

RIDDLE GULLY RUNAWAY

Jen Banyard

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Themes: Adventure, self-perception, resilience, forgiveness

Year level: Y4 to 8

Cross-curriculum priority: Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

Riddle Gully Runaway is a humorous stand-alone adventure story for middle-primary to lower-secondary readers, suitable for both boys and girls. It hinges on themes of self-perception, self-acceptance, resilience and forgiveness; it also sketches simple strategies for young people towards bolstering self-esteem. Themes, though serious, are handled with an engaging, light touch.

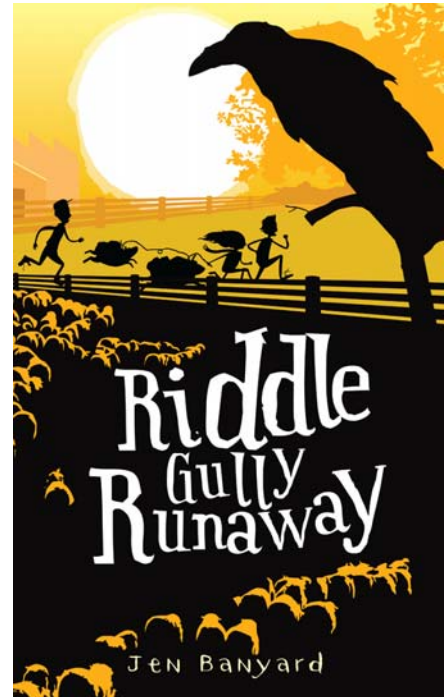
The novel is the second *Riddle Gully* book and sees the return of lovable 13-year-old newshound Pollo di Nozi, her pet sheep sidekick Shorn Connery and best mate Will Hopkins. Pollo is as overeager as ever in her quest for a good news story. And, as ever, Will's cautious instincts count for zip against Pollo's enthusiasm.

Mayor Bullock's nephew, the hip-hop-crazy 16-year-old Benson Bragg, has been branded a thief and suspended from his school in the city. He is forced to stay with his uncle and grandmother in Riddle Gully. Coinciding with his arrival, a string of petty thefts in Riddle Gully comes to light. Benson's 'confession' to Pollo and Will is misread and ends up in the newspaper. Benson hitches a ride on a sheep truck to escape Riddle Gully.

When Pollo and Will realise Benson is innocent, they give chase. Their hunt leads them to the coastal abattoir town of Princeville. En route there are mishaps and adventures. Benson, who has found a job at the abattoir and is living rough, looks like sliding into real strife when he capitulates to a dare from his workmates. Pollo and Will rescue Benson and help him to convince others but, more importantly, himself that he is not the 'scumbag' he had come to believe himself to be.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jen Banyard grew up by the Canning River in Perth, Western Australia. Her youth was filled with fun, affection, adventure and challenge, which she draws on in her writing. There is also the small matter of her lifelong covert hankering to be a secret agent. She has a PhD in creative writing from the University of Western Australia. *Riddle Gully Runaway* is her third novel for young readers.



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STUDY NOTES

1. AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LINKS

a. Cross-curriculum Priority: Sustainability

Systems – Sustainable patterns of living rely on the interdependence of healthy social, economic and ecological systems.

Riddle Gully Runaway features a pair of nesting ravens that, among other things, attack sheep and 'steal'. Ravens are inventive, bold and smart. Across Australia, as a native species, they are protected. Traditionally, to Aboriginal people crows and ravens are highly revered animals and they wouldn't think of killing them. However, they have many unwelcome traits, such as killing newborn lambs and chicks, raiding crops, scavenging in bins or just being plain noisy.

The Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*) is a member of the Corvidae family, which includes all crows and ravens. Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), these birds are not threatened in terms of numbers. But occasionally, under licence, culling programs (including shooting, nest destruction or a combination of these measures) are implemented. **What circumstances might justify culling a native species?**

b. General Capability: Personal and Social Capability

An important theme of the novel is resilience. Benson must, as Will puts it, 'learn to get along' with his problems (actions he regrets), rather than feeling weighed down and controlled by them. This approach is reflected in 'acceptance and commitment therapy' (ACT), which involves accepting what is beyond one's control and committing to action such that challenges have less impact. (Benson resolves to give a charity hip-hop concert to reestablish his sense of the person he wants to be, and to allow others the opportunity to forgive him for the events that saw him suspended.) The graphic novel *I Just Want to Be Me!* (Timothy and Sandra Bowden, Exisle Publishing, 2010) is recommended reading on ACT for children aged approximately 9 to 14 years.

c. Year Level Content Descriptions and links to Teaching and Learning Activities

Year Level Content Descriptions	Teaching and Learning Activities (Detailed in 2 below)
English / Year 4 / Literature / Responding to literature: Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view	Making predictions
English / Year 4 / Literature / Examining literature: Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension	Plot tension
English / Year 4 / Literacy / Creating texts: Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features	Book review
English / Year 5 / Language / Expressing and developing ideas: Understand the use of vocabulary to express greater precision of meaning, and know that words can have different meanings in different contexts	Verb choices [Worksheet 1]
English / Year 5 / Literature / Examining literature: Understand, interpret and experiment with sound devices and imagery, including simile, metaphor and personification, in narratives, shape poetry, songs, anthems and odes	Simile or metaphor [Worksheet 2]
English / Year 5 / Literacy / Interpreting, analysing, evaluating: Navigate and read texts for specific purposes applying appropriate text processing strategies, for example predicting and confirming, monitoring meaning, skimming and scanning	<i>Riddle Gully Runaway</i> Crossword [Worksheet 3]

English / Year 6 / Literature / Literature and context: Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts	Being homeless
English / Year 6 / Literature / Creating Literature: i. Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways ii. Experiment with text structures and language features and their effects in creating literary texts, for example, using imagery, sentence variation, metaphor and word choice	Forgiveness Describing the ocean
English / Year 6 / Literacy / Interpreting, analysing, evaluating: Analyse strategies authors use to influence readers	Benson's explanation
English / Year 7 / Literature / Responding to literature: Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and differences with others and justifying a point of view	Pollo the Youth Reporter
English / Year 7 / Literacy / Interacting with others: Plan, rehearse and deliver presentations, selecting and sequencing appropriate content and multimodal elements to promote a point of view or enable a new way of seeing	Shorn Connery's view of Pollo
English / Year 8 / Language / Language for Interaction: Understand how rhetorical devices are used to persuade and how different layers of meaning are developed through the use of metaphor, irony and parody	Irony
English / Year 8 / Literature / Literature and context: Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups	Robinson Crusoe
English / Year 8 / Literature / Responding to literature: Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts	Debate – Ravens should be culled
English / Year 8 / Literacy / Creating Texts: Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that raise issues, report events and advance opinions, using deliberate language and textual choices, and including digital elements as appropriate	Write a newspaper article or editorial
English / Year 8 / Literacy / Creating Texts: Experiment with text structures and language features to refine and clarify ideas to improve the effectiveness of students' own texts	Create a poem
Technologies / Year 5 and 6 / Design and Technologies / Design and Technologies knowledge and understanding: Investigate how and why food and fibre are produced in managed environments	Paddock to plate
Health and Physical Education / Year 7 and 8 / Personal, social and community health / Being healthy, safe and active: i. Evaluate strategies to manage personal, physical and social changes that occur as they grow older ii. Practise and apply strategies to seek help for themselves or others	Being homeless Dealing with problems
The Arts / Visual Arts / Years 7 and 8: Develop ways to enhance their intentions as artists through exploration of how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes	Cubist portrait of Benson

2. TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

a. Before reading

Making predictions: Predict what might happen in *Riddle Gully Runaway* by examining the cover illustration and reading the title and book blurb. Consider who you think will run away from Riddle Gully and why. Where do you think the story is set? What makes you think that? Share predictions with others.

