

Can You Teach a Fish to Climb a Tree?

AUTHOR

JANE GODWIN

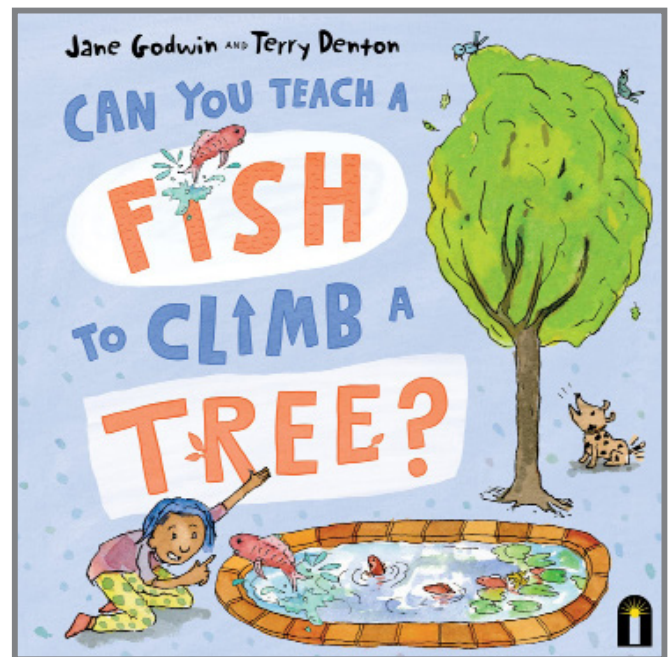
ILLUSTRATOR

TERRY DENTON

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

Can you teach a fish to climb a tree? And if it couldn't, would you assume it's not smart enough to? Fish aren't very good at climbing trees, but they're really good at swimming, and making shapes in the water. And hippos can't walk a tightrope, but they can run and leap underwater.

We can all try to learn new things, but some things will come more naturally to some than to others. And that's ok! Because we all bring our own unique, incredible skills to the world, and that's one of the things that makes us so interesting!

Can You Teach a Fish to Climb a Tree? is a beautiful, gentle book that encourages curiosity and acceptance, and celebrates the value of the things that make us unique.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Godwin is the highly acclaimed author of over thirty books for children. Her work is published internationally and she has received many commendations, including the Queensland Premier's Award (Children's Books), and shortlistings in the CBC Book of the Year Awards, the Prime Minister's Literary Award, the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award (Patricia Wrightson Prize), the YABBA Awards, the Speech Pathology Awards, The Family Award for Children's Books and the Australian Book Industry Awards. Jane spends as much time as she can working with young people in schools: running various literature and writing programs, making books and encouraging students in their own creative ventures. Jane lives in Melbourne with her family.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Terry Denton has been creating children's books for over 30 years. He has worked with many of Australia's top authors, written much-loved picture books and junior fiction novels, won more than 40 children's choice awards and been shortlisted many times in the Children's Book Council of Australia awards. His book, *Felix and Alexander*, won Picture Book of the Year in 1986. His books include *The Upside-down History of Downunder* with Alison Lloyd, *The Worm Who Knew Karate* with Jill Lever, as well as the Gasp! books and the animated TV series, and the world-famous Just! books and Treehouse series with Andy Griffiths. His work is characterised by a devious sense of humour, an adventurous and inventive drawing style and an informed flair for what interests and amuses kids.

THEMES

- Celebrating difference
- Unique skills
- Friendship
- Care
- Curiosity
- Acceptance

'Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.' —Albert Einstein (or not, as it turns out!)

This is a book that not only encourages readers to accept their limitations, but to celebrate the differences that make us all unique. By illustrating the things that various animals can do (and the things they absolutely cannot do), Jane Godwin and Terry Denton invite reflection on why we need to be good at the same things as everyone else.

Can You Teach a Fish to Climb a Tree? can be used as a starting point to practice celebrating friends rather than being jealous of them, and to follow curiosity, joy and wonder. Discussion topics might include:

- Instances where readers have felt pressured to be good at something
- Jealousy—where it comes from and how we can choose differently
- How to discover and celebrate our own strengths and passions.

STUDY NOTES

- Write a letter to someone in your class and share something you've noticed they're really good at. Now write one to yourself—what do you absolutely love to do?
- Put on a class talent show and invite everyone to share something they're good at.
- Think of your favourite animal and draw a picture of it trying to do something that you know it absolutely cannot do. Write down a fact about your animal that shares something it can do really well.
- What are some of the things you could say to someone who's feeling bad about themselves? Make a poster with words of encouragement and decorate it in Terry Denton's illustration style. Put it up in your classroom so that people can look at it when they need a boost.

WRITING STYLE

- Jane Godwin uses questions to invite curiosity from the reader, which sets the tone of the book—gentle, open, inquisitive. Using questions means that rather than telling the reader how to feel or what to think, she encourages them to think about why we would try to teach a fish to fly. Then, in the second half of the book, she shares a variety of talents and abilities that these animals do have, which generates a sense of wonder. Invite readers to reflect on some of their responses to the questions and discuss how you might use questions to tackle other challenging topics.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

- Terry Denton's iconic illustration style captures the humour of animals in ridiculous situations. His images are detailed, colourful and full of expression, inviting readers to take time to explore them, discovering new details with each read. For example, compare the expressions of the hippo walking a tightrope and the hippos dancing in the water—which looks happier? Can you spot the hiding lizard?

COMPREHENSION

- Write down three interesting things that you've discovered from the book.
- Choose one word to describe what you think this book is about.
- What three words would you use to describe Terry Denton's illustrations?
- What makes penguins so special?

- What can horses do that people can't?
- Look at the picture of sleeping horses—how do they keep their necks up?
- What happens when a seal tries to fly?
- How does it feel when you're not good at something you feel like you should be?
- How do you think the hippo feels when they're trying to cross the tightrope?
- Why do you think the writer of the book asks so many questions about animals? What are they trying to say?
- What are you really really good at? How does it feel when you're doing this thing?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
BEC KAVANAGH