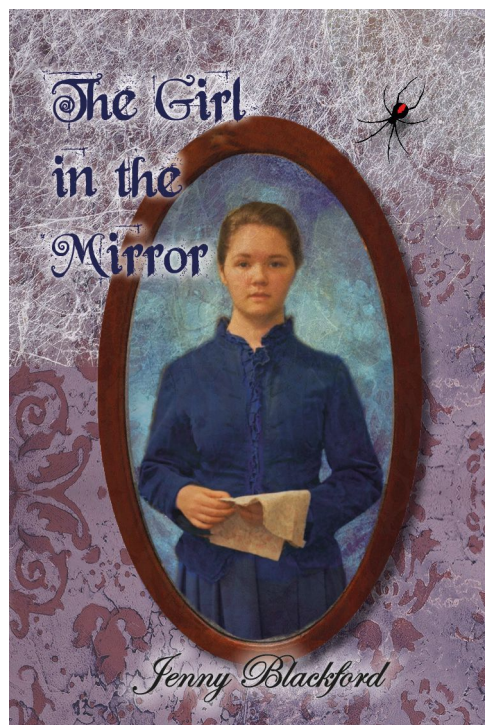




Teachers' Notes— *The Girl in the Mirror*

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The Girl in the Mirror

By Jenny Blackford

Cover and internal illustrations by Fiona McDonald

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Published October 2019 by Eagle Books, an imprint of Christmas Press

About the book:

Maddy is picked on by bullies at her new school and terrified by ghosts in the old house her family has moved to – but she soon becomes friends with Clarissa, who slept in that same room and used the same mirror more than 100 years earlier.

Then Maddy's baby brother nearly dies of whooping cough, and Clarissa discovers that her poisonous Aunt Lily is even more evil than she seems. The two girls have to use all their intelligence and verve to fight against Aunt Lily's plots, each in her own time, with help from Clarissa's ghostly brother Bertie...but will they succeed?

An enthralling, original debut middle-grade novel by award-winning poet and short-story writer Jenny Blackford.

*A wonderful story, with creepiness lurking in the corners, to startle you and make you look twice next time you go past a mirror. Jenny Blackford has created a time-shifting, spine-tingling winner with *The Girl in the Mirror*. (Geoffrey McSkimming)*

About the author:

Jenny Blackford writes poems and stories for people of all ages, usually with a tinge of myth and legend, ancient history, science, or deep time. Over 30 of her short stories and over 50 of her poems have appeared in Australian and international anthologies and journals. She loves to write for kids as well as adults.

Her poems and stories for kids have been published in the School Magazine, Our Home is Dirt by Sea: Australian Poetry for Australian Kids, Stories for Nine Year Olds and other wonderful places. Kids aged 11 plus should enjoy her poetry books *The Loyalty of Chickens* and *The Duties of a Cat*, both published by Pitt Street Poetry, as well as her short YA novel *The Priestess and the Slave*, published by Hadley Rille.

Jenny's most recent poetry prizes are first place in the NEWC Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Poetry 2017 and first place in the Humorous Verse section of the Henry Lawson Awards 2017. She won two prizes in the Scarlet Stiletto Short Story Awards 2016 for a murder mystery set in classical Delphi, with water nymphs. In 2014 she was awarded third in the prestigious ACU Prize for Literature 2014.

About the illustrator:

Fiona McDonald is an illustrator, author and doll-maker with over 12 books published, including acclaimed picture books, a graphic novel, and non-fiction books.

She is also half of the duo who write under the name of Phoebe McArthur, whose first book, the illustrated chapterbook *Lucy Newton, Little Witch* (published by Christmas Press) was shortlisted for the 2019 Speech Pathology Awards.



The path to publication, by author Jenny Blackford

The mirror in the cover of *The Girl in the Mirror* is almost exactly like the mirror that inspired the book. Many years ago I was living in a decaying terrace house in inner Melbourne. According to the records I found, it was built in the 1890s. Workmen came to the house one day for a small patch-up of one of the many falling-apart bits of the house. Before they left, one of them asked me if I'd like a mirror they had on the truck, which had come from an old hotel being demolished, and was otherwise headed for landfill. I said yes, of course, gratefully, and hung it on the wall of my bedroom. It was a long oval of dark wood, and the mirror within was a little stained and spotted, but still functional.

The old mirror was at least a hundred years out of fashion, probably more. How many faces had it seen, over the years? I couldn't help remembering my grandmother berating me, trying to make me call mirrors 'looking glasses', and perfume 'scent'.

My workroom, in that old house, was a bedroom at the back of the upper storey. As worked at my computer, if I looked out of the window, I saw a huge eucalyptus at the far end of the garden. How long ago had that been planted?

And, if, sometimes, while I worked into the evening in that back bedroom, I heard strange creakings on the stairs, how could I not wonder about the family who lived there, back when the house was new?

My short story 'Bertie', about a modern girl who hears a ghost clomping on the stairs of an old terrace house, and talks to an 1890s girl through the mirror on the wall of the same bedroom, was published in *The School Magazine* in 2005. I am delighted that it has grown into a novel and has been published by Eagle Books.

Something about an important feature of the book: Spiders!

Spiders are endlessly fascinating, and Australia has the best spiders in the world. There is an amazing amount of information about spiders on the National Museum website:

<https://australianmuseum.net.au/learn/animals/spiders/>

You can read more about producing spider anti-venom here: <https://reptilepark.com.au/venom-program/>



Image from the Australian Museum,

<https://australianmuseum.net.au/learn/animals/spiders/redback-spider/>

Post-reading discussion questions

Would you rather live in the 1890s, or now?

How would you feel if your house was haunted by a loving family member?

Do you think Maddy will ever tell her baby brother about how she saved him?

Post-reading research activities

Like the author of the book, Maddy loves most spiders, and lets daddy-long-legs spiders live in the bathroom. What do daddy-long-legs eat?

Spider anti-venom is extremely effective at saving the lives of people bitten by spiders. Who developed it, and when? How many people have died of spider bites since then? Where and how is the anti-venom produced?

Many medicines have been developed from plants, even plants that can be dangerous, eg digitalin from foxgloves. Find three medicines that started with plants.

Classroom creative activities

Bertie is very important in the girls' battles with Aunt Lily. Try writing one of the scenes from Bertie's point of view.

Make a drawing of Bertie's eucalyptus tree, when it was planted and then when Maddy sees it.

Draw a giant redback spider.

Looks in a mirror and imagine someone different is looking out at you. Who is it? Write down the conversation you have with them.