b. During reading

- **Verb choices:** Read the first chapter of *Riddle Gully Runaway* and then complete the Verb Choices activity (Worksheet 1, page 7) to decide which verbs express greater precision of meaning.
- **Write a newspaper article or editorial:** Read the first five chapters of *Riddle Gully Runaway*. Pollo's pieces in the *Coast* newspaper are in a style called 'editorial' whereby a personal viewpoint is permitted, even expected, and the writer's name is often published. Write either a newspaper article or an editorial about the Best Dressed Pet parade in Chapter 3. In the newspaper article stick to the facts, leaving out opinions, emotions and adverbs like 'unfortunately' which indicate opinion. In the editorial report events, raise an issue and advance opinions. Draw a cartoon to accompany your article or editorial.
- **Irony:** Read pages 51–52 and think about what Pollo and Sherri have to say about irony. Identify the statements that mean the opposite and explain why they are amusing. Discuss whether sarcasm is a form of irony. As you read the story think about ironic comments Pollo might make and share them with others.
- **Robinson Crusoe:** In Chapter 18, Benson draws a parallel between himself and Robinson Crusoe, the main character of a famous novel titled *Robinson Crusoe*, written in 1719 by Daniel Defoe. Why do you think he does this? Does he have a fair point? Find out more about this famous novel. Download it free as an ebook via the Project Gutenberg website and read excerpts from it. Do you agree with Benson when he says, 'The language was weird but you got used to it' (p. 133)? How are the attitudes and ideas expressed in the book the same as or different from yours?
- **Describing the ocean:** When describing the ocean at Maloolo and Princeville, Banyard uses language such as *white-tops being whipped up by the stiff breeze* (p. 105), *the ocean growled* (p. 130) and *seaweed was massed on the beach in dark shoals, its sulphurous smell wafting on the air* (p. 170). Do these words and phrases make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable? What words could you use to describe the ocean setting in a way that would make you feel happy and glad to be with Pollo and Will?
- **Benson's explanation:** Read Chapter 23 in which Benson relates to Pollo and Will the incident at school involving Kal and him. What tense is this passage written in? Why do you think the author might have used this tense here?

c. After reading

- **Being homeless:** Reflect on who ran away from Riddle Gully and why. Think about the reactions of Pollo's, Will's and Benson's family members when it was discovered they had been 'sleeping rough' and discuss how your parents would react if you ran away and slept in isolated places like a homeless person. Imagine what it would be like to be homeless by going without something that makes you feel comfortable just for one night (e.g. *sleep on the floor without a pillow or go without dinner*). Discuss what might make someone become homeless and think about the dangers of being homeless. Identify some people you could contact for responsible help if you felt really sad at home – friends or relatives. Find out about support services such as Beyond Blue, Anglicare and Kids Helpline.
- **Plot tension:** From the first few paragraphs of *Riddle Gully Runaway* the reader is hooked by the tension created on the rollercoaster ride. How does Banyard create tension throughout the story to keep the reader wanting to turn the pages? Find a part of the story you found exciting and note the length of the sentences Banyard uses. Are there many active verbs used? Are the characters under a time limit to achieve certain goals? Are there any

unforeseen obstacles put in their way? Are the characters in danger at any point? Are the characters facing one crisis after another? Discuss these questions and give examples from the story to substantiate your answers. Identify the techniques Banyard uses to create plot tension.

