

## Reviews of Gracie and Josh

### Children's Books Daily

<http://childrensbooksdaily.com/review-of-gracie-and-josh/>  
'Gracie and Josh'

Written by Susanne Gervay and illustrated by Serena Geddes

Publisher: Ford Street Publishing

Age Range: Early Childhood – Middle Primary

Themes: siblings, family, illness, childhood, hospitals, cancer, resilience

Sometimes I finish reading a children's book and I just hope, hope, hope that it finds its way into the right little hands and the right family. Every child wants to see their life reflected in a book, to know they are not alone, and to know that someone feels and thinks as they do. Young children do not always have the words to express their deepest feelings, but sometimes an author finds the words for them.

'Gracie and Josh' is a book that I really do hope finds its way into the many homes where families are battling childhood illness, that it may offer some comfort, reassurance and a few smiles in a tough time.

Though the illness is never named, 'Gracie and Josh' is a story of the effects of childhood cancer on the whole family. It is endorsed by Variety. Variety-the Children's Charity is a national not-for-profit organisation committed to empowering Australian children who are sick, disadvantaged or have special needs.

Gervay and Geddes have tackled a tough subject with lightness and with laughter. Gracie loves dressing up and pretending to be a squiggly black spider. Her brother Josh is making a movie about Gracie Spider. On his good weeks Josh delights in playing with Gracie and the close bond between the siblings radiates from both words and illustrations. On his bad weeks Gracie sits by his bed and reminds him that incy wincy spider just kept on trying, getting up time after time.

The story is set at home, and then largely in a children's ward in a hospital. When the doctors get Josh to take his beanie off, Gracie gets upset and mum gets upset at Gracie. Some of the tough struggles that are faced are depicted, but Gervay at all times focusses on the sometimes small glimmers of hope, fun and laughter.

Ford Street Publishing are producing some great books, and this is one of them.

### READPLUS

[http://www.readplus.com.au/blog\\_detail.php?id=3536](http://www.readplus.com.au/blog_detail.php?id=3536)

Review Blog

Apr 17 2013

Gracie and Josh by Susanne Gervay

Ill. by Serena Geddes. Ford Street Publishing, 2013. Hardcover. ISBN 9781 9216 65844.

(Ages 5+) Well recommended. Written by award winning author Susanne Gervay, and with an endorsement from Variety, this book is a must have for any children's collection, be it school or public library.

This is the touching, funny, honest and heartwarming story of brother and sister, Gracie and Josh. Josh is a movie maker, and Gracie is his shining star - she is the Incy Wincy Spider, and Josh helps her costume along by making fat black sausage legs. Josh and Gracie are making a movie together - a story which features many of the people in their day to day world - a movie which brings people together, and makes them laugh, and celebrates the day to day moments which were often too busy to stop and celebrate.

It's especially important for Gracie and Josh to celebrate these little moments, because Josh is sick. Josh is so sick, he spends a lot of time in hospital, has weeks where Gracie can't come close, and so sick that his hair has all gone. Gracie is a staunch defender of Josh, getting cross with the doctors who make Josh take his beanie off, and cross with the sickness which keeps Josh away. Josh is stoic and strong, and there for Gracie, except in his bad weeks.

In his bad weeks, Gracie is there for Josh, reminding him that the spider fell down 6 times, but he didn't give up - you just have to try, try, try again.

Supported by bright, colourful and honest illustrations, this book comes well recommended.

Freya Lucas

## CBCA Book Buzz

### REVIEW 'Gracie and Josh' February 2013

Gracie and Josh is one of those rare books, which takes a hard and gut wrenching topic and approaches it in such a delightful way, both adult and child reader, will thoroughly enjoy and learn from it. A story about a brother and sister relationship, and the effect of battling cancer. So brilliantly created, with story and illustrations intricately blended, this book does not even mention the word cancer, but delicately assumes some knowledge of child illnesses. This illness does not become the focus of the book, but the means by which Gracie and Josh take every moment of life as a precious gift. A sweet telling of siblings loving each other, enjoying each other, and rising above what life throws at them.

