



**The Horse Who Bit a Bushranger (Animal Stars Book 5)  
By Jackie French**

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Teaching Notes prepared by Christine Sarandis**

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**Book Description**

A story of survival, second chances ... and a dance with danger.

Young Billy Marks is a pickpocket, transported to the penal colony of New South Wales. He and his mate reckon they'll become bushrangers — but that's before Billy's had a chance to see the bush up close. And when he buys the big white brumby stallion, covered with scars but refusing to bend to any man's will, he knows he made the right choice.

Billy's daughter Mattie Jane thinks her father can ride any horse who ever lived ... and so can she! But when tragedy strikes, the Marks clan, including Mattie and her beloved horse, Rebel Yell, will need all the courage they can find to keep the family together.

The deeds and disputed stories of Jackie French's own ancestors inspire another novel — a novel of proud and gutsy horses, trailblazing farmers and their resilient wives, and desperate men forced to break the law to survive.

### **About the Author**

**Jackie French's** writing career spans eighteen years, forty-seven wombats, over 130 books and translations into twenty-three languages. Jackie's picture books, on which she collaborates with Bruce Whatley, have proved outstandingly successful. *Diary of a Wombat*, published in 2002, gained many awards, both in Australia and internationally.

Jackie is one of the few writers to win both literary and children's choice awards, with her historical fiction appearing consistently on the shortlists for the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards. *Pharaoh* was included in 2008's shortlist for Older Readers. *Hitler's Daughter* won the CBCA Award for younger readers in 2000. *A Rose for the Anzac Boys* was named an Honour Book in 2009.

Jackie's award-winning non-fiction includes the account of the Australian involvement in the Apollo 11 moon landing *To the Moon and Back* won the CBCA's Eve Pownall Award for Information in 2005.

Jackie lives near Braidwood in the Araluen Valley, NSW.

For more information on Jackie French, go to:  
<http://www.jackiefrench.com/>

### **PART 1 – 1830 to 1942**

#### **Questions for discussion**

##### **The horse – the King, later known as Conservative**

- How did the horse become King of his mob?
- Why did the King give himself up when his mob was captured by men?
- Despite being held in captivity by the men, what did the King understand his job to be?
- What were the consequences of the King's bid for freedom and why had the men spared him?
- What was the King's immediate fate after old Hogan failed to break him in?
- Once Billy had purchased the King, how did his behaviour towards the horse differ from the previous treatment the horse had received?
- On the long walk back to the farm from the auctions, how did the newly named Conservative come to view his new owner?
- How did Conservative feel the first time Billy rode him?
- What were Conservative's feelings during and shortly following the Forest Race event?

See **General Questions** for more questions about Conservative.

### **The passage to Sydney Town**

- Why did Billy think that pickpocketing was the best choice as a way of life?
- How had Billy and his friend Jem ended up as convicts bound for NSW?
- What was life like for the convicts travelling from Portsmouth to Sydney Cove?
- Whilst still on board the transport ship, what did Jem and Billy dream of?

### **Billy's life in the new land**

- Why was NSW a 'gaol without walls'?
- How did Billy and Jem become separated at Sydney Cove?
- Why did Dargue's foreman tell Billy he was better off not going with Jem?
- What choices did Billy have on the ship in Sydney Harbour?
- How did Billy convince Roman John that he was worth consideration and a second chance at life?

### **Billy's new life under Roman John**

- How were Billy's new surroundings different from home?
- According to Roman John, why were there ghosts along the difficult road they travelled?
- After three months as a shepherd what did Billy like and hate about his life?
- What made Billy rethink his plans to run away from the farm?
- At the horse auctions, why did Billy want the wild stallion when Roman John said it was worthless and destined for the glue factory?
- Why did Billy choose the name 'Conservative' for his new horse?
- How did Billy outsmart the bushranger who tried to rob him?
- Why did the Reverend Hassel have to sack all his workers?

### **Billy's leasing of land and his partnership with Roman John**

- How did Billy meet Annie Lamb?
- Why didn't Roman John approve of Billy's admiration for Annie?
- How did Annie's native American heritage make a difference to her life in England and Australia?
- Why did Billy enter the Forest Races and why did Roman John oppose the idea but support Billy regardless?
- Why was Billy so jubilant after he and Conservative won the race and how were his earlier dreams beginning to be realised?
- Which childhood memories returned to Billy after Mr Goldberg approached him and what was the final outcome of his encounter with the man?
- What exciting changes lay ahead for Billy and Annie after Billy secured a farm?

