



# JINNY AND COOPER: MY TEACHER'S BIG BAD SECRET

Tania Ingram

## SYNOPSIS:

**WARNING:** This story contains magic, witches, talking animals (well, at least one), potato charms and a huge amount of fun!

Cooper is not the beautiful, golden guinea pig of Jinny's dreams. He's **trouble!** Not only can he speak and read, he can disappear, hover in the air and teleport small distances. He's obsessed with junk food and full of tall tales, but worse still, Cooper is convinced that Jinny's kindly, elderly teacher, Miss Bunney is a witch. Come on, Cooper, really?

Tania Ingram has created quite an irresistible character in Cooper. He is like a guinea-pig Dr Who - eccentric, hilariously funny and yet potentially a hero, even if his heroic deeds are fuelled by a very unsuitable diet of biscuits, cake and gherkins! Jinny is the perfect foil - and even though Cooper is a scruffy, dirty, annoying pet who seems to constantly lead her into trouble, Jinny soon comes to realise that Cooper is far more than a pet. He is an extremely special and loyal friend.

## WRITING STYLE

- Tania Ingram is a new, up-and-coming author with a fabulous talent for adventure, fun and humour.
- Wonderful humorous cover and internal illustrations (chapter openers and text breaks) by the talented Tony Flowers, illustrator of the popular series *Samuri vs Ninja*, *Billy and the Dragon*, and *Saurus Street*.
- Tania has a Masters Degree in clinical psychology and, until recently, worked as a child psychologist so has great insight into the way they tick. She believes books are a powerful way for children to explore their feelings, their fears and their world - and if you can do that with a large sprinkling of humour, all the better!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Whyalla and moving to Adelaide in her teens, **Tania Ingram** became a child psychologist before taking a break to spend more time with her family, which was when she began writing stories for children. The Jinny and Cooper series evolved from Tania's daughter begging her to write a story about a magical guinea pig. Then three months after finishing the first Jinny and Cooper book, Tania was given two baby guinea pigs. One of them had scruffy black and brown fur and never ate carrots. Furthermore, he proved to be very mischievous (Tania once had to pull a hama bead off his bottom teeth!). Of course, he was immediately named Cooper. Tania lives in the Adelaide hills with her family.

## STUDY NOTES/ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHERS

### Pre-reading

- Why do we keep pets? What do we hope that they will provide us with?
- In the novel, Jinny wants a guinea pig. What sort of pet is a guinea pig and what would their appeal be?
- What sort of pet would you choose and why?
- Research guinea pigs – habits, foods they eat, how to care for them etc
- Do you believe in witches? Where do we usually find witches?
- What characteristics do you expect a witch to have?

### THEMES:

#### Being different

- How does Cooper look different from the other guinea pigs at the shop?
- How does Jinny feel about getting him as her pet?
- Gary, the pet shop owner, describes Cooper as being 'unique'. What does this mean?
- What characteristics does Cooper have that are unusual for a guinea pig?
- What special skills does he have?
- Why was the pet shop owner so desperate to sell Cooper? What does this suggest about our need for things to be 'normal'?
- What positive characteristics does Cooper have?
- What makes him a good pet?
- Do we need to look and act like the stereotype in order to be accepted?

#### Appearances can be deceptive

- What sort of person do the children think Miss Bunney is?
- What witch-like characteristics does she have?

- How has she managed to fool people about her true identity?
- Why does Tyrone say that 'if anyone was a witch it would be Mrs Fontane'?
- What do we mean when we refer to someone as being 'a witch'?
- Why does Miss Bunney need to be around children?
- What does it mean to steal a person's essence?
- How does this help Miss Bunney?
- What does Jinny expect Miss Bunney's house to be like (p89)? Why would it not look like she expects it to?
- What clues are there that Miss Bunney is a witch?
- What would be the advantages in pretending to be a teacher if you were a witch? What sort of things would you be able to do that a lot of teachers might not be able to?

### **Teamwork**

- How do brothers and sisters often relate to each other? (eg what might an older sibling feel about a younger sibling and vice versa)?
- What sort of relationship do Jinny and Tyrone have?
- How do Cooper, Jinny and Tyrone work together as a team to find out about Miss Bunney?
- What skills does each of them bring?
- Do you think they could have solved this mystery alone? Why?

### **Friends**

- Jinny says that Cooper is better than a pet, he is a friend. What qualities of a friend does he display?
- How can pets be seen to be friends? What qualities do they have that make them friends?

### **Adults**

- What sort of person is Jinny's mum?
- Why do the children not tell her about Cooper's special abilities?
- Jinny says 'is she had seen him talk she probably would have freaked out and made us take him back to the pet shop.' Why would she react this way?
- How do you think your parents would react if you told them your pet had special skills like Cooper?
- How would she react if the children were to tell her that Miss Bunney is a witch?
- Why can adults often not see what people are really like, while children can?
- What does this suggest about how we change as we move from childhood to adulthood?

### **Heroism**

- What does it mean to be a hero? What characteristics do they need?
- In what way can this be seen to be a story about heroes?
- How do the children manage to destroy the witch?
- What characteristics do they display in identifying and destroying Miss Bunney?

- Why does Miss Bunney turn into a guinea pig?
- Why do you think the author chose for this to happen rather than Miss Bunney being killed?

### **Learning**

- Why is Cooper so excited about the idea of going to school?
- Why does he love libraries?
- Why are books so important in our lives?
- How do books help the children and Cooper solve this mystery?

### **Old Wives' Tales**

- Cooper tells the children a lot of tall stories (often referred to as old wives tales).
- Make a list of the things he tells them:
  - Witches cause colds
  - If you sneeze with your mouth shut your eyes will blow out of your head
  - Adults only tell you that biscuits and cakes are unhealthy because they want you to eat vegetables
- Make a list of other tall tales adults tell children.
- Why do we tell these stories?
- Why do so many children's stories contain witches?
- Do you think it is a good idea to tell children these sorts of stories, or is it just a form of lying?
- Given the number of stories Cooper tells, do you think the children believe him when he first tells them that Miss Bunney is a witch?
- Read the story of 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf'. Why are we less likely to believe someone who often tells stories?