

# Monster Nanny

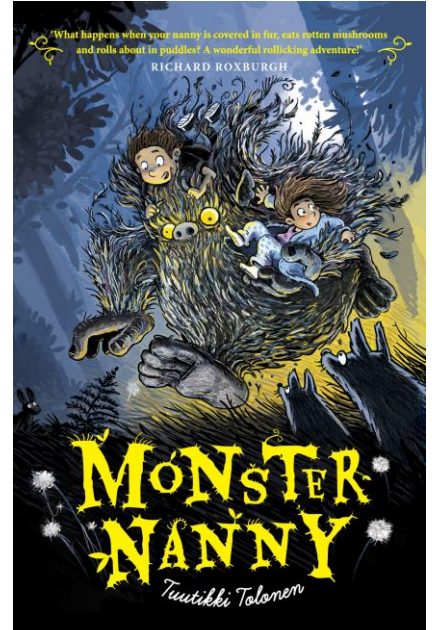
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Recommended for 7 to 10-year-olds



## Summary

Halley, Koby and Mimi have been sent a nanny to look after them while their parents are away. The only problem? Their nanny is a monster! Grah is enormous, hairy, dusty and doesn't talk. As the three siblings search for answers, they discover that other neighbourhood kids have also been left with similar creatures. So where did they all come from? With no parents around and the fate of their new nanny at stake, the Hellman kids must depend on each other as they solve the mystery of the monsters – and maybe even help them get back to their home.

## Author Style

'Tuutikki Tolonen's *Monster Nanny* is an original, fresh and skilfully constructed novel, which appeals seamlessly to both juvenile and adult readers. The characters are easy to identify with, the narration flows freely, and the mystery of the monsters soon has the reader hooked. Woven through the thrilling and good-natured adventure run the themes of friendship and understanding diversity. The book is suitable both for reading aloud, a desk book at school, and for devouring at the library or at home in one's favourite reading nook. *Monster Nanny* has all the ingredients of a beloved children's classic.'

—Arvid Lydecken [a major Finnish literary award] judging panel

## Use in the curriculum

*Monster Nanny* is a funny book, based on the premise that parents are suddenly required to leave their children in the care of the mysterious nannies. It is also a great adventure story in the tradition of children left to work things out for themselves – and doing rather well.

For younger students, *Monster Nanny* can be read aloud. It extends students to experience unusual events in a framework of familiar family and neighbourhood experiences.

For students who are reading the book themselves, *Monster Nanny* provides an unusual Finnish setting and some unfamiliar vocabulary to negotiate while enjoying the fantastical adventure. The book extends into other Learning Areas (mythology, folk tales, geography, social studies).

Companion books: the Moomintroll books by Tove Jansen are Finnish/Swedish children's classics. See <https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/childrens/Finn-Family-Moomintroll-Tove-Jansson-9781908745644>.

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## Themes

- friendship
- tolerance
- family
- fantasy
- adventure
- humour

## Discussion questions

### Comprehension questions

#### Chapter One

- Chapter 1 is titled 'The Fateful Breakfast'. What does the word fateful mean? What fateful thing or things occur in Chapter 1? (page 1)
- What do the Hellman kids call their dad and why? (page 2)
- What prize does Mrs Hellman win? (page 1)
- After the train tickets to Lapland, what other special delivery arrives on the Hellman's doorstep? (page 8)
- What is the secret special experiment that the monster nanny is part of? (page 6)

#### Chapter Two

- Why do you think having a monster nanny will make it hard to keep the Hellman's apartment clean? (page 14)
- Why can't Invisible Voice get home in time to look after his kids? (page 16)
- Why is Mimi's bathrobe 'the best bathrobe in the world'? (page 17)
- Why does Koby suggest he might need a photo of his father? (19)
- Why is Mr Hellman away from home so much? (page 19)

#### Chapter Three

- Why is Halley allowed to go to the library and not Koby? (page 22)
- Does Koby believe that Mimi's bathrobe can talk? (page 23)
- Why doesn't Mrs Hellman think it is a good idea to call when she is away in Lapland? (page 28)
- Who told Mimi about monsters never sleeping? (pages 29-30)
- What is the monster nanny watching on TV when Mrs Hellman leaves for Lapland? (page 30)

