

# The Isabelle Stories: Volume 1: Izzy & Belle

AUTHOR

**JANE GODWIN**

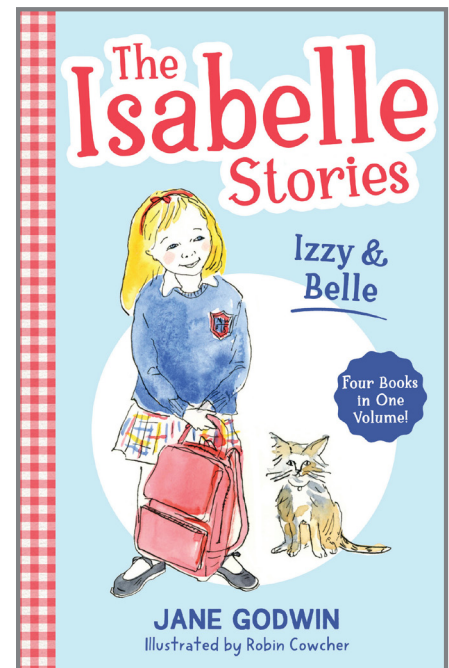
ILLUSTRATOR

**ROBIN COWCHER**

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Six-year-old Isabelle doesn't have any brothers or sisters. But she does have her dad, her cat Steve, her friend Harry B and her baby cousin, Bibi, who she's very good at looking after. And then along comes Isobel, a new girl at school. They have the same name, but will they be friends?

Four gentle stories in one volume, all about Isabelle and her world, its trials and triumphs, its small moments and big dramas: friends, family, school life and growing up.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Godwin is the highly acclaimed and internationally published author of many books for children and young people, across all styles and ages. Children's Publisher at Penguin Books Australia for many years, Jane was the co-creator with Davina Bell of the Our Australian Girl series of quality historical fiction for middle readers. Jane's books include her novels *A Walk in the Dark*, *Falling From Grace*, *As Happy as Here* (a CBCA Notable Book) and *When Rain Turns to Snow* (shortlisted for the CBCA Book of the Year for Older Readers and for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards) and picture books *Tilly*, illustrated by Anna Walker (shortlisted for the CBCA Picture Book of the Year Award), *Sing Me the Summer*, illustrated by Alison Lester, and *All the Words I Need to Know*, illustrated by Andrew Joyner.

Jane is dedicated to pursuing quality and enriching reading and writing experiences for young people, and spends as much time as she can working with them in schools and communities and running literature and writing programs.

Find out more about Jane at [janegodwin.com.au](http://janegodwin.com.au).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Robin Cowcher has worked at *The Age* newspaper as a designer and Illustrations Editor. Now freelancing, she illustrates for Spectrum in *The Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, and has illustrated wine and food books and several children's books, including *Digger* by Mike Dumbleton) and *Little Dog and the Summer Holiday* and *Little Dog and the Christmas Wish* by Corinne Fenton, which was shortlisted for the 2015 CBCA Crichton Award, and became the theme of the 60th anniversary Myer Christmas Windows display that year. Robin tutors part time in editorial illustration at RMIT.

Find out more about Robin at <https://www.robincowcher.com.au/>.

**STUDY NOTES**

- Before reading the story, examine the cover of this first book in the series. What does it suggest about the series' themes?
  - After you have read the four stories in Volume 1, examine the cover again: what does it suggest to you now?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS IN EACH STORY****THE WRONG ISABELLE**

- Isabelle desperately wants to win a Star of the Week certificate but it never seems to happen. Do you struggle with any similar problems?
- Isabelle feels that some people are awarded Star of the Week when they don't necessarily deserve the prize. Do you think that sometimes people receive awards or prizes when they may not deserve them and other people miss out?
  - Do you think the awarding of prizes is always fair?
- Isabelle wonders if she needs a middle name like Isobel has. Are middle names important? Do you have one? What would your middle name be, if you got the chance to choose it?
- Isabelle and Isobel are two students in a class which contains several people with the same name. (For example, the Olivias are called Ollie, Liv and Olivia.) How many repeated names are in your class? How do you distinguish between them?

**TEENAGERS**

- Do you have teenagers in your family or amongst your friends? How are teenagers different from children?
- What would you have done if you'd accidentally boarded a train without your dad, mum or another adult? Would you have gotten off the train as Isabelle does? What might have happened if Sophie and Stella weren't at that station?
- Have you ever had to help look after a baby? If so, what special things do you like to do with a baby?

**THE SPECIAL PEN**

- Invite students to name their favourite thing. Why do they like it so much?
- Have you ever suspected someone else of taking something, and then found that you were wrong? How did that make you feel? Did you apologise?
- Have you ever said something to a friend and then wished you hadn't said it? Have you ever had a misunderstanding or argument with a friend? How did you resolve it?
- Do you have a family tradition? What is it?

**NOT RUBBISH**

- Discuss with students the practice of throwing out rubbish and how sometimes things can be re-purposed or recycled. Encourage students to consider the rubbish collected in their own homes. Invite each student to bring small items from home for a session on recycling or repurposing something to make it useful or decorative again. Examples might be items of clothing which have been discarded, accessories such as a hat or a handbag, domestic items such as a cushion or a small lamp.
- Have you ever created a special place outside, like Harry B does? It might be a treehouse or a cubbyhouse, or a whole outdoor room like the one in the story.
- What is an art installation? Have you ever seen one?
- The outdoor house brings all the children's families together for a barbecue, so it has created a community. Neighborhoods are often brought together by outdoor celebrations such as street parties. What brings your community together?

**GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES****HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)**

- Isabelle is an only child in a single-parent household. She is somewhat shy and anxious to please people. Does she

change in the course of these four stories? In what way?

- Izzy is very outgoing but how does meeting Isabelle change that?
- Your name is a part of one's identity. Do you think your name suits you? If not, what other name would you choose for yourself?
  - Find a middle name for Isabelle. Some of the unusual names discussed were: Stormy, Calypso, Wednesday and Bluey (p 25). Write a name for each letter of the alphabet and then explain why you chose it.
- Isabelle befriends 'New Isobel' and also has her old best friend Harry B. How important are friends? How can friends help you?
- Isabelle is happy she has such a good friend in Izzy: 'A friend who forgives you if you make a mistake. A friend who smiles when you say sorry. A friend who doesn't sulk. A friend who doesn't go off and play with other people and leave you out.' (p 94) How important are these qualities in a friend?
- Isabelle and her dad live together. It seems that her mother has died although this isn't mentioned. Izzy has two teenage stepsisters, Sophie and Stella, who live in two separate houses at various times. Discuss the fact that families come in different sizes and are made up differently.
- What makes a family? Look around you and you will discover different types of families.
- School is a large part of these children's lives. Their teachers are each described very creatively. Miss Amira is Isabelle's teacher. Why does she like her so much?
- Rules are a big part of schooling. What rules are mentioned in these stories?

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERACY

- The stories are told in third person, present tense. How different might the narrative have been, if it had been written in first person?
- Find examples of the following literary devices in this book, to describe characters or setting:
  - Simile
  - Metaphors
  - Personification.
- Language can be confusing when adults use words that are unfamiliar, for example, Isobel is upset and confused when Mr Riled says: 'Take your bags off your pegs because I'll dismiss you from the oval.' (p 30) She's not sure what 'dismiss' means in this context. What other words are unfamiliar or confusing for the characters in this book?
- Identify any section in the book which you found humorous. Why did you find it funny?
- The structure of each story can be analysed in terms of the below key narrative features used to engage the reader's attention and to shape the work:
  - Strong beginnings and endings of chapters. Which opening or closing sentence was particularly gripping, in your opinion?
  - Suspense. Read each story and discuss the suspenseful aspects of each story. Some specific suspenseful moments to look at are:
    - The Wrong Isabelle: Will Isabelle ever win the Star of the Week award?
    - Teenagers: Will Isabelle's dad find her and Bibi again?
    - The Special Pen: Did Izzy steal Isabelle's special pen?
    - Not Rubbish: Will Harry B make a success of his outdoor room?
- Isabelle is the central character but there are many other characters in this book. How are Isabelle (Belle) and Isobel (Izzy) different? How are they alike?
- Which character was most intriguing and why? Which character would you like to have heard more about?
- Mr Riled, the assistant to the principal Ms Free, is a little alarming. He 'shouts quite a lot' (p 29). What makes a teacher so bossy?
- From your reading of the stories, how would you describe Isabelle's dad?
- Write a note to your friend, using 'picture writing', as Isabelle does when she writes her name and then Isobel's. (See p 14.)
- Use picture writing to tell a short story. Write the below sentences out again but replace some words with images:

- Isabelle wanted to win Star of the Week.
- Isabelle loved her special pencil.
- Isabelle likes travelling on trains.
- Isabelle's dad is really good at drawing horses.
- Miss Amira read Isabelle's class a book.
- Write a diary entry by Izzy about meeting Isabelle for the first time.
- Write a letter from Miss Amira to Isobel's parents describing her behaviour in class.
- This book is the first in a series. Write an outline for a possible new story about Isabelle and her friends.

### Comprehension

- Who is Steve? (Isabelle's cat.)
- How many Olivias are there in Isabelle's class? (Three. 'They are called Ollie, Liv and Olivia. And there is an Olive too!' [p 3])
- Who was Isabelle's best friend before Isobel arrived at her school? (Harry B.)
- What does Isabelle receive Star of the Week for? ('For always being kind, considerate and looking after others'. [p 33])
- What are Izzy's stepsisters' names? (Sophie and Stella.)
- What does Isabelle give to Izzy to say sorry for accusing her of stealing her special pen? (A horse drawing and a picture letter. [p 92])
- What was the first thing Harry B rescued from the hard garbage? (A big chair. [p100])
- What does Mr Riled call the older kids in the school? (You. [p 4])
- What names does Mr Riled give kids in Years One and Two? (He calls all the Year Ones 'Grade One', and all the Year Twos 'Sonny' or 'Miss'. [p 4])
- What do Anna and Dom next door give to Isabelle and her dad? (Tomatoes and chillies. [p 17])
- What is the name of Isabelle's baby cousin? (Bibi. [p 39])
- What is so special about Isabelle's special pen? (It has six colours and a rubber on the end that can rub out pen. [p 72])

### VISUAL LITERACY

- Examine the images of Isabelle and her dad and her friends. Depicting body language is one of the skills of an illustrator. Invite students to create a picture of Isabelle, Izzy and Harry B which gives you some idea of their personalities from the way their body language is depicted.
- Activity: Series like this one are enhanced by the illustrations. What is distinctive about the illustrator, Robin Cowcher's, work?
- Design a new cover for this book.