- **Shorn Connery's view of Pollo:** Recall the times Pollo di Nozi and the sheep Shorn Connery interact and reread these sections in the book to get a sense of their relationship. Relevant sections might include the Best Dressed Pet parade (Chapter 3), the train journey (Chapter 11) or approaching the abattoir (Chapter 19). Write a description of Pollo from the point of view of Shorn Connery. Perform it as a monologue.
- **Book review:** Write a book review of *Riddle Gully Runaway* with a view to publishing it in a class or school newsletter or a local community newspaper. Include the title, author, publisher and year of publication. Write a brief summary of the plot and conclude with your opinion of the story and its recommended readership.
- **Pollo the youth reporter:** Pollo wants to be an investigative journalist like her mother was and has secured a cadetship as the youth reporter for the district. Is Pollo a good reporter? Does she draw conclusions based on evidence or does she jump to conclusions in pursuit of a juicy story? Does she check her sources of information or does she rely on gossip and overheard comments? What lessons does Pollo learn about being a good reporter? Discuss these questions and justify your opinions with examples from the story.
- **Paddock to plate:** How well do you know where our food comes from? Do you think about 'animals' when you eat meat bought from the supermarket? *Riddle Gully Runaway* is set in regional Australia in a sheep-farming district. Draw a map of the district and include locations such as the farm belonging to Auntie Giulia and Uncle Pete on the outskirts of Riddle Gully, the stockyards at Two Wells, the train station at Maloolo and the abattoir at Princeville. Draw and label the route a sheep might take in its journey from the farm to a roast dinner at Pollo's place to demonstrate the 'paddock to plate' supply chain undertaken in the Australian sheep industry.
- **Debate 'Ravens should be culled':** *Riddle Gully Runaway* features a pair of nesting ravens that, among other things, steal jewellery, attack sheep and scavenge. Analyse arguments for and against culling ravens and justify a personal stance. Consider different viewpoints such as those of farmers, Aboriginal communities, environmentalists and people recreating in a picnic area.
- **Create a poem:** Choose one of the three monologue passages related by Benson (either internally or to Pollo and Will; pages 78–80, 132–5 and 165–7). Using punctuation (line breaks) and contraction (deleting unnecessary words like 'the'; distilling phrases) convert two or three paragraphs of one of Benson's monologues into a poem. Amend language as feels right to you.
- **Dealing with problems:** Benson regrets having prompted his friend to steal their classmate's wallet. Read the advice Will gives for dealing with personal problems on pages 157–8. Think about a time you did something you wish you could undo. Perhaps you said something unkind to someone or made a mistake that couldn't be changed or 'fixed'. Nearly everyone has! Do you think you can accept and get along with that mistake? Role-play different scenarios putting Will's strategies into practice. Identify how emotions, dispositions and decision-making can affect outcomes.
- **Forgiveness:** In Chapter 23 Pollo suggests that Benson and Kal hold a Sorry Concert to atone for what they did. Discuss the concepts of atonement and forgiveness. What does it feel like to forgive someone? What does it mean to 'forgive and forget'? Have you ever *not* accepted an apology from someone? How did you feel afterwards? Write a story in which someone unintentionally hurts someone else's feelings or harms them in some way and apologises. Then write two scenarios – one in which the person forgives them and another in which the person does not forgive them. What happens afterwards? (This may be in the form of an 'epilogue' – as is used in the novel.)
- **Cubist portrait of Benson:** The logo for the band 'Twisted Lips' on Benson's T-shirt is a rip-off of the painting *The Weeping Woman*. This was painted in 1937 by a Spanish artist called

Picasso who helped found a movement in art called 'Cubism'. In cubist artwork, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a richer context. Images of *The Weeping Woman* and other cubist artworks can be viewed on the internet. How might Benson be represented – as a thief, a musician, a friend, homeless person, a vulnerable new worker (at the abattoir), a loving grandson, a rebellious nephew, or a rollercoaster worker? Create a portrait of Benson in the cubist style that includes some of these aspects.

- **Simile or metaphor:** Classify sentences from *Riddle Gully Runaway* according to the type of figurative language used and create some examples of simile, metaphor and personification. See Worksheet 2, page 8.
- **Riddle Gully Runaway Crossword:** Complete the *Riddle Gully Runaway* Crossword (Worksheet 3, page 9) referring to the book whenever necessary.

WORKSHEET 1: VERB CHOICES

NAME:

Read the first chapter of *Riddle Gully Runaway*. Read the sentences below and write a verb in each space. List the verbs in the 'My Verbs' column. Find the sentences in the book and list the verbs Banyard uses in the 'Banyard's Verbs' column. Compare the verb choices and underline the ones you think express greater precision of meaning or which paint a more interesting picture.

1.	<i>He could hear each cog _____ into place, hauling them slowly upward to the crest. (p. 6)</i>
2.	<i>Pollo _____ him with her elbow. (p. 6)</i>
3.	<i>Their carriage _____ to the crest of the iron-girder mountain. (p. 6)</i>
4.	<i>He felt his heart _____ against his ribcage. (p. 6)</i>
5.	<i>The passengers _____ as a single organism. (p. 8)</i>
6.	<i>They _____ toward the string of tattered flags that marked the finish. (p. 8)</i>
7.	<i>Will stood on the pathway, swaying, with the crowd at the Riddle Gully annual fair _____ around him and Pollo. (p. 9)</i>
8.	<i>Pollo _____ a hand to her mouth. (p. 10)</i>

MY VERBS

BANYARD'S VERBS

1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

WORKSHEET 2: SIMILE OR METAPHOR

NAME:

Classify these sentences from *Riddle Gully Runaway* according to the type of figurative language used. Write S for simile (something having characteristics *like* something else) or M for metaphor (something *being* something else) next to each one and underline the important words. Circle the examples of personification. Create some examples of your own and share them with a partner.

