

## Paruku: The Desert Brumby

Jesse Blackadder

### Book Summary

From the award-winning author of *Stay: The Last Dog in Antarctica* comes a moving story inspired by the true story of the Kimberley brumbies and their journey to Dubai.

### Curriculum areas and key learning outcomes

*Paruku* is an excellent resource for Years Five onwards and could be used for the following subjects:

- Literacy and Language
- SOSE

It could also be used to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- ACELT 1609 • ACELT1608 • ACELY1709
- ACHGK029

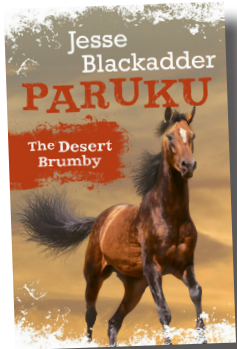
### Themes

- Family
- Growing Up
- Animal Instincts and the Animal World
- Freedom Versus Captivity
- Home and Belonging

### Appropriate Ages:

9-12

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Notes By Simone Evans



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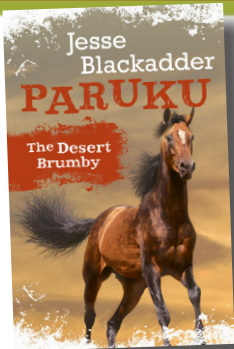
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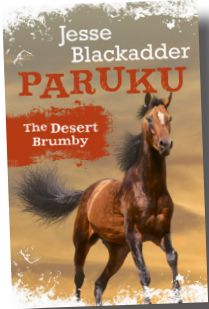
### Introduction

Twelve-year-old Rachel lives with her family in a 'horse-household' in Armidale with her veterinarian father Mike and expert horse-training mother Helen. Her sister Cassie is the star show-jumper – all neat plaits and gleaming boots – and sometimes it seems as though the whole family revolves around Cassie and her horse Aragorn while Rachel – with her fiery red curls and muddy clothes – is largely forgotten.

Ordinary life takes an extraordinary turn when Mike announces that an old friend has offered him some work; he is to travel to the remote Kimberley Desert and capture twelve wild brumbies for the stables of Dubai's Sheik Hamdan bin Rashid Al Mohairi. Their Arabian bloodlines make them the perfect addition to an already successful United Arab Emirates horse-racing team and the Sheik will spare no expense in securing them. Rachel, desperate to accompany her father, dreams of going to see the wild brumbies but her parents will not agree to it. The case appears closed, until a terrible accident leaves Cassie in hospital and Rachel is whisked off on an adventure that will take her from the plains of the Kimberley to the white sands of Dubai.

It is in the heart of the Kimberley that Rachel meets Paruku, a young bay stallion. A special trust-bond develops between them; she is captivated by his wild majesty and he is curious about this small two-legged creature with the 'flaming-hair.' Rachel believes that this horse was meant to run free, but despite her desperate attempts to secure this freedom Paruku is

captured and, along with Rachel's family, travels to Dubai. With encouragement from the Sheik's stable manager Ali, Rachel must use the tactics she has learned from Helen and her own animal instincts, to show Paruku that he can still trust her. Jesse Blackadder's story of finding freedom and friendship reminds us that as we go about our human lives there is a whole world of animals out there, each species with their own story to tell.



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## About the Author

Jesse Blackadder was a horse-mad kid. She wanted to be a vet from the age of five, but ended up becoming a writer. She lives near an extinct volcano in northern New South Wales, and shares her very big garden with a water dragon called Kinky, a koala called Blinky, a python called Slinky and lots of other wild creatures. Jess is also the author of *Stay: The Last Dog in Antarctica*.

## Author Inspiration

Jesse to add something here...

## Themes

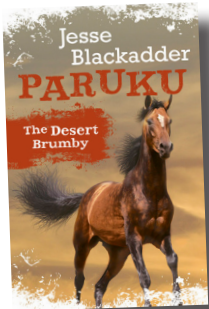
### Family

Rachel's family love each other and work together as a team, but family dynamics can be complicated. Rachel learns a lot about herself and her family on this adventure.

