

# Teachers' Notes

## Figgy in the World

Written by Tamsin Janu

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle

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## Introduction

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Growing up in her Grandmother's home in rural Ghana, eight year old Figgy envies the cousins she lives with for their ordinary names. Perpetua and Kwesi never have to cope with stares and whispers when telling people what they are called – but then again, as Figgy says, they also find it harder to eavesdrop on conversations about themselves. After all, if someone is talking about Figgy, then she knows it is about her because she is probably the 'only Figgy in The World'. Grandma Ama is the centre of Figgy's universe, and has raised her since Figgy was abandoned by her mother as a tiny baby, with nothing but a note saying 'Her name is Figgy' to explain why she was left. Her cousins have their father who lives and works in a nearby town, but Grandma Ama is the only adult that Figgy has. So when Grandma Ama collapses, and then Figgy overhears conversations about how ill she is, Figgy decides that something needs to be done, and it is up to Figgy to do it. She has heard about the rest of The World, and how in America they have good doctors and amazing medicine, and so Figgy and her pet goat set off walking to see if she can somehow find her way there to buy Grandma Ama the medicine she clearly needs. The World, however, turns out to be both bigger and more confusing than Figgy had ever realised, and her journey is beset by challenges. But she has no choice. Unless she succeeds, she is sure that her Grandma will die, and so with the help of various new friends she meets along the way, Figgy bravely travels on. *Figgy in the World* is a heartwarming and compelling story of courage and determination, and presents a view of the various aspects of life in Ghana as seen through the eyes of a frightened, stubborn, and deeply compassionate child.

## About the Author

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Tamsin Janu was born and raised in Sydney. She is the second-eldest of six children only nine years apart, so growing up in her house was noisy and chaotic! She has always loved reading and telling stories but was inspired to write fiction for children after living for three months in Ghana, West Africa, working at a school and orphanage. She found the Ghanaian kids were just as interested in her country as she was in theirs, so they had a lot to teach each other. Over the past few years Tamsin has worked as a volunteer in legal centres, and with kids living in remote Western Australian and Northern Territory communities. She has paid her bills by working part-time in cafés and a children's shoe shop. Tamsin has degrees in International and Global Studies and Law from the University of Sydney. She currently works as a youth development worker in a remote community in the Northern Territory, where she is lucky enough to hear the stories of, and tell stories to, curious and funny kids every day.

Tamsin Janu was born and raised in Sydney.

[www.tamsinjanu.com](http://www.tamsinjanu.com)

You can find a book trailer for *Figgy in the World* at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXgZSQBtgMs>

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# Activities

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## English

*Figgy in the World* is set in Ghana. Ghana is in Africa, and there are a lot of things about life in Ghana that are very different from life in Australia. There are also, however, a lot of things that are the same. Figgy lives with her family, who she loves. She goes to school and plays with her friends and cousins there. When she wants to travel she talks of catching buses or taxis. When the author chose to write a story about Figgy, she also chose to set it in Ghana.

1. What are some of the ways in which Figgy's life is similar to yours?
2. What are some of the ways in which it is very different?
3. What do you think are some of the reasons why the author chose to write a story set in Ghana?
4. Think about all the things that happen to Figgy, and are important to the story. Write a brief plot outline of the main events.
  - If the author had decided to write a story about an Australian child called Figgy, which events would have to be changed? Would the story still make sense if it was set in Australia? Why/Why not?
  - As a class make a chart listing important ways that the setting of a story (the time and place where the story happens), can influence what story is actually told.

## Creative Activities

5. There is a picture of a tree at the start of each chapter. The tree is drawn without shading or colour – as a silhouette.
  - Use chalk pastels to colour a paper as an African countryside background.
  - Make sure to look at photos of African countryside first to get an idea of the colours that you can see there.
  - Using either black paint or a black marker, draw the silhouette of an African native tree.
  - Look at the silhouette of the tree used in the book. What features of the drawing identify it clearly as a tree? What has the artist done that ensures it does not look like a big blob on a pole? Use these techniques in your drawing of a tree.
  - For a challenge include the silhouette of a native animal. Make sure it is small enough that it does not overshadow the tree in your picture!
6. As a class learn a traditional African song or poem, and perform it for another class or at a school assembly.

7. What foods are commonly eaten in Ghana? Choose a common Ghanaian food and try cooking it.
8. Create a crossword using the names of African animals as the answers.
9. What countries are in Africa? How many are there? In pairs or small groups, create a small poster featuring an African country. Assemble the posters into a rough outline of a map of Africa.
10. Tamsin Janu wrote *Figgy in the World* after she had lived and worked in an orphanage in Ghana. As a class, research which Australian or international charities are working to help people in Ghana. With the help of your school and families, organise and run a fundraiser at your school to help one of these charities.
11. If you had to travel to the nearest big city, how would you get there? Write an imaginative story about someone travelling across Australia without any money. Be inventive and see how many different means of transportation you can include in your story!