	<i>His knuckles, as they gripped the bar, looked like eight snow-capped mountain-tops.</i> (p. 5)
	<i>Adults ran into old friends and sugar-loaded kids zipped like flying beetles between their legs.</i> (p. 14)
	<i>Will turned back to Pollo whose eyes were now steely blades.</i> (p. 20)
	<i>And he'd seen them pecking the eyes from his fallen comrades on Auntie Giulia and Uncle Pete's farm.</i> (p. 26)
	<i>'Hmmm ... Heaven forbid that the truth be allowed to sit quietly and mind its own business.'</i> (p. 52)
	<i>Mayor Bullock's laugh rasped like a shoe scuffing on pavement.</i> (p. 75)
	<i>[The swing] looked like a ghost-child was riding it.</i> (p. 120)
	<i>They headed up the access road lined with twisted, whispering eucalypts.</i> (p. 121)
	<i>When they stepped outside, the sun had all but signed off for the day.</i> (p. 128)
	<i>Will hastily shoved the phone into his backpack like it had suddenly sprouted fangs.</i> (p. 130)
	<i>For a flash, Pollo and Will saw his spotty figure sailing in the moonlight, and then ... nothing.</i> (p. 140)
	<i>'We'll stand out like emus in a chicken coop if they catch us there!'</i> (p. 150)
	<i>[The] wind whipping off the black ocean was so cold it felt like a slap.</i> (p. 160)
	<i>A dirty grey light was spilling over the playground [...]</i> (p. 170)
	<i>He smiled, feeling the return [...] of a weary friend — his old self, the person he wanted to be, the person he knew he was.</i> (p. 179)

WRITE YOUR EXAMPLES HERE:

