

# George the Wombat

TEACHING NOTES



# BEFORE READING

- As a class look closely at the cover and title and discuss what you can learn about a book from its cover. What type of story do you think this will be? (The photographic cover suggests nonfiction, but the title could suggest fiction.)
- Discuss conventions of nonfiction (table of contents, glossary, page numbers, title, photographs/pictures, diagrams, and labels) and fiction (setting, plot development, conflict, descriptive language, themes, point of view, characters, characterisation).
- Where do you think this story might be set, and what makes you think this?
- Read the writing on the back cover: What is the purpose of a back-cover blurb?

# DURING READING

- Chart what students already know about wombats. Add additional facts located during subsequent research or as you progress through the text.
- Create a vocabulary wallchart to record new and interesting words as they are encountered in the text or in wider reading.



# AFTER READING

## TEXT TYPES

- Look closely at different kinds of nonfiction and discuss where this book fits with them.
  - **Traditional nonfiction** includes writing that gives readers an overview of an entire topic. It is great to use to gauge interest in or to begin researching a topic. Readers who don't need specific details but who want to get a general feel for something will enjoy traditional nonfiction.
  - **Expository nonfiction** is great for investigating a specific subject. It takes a unique point of view and examines a specialised concept. Readers who want an entertaining look at a specific topic will gravitate towards expository nonfiction.
  - **Narrative nonfiction** is a true story written in the style of a fictional story.
  - **Browsable nonfiction** allows young readers to explore topics of interest in a fun way, without the stress of longer chapter books. Based on the popular magazine format of quirky, fun facts that many young readers love.
- If possible, gather a range of information texts on wombats and have students examine these, comparing and contrasting them to this text. Discuss how authors have treated the same subject matter differently.
- Ask students to write a fictional narrative about a wombat. Discuss how their story will differ from the approach used in this book. Highlight that the knowledge they have gained about wombats from this book could help them to write a fictional piece.

# COMPREHENSION

Test knowledge gained from reading the book by asking:

- What type of animal is a wombat?
- Where do wombats live?
- What is special about the way a mother wombat digs a burrow?
- How did George become an orphan?
- How was George lucky to be saved?
- What did George need to survive?
- What became George's favourite food?
- Where was George's favourite place to be?
- What important work is done by The Australian Reptile Park?

# ANIMAL CLASSIFICATION

- Create a class diagram of animal classifications, identifying what traits they have in common:

- **vertebrates:** fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals (marsupials, placentals, monotreme)



- **invertebrates:** including sponges, flatworms, jellyfish, starfish, shrimp, snails, spiders, and scallops.



- Ask students where George would sit in this diagram and why.

# THE AUSTRALIAN REPTILE PARK

- Have students research The Australian Reptile Park and discuss why it is such an important Australian institution.
  - See <https://www.reptilepark.com.au>
- Wombats in the wild have significantly declined in numbers. They are losing their natural habitats to development and agriculture. Additionally, they are often killed by cars or dogs, and their young are taken by predators. Ask students to find out what other Australian animals are endangered and to prepare a fact file on an endangered animal of their choice.
- Students could also create illustrated posters of their animals of choice, aimed at drawing attention to their plight.
- If possible, arrange for students to visit The Australian Reptile Park or an animal conservation group to see firsthand the important work they do.
- Celebrate **International Wombat Day on October 22 each year.**



# WOMBAT FACT FILE



## DESCRIPTION

- The common wombat has short, rounded ears, a large, hairless nose, and coarse, thick fur.
- Wombats have powerful, strong claws for digging burrows.
- Their pouches open to the rear, so they don't fill with soil while they are digging.
- Their rump is protected by a bony plate that acts as a shield. They use this part of their bodies to block their burrows to keep predators out.
- Wombats are big, solid animals and adults can weigh over 30 kilograms.
- In summer, they are mostly nocturnal. In winter when it is not as hot, they will come out during the day.
- Wombats do share their burrows with other wombats but usually only one is home at a time.
- Although they are not territorial in where they sleep, they are territorial about feeding areas.
- They scent mark their feeding territories and defend them aggressively.
- Wombats come in different shades of grey and brown, depending on where they live.
- They sometimes suffer from a mange that can make them very sick.
- A group of wombats is called a wisdom.
- Wombat poo is cube shaped!
- Wombats can run as fast as 40 kilometres per hour.
- Wombats' teeth do not stop growing. They wear them down by eating hard roots and tough grass to keep them short.
- Threats to wombats are humans who don't want wombats on their land; loss of habitat from farming and development; car strikes; and foxes or wild dogs.

## HABITAT

- Wombats prefer the forests of temperate south-eastern Australia, including alpine areas.
- They also inhabit coastal habitats and heathland.
- They live in burrows, which can be up to 20 metres long with several burrow systems they use at different times.
- Wombats prefer to dig their burrows in the slopes above creeks, to prevent them flooding.

## DIET

- Wombats eat mainly native grasses, green leafy plants, and plant roots. They forage at night.
- A wombat may travel several kilometres each night in search of food.



## REPRODUCTION

- Wombats reach sexual maturity at the age of two years.
- They have no specific mating season.
- Usually only one young is born and will remain in the mother's pouch for around six months.
- They then stay with the mother for almost another year.



# George the Wombat

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