

These notes are for:

- 5+ years
- Primary

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Art and Craft

Example of:

- Illustrated Fiction

Experience of:

- Thinking Outside the Square
- Crafts
- Archaeology
- Plotting

Values addressed:

- Resourcefulness
- Creativity
- Friendship

Themes:

- Family
- Creative Thinking
- Determination
- Imagination

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot - Overview

Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot (HB)

By Anna Branford
 Illustrated by Sarah Davis
 ISBN: 9781921529177
 ARRP: \$19.95
 NZRRP: \$22.99
 Pages: 112
 November 2010



Outline:

Violet Mackerel thinks she would **QUITE LIKE** to own the blue China bird at the Saturday markets.
 This is not just a **SILLY WISH**.
 It is instead the start of a **VERY IMPORTANT** idea.
 But what she needs is a **PLOT**.
 A **BRILLIANT** plot.

Introducing readers to a new warm and loveable character, *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot* is a story not to be missed.

Author Information:

Anna Branford was born in the Isle of Man and spent her early childhood in Sudan and Papua New Guinea before moving to Australia. Creative writing was her favourite subject at school and she wrote stories in all these different countries. Anna is a doll maker and a sociology lecturer at Victoria University. *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot* is her first published work for Walker Books Australia.

Illustrator Information:

Sarah Davis grew up in New Zealand, wearing gumboots and falling in rivers. She worked as a secondary school teacher before moving to Sydney. Sarah is a very busy, award-winning artist who has collaborated with a number of leading authors in Australia, New Zealand and America, including Jennifer Poulter *Mending Lucille* (Lothian), for which Sarah won the 2009 Children's Book Council of Australia's Crichton Award for Best New Illustrator. Most recently, Sarah's title *Fearless*, written by Colin Thompson, was short-listed for the 2010 Children's Book Council of Australia Awards and has won numerous Children's Choice awards.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

www.violetmackerel.com

Anna Branford on writing *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot*:

"Violet Mackerel began to grow in my imagination on a very early morning when I was setting up my own stall at a beautiful outdoor market. There was a bonfire, the smell of hot chocolate and poffertjes, and even though the sun was rising, there were still stars in the sky. I saw some sleepy children rugged up with hats and scarves, helping their families to set up their stalls, and I started wondering who they were and what their lives were like. Before I knew it, my mind was all full of Mackerels."

Sarah Davis's inspiration for *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot*:

"I fell in love with Violet as soon as I started reading the story – I like the way she thinks. I was quite similar to Violet when I was little, although perhaps a bit naughtier. I particularly love the way the story focuses on small things, like wanting the china bird and finding the red button. That's how I remember feeling when I was small – every little thing had its own personality and significance. To Violet these little things are very important and fill her whole world – and she's right, because in the end they do prove to be big things after all, for her whole family. When we went to the beach as kids, my younger sister would collect the tiniest shells she could find, and when I was drawing Violet sifting through dirt for treasure, I thought of my sister's clever little fingers sorting through her beautiful shells. Also, Violet's mum ended up looking a lot like my mum did when I was Violet's age! I didn't plan that – it just happened."

Classroom activities for *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot*:

Before Reading *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot*:

- Think about the title of the book. A "brilliant plot" could mean at least two different things. In groups, discuss what its meaning might be in this case.
- Take a close look at the picture of Violet on the cover of the book. What sort of person do you think she might be? Ask students to create a character profile for her, including interests, ideas and likes/dislikes she might have.
- Look carefully at the cover of the book. It offers quite a few clues about the story inside. What are they? Ask students to try writing a story that includes these clues.

Guided Reading Activities:

- On the first page of the story, p. 7, it is explained that Violet has a theory. What is a theory? Ask students if they know any famous theories.
- P. 10 introduces you to Violet's family. Ask students to draw a family tree for the Mackerels, guessing the ages of the characters in the story so far.
- Look carefully at the illustration on p. 13. What clues does it contain about the life and personality of the man who never smiles? Ask students to create a character profile for him, based entirely on this picture.
- On p. 14, Violet has the thought that the man who never smiles might be an archaeologist. Encourage students to look up the definition of archaeology and consider what the job of an archaeologist might involve.
- At the end of the first chapter, "The Red Button", Violet sees a red button on the ground at the market. Discuss why this might be an important event in the story and what it could mean.
- On p.17, Violet discovers that she very badly wants to own the blue china bird. Ask students if they can relate to a sudden desire to own something. Encourage them to write a short piece about how this feels.
- In Chapter 2, "The Important Idea", readers learn about the ways Violet's brother and sister make money to buy the things they want. Ask students to form groups and pool their own ideas about how children can make money, including their own experiences of success or disappointment.
- On p. 25, there is a blank "thinking square" and on pp. 31-32 you see how Violet uses the square to think through her problem of wanting the blue china bird. Ask students to draw a square each and try using it to solve a problem of their own.
- On p. 37, Nicola says that, "if she hears Dylan's Christmas carol one more time, she will chop off her own head". What does she want to communicate by using this expression? See if students can compile a list of other expressions Nicola could have used to convey her frustration.