### **Annie Lamb**

- Why did Annie sometimes wish she had skin the colour of white bread?
- What was one important thing from her past that Annie could not remember?
- Why had 'the man in black' wanted to care for Annie after he found her alone in a village filled with dead people?
- What were Annie's reasons for deciding to move to the colony?
- How did Annie initially feel about Billy and his potential as a husband?
- What were Annie's aspirations for the future?
- Despite not wanting Billy to race, what was Annie's promise regardless of his win or loss?

## **PART 2 1858 to 1870**

### **Mattie Jane**

- Despite her ongoing illness, there were two things Mattie Jane wanted most of all after her mother left. What were they?
- Why was Mattie Jane afraid of her future once Martha had announced she was to be married?
- Which factors contributed to Mattie Jane's feelings of entrapment?
- Describe Mattie Jane's encounter with the bushranger Ben Hall and give an opinion about the promises they made one another?
- Why were Ben Hall's promises so important to Mattie Jane?
- When Ahmed bought news of Ben Hall's death, what was Mattie Jane's response and why?
- Despite her grief following the bushranger's death, which factors gave Mattie Jane renewed hope for a better future?

### **Rebel Yell**

- How did Rebel Yell feel and respond when Mattie Jane climbed onto his back and rode him for the first time?
- Following Annie's departure, what changes amongst the people and the family home did Rebel Yell notice?
- How did Rebel Yell feel about his new life and master, Ben Hall?
- How did Rebel Yell's feel when his second master died?

### **Billy**

- How did Billy feel when Mattie Jane came to meet him riding Rebel Yell?
- At the beginning of Part 2, what had occurred in Billy and Annie's life together since they married?
- How did Billy change after his beloved wife Annie left him?
- What made Billy challenge his son Richard to a race?

### **Richard**

- According to Richard, how had Billy died and what reasons did his siblings and the police have for mistrusting him?
- After the death of his father and Annie's return, how was Richard's life forever changed?
- Do you think Richard did kill his father? Why? If you think he was guilty, how would you think he would feel about his father's death as he grew older?
- If Richard was innocent, how do you think the suspicion that he killed his father might affect his life?

### **Annie**

- What effect had community prejudice had on Annie and her family?
- Do you think Annie should have left her family? Once she had left, should she have come back?
- Why did Annie give Ben Hall a second chance and offer him Rebel Yell? What else did she give him?

### **Ben Hall**

- Why was Ben Hall fearful, even of his friends?
- What had caused him to lose the passion for thieving?
- What did the bushranger hope to gain by robbing the guests at the ball?
- How did he feel about the second chance that Annie provided?
- How and why was Ben Hall murdered?

### **General Questions**

- What did Billy, Annie, Ben Hall, Richard, Mattie Jane, Conservative and Rebel Yell all have in common that somehow linked them and gave their lives renewed meaning and purpose?
- Describe Billy's reaction to the news that his best friend Jem had died soon after arriving in the colonies. Why did he experience such mixed emotions?
- In Part 2 we learn that Conservative had died in 1857. What was his legacy and how had Billy and his family honoured and remembered him?
- Imagine what Mattie Jane's future might look like following her planned marriage at the end of the novel and write a description of what you imagine it might be like.

### **Projects and activities**

- Life on transport ships — choose one or more of the following topics to research and create a project on — health, food, conditions, work.
- Life in the colonies — choose a role such as that of a convict, bushranger, land owner, shearer or cook and research what their daily life would have been like

in the colonies. You could present your project in diary format or any other chosen presentation method.

