PETAA
PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING
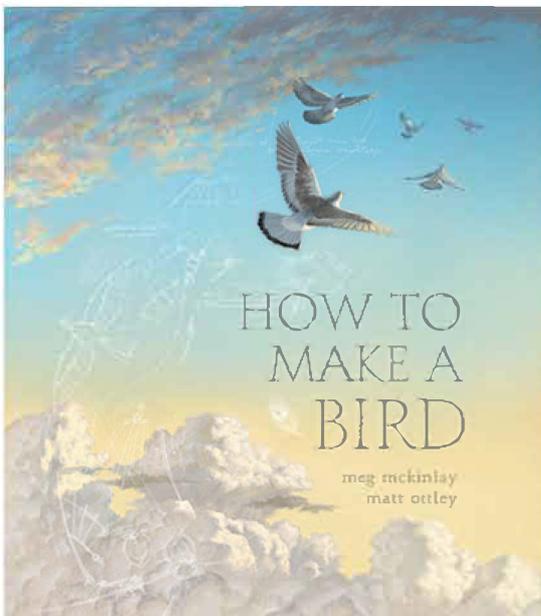ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA
CONTINUAL PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

How to Make a Bird

Exploring the 2021 CBCA Short List: Picture Books

Parts in this unit of work

- Reading, listening to and appreciating the book
- Using the book for speaking, writing and creating
- Relevant resources and links

Illustrator: Matt Ottley **Text:** Meg McKinlay

Publisher: Walker Books

Synopsis: 'From award-winning author Meg McKinlay and celebrated artist Matt Ottley comes a moving and visually stunning picture book that celebrates the transformative power of the creative process from inception through recognition to celebration and releasing into the world. We shadow the protagonist as she contemplates the blue print of an idea, collects the things that inspire from the natural world to shape a bird. And breathes life into it before letting it fly free. It shows how small things, combined with a little imagination and a steady heart, can transform into works of magic.' (Sourced from the Publisher's website.)

Themes: Imagination, creativity

Year levels: Australian Curriculum: English, Years 5 and 6; Design and Technologies, Years 5 and 6

Why use this book? A visually stunning book with a story that appeals to the child 'maker', and would be enjoyed by a younger audience. As a teaching text, this is a sophisticated picture book that, with support and guidance, could be appreciated at a deeper level by older students. It demands multiple readings, bringing your own experiences, to linger over the pages as you interpret, and ponder and make meaning.

Focus passages: Pages 2-3 for character development, pages 6-11 and 22-29 for visual techniques and word level grammar and vocabulary.

Unit writer: Amanda Worlley

Reading, listening to and appreciating the book

Book introduction (big picture)

- Build students' field knowledge if necessary around some of the elements they may not be familiar with to help their interpretation of the text. Students may be aware of Leonardo da Vinci the artist, but not as an inventor, engineer or scientist. Share with students images of Leonardo da Vinci's Flying Machines sketches, drawing their attention to the colour and texture of the paper.
- Closely examine the cover and notice the silvery, almost ghostly, overlay of plans or blueprints for creating a bird. The end papers suggest an old parchment type paper with faint images of different types of birds and the salient features of the feathers. The title page has the design drawings that are very subtle on the cover, now more visible, and the mixture of these with the old style parchment paper colours are reminiscent of Leonard da VInci's sketches. Consider the title. What type of text do they think this is? ACELA1504 ACELA1518
- Examine the structure of the text with students. What type of narrative is this? Can students identify a complication and resolution? Is there a theme or message? If appropriate you may want to introduce the term of allegory (a story that operates on a symbolic level). Can students relate to a creator, once they have finished, having to let go of what they have made and release it to the world? ACELA1518 ACELT1610
- Do they interpret the text on a procedural level? Consider the narrator's voice in second person as it speaks to 'you' the reader. The text guides 'you', step by step, in the procedure of making a bird. Is the text a macro-genre, a combination of genres? (Humphrey & Vale, 2020) ACELA1518 ACELT1610

Close reading

Study of pages 2-3

- Have students consider how the images and words used on pages 2-3 have contributed to the character's development. What can they see in the room? What might this tell us about her? What mood or feeling does the lighting used give? ACELT1616
- The phrase 'To make a bird' sits isolated in the light from the window pane with no comma or ellipse. How does this affect the reading? Do you feel compelled to turn the page, to finish the sentence? ACELT1610 ACELT1617