**Discussion Point:** What traits has Rachel inherited from her parents? Are Rachel and Cassie similar at all? What makes them different? What does Rachel learn from her dad about her sister - 'Miss Perfect'? Does Rachel want to 'prove' something to her family? What? Have you ever felt like this before?

### Growing Up

When Rachel is preparing to leave Dubai she realises that 'she couldn't go back to being the girl she was at the start of this adventure' (p 205). She has changed a lot on the journey, growing physically taller (almost as tall as Cassie!) and emotionally stronger; a natural horsewoman with a special talent for communicating with the brumbies. Ali's invitation to spend her future school holidays in Dubai means everyone else can see this new grown up Rachel as well. Even Cassie recognises this change remarking that she will 'have to find another strapper,' (p 208). Jesse Blackadder



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shows us how sometimes actions can speak louder than words and it is Rachel's actions that show how fast she is growing up.

**Discussion Point:** What is the significance of Rachel catching and calming Aragorn after Cassie's fall? Does Rachel's father see her in a new light? Can you think of some other times that Rachel shows her parents how responsible she is? Plot the key moments throughout the book where Rachel demonstrates that she is growing up.

### Animal Instinct and the Animal World

The animals in this story – horses, camels and dingoes – also have a story to tell. They have special relationships with each other and also with the 'Two-Legs' in the story. We learn that horses are curious by nature and they are very sensitive to their environment and to scent. Horses rely heavily on their instincts about place and people. Rachel is very sensitive to this world and has a special way with them. This allows her to develop a relationship with Paruku and regain his trust after capture.

**Discussion Point:** What are some key differences between the animal world and the human world? Do you think some people are

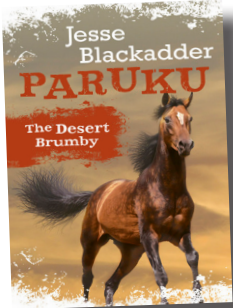
able to tap into the animal world? Why do you think Rachel has a special way with horses? When does Rachel use her animal instincts in the novel?

### Freedom Versus Captivity

'She didn't know if she wanted to will the horses to run away from them and escape, orto run towards them and be caught.' (p94)

Rachel feels instinctively that Paruku wants to be free and throughout the novel she struggles with the idea that they are robbing him of his 'wildness'. As Rachel prepares to leave Dubai she finds comfort knowing that 'the wild gallop'she and Paruku shared 'was theirs.' (p201)

**Activity:** What activities do you like to do that make you feel free? Do you think Paruku felt free at the end of the novel? Do you think he will retain some of his 'wildness' in Dubai? Can animals be 'free' in captivity? Why/Why not.'



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### Home and Belonging

To the people of the Kimberley desert the wild brumbies are outsiders, introduced species, a long way from home. But Rachel cannot understand this. She wonders how the wild horses could be out of place and decides 'if they were, they didn't know it. As far as they were concerned, this was their home.' (p 86) But Jesse Blackadder suggests that 'home' might be more than just the physical space we occupy and perhaps 'home' can be two places at once. When Paruku sleeps in the Australian desert 'his skin keeps on twitching, all through the night, and he dreams of that white, windy desert a long way away,' (p 88) Ali suggests that the brumbies are 'more at home' in Dubai 'than in Australia,' (p 167) because they have Arabian bloodlines and they remember the land of their ancestors. Blackadder shows us different ideas of home and what it means to belong.

**Activity:** Listen to the last words we hear about Paruku:

'In the distance he can see the other horses cantering towards them. He's coming to know their scent. He lifts his head to greet his new herd,'(p 203).