- Discuss and research the way in which the treatment of animals can affect both their behaviour and well being and write about the way in which Conservative changed once he was treated with kindness rather than cruelty. Also discuss and explain whether this is any different from human to human behaviour?
- Second chances — discuss the meaning of the term ‘second chances’ and give examples from the book in which this occurred and the consequences.
- Gender divisions in 1800s Australia — In the novel men and women have very different roles in life. Choose one of the characters from the story and write about the work they were required to do and describe how that work was related to their gender. (E.g. Elijah helped Mattie Jane out with washing, ‘even though he was a boy’. pg. 180)
- Choose one of the bushrangers from Australian history and write a police report about him.
- Find out about Ben Hall and describe how he was different from many bushrangers. Create a PowerPoint presentation about his life and death.
- Research and write about the history of horses in Australia and their role as workers in the colonies.
- Research and write a history of brumbies. How were brumbies regarded back in 1860? What do people think about them now?
- Discuss your family history with parents or grandparents and see how far back your family can be traced. Write about your own ancestors, including details about where they came from, why they came, where they lived and what work they did. Choose a presentation method that you haven’t used before
- Australia used to be a land where it was easy to reinvent your past. Discuss some of the ‘pasts’ that people who came to Australia as convicts, in the Gold Rush, or after World War Two, might have wanted to get away from.
- Discuss the language of the convicts and how it differed from that of gentlemen. E.g. Roman John had changed his speech to improve his prospects, something Billy also tried to do. What else did Billy change in order to be viewed more favourably?
- Does the way people speak affect the way people think about them today? What about the way people dress?
- Paint a picture of the ball scene in which Ben Hall disturbed the party.
- Re-enact the scene at the ball in which Ben Hall disrupts the party. Alternatively, choose another scene from the book to recreate dramatically.
- Sketch, paint or model your impressions of Conservative or his son Rebel Yell being ridden by Mattie Jane.
- Discuss the foods that the characters in the story ate and the food of the times in general. Then make damper (and spread with lashings of butter and jam) to share in class:

### **How to Make Damper**

Damper is the Aussie version of Irish soda bread. These days Irish Soda Bread is made with self raising flour or baking powder, but the first white settlers to Australia arrived before either was invented. In those days Irish soda bread was made by mixing some wood ash, or lye- water dripped through wood ash- into flour. When the alkaline lye and flour was mixed with acidic buttermilk the 'soda bread' rose up to be rich, light and crusty. Warning: don't try this, except with thick gloves - water strained through wood ash can 'burn' your fingers and be dangerous if splashed into your eyes.

The new colony however had few cows- and most of those escaped - and no good cooks. Damper was made with flour, weevils and water and cooked in the ashes, which is how it got its name - the fire was 'damped down' when you raked away the hot coals, threw in the dough, then raked the coals back over it. Half an hour later you thrust in your spade, shovelled out the damper, whisked off the ash with a bullock's tail (preferably without the bullock attached), broke the crust and dripped on golden syrup or 'cockies' joy' or 'bush honey' from a wild hive.

Gradually the dampers became something you'd really want to eat. Wheat was stored in siloes so they flour no longer became mildewed or full of rat droppings and weevils. When self raising flour was invented in the 1840's it meant you no longer had to know how to make lye from wood ash. Camp ovens- metal pots shoved into the coals, with more coals loaded on top so the damper browned evenly- meant that you didn't have to eat ash with your damper.

A good cook knew exactly when the coals were right so their damper was neither burnt nor soggy. They knew how much water to add as well- too much made it heavy, too little and you got dry crumbly damper and insults like 'Who called the cook a (add your favourite insult here)? Who called the (add your favourite insult here) a cook?'

A bad damper is hard enough to break your dentures, heavy as a bag of wet manure, and just about as tasty. But when damper's good- hot and soft and doughy- it's pure magic.

PS: If you add sugar and fruit and spices you've turned your damper into 'brownie'. If you fry rounds of damper in fat in your frying pan you've made 'Johnnie cakes'. And if you wrap the dough around green sticks and cook them over the fire (see below) you've made 'sinkers'.

## **Damper Recipe**

### Ingredients:

3 cups of self raising flour  
4 tbsp of butter, cooking oil or mutton dripping  
1 cup of water (or buttermilk or coconut milk - either makes the damper sweeter and moister. Buttermilk damper was mostly made on farms where there was a cow, and coconut milk damper is a Northern Australian tradition)

Optional: half cup currants, and/or half cup chopped dates, and/or 1 tsp cinnamon, and/ or 1 tsp mixed spice, and/ or quarter cup mixed peel and /or half a cup of sugar

Extra butter and flour

You also need:

a good fire, burnt down to lots of coals

a spade

a camp oven, billy or a large tin can and alfoil

Mix self raising flour (and spices and fruit if you are using them), butter and liquid with a knife till all the flour is incorporated. This is the secret of a light, fluffy damper- knead as little as possible! Don't worry if the butter is still a bit lumpy- it will melt and mix in while it cooks.

Now rub the extra butter over the bottom and sides of the camp oven, or the sides and base of the billy or tin can. Add the extra flour and shake it around till the flour coats the butter. There shouldn't be any gaps or your damper may stick to the edges. Roll the damper into a ball and put it in the camp oven. Make sure the damper doesn't take up more than a third of the space as it'll expand.

Put the lid on the oven or find a rock to cover the billy or tin, or use alfoil.

