Outline:

Up high in the grasslands where Wooble Beasts roam, Donfinkle Vonkrinkle is building his home.

When up pop four creatures to babble and squawk, A troublesome taunt full of bothersome talk …

Author/Illustrator Information:

Choechoe Brereton loves writing. She also loves rainy days, hot chocolate, whales, friendly monsters and magical shops. She doesn’t know where she would be if she couldn’t imagine. A House For Donfinkle is her first book.

Wayne Harris is an award-winning illustrator and designer. He won the APA Best Designed Picture Book of the Year Award for A Bit of Company by Margaret Wild and for Gordon’s Got a Snookie by Lisa Shanahan. He was short-listed in the 1995 NSW Premier’s Award for writing and illustrating Judy and the Volcano, the same year Going Home was named an American Library Association Notable Children’s Book. He works as a designer for Walker Books Australia and also teaches design and illustration. He has most recently illustrated Edge of the World, written by Ian Trevaskis, published by Walker Books.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

The National Curriculum Focus:

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Discussion Questions and Activities

Before Reading

• View the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:
  » The title
  » The author
  » The illustrator
  » The publisher
  » The blurb.

• What do you think the story might be about from looking at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover? Write your own story using the title A House for Donfinkle.

• Read the book aloud to the class without showing the illustrations. Ask students to draw or make an image in their mind of the different versions of Donfinkle’s house. Read the book again, showing the illustrations to the class. How do the illustrations change the story?

Exploring the Text

• Is A House for Donfinkle an imaginative, informative or persuasive text? Is it a combination of more than one of these types of texts? How can you tell? Who do you think the book was created for?

• Take turns describing/retelling the story as if you were explaining it to someone who hasn’t read it yet. What do you think are the most important parts of the story? Why do you think that?

• What is your favourite part of the book? What do you like about that part?

• Choose a page and discuss how the words and images convey what emotions the characters are feeling. Look at their body language, facial expressions and the language.

• What do we know about Donfinkle based on the text and illustrations in the book? Create a word cloud using words to describe Donfinkle at www.abcya.com/word_clouds.

• Why do you think Donfinkle listened to the creatures in the first place and changed his house? Why do you think he changed everything back in the end? Can you think of a time when you changed your mind based on what someone else said? How did this make you feel? Have a class discussion on when it is okay to be influenced by others and when you should do what you think is right.

• The Gooble warns Donfinkle about the dangerous Fozzles. Draw a picture of and write a short story about a Fozzle. Where does it live? What does it eat?

• Why do you think the creatures were being so critical to Donfinkle about his house? What do you think Donfinkle learnt by the end of the story? What do you think the creatures learnt by the end of the story?

• As a class, write a list of strategies people can use when being teased.

• Choose one of the four creatures (i.e. Mooble, Flooble, Gooble or Blooble) and think about what their home would look like based on what they suggest to Donfinkle in the book. Draw a picture of their houses and label interesting parts. Present your design to the class and explain why each feature is important and how it suits the creature that will live in it.

• Compare Donfinkle’s house as he built it originally and as it looks when all the creatures have modified it. Describe the difference between the houses and discuss what you think of the original and the modified version. Do you think it was a good idea that Donfinkle listened to the creatures in the first place?

• Why are some words written in a larger font? What effect does this have on how you read the book?

• As a class, write a sequel to the book about Donfinkle making or building something else with interference from the other characters. Each student can write and illustrate a page about one of the characters telling Donfinkle that he should change his creation. Share your draft page with another class member and have a discussion about what could be improved (punctuation, spelling and meaning). When all the pages are complete, bind them together to make a book that can live on the bookshelf in your classroom.
Grammar and Punctuation

• Why do the characters’ names start with a capital letter? Why are names written like that? What does a sentence begin and end with? Find examples of this in the book.

• Draw punctuation marks (such as full stops, commas, quotation marks, exclamation marks and question marks) on the board and identify where they are in the book. Ask why books use these punctuation marks. How would the book change if the author didn’t use punctuation?

Visual Arts

• Design your own imaginative dream home and build it out of ice-cream sticks, paper-mâché and other craft material.

• Form groups of 3 or 4 students, take a sheet of paper and fold it into thirds or quarters lengthways (depending on the number of students). Fold the paper so you can only see one section at a time. Students take turns at drawing a section of a house (without the other students looking) and then pass it to the next student. When everyone is finished, unfold the paper to see what the house looks like. Discuss why it is important to have a plan for a group project, rather than everyone doing their own thing.

Illustration

• Analyse one of the double-page spreads from the book. Questions to ask could include:
  » What do you look at first? Why? Then how does your eye travel around the page? (This is called the “reading path”).
  » What perspective is used? Is the picture shown close-up or from a distance?
  » What objects are big and small? Why are they shown this way?
  » What objects are in the foreground (front) of the picture? The background? Midground?
  » What are the dominant colours? What mood (feeling) do these colours create?
  » Where are the characters in the picture looking? Why are they looking there? What effect does this have?

• What other books has Wayne Harris illustrated? Have you read any of his other books? Can you find any in your school library? Which is your favourite Wayne Harris book? Present it to the class explaining why you like it.

Create your own weird and wonderful world full of unique creatures and plants. Give each of the creatures a name and write a story about them.