Do you think Paruku feels like he 'belongs' at

the end? What does it mean when Paruku thinks Rachel 'smells like home?'(p 183)

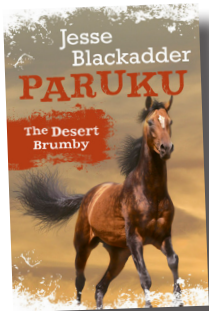
Does she smell like Australia? Or Dubai? Or is she simply 'home' to him now? Can we belong in more than one place at once? Where are some places you belong and why is it important to have a sense of belonging? What do we learn about the Sharp-Tooths, the Never-Thirsts and the Soil- Breakers on Pages 40-41?

## Curriculum Topics

### Literacy and Language

Jesse Blackadder uses lots of interesting verbs to describe the way her characters (both humans and animals) move. These paint a picture for the reader and help us understand each character's physical traits.

**Activity: Worksheet One: Part A** asks you to examine the first page of the book and identify what the verbs tell us about Rachel. **Part B** gives examples of different verbs Blackadder uses to describe the way her animals move.



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There are lots of words used in the book that are specific to the culture of horse riding and you may not hear them in daily life. We can call this a **specific vocabulary**.

**Activity:** As you read through the novel, create a word bank of 'horsey' vocabulary. List the word, its dictionary definition and draw a picture. You may like to include: jodhpurs, a strapper, saddle, bridle, cantering, mares, foals and stallions.

**Activity: Worksheet Two** gives you some examples of **similes** from Blackadder's writing. Identify the comparisons and discuss the effect they have on the reader.

It also lists a number of things you may find in the Australian bush. Have a go at creating some of your own similes. These should help the reader imagine what the bush looks or sounds like.

Sometimes the **repetition** of words can create a kind of **poetic rhythm**.

**Activity:** Close your eyes and listen to your teacher read the below sentence that describes the wild brumbies: 'Flank to flank, rump to rump, nose to rump, hoof to hoof for warmth.' (p 12).

Think about how this repetition places emphasis on what the author wants the reader to see, hear, know, or feel. Brainstorm some different Australian animals as a class. Create your own sentences to describe these groups of animals in

their natural environment, using repetition for poetic effect.

Did you notice when you were reading that the animal passages are written as if they are happening now? This is called present tense and means that the author is telling us the story as it happens – in real time. Jesse Blackadder is very clever using this tense because it helps the animal world to come alive and jump right off the page. It helps the reader feel as if they are right there 'in the moment' and contrasts with the majority of the book, which is told in past tense.

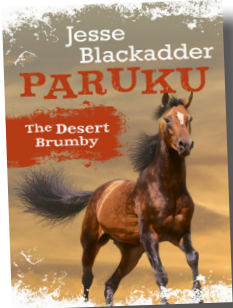
**Activity:** Explore past and present tense in the novel and the effect this has on the reader. In pairs, select one passage using **past** and one passage using **present** tense and then re-write both passages using a different tense. You can challenge yourself to produce a passage in **future** tense if they like. Share these with the class.

## SOSE

### A Snapshot of Australian History.

Rachel is a fictional character but the story is based on real events, people and horses. The vet who caught the thirteen brumbies was a man called Alan Post and he really did send them to Dubai.

**Activity:** Read the author's notes **After You Read this Book ...** (p211) and then listen to the



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ABC interview with Jesse Blackadder about her inspiration for the story:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-01-22/paruku-brumbies/5212826?&section=news>

**Activity:** Compile a list of interview questions that you would like to ask Jesse Blackadder about her experience researching and writing the novel.

### The Traditional Owners of the Lake

The Mulan Community are one of 'the most remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.' (p 62) They are the traditional owners of Lake George, which lies within the Indigenous Protected Area. Access the below website which looks at the Paruku Rangers and their role in community.

<http://klc.org.au/rangers/paruku-ipa-rangers/>

### Wild but Not Native

Libby Lovegrove from Wild Brumbies Kimberley believes the brumbies should 'stay wild,' (p 48) but most people in the Kimberly 'want them gone.' (p 51) When Rachel asks Eddie (from the Paruku Rangers) why they don't like the horses being there, he answers:

'It's not that we don't like 'em; there's too many. They're grazing out the land around the lake and wrecking it. We've got places where we keep the horses out, and you should see the difference. They're full of bush tucker.' (p 77)

In the story and later in the **Author's Notes**, we learn that there are 'thousands' of wild brumbies in the Kimberley. Mike describes the situation as 'complex' and it is.

