



# The Wolf in the Wardrobe by Susan Brocker

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*The Wolf in the Wardrobe* is the fourth novel for Kiwi kids and teenagers by Susan Brocker following *Restless Spirit* and the bestselling *Saving Sam* and *Dreams of Warriors*. Her books absolutely delight and fascinate young readers, and this skilfully crafted novel will be no exception. The story highlights the absolute commitment and respect that caring humans can have towards animals. This commitment is exemplified by Finn, a young teenage boy, who finds and cares for an injured wolf who has escaped from an unpleasant and fearful life in a circus. The uneasy historical relationship between wolves and humans is explored and highlighted as the relationship between Finn and the wolf develops. As more family members become aware of the wolf's existence, this dynamic becomes increasingly important in the story. Finn's unwavering love and concern for the wolf is cleverly used as a device that helps heal a mildly dysfunctional family and enables them to display the best parts of human nature as they unite to seek resolution to a common cause — the future welfare and safety of the wolf. Joy and optimism are mixed with palpable tension, making this gripping and fast-moving tale simply impossible to put down.

### Story synopsis

Finn falls from his bike to avoid a large dog leaping across the road in front of him. The dog is hit by a car and runs off. Knowing he must take the injured animal to the vet clinic, Finn searches the bush and discovers the animal. It is a yellow-eyed wolf called Lupa that Finn recently saw in a circus. He remembered the fear in the eyes of Lupa and the other wolf, Lupus, as they performed for a creepy clown named Cackles. He also remembers reading that Lupus was recently put down after he bit Cackles during a performance. Finn realizes that the undernourished and injured Lupa has escaped the clown's cruelty and that Cackles would be looking for her. To protect Lupa's identity, he tells the vet that his injured 'dog' is a Siberian Husky. After using all his savings to pay the vet and buy food for Lupa, he decides to conceal the wolf in his wardrobe as he knows his mother will call the pound. Finn's grandmother, Nana Eva, an early Alzheimer's sufferer, discovers the wolf. Finn swears her to secrecy and she too, along with Finn, builds up a rapport with the healing and increasingly trusting Lupa. Nana believes her to be Molly, a dog she had many years ago. The presence of Lupa is revealed to Finn's mother when she arrives at Finn's rugby match where Nana has taken Lupa for a walk. It is only when Finn uses Lupa to locate Nana when she goes missing at night that his mother agrees that Finn can keep what she believes to be a large dog. At a 'food for Lupa' fund-raising activity, Finn comes face to face with Cackles the evil clown, who demands Finn hand over Lupa's gem-studded collar otherwise he will steal and kill 'the dog'. Finn finds the collar is valued at \$250,000 and at a family conference involving Finn's father, his partner Pam, and Finn's mother, they decide to call the police. Finn explains all, and Lupa is moved to his father's farm for safety. Through extensive wolf research, Finn knows Lupa (who is found to be having pups) must be returned to the wild, and he arranges with Dr Shapiro in the USA to have her released with other wolves in Yellowstone National Park. The police discover that the valuable stones in the collar were stolen by Cackles from a bracelet. The bracelet's owner is delighted and offers to pay Lupa's expensive air travel bill. Cackles tracks Finn and Lupa to the farm. Finn and Lupa run for their lives through the bush toward a waste-water sump-hole. Lupa dives on the evil, threatening Cackles, who falls into and is trapped in the hole until arrested by the police. Lupa is flown to the USA and released in Yellowstone where she has three pups. Finn's Nana Eva dies a year later and leaves a legacy of \$5,000 for Finn to visit Lupa and her pups. Lupa instantly remembers Finn and showers him with affection. To the surprise and delight of Dr Shapiro, Lupa introduces her pups to Finn, who names them Eva, Molly and Danny (after Nana Eva's dead son).

### Setting the scene and motivational activities

- Using the cover as a visual stimulus, have students speculate on content of the novel. How/why would a wolf get in a wardrobe? If this was set in New Zealand, where could it have come from?
- Through discussion, list all facts that students know about wolves. What is the relationship between dogs and wolves? Google: **the Wolf & the Dog pdf**. Download and data-project for a class/group shared reading exercise. Summarize and wall-display main facts from the pdf. Illustrate with wolf pictures.

### During and post reading activities

- Ensure students understand the **Five Animal Freedoms** at: (<http://mzspca.org.nz> > select animal-care). Discuss the importance of the **Freedoms**. As they read the story, challenge students to identify instances when one or more freedoms is demonstrated in the story by any of the main characters. Have them contrast this with the behaviour of Cackles the clown towards the wolves.
- Introduce the word **Coulrophobia** as the fear or dislike of clowns. While it easy to dislike Cackles, why do students think that many people don't like or are even afraid of clowns? Run and publish a pro- and anti-clown class poll with students, giving reasons for and against.
- Can students identify the factors that made Finn decide to return Lupa to the wild? Do they think that this was the best decision for Lupa? Was this the best decision for Finn? Justify answers.
- As a class discussion, find out the students' attitudes to captive animals in circuses. Why do they have these attitudes? Do they think that zoos play an important role for animals in any way? **eg** conservation, breeding, and education.
- Can the students come up with any reasons why humans throughout history have developed such a dislike and distrust of wolves? Find and read out any sections of the story that focus on this distrust and the reasons for it. Do the students think it is justified? Have students carry out online research and answer the following at: [www.animalcorner.co.uk/wildlife/wolves/wolf\\_history.html](http://www.animalcorner.co.uk/wildlife/wolves/wolf_history.html)
  - What has led to this distrust and negative attitudes?
  - What has been the consequence for the wolf in most cases?
  - What has led to a changing human perception about wolves?
- As a class, conduct online research on the re-introduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park. Useful websites include:
  - [www.yellowstone.net/wildlife/wolf.htm](http://www.yellowstone.net/wildlife/wolf.htm)
  - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2T1Uphfkj8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2T1Uphfkj8)
  - [www.yellowstone-bearman.com/wolves.html](http://www.yellowstone-bearman.com/wolves.html)