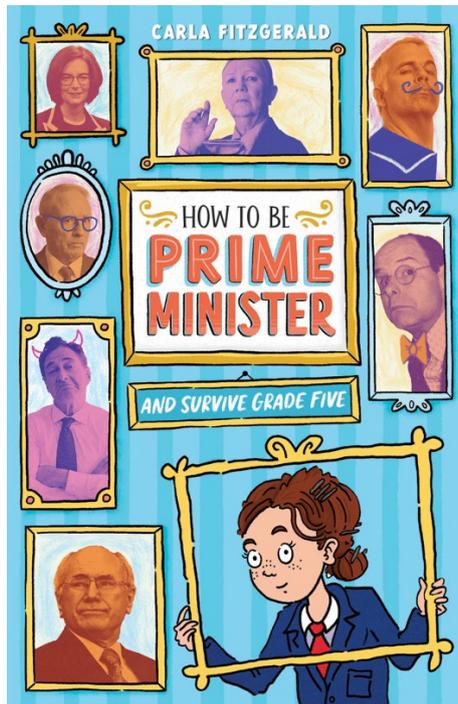


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# HOW TO BE PRIME MINISTER AND SURVIVE GRADE FIVE

Carla Fitzgerald



## Teachers' Notes

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**SYNOPSIS**

Things have changed for Harper and Lottie now their father has become prime minister. Not only are they constantly followed by security and photographers, but they also now live in Kirribilli House and attend Oceanview Grammar. They miss their old life, but most of all they are worried about their dad, who is terrible at his new job and has secretly gone on a holiday.

When Harper realises his phone has been left behind, she has a choice to make: share his secret or run the country in his place. Deciding on the latter, she must devise a new policy by the end of the week and overcome her fears to make a difference.

*How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five* is a humorous story about friendship, courage and self-belief, and asks the question whether kids could run the country better than adults.

**THEMES**

- Friendship
- Action
- Courage
- Confidence
- Resilience
- Democracy

**WRITING STYLE**

*How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five* is told through the first-person past-tense narration of Harper, a quiet girl who prefers to fly under the radar. The move to Kirribilli has been anything but smooth, and now more than ever she craves a reminder of her old life. She finds the Cooper Street Reserve, a tiny pocket of nature with a beautiful jacaranda tree, only to discover the government is about to sell it.

Lottie, meanwhile, is a natural leader with the confidence to use her voice. When her teacher announces a public speaking competition about why kids should rule the world, she is full of ideas about how to make the world a better place.

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As the text progresses, Harper realises that when you play to your strengths, the rest will fall into place, and helps her dad to do likewise. Interwoven into the text is Harper's favourite mystery series, *Beatrix Brown*, along with processes that underpin Australia's democracy. It is suitable for middle readers.

**STUDY NOTES**

- Discuss the opening sentence of Chapter 1. How does it help establish the premise for narrative? How has the problem been introduced so quickly?
- Why does the author make a point of including the labradoodle in the Prime Minister's hero story? Why does Harper's dad doubt whether he's even a hero?
- Why has the author deliberately left Harper and Lottie at home with neither of their parents? Why is Cerise a necessary character in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*?
- Why is Harper more comfortable flying 'under the radar' (p. 5)? What does this mean? How does she learn to emerge from the safety of this place?
- How does the fact that Harper was called Harriet for most of last year reflect how she thinks about herself?
- How has life changed for Harper and her family since her dad became PM? How has it stayed the same?
- Discuss the 'Baby Shark' thread that appears throughout the story. How does it help keep the narrative cohesive?
- How would this story be different had Dad taken his phone with him?
- Harper and Lottie must devise possible policies before the Annual Party Meeting. What is a policy? How do policies shape Australia's democracy? What other policies would you like to add to their list?
- Create a Character Iceberg of Harper's dad. Above the surface, note what we are literally told about him. Beneath the surface, add what readers must infer about him. Why is it important that we have both literal and inferential information about characters?
- Harper is careful to capture her dad's 'voice' when texting from his phone. How would you describe his 'voice'?
- What are the differences and similarities between Harper and Lottie? What would they admire about one another? What might frustrate them? Why does Harper describe Lottie as 'infinitely braver' than her (p. 23)? Is this true? Discuss.
- Why does Harper say 'I hated the way everyone knew my name. And thought they knew me' (p. 29)?

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- Has is the inclusion of Camo Man, the photographer, important to the plot of *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*?
- What do jacarandas represent in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*? How is this motif used throughout the text?
- How is the line from Beatrix Brown 'If not me, then who?' pivotal to the themes of *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*?
- Harper's description of her dad's performance as prime minister is not very flattering. Why does she think he's not cut out for such a role? What makes her change her mind later in the story?
- Why does Harper describe Lottie as a chameleon (p. 40)?
- Why does Harper feel she 'seemed to be carrying the world on [her] shoulders' (p. 43)?
- Why does the author include Harper's eczema in the story?
- Harper describes changing schools as 'learning to walk all over again' (p. 47). Have you ever changed schools? If so, how would you describe the experience? Share in a reflection.
- On p. 52, Harper says she and Lottie 'communicated without saying a word, as only siblings can'. How does this show the strength of her relationship with Lottie? How would you describe your relationship with your siblings?
- What are Lottie's strategies to make public speaking less daunting for Harper? What strategies do you use?
- Why, after giving Theo her Beatrix Brown book, do Harper's cheeks feel flushed (p. 93)?
- Why does Bella invite Harper to her party?
- What does Harper learn about herself in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*?
- As you read *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*, track the plot on a story graph.
- In what ways does Harper show courage and resilience in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*? Give examples from the text to help support your ideas.
- What role does Theo play in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*? Why is he an important character?
- Discuss Carla Fitzgerald's use of figurative language throughout *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*. Some examples include:
  - Cerise reminded me of one of my dolls that I used to dress up and paint with Mum's make-up p. 18
  - She sprayed it all over me, making me gasp for life like a helpless cockroach pp. 19–20
  - It was so tight I felt like a thousand tiny ants were pulling back my scalp p. 20
  - She smelt like the secret compost bin p. 23