**Activity:** What does the class think? In groups of four (first –fourth speakers) hold a series of class debates for and against the topic:

### The Kimberley brumbies should remain wild

Some of the below links contain excellent online resources.

<http://www.wildhorseskimberley.com.au/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-06/opponents-of-cull-of-wild-horses-say-it-is-inhumane/5072566>

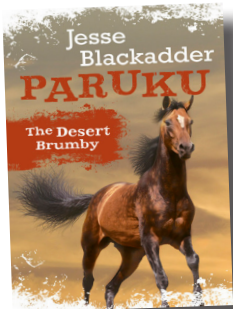
<http://www.australianhorserescue.com/news/2010/11/25/brumbies-from-lake-gregory-kimberley-wa-to-be-trucked-to-qld-for-slaughter/>

<http://www.savethebrumbies.org/news/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/23/2371771.htm>

<http://www.kimberleypage.com.au/2013/11/geoffrey-clarke-on-lake-gregory-horses/>





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### From One Hot Spot to Another!

Rachel and her father travel from the Kimberley desert to Dubai and back again. These two places are on different sides of the world but they do have some things in common.

**Activity:** On a world map locate the two places. Use an atlas to find how much distance lies between them. Find ten interesting facts about each place and write a small information report on each. Present the report, along with any images you have sourced, to the class.

### Visual Arts

#### Create a Desert Landscape

Jesse Blackadder does a wonderful job of describing the Kimberley desert. She details a world of spinifex grass, coolabahs, wattles, gum and boab (bottle) trees as well as sand dunes, red termite mounds and dust filled sleeping bags. Create a diorama of the Kimberley desert as you imagine it. Create the landscape first and then think about including some people and animals. Don't forget the brumbies!

#### Beautiful Birds

Throughout the story Jesse Blackadder includes lots of birds in the landscape. Budgies, broilgas, black swans and galahs all flit across the pages. Choose one bird to draw in detail. Locate images of your bird in an encyclopaedia and try to draw the features and colours as realistically as possible. Label your drawing.

#### Shimmering Deserts

In Jesse Blackadder's thank you notes she mentions a special book called *Desert Lake: Art, Science and Stories from Paruku* (2013). This book contains beautiful colour photographs and paintings. Mix watercolour paints to create desert landscapes inspired by the images in this book. Experiment with very thin layers of light colours to create shimmering lakes and sand dunes. Classroom displays may include descriptions of the novel's desert setting.

## Questions for Reading and Discussion

1. Rachel is very passionate about accompanying her father to capture the wild brumbies and feels like 'making a racket.' (p 6) when her parents don't allow her to go. When have you ever felt like 'making a racket'?

2. Cassie is so determined to land a jump in the rain that she does not listen to her parents warning her off Aragon and subsequently dislocates her hip (p 20). Have you ever wished you listened to your parents instead of being stubborn?

3. Listen to how much Rachel loves her 'shaggy pony' Rapsallion. 'She loved his smell. She pushed her fingers under his mane and scratched. She knew all his itchy spots and he blew out softly through his nostrils with pleasure.' (p 16)  
Have you ever had a pet that you loved this much? What did you love about them? Did they trust you? How did you know?

4. "I want to go home," Cassie snapped. "I'm not staying in traction. It's ridiculous." (p 32) Cassie has to stay in traction for six weeks. Her aunt says she will just read showjumping magazines the whole time. How do you think she feels? What would you do for six weeks in traction?

5. *The Silver Brumby* is a famous book by Australian author Elyne Mitchell and first published in 1958. It tells the story of a magnificent pale brumby called Thowra and is set in the Snowy Mountains. Have you read this book? Why do you think Jesse Blackadder makes reference to *The Silver Brumby* in her own novel?

