

Teacher's Notes



Polly and Buster

Written and illustrated by Sally Rippin
Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Primary-aged readers (ages 7+, grades 3-4)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - ACELA1501
 - ACELT1610
 - ACELT1618

THEMES

- Friendship
- Empathy and understanding
- Celebrating difference
- Kindness
- Courage
- Standing up for what you believe in

SYNOPSIS

Polly and Buster have always been best friends – Polly makes Buster turn pink with happiness, and Buster makes Polly feel completely safe. But everyone knows that witches and monsters aren't supposed to be friends with each other. So, Polly and Buster have to keep their friendship a secret. But when Polly is on an excursion to the museum and sees her best friend getting teased by the other monsters and casts a powerful spell to protect him, she inadvertently triggers an all-out war between witches and monsters, and soon the two friends find themselves on the run.

With the help of Polly's favourite teacher, Miss Spinnaker, and some other friends along the way, Polly and Buster need to find a way to show everyone that witches and monsters can be friends, and they need to do it before it's too late.

In this award-winning trilogy, Polly and Buster discover that sometimes being a good friend means being brave enough to stand up for the things (and people) you really believe in. Polly learns secrets about her family and her power that might just help her save everyone from the power-hungry gorman. And Buster realises that being a feelings monster might just be the best thing a monster can be.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Rippin was born in Darwin but grew up mainly in South-East Asia. She has a very clear memory of herself as a child. She remembers the details of her primary school years with surprising clarity: the trials, the treasons, the tribulations, as well as all the lovely things that exist in childhood friendships. Perhaps this is the main reason behind why she is the successful author and illustrator of over 50 published children's books; many of them award winning, including two novels for young adults. She aims to write stories with heart.

Her most recent books include the best-selling Billie B Brown early-reader series and its recent spin-offs, A Billie B Mystery, Billie's Adventures and Hey Jack! series. These are quality stories with characters that have struck a chord with children, their parents, teachers and librarians alike, and has gone on to cement Sally's position as Australia's highest selling female author, third-highest selling children's author, and eighth-highest selling author overall.

Sally's brand-new junior-fiction series Polly and Buster is very close to her heart as it's a story she's wanted to write for some time. As a bonus to fans, Sally – who spent three years studying fine art in China as a young adult – has stunningly illustrated Polly and Buster herself!

THEMES

More than anything, *Polly and Buster* is about friendship. Polly and Buster's friendship is so special because they've known each other for so long, and because they always look out for each other. But that doesn't mean that it's perfect! Over the three stories Polly faces plenty of challenges in her friendship with Buster that will be familiar to readers. Polly learns how to:

- Put her friendship with Buster ahead of her popularity
- Say sorry when she upsets Buster in order to fit in
- Make Buster feel happy when he's sad
- Be a good friend to people who might not deserve it

Because of their friendship, Polly and Buster also learn how to make each other brave and give each other the confidence to tackle problems with confidence instead of fear. Readers will easily be able to explore their own experiences of fear, friendship and failure against the gentle adventure that Polly and Buster undertake together.

WRITING STYLE

In addition to the themes explored above, Sally Rippin's writing shows a deep understanding of the difficulties children have when it comes to reading and comprehension. Although the stories capture the complexity and nuance of their themes, the language is conversational and familiar, with visual elements breaking up the page (including pictures, illustrative text, and different colour backgrounds). These difficulties are also acknowledged in the story itself – although witches are seen as more educated and sophisticated than monsters, Polly struggles with her spells, and finds that when she tries to read the words swim on the page in front of her. Through Polly, Sally Rippin highlights the significance of good teachers – the relief that Polly feels in book two, when her beloved Miss Spinnaker reveals that she too was terrible at spells in school, is palpable, and again when she tells Buster that she struggles to read, and he shows



empathy and kindness rather than judgement. Leading by example, these stories show readers how they might support each other through similar struggles and helps them to feel less shame about asking for help.

These stories also introduce key storytelling concepts such as metaphor and simile, which are often used to show the way that Polly or Buster are feeling in a scene.

COMPREHENSION

- What goes wrong when Polly tries to read her spells?
- Why is Buster called a 'feelings monster'? Is this considered a good thing for a monster to be?
- Why is it forbidden for Polly and Buster to be friends?
- Why does Polly tell Malorie that she hates monsters? How does this make Buster feel?
- Where does Polly get the precious stones that guide her through the second book?
- What does the gorvan feed on? Why does Mrs Halloway hate monsters so much?
- What do Polly and Buster do in book two that surprises the monsters who capture them? How does this help them later in the story?
- Describe the way that Polly feels when she is reunited with her father in the second book? Why does she have to say goodbye to him again?
- What is something that witches say about monsters that isn't true. Why do they say it?
- What power do Polly and Buster use to defeat the garvon?
- What is so special about both Polly and her Aunt Hilda? What does Aunt Hilda do in book three that makes Polly so disappointed in her?
- What does true courage look like? How do Polly and Buster each demonstrate courage?
- Does Mrs Halloway deserve their forgiveness in book three?
- Why is it important to have a monster Mayor *and* a witch Mayor? Is it possible for one person to make good decisions for everyone?
- What is the big problem that Polly and Buster overcome in each book? What is the big problem that stretches across all three books?
- Can you think of any real-world examples where people behave like the witches and monsters in the books? How would Polly and Buster handle these situations? What could we learn from them?

WRITING EXERCISE

Write your own adventure for Polly and Buster to go on together. Try to answer the following questions in your story.

- What is the problem for them to overcome?
- What other characters will help them (and how)?
- Who will stand in their way?
- How will their friendship help them to solve the problem?

ILLUSTRATION EXERCISE



As a feelings monster, Buster becomes bigger and brighter when he's happy, and smaller and grey when he's sad. Draw a picture of the biggest, brightest Buster you can imagine, and the thing that's making him so happy!

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Choose your favourite chapter from one of the *Polly and Buster* books and stage a performance of it in class. You will need to:
 - a. Write a script
 - b. Make costumes
 - c. Learn your lines
 - d. Draw backdrops for your set
2. In the first book, when Buster overhears Polly say that she hates monsters, he leaves without saying a word. Rewrite this scene from Buster's point of view, starting when he arrives at Polly's window and then following him after he's heard her talking to Malorie. How do his feelings change? What happens to him? What does he do?
3. When Polly is facing Mrs Halloway and the gorvan, she needs Buster to help give her the strength to defeat them. Write about a time you've needed the support of a friend to overcome something difficult. What did they do or say to help you? How did you show them what their help meant to you?
4. Polly and Buster show all of the witches and monsters that kindness and love are more powerful than anger and fear. Look at the world around you, and choose a situation that could be made better with empathy and love (It might be something big like climate change or refugees in detention, or something that you're personally struggling to overcome). What would you change about this situation if you had the power?
5. The letters 'm' and 'w' are used to divide people in the story – can you design a symbol or illustration that could bring the witches and monsters together.
6. When Polly defeats Mrs Halloway she uses **empathy** to know what to do. What does empathy mean? How have you shown empathy? Try to understand why Mrs Halloway behaves the way she does by writing the 'bad experience' she had with a monster as a child.

RELATED READING

Rainbow Grey by Laura Ellen Anderson

Skunk and Badger by Amy Timberlake

Sophia and the Corner Park Clubhouse by Davina Bell