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- The flame in my cheeks followed soon after p. 28
- My heart started thumping in anger p. 29
- Sparks of adrenalin pumped through me p. 31
- I felt myself pulled towards it, like a toddler running towards its mother p. 34
- As I leant back it felt as though the tree was embracing me and keeping me safe p. 34
- She was like a chameleon, adapting easily to whatever environment she was put in p. 40
- She waved her hand in my face as though I was an irritating blowfly distracting her from her lunch p. 42
- The quadrangle ... was as loud as a footy stadium p. 43
- My feet were stuck in stone p. 46
- I hated change; it was like learning to walk all over again p. 47
- My insides were twisting and turning like an Olympic gymnast p. 51
- The grandfather clock in the hallway stood over me like a parent, ticking with disapproval p. 51
- Anger flooded my body p. 68
- Embarrassment and fury were racing around my body and I was having trouble pushing the lump down in my throat p. 70
- My face was the colour of a tomato p. 88
- Lottie started pacing around like a boxer in the ring p. 110
- The knot of fear that had sat in my stomach since Dad left turned to anger p. 131
- It felt as if a bunch of toddlers were doing the 'Baby Shark' dance in my stomach p. 133
- I ... saw a sea of heads staring back at me p. 140
- A ball of anger started forming inside me p. 172
- Her voice warmed me on the inside, like drinking hot chocolate p. 203
- The clues to Dad's whereabouts were thrashing around my brain like flathead in a fishing net p. 233
- Waves of relief flooded my body p. 240
- The semi-deflated flamingo ... sat between us like his half-baked fib p. 241
- Hold a mock parliamentary debate on Saunders's proposed Minors Management Bill. Create a flowchart to help explain the process of how bills become laws.
- Use Lottie's speech on pp. 135–138 to identify the persuasive devices she uses. How does Lottie argue that kids make a difference? How does Lottie's speech spur Harper to act?

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- Research the actions of the influential young people mentioned in Lottie's speech: Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai and Bassam Maaliki. Share your findings with your class.
- Why do you think Theo's suggestions for the policy are so intent on making childhood fun? What is the connection between this and his sister's illness?
- How does Harper standing up to Bella give her the courage to do more?
- What does Harper's mum mean when she says, 'What's important to one person might not be important to another' (p. 206)? How does this reflect the nature of Australia's democracy?
- How do you think Harper really feels upon finding her dad in the pool shed? How would her dad have felt? What advice would you give to Harper's dad?
- How does Harper grow and change from the beginning to the end of the text? What has allowed this growth to occur?
- Which character from *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five* are you most like? Why?
- The concept of 'action' is an important theme of *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*. Discuss the ways in which people of all ages and abilities have the capacity to act and contribute effectively to the community. How do Harper and Lottie go about creating such change through their actions? What have you learnt about action through these characters?
- Recreate Harper's letterbox drop, adding visuals to help attract and persuade your audience.
- In the role of Harper, write a reflection to share how you feel about the potential sale of Cooper Street Reserve.
- Why does Harper start needing her soft monkey, Marcella, again?
- In what way is *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five* a book about confidence?
- What impact has Dad becoming prime minister had on Harper's mum?
- Write one of the newspaper articles about Harper's dad. Examples include:
  - Accidental hero becomes accidental prime minister.
  - What rescue? PM's shark story in doubt.
  - Worst prime minister ever?
- In your own words, explain Bono's comment that 'fame is a currency ... you need to use it wisely' (p. 4)
- How are Harper and her dad alike?
- Draw a line diagonally on a piece of A3 paper. On opposite sides of the line, create a visual depiction of Harper's life before and after her dad becomes prime minister.

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- In small groups, choose a scene from *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five* to dramatise to your class.
- Create your own Bottle Brigade, Plastic Police, or other action group. Devise a promotional campaign to help promote your cause.
- Write and deliver your own three-minute speech about why kids should rule the world.
- Complete the Prime Ministers Quiz and Would You Rather game at the end of the book. Devise your own questions to add to these activities.
- What do you believe to be the main message in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*?
- Discuss the role the Beatrix Brown series plays in *How to be Prime Minister and Survive Grade Five*. How do the books help Harper? How would the story be different without them?

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

Carla says: My intention was to write a fun and humorous story about power, mischief and what you'd do if you could change the world – because who doesn't want to do that sometimes? I particularly wanted to capture the excitement that kids feel when they're the boss. What could be better than free lollies and longer school holidays? But, with the laughs and the wish fulfilment, I wanted to show that with power comes enormous responsibility. I know there are a lot of young people who are desperate to do something about big issues, such as climate change, and that was an important part of the narrative. It was challenging balancing all of this. It was a battle between the fun and the serious, the kids and the grown-ups, the desire to live in the moment and the need to think of the future. Hopefully readers enjoy it.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carla Fitzgerald is a writer, a recovered lawyer and mum of three from Sydney. She studied arts/law at university before working for a judge, in private practice and at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Only after that did she rediscover the great fun of making stuff up and writing it down. Carla is a Books in Homes role model and a coach with the Harding Miller Education Foundation. Her favourite things to do are write, walk, read, eat, and hang out with her family. Not in that order.