## Geography

12. Locate Ghana on a map of the world.
13. How large is Ghana? Trace over the outline of Ghana on a map, and place it over a map of Australia. Make sure you are using the same scale for both maps!
14. Research Ghana either on the internet, or in the library. What information can you find about its history, climate, and the people who live there?
  - Find one interesting fact about Ghana that was not mentioned in *Figgy in the World* and share it with the class.

Figgy talks Twi at home, but speaks English at school. When she travels, she uses English to speak to most of the people she meets, because they don't understand Twi.

15. Why do you think that so many people in Ghana speak English?
16. Look at an Australian language map,\* and mark off an area the same size as Ghana - with the place where you live in the middle of the area.
  - How many indigenous languages/language groups can you see represented in the area on the Australian map?
  - Research and see if you can find out how many languages/language groups there are in Ghana.
17. In some parts of Australia, there are many Indigenous languages in a comparatively small area, while in other parts there can be a relatively large area where only one Indigenous language is spoken.
  - See if you can come up with some theories why the same size region might have either one, or many, languages spoken. (Hint – look at the climate and vegetation of an area, and think about how differences in geography might affect the people who live there, and in what ways.)
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\* There is an Interactive Australian Languages Map available online at <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/>

It is also viewable (but not available for download) in non-interactive format at

[http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/images/indigi\\_map.png](http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/images/indigi_map.png)

A large hard copy version published by Aboriginal Studies Press can be purchased from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/asp/map.html>). It is stated on the website that it can be ordered by phoning (02) 6246 1183, or by emailing [sales@aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:sales@aiatsis.gov.au).

## Health

On page 63, Frank laughs because Figgy thinks that the USA is called 'the United Stilts of America'. Her friend Nana had told her it was called that because people walk around on stilts the whole time, and when Frank found this out he laughed until he had a coughing fit.

18. When you read the part where Nana tells Figgy about the United Stilts of America, did you laugh or find it funny?
19. Why do people find this sort of mistake funny?
20. Have you ever had someone laugh at a mistake you made?
21. How does it feel when people laugh at your mistakes?
22. How does it feel to make a mistake?
23. What are some things we can say or do to help someone who is feeling bad about a mistake they made?
24. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, and has things that they don't know. Can you think of some mistakes you made, or misunderstandings you had when you were younger, that you now find funny? As a class, share your stories of ideas you had when you were small that you now know are wrong.
25. As a class, make a list of things you can say to people to help them feel better about having made a mistake, and to encourage them to keep learning and trying new things. In pairs or small groups, each choose one phrase and create a poster with the phrase at the centre, and illustrations showing people helping their friends feel better. Think about using thought bubbles, and comic strip formats to illustrate the way the people are feeling.

## Maths

Some names are popular in one place, or at one time, while other names are more uncommon. Figgy says at the very start of the story that she is *the only person named Figgy in my village. Probably the only Figgy in Ghana. Maybe the only one in Africa. And possibly, by the smallest chance, I might be the only person named Figgy in The World.*

She also talks of how Perpetua, Kwesi, and Esi are common names in Ghana, while Eddie is an unusual name in her village, because it is an English name.

26. What names are common or popular in your class?
27. What names are common in your school?

28. Collect information on the names that the children in your class have. Who in the class knows someone else with the same name as them? Who knows several people with the same name? Who has never met someone else with their name?
29. Make a chart showing where the names of the children in your class come from: Are they originally English, or Irish, are they Pacific Islander names, or Indigenous, or from somewhere else? Present the results using a pie chart.

Names change in popularity over time, even in the one place. According to the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages website, the most popular name given to baby boys in 1963 was David, and to girls was Karen. Fifty years later in 2013, the two most popular names were William and Charlotte.

30. Research the popularity of your own name over time. Make a graph showing how your name has changed in popularity. If you have a classmate with the same name, you can work in pairs!
  - There are a lot of different websites showing the changing popularity of names given to babies – as a class look at several of them and discuss which ones would be likely to give you the information that you need.
  - Consider your scales when you make your graph. Make sure that they show any changes clearly.
  - Include a way to indicate on your graph which year you were born.
  - Think carefully about what type of graph will be best to display the changes for your name. You may decide a line graph is best, or choose a bar graph or column graph.
  - Present your graph to the class, and discuss both the results of your research, and why you chose that graph to show them.
  - Make sure you include the country/state/region that the information is from.
  - As a challenge activity – use information from more than one country/state, and show the differences between the two on your graph.