WORKSHEET 3: RIDDLE GULLY RUNAWAY CROSSWORD

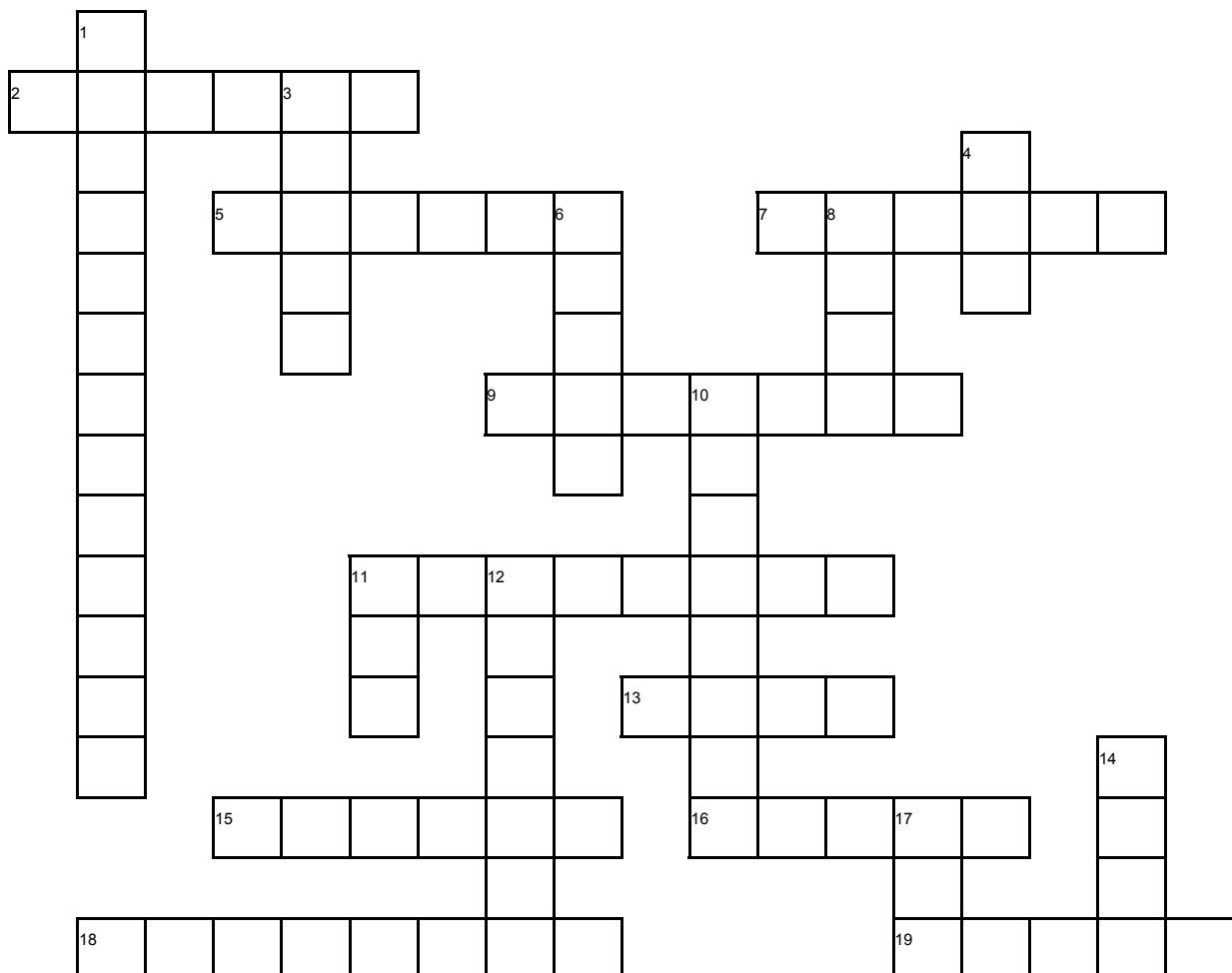
CLUES

ACROSS

2. A raven steals this from Mayor Bullock at the pet parade (6)
5. Tommy Mobsby's pig is named after which Shakespearean character? (6)
7. Pollo and Will use Shorn Connery's ___ to confuse the abattoir guard dog. (6)
9. This artist painted *The Weeping Woman*, p. 15. (7)
11. After school, Pollo is a cadet Youth _____. (8)
13. Will is getting into the habit of keeping his ____, p. 17. (4)
15. Benson loves this kind of music. (3-3)
16. Crow-like bird that sounds *kinda sad* (p. 154) when it caws (5)
18. On p. 169 Benson says he'd like to help these people. (8)
19. Dense black wood; roadhouse girl's name, p. 112 (5)

DOWN

1. The *iron girder mountain* at the fair that makes Will sick (13)
3. What old Mrs Bullock calls an *electric letter*, p. 74 (5)
4. Animal-loving profession of Pollo's father, Joe di Nozi (3)
6. On p. 74, Mayor Bullock calls this a *convenient conveyance for the masses*. (5)
8. The band logo on Benson's T-shirt is for *Twisted* ____, p. 15. (4)
10. Building where animals are butchered for meat (8)
11. The ravens' nest is in a ___ gum tree. (3)
12. Self-important and overbearing; on p. 17, Pollo describes Mayor Bullock as a *puffed-up* ___ *grump!* (7)
14. Mayor Bullock's mother and Benson's grandmother (4)
17. A female sheep; Ear is one. (3)



SOLUTION

Across: 2. **TOUPEE**. 5. **HAMLET**. 7. **FLEECE**. 9. **PICASSO**. 11. **REPORTER**. 13. **COOL**. 15. **HIP-HOP**. 16. **RAVEN**. 18. **HOMELESS**. 19. **EBONY**.
Down: 1. **ROLLERCOASTER**. 3. **EMAIL**. 4. **VET**. 6. **TRAIN**. 8. **LIPS**. 10. **ABATTOIR**. 11. **RED**. 12. **POMPOUS**. 14. **GRAN**. 17. **EWE**.