6. Helen worked with brumbies using 'the training methods she'd learned from a horse whisperer in America many years earlier. (p160) Have you ever heard stories of animal 'whisperers' before? What does Rachel mean when she says 'My mother trains horses with kindness?' (p166)

7. Rachel was initially cautious of camping under the stars but learns to love it. Share your camping stories with the class.

8. Pages 189 – 191 describe some powerful moments between Paruku and Rachel. How does Jesse Blackadder choose to describe these moments? What is special about the writing in this section? How does it make you feel?

## Worksheet One – Verbs

Jesse Blackadder uses lots of interesting **verbs** to describe the way her characters (both humans and animals) move. These paint a picture for the reader and help us understand each character's physical traits.

**A) Read the below excerpt from the first page of the book and circle the verbs used to describe Rachel's movements.**

Rachel burst in through the screen door. It hissed behind her on its automatic closer, and slammed at the last second, like it always did.

'Boots!' Her father called.

Rachel skidded to a halt. 'But Cassie's wearing hers!'

Cassie looked up from her show-jumping magazine and raised an eyebrow. She was indeed wearing her new black leather longboots, and they gleamed. She never seemed to get a speck of manure on them. Her straight blonde hair was always neatly plaited. She had been born neat and tidy, it seemed.

Rachel looked down at her own elastic-sided work boots. They were smeared with a mix of mud and stable sawdust. She shoved her heel into the boot remover and twisted her ankle to the side, repeated the action for the other foot, then kicked the boots out of the way and stepped up the single wooden stair into the kitchen shaking her red curls out of her eyes.

**B) Why do you think Jesse Blackadder has chosen these verbs to describe Rachel's movements?**

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**C) Animal Movements – Circle the verb in each example.**

**(i)** Two dingos were trotting along the edge of the lake, looking like they were flowing through the long grass. (Page 105)

**(ii)** A big mob (of brumbies) was threading its way down to the lake. (Page 107)

**(iii)** Paruku showed no sign of slowing down; in fact he sped up so much that he was thundering about the ring, his tail held high, with Rachel in the middle. (Page 186)

**(iv)** As the brumbies approached, they split into two groups, shifting course left and right to go around them. Rachel gasped as they swept past just a few metres away. (Page 70)

**Answers: A) Burst, skidded, shoved, twisted, kicked. C) Trotting, threading, thundering, swept.**

## Worksheet One – Similes

Jesse Blackadder uses some interesting similes in her novel. A simile is a figure of speech that compares one thing with another and usually starts with like or as.

**A) Examine some examples from Blackadder’s writing. Circle the comparisons and then discuss the effect they have on the reader.**

**(i)** The thunder cracked again, like a volley of pistol shots, and Aragorn gave a terrified neigh. (Page 22)

**(ii)** They were sand dunes, running in long lines as if someone had dragged a giant plough across the country. (Page 59)

**(iii)** A flock of tiny birds fluttered past, chirruping sweetly. They landed for a moment on a bush and hung like tiny green jewels. (Page 69)

**(iv)** They clambered out of the cool Mercedes, the heat hitting them like a brick. (Page 162)

**B) Try creating some of your own similes inspired by the three things below. The similes should help the reader imagine what they look or sound like.**

E.g. Kookaburra. The kookaburra laughed so hard its belly shook like a cup of jelly!

Gum Tree \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Snake \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

River \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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Author unknown, Brumbies from the Kimberley in WA to be Trucked to Qld for Slaughter, retrieved from:

<http://www.australianhorserescue.com/news/2010/11/25/brumbies-from-lake-gregory-kimberley-wa-to-be-trucked-to-qld-for-slaughter/>

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Vanessa Mills, Wild horses in the Kimberley, 2008, retrieved from:

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/09/23/2371771.htm>

## About the Author of the Notes

Simone Evans attended Newtown High School of the Performing Arts before completing a Bachelor of Media and Communications at Charles Sturt University. She worked for almost a decade producing theatre for young people in Australia and England and is now a primary school teacher in rural NSW.