#### Chapter Four

- Why does Halley call *Monster Rhymes* and *The Adventures of Honey Monster on Honey Island* decoy books? (pages 33, 39)
- Who wrote *Monsters: Characteristics and Qualities of the Species in Light of My Experience*? (page 33)
- What happened to the author after he wrote the book? (page 35)
- What does the word 'empirical' mean? (page 39)
- Why does Koby think it is a good idea to read the table of contents of a book before you read the first chapter? (page 39)



## Discussion questions

### Characterisation

Make a list of words or phrases to describe Halley, Koby and Mimi.

- Find quotes from the book that made you think this about them. For instance, you might say that Koby is sensible and intelligent (page 25) because he corrects his mother when she falsely claims that Mimi will get nits if she doesn't have her hair washed. Halley is super-competitive because she insists on racing the monster nanny (pages 63-72) and Mimi is a very good communicator because she learns how to understand Grah (Chapter 7).

### Finland

- a) In many ways the Hellman children could be living anywhere in the world, but the author tells us on page 171 that they live in Finland. If she hadn't done this what clues in the novel tell us that where they live is definitely NOT Australia?  
[Answer: you can catch a train from their city to Lapland; summer holidays are in June; the sun barely sets at night during summer; it's common to sail boats to small islands and stay in cabins during vacations.]
- b) Research five interesting facts about Finland and present them to your class.

### Grammar

Rule five columns on an exercise page and title each column with one of the following: verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives and similes.

- Turn to the first paragraph on page 67, 'The monster did not dodge tree stumps or trees or anything at all ... It felt like they were on a roller-coaster that only went downhill.' and find as many examples of each as you can.
- Place examples in the correct column. For instance, the word *dodge* is a verb and should be placed in the column headed Verbs.

Verbs	Nouns	Adverbs	Adjectives	Similes
dodge				

[The following is a longer option for older students.]

- Turn to the bottom of page 137 and read from 'In a few seconds, the tear was big enough, and out peeked a tiny, snub-nosed, and greenish face, undeniably like a frog or bulldog.' to page 139 "'Watch out!' Halley managed to call before there was a cloud of dust, and everything disappeared in an all-pervading gray-black cloud.'
- Find every example of verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives and similes in the extract, making sure to place examples in the correct column.

### Writing

Once you have finished reading *Monster Nanny*, write a review. Remember, a good book review should include the following:

- The book's title and author.
- What the story is about without retelling it too much.
- The things you liked about the story. Was it exciting, scary, funny? Make sure you include anything you disliked, too. Was it sad, unbelievable or boring?

(Continued over page)

- Did you want to finish it quickly to find out what would happen to the monster nanny or did you struggle to finish it because you didn't really care?
- Back up your opinions with specific examples from the book.

## Prediction

Imagine you are set the task of writing the sequel to *Monster Nanny*.

- What would happen next in the story? Would the children follow Grah to the monster world? Would the monsters return to the human world? Would you explain who the three women were and why one of them ate the mosquito fairy? Or explain what really happened to the author of the monster book, Runar Kalli?

## The author and her inspiration

'I got the idea for my monster books from my son Leonardo, who was six years old at the time. We were eating breakfast when all of a sudden Leonardo told me that he had heard on the radio that all the mothers in Finland had to leave home since monsters were coming to replace them. This idea was so strange that it stayed on my mind. How would that work? What would the monsters be like? Would they be friendly, or would they pop the children right into their mouths? After I'd spent several weeks pondering this, I just had to start writing a story to figure out how everything would go. I didn't think anyone but me would be interested in the story, but how wrong I was: this has been my most popular book so far!'

— Tuutikki Tolonen



Tuutikki Tolonen is the author of several acclaimed children's books, plays and academic articles.

For *Monster Nanny* she received the Arvid Lydecken prize. She teaches creative writing and has worked as an editor and reporter at Vinski, Finland's only literary journal for children.