Rachel Greenwood Editor

Gracie and Josh  
Susanne Gervay  
Serena Geddes  
Ford Street Publishing, 2013 (March 1)

hbk, 32 pp., RRP \$A26.95  
9781921665844

pbk., RRP \$A16.95  
9781921665851

Josh is making a movie, the first on his journey to being a famous movie director. His sister, Gracie, is the star – dressed up as a spider with lovely black squishy sausage legs and singing Incy Wincy Spider with gusto and love, especially love. This is a good week for Josh and it's celebrated with things like going to school... because that is a celebration for Josh. The following week he's on the downhill slide to his next bout of chemotherapy. That striped beanie is not just an artistic affectation. Gracie urges him to be resilient, "Look, Josh, the spider fell down six times. But the spider didn't give up. You just have to try, try and try again." The story follows to Josh to hospital and the events there are touched with such a gentle brush that it uplifts the spirit. It is a story which shows both the joys of being a kid as well as their vulnerability and confusion when confronted with tough stuff, and how the special relationship between siblings is so critical. As much as Gracie is there for Josh, he is there for Gracie.

Full disclosure – I have to be one of Susanne Gervay's greatest fans, but I'm not going to recuse myself from reviewing her books. I love the way she tackles topics that are not the mainstream for children's literature, but ARE mainstream in the lives of many children. I am blessed – so far none of the precious little people in my life have been touched by serious illness or injury, but so many families have and so many of the children in our care would relate so well to Gracie. To go to the bookshop or the school library and find a book that deals so beautifully and sensitively with what is your everyday life has to bring some comfort. "Wow, someone sees the way my family is as normal and important enough to write a book for me ... maybe I'm not so alone after all. Maybe now my friends will understand." There needs to be no other justification for having this book in your collection than that, and the fact that it is perfectly pitched, masterfully written and delicately illustrated in the softest lines and colours just adds to its beauty. The partnership between Susanne and Serena is inspired.

This story has been endorsed by Variety <http://www.variety.org.au/>, a organisation dedicated to making the lives of sick children better – no doubt many of us have reason to be grateful for their work – and the publishers have invited everyone to the launch at The Children's Bookshop at 6 Hannah Street in Beecroft (Sydney) on March 1 at 9.15 for 9.45.

Even if you can't make that, make sure this book is part of your collection. Teaching notes are available from <http://www.fordstreetpublishing.com/ford/index.php/teachers-notes> - and they are great conversation starters for the classmates of a student like Josh, or even for a parent needing guidance in talking to their healthy children. Correlating them to the ANC is a bonus.

Barbara Braxton - Teacher Librarian -M.Ed. (TL); M.App.Sci. (TL); M.I.S. (Children's Services)

## BOOK REVIEW

***Gracie and Josh*** by Susanne Gervay & Serena Geddes

Ford Street Publishing

PB—5+ Price: AUD HC \$26.95 PB \$16.95

ISBN: HC 9781921665844 PB 9781921665851

Reviewer: Jenny Mounfield

*'My name is Gracie. Today, I'm a squiggly black spider.  
My brother Josh helps me make my spider legs. They look like fat sausages.  
Josh gives me his woolly black beanie. His favourite one has green stripes.'*

Josh is going to be a famous movie-maker. Dressed in her spider costume, Gracie is starring in her brother's first film. The only thing to mar this perfect picture of childhood is Josh's cancer.

It isn't often—if ever—that a picture book has the power to bring a lump to my throat. This one did it for me. Endorsed by Variety the children's charity, *Gracie and Josh* is not a story about fighting a life-threatening disease; it's a story about life and living—and milking every drop from every minute we have been given. This is a profound lesson for us all. Sadly, the world is filled with children like Gracie and Josh. Every one of them is undoubtedly a hero.

Susanne Gervay's best-selling books include: *I Am Jack*, *That's Why I Wrote This Song* and *Ships in the Field*. She was awarded the Lady Cutler Award for Distinguished Service to Children's Literature and an Order of Australia OAM.

Serena Geddes began her career as an illustrator for Walt Disney Australia. Since 2009 she has illustrated 14 titles including: picture book, *Samuel's Kisses* and junior fiction, *Totally Twins*.