- At the beginning of Chapter 4, "The Mind's Eye", Violet's mum is learning the French words for some colours. If you are trying to learn new words, it can be helpful to think of a trick to help you remember. For example, if you want to remember that the French word for pink is "rose", you could try to picture a big pink rose in your mind's eye and if you want to remember that the French word for red is "rouge", you could imagine someone dusting bright red rouge on their cheeks. Ask students to see if they can devise tricks for remembering some other colours in French:
 - Black ("noir", pronounced *nwah*)
 - White ("blanc", pronounced *blong*)
 - Blue ("bleu", pronounced *bluh*)
 - Grey ("gris", pronounced *gree*)
 - Purple ("violet", pronounced *vee-oh-lay*)
 The two colours Violet's mum is working on are red and green. Working as a group, see how many different languages students know these two colours in.
- On p. 40, you see a small note Violet's mum has written, which says, "If You Can See It, You Can Be It". Violet's mum also explains what she thinks it means. Encourage a debate between students, with some arguing that the message is true and some arguing that it is false. See what kinds of conclusions can be drawn.
- On pp. 40-41, Violet and her mum talk about the idea of the "mind's eye". Ask students to draw or paint a self-portrait that includes a representation of a mind's eye and encourage them to reflect on what the concept means.
- Look at the illustrations on pp. 42-43. They include some postcards that Violet imagines sending to her mum if she was away on an archaeological dig. Ask students to look at the postcards and try to figure out which countries they are from.
- On pp. 45-47, Violet imagines herself becoming famous. Ask students if they would like to be famous and if so, what for? Encourage a discussion on why this might be such a popular daydream for so many people.
- At the beginning of Chapter 6, "The Slight Disaster", Violet finds that her hopes and wishes "seem to swirl and drain away like dirty bathwater". This is a simile that expresses part of Violet's sudden disappointment. Ask students to compile their own list of original similes that could be used to describe the feeling of hope fading away.
- On pp. 64-65, Violet and her mum explore ideas to solve the problem of a garden with most of its grass ruined. Ask students to draw a plan of the garden and develop their own design for solving the problem.
- On p. 66, Violet and her mum decide to plant some bulbs in the newly turned soil. The reader learns that, "it is actually just the right time of year for planting them". Drawing on the students' general knowledge of plants and gardening, encourage them to guess what time of year it is.
- In Chapter 7, "The Leg Warmer", Violet tries to learn to knit. Violet's mum encourages her to say, "Through, loop, forward and flick." Ask students if they know any other ideas or rhymes that help people learn to knit, or if they can develop any of their own. Encourage those who can knit to teach other class members.
- Look at the illustrations on pp. 75-76. Ask students to consider some terms to describe the feelings Violet and her mum are experiencing.
- On p. 96, Vincent tells Violet that he is a backpacker. Ask students to form groups and arrive at a definition for this role. What does it mean and what does it entail?

After reading *Violet Mackerel's Brilliant Plot*:

- Ask students to apply Violet's Theory of Finding Small Things to their own lives for a morning or an afternoon and document the results. What small things did they find? What were they thinking at the exact moment they spotted the things? What could it mean, if Violet's theory is right?
- Set students the task of devising their own theory. Encourage them to develop their ideas through peer review and to consider how each of the theories could be tested.
- Violet finds an interesting use for her Mum's failed legwarmer, and turns it into a Tubular Scarf. Ask the students to find a common object like a fork or a book and brainstorm with the class to create a list of its potential uses. Be open to all ideas – the crazier the better! Go beyond the obvious to find zany or hilarious uses for the object. Write all the ideas down and set challenges like, "Let's think of three more!" Ask probing questions like, "What might an alien do with it?" and "What if it was made of a different material?" Follow up with an individual task where each student picks an object and brainstorms alternative uses for it.

Check out Violet's very own website for fun
 activities, downloads and more ...
www.violetmackerel.com



Violet Mackerel

Design a China Bird



Photocopy the bird template onto card. *Decorate* with collage, sequins, glitter, crayon, pencils and paint, or *anything else that inspires.*

Punch a hole in the top and hang the bird from the ceiling, or a tree branch.

