create a ‘Get Well’ card for Gramps, explaining why you haven’t visited him and how you are feeling about him being ill.
WRITING

Small-group activities
1. Write a different ending to the story. What might have happened to Bucks and Eddie?
2. Create a Venn diagram to show what Joshua and Gramps have/don’t have in common.
3. Create a small book about one of the humorous events from the book to share with a classmate. For example, when Eddie ran up Budgie woman’s pants (pp 165–6) or when Josh got bitten on the nose (pp 5–8).
4. Invent a new board game such as Snakes and Ladders or Trivial Pursuit using the main events, settings and characters.
5. Compose a chant for Josh’s supporters to call out on race day, using his nickname ‘Ferret Boy’.

Whole-class activities
1. Write ‘Who am I?’ quiz questions for the main characters in the story.
2. Make a list of different animal family names, beginning with the ferret: male – hob; female – jill; baby – kits; family (collective noun) – a business of ferrets. Use resources from the library or websites to create a class chart of different animal family names (collective nouns).
3. Create a chart listing the problems Joshua faced. How did he solve these situations and what were the consequences? Discuss how you may have faced similar bullying situations and how you resolved this problem.
4. Prepare some interview questions for Josh or Scott, either as a TV reporter or Repco, the Principal.

Individual activities
1. Write a set of instructions on how to train a ferret to race. Include equipment, training methods and food.
2. Write a new blurb for the book, using highlights from the story to encourage people to read Ferret Boy.
3. Create a wanted poster for Eddie when he goes missing, including a detailed description.
4. Make a fact file on ferrets. Include facts about the food they eat, where they live, types of ferrets, how to handle them, costs involved and licences needed.
5. Create an acrostic poem on different characters in the text, Derby Day or hospital visits.
6. Create an advertisement for the annual ferret derby.
7. Create a newspaper article on events that took place at the Hartley Ferret Derby.
8. Design a ferret hutch (shed/enclosure). Label its features and explain their uses.
9. Imagining you are Joshua, write a diary entry for each day. Write how you felt about the events that took place.