Scrape the coals from the fire. Now place the oven, billy or can where the coals were. Scrape the coals back OVER the billy or camp oven - all around and on top as well. (Damper cooked on top of the fire gets a hard burnt bottom and a raw middle). Leave your damper to cook for three quarters of an hour, then use a spade to bring it out of the ashes.

Eat your damper straight away - they don't keep well - with butter or just a trickle of golden syrup. Damper is also good with jam and cream (even old doormats are better with jam and cream)

### In the Oven

Preheat the oven to 275C - this is important, as damper placed in a cold oven will be heavy. Place the dough on a greased and floured tray, make two deep cuts in the top (this helps the dough to expand) and bake till the crust is pale brown and it sounds hollow when you tap it. This should take about 30 minutes.

### **Sinkers**

Sinkers need less experience than good damper.

Make the damper dough above. Now find some clean green sticks.

Use your (clean) fingers to press the dough out like a small, thickish pancake. Roll it around a stick and press the edges together.

Hold your stick out over the fire and turn it every now and then till the sinker is brown.

Don't hold the dough too close to the fire or the outside will burn and so will your fingers, and the inside of your sinker will be raw and doughy.

Eat your sinkers quickly while they are still hot, with butter or just with golden syrup or honey, or dip them into the gravy of your stew.

### Author's notes

- Read and discuss the notes at the back of the novel.



- In particular discuss the author's connection with the people and places of the story and the combined impact of fact and fiction in making this story interesting and enjoyable for the reader.
- According to the author, why did bushranging die out?
- Choose one of the topics discussed in the 'notes' to research and write about and share your presentation with the class.

### **Further Reading – Books by Jackie French**

#### **Books in the Animal Stars series**

- *The Goat Who Sailed the World*
- *The Dog Who Loved a Queen*
- *The Camel Who Crossed Australia*
- *The Donkey Who Carried the Wounded*

#### **Historical Fiction**

- *Hitler's Daughter*
- *Tom Appleby, Convict Boy*
- *They Came on Viking Ships*
- *The White Ship*
- *How the Finnegans Saved the Ship*
- *The Soldier on the Hill*
- *Daughter of the Regiment*
- *Walking the Boundaries*
- *Beyond the Boundaries*
- *Somewhere around the Corner*
- *Valley of Gold*
- *They Came on Viking Ships*
- *Macbeth and Son*
- *Pharaoh*
- *A Rose for the Anzac Boys*
- *The Night They Stormed Eureka*

#### **Horse stories by other authors**

- Horse Mad series by Kathy Helidoniotis
- *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell
- *The Silver Brumby* by Elyne Mitchell
- *Flambards* series by K M Peyton
- *Follyfoot* series by Monica Dickens
- *National Velvet* by Enid Bagnold
- *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley
- *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* by Paul Goble
- *Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand
- *For Sale and Swap, Beginner's Luck, Hot Potato, Hide & Seek, Greener Pastures* by Alyssa Brugman

### **Other books about convicts and early colonization of Australia**

- See examples in the historical fiction list above, also by Jackie French
- *Riding With Thunderbolt - The Diary of Ben Cross* by Allan Baillie
- *A Banner bold: the diary of Rosa Aarons, Ballarat goldfields, 1854*, by Nadia Wheatley
- Books by Mark Greenwood such as *Ned Kelly and the Green Sash* or *The Legend of Moondyne Joe*  
<http://www.markgreenwood.com.au/bookshelf.html>

### **Research Links**

#### **History of horses in Australia**

<http://www.australianstockhorsesusa.com/pages/history-of-ash.php>

<http://library.thinkquest.org/03oct/00128/en/horses/history.htm>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_Stock\\_Horse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Stock_Horse)

#### **Facts about horses**

<http://www.kathyhelidoniotis.com/>

#### **Ben Hall and other Bushrangers**

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/benhall/>

<http://www.australianhistory.org/ben-hall.php>

#### **Convicts and the British Colonies in Australia**

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/convicts/>

#### **The Australian Gold Rush**

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/goldrush/>

<http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/cms/wp-content/uploads/teachers-resources/factsheets/MHC-Gold.pdf>

#### **Consumption & Tuberculosis**

Consumption- A wasting disease often caused by tuberculosis.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuberculosis>

#### **Wild Brumbies and the role of horses in the colony**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brumby>

[http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover\\_collections/society\\_art/races/horse/index.html](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/society_art/races/horse/index.html)

#### **Migration history timeline**

<http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/objects-through-time/essays/1840-1900/>