Study of pages 6-11

- Provide small groups of students a copy of pages 6-7 and ask them to list the visual elements used and how this contributes to the story. For example, the curved horizon which contributes to a feeling of vastness, the dwelling that perhaps the character has built, raised up high — as a lookout? The barren

landscape and single bird indicating she is alone, but is she lonely? How does the colour palette used contribute to the mood? ACELA1511 ACELT1616
- Have students close their eyes and read the phrases from page 9 **'proud arch** of an eagle' and 'the **soft curve** of a sparrow'. List the phrases on the board and identify the **noun** groups. Have students discuss how the adjectives used by the author have created a more vivid image for the reader. ACELA1508 ACELT1617
- Examine pages 10-11 with students. What is happening and how have the visual techniques contributed to this meaning? (For example, the girl has finished collecting and returning home for the day — the lighting indicates dusk, the end of the day, the birds are returning to land.) Consider the text and how it supports this idea, how it gives 'permission' for the girl to retreat. Why has the illustrator placed the boat in the centre foreground, bow pointing towards the water, like it wants to float? The illustrator's creative notes allude to floating of an idea. ACELT1610 ACELT1616

Study of pages 22-29

- Discuss the idiomatic expression 'breathe life into it' and the difference between literal and inferential meaning, which the latter, in context, means to bring new ideas or energy to something. Draw attention to the character on page 22, particularly her facial expression where she appears to be literally breathing life into her creation. Notice the other objects in the image. What significance could the closed suitcase have? ACELY1698 ACELT1613
- Write the phrase 'throw it in the air' on the board and ask students to mime this action. Then examine the phrase from the text 'cast it gently *upon* the air' and have students mime this action. How has the author's choice of verbs 'cast it gently' and the preposition 'upon' created a much more vivid picture for the reader. ACELA1508 ACELA1523
- On pages 24-25 following, have students identify the visual elements that the illustrator has used — draw their attention to the lighting, the gaze of the bird towards the light source, and the placement of the bird, in hands, in the corner, the curved horizon creating the feeling of a great expanse. Read the text. Highlight the idiomatic phrase 'catch your eye'. Why has the last line 'Open it' been placed separately? What affect does this have on the reading? How have the multimodal elements worked together to create meaning? ACELT1610 ACELT1616
- Pages 26-27 show a sequence of images as the bird takes off both in real form and flight. Ask students to think about how their eyes travel across the page. How has the illustrator created the meaning of movement for the reader? Use your finger to trace the direction, examine how the bird comes from shadow towards the light, the first awkward steps and then the wings elegantly spread. ACELA1511 ACELA1524
- The final pages in this sequence allow a closer look at the vocabulary and how it affects shades of meaning. On the board write the words 'until it is a speck in the sky' and underneath write the words from the text 'until it is a **disappearing** speck in the **vast blue** sky'. Discuss how the addition of the adjectives create a more vivid image and work together with the illustration. ACELA1512 ACELA1525

Word recognition, phonic knowledge and spelling

- Choose words from the text to create spelling activities for students to challenge them to spell new words using their knowledge of letter patterns and generalisations (for example, *strong/* strongest, strongly, strength, headstrong; *disappearing*/disappeared, disappearance, appear, appearance, appeared; *breathe*/breath, breathtaking, breathing). ACELA1513 ACELA1526

Using the book speaking, writing and creating

- Building from the activity above from page 9, display an image of an eagle and the phrase *'proud arch of an eagle'* and a sparrow and the phrase *'soft curve of a sparrow'* to allow students to compare the image

and the descriptive phrases used by the author. Choose a range of bird images that have distinct features (for example, peacock, vulture, willy wagtail, cockatoo, kookaburra) and challenge students to create their own descriptive phrases. ACELT1798 ACELT1800

- Use the students' experience with the book to have them create an innovative digital text. This could take the form of a podcast (audio only) or vodcast (audio and visuals). Select a passage from the text for example page 26 and 27 where the bird takes flight. ACELT1798 ACELT1618 ACELY1816
- Use a free open source audio software such as Audacity, or other software you have access to (for example, Adobe Audition) for students to record the text. They should consider the voice effects such as tone, volume, pitch and pace and they should also consider suitable copyright free music (for example, Bensound) and sound effects (for example, Adobe Audition Sound Effects) to create a suitable backing sound track to enhance their text. ACELY1796 ACELY1816
- To further extend students, access free digital video production software such as Windows 10 Video Editor, or Adobe Spark; or if you have access to Adobe Premiere Rush use these to create a short video. Students can use copyright free sources to search for suitable images such as Pixabay or Unsplash. This activity will also ask students to consider the visual language elements and how their image choices, including elements such as framing, colour and composition, will affect their audience. ACELA1511 ACELA1524
- As a separate unit of work students could imagine and create their own bird. Gather a range of recycled materials for students to select from. Have students develop and communicate design ideas providing graphical representations. They will need to consider materials, tools and equipment needed to apply safe procedures to make their design. ACTDEP025 ACTDEP026

Relevant resources and links

The creative notes from the author and illustrator about the creative process are a valuable resource to help you as a teacher to delve deeper into the text and understand their creative process. This should support and enrich your discussions with students and provide you with further opportunities for close study of pages not covered in this unit. Publisher's Teacher Notes are also available. Read an interview with the author about writing the book. Other texts that Matt Ottley has illustrated include *Suri's Wall* by Lucy Estela, *Parachute* by Danny Parker and *Tree: A little story about big things* by Danny Parker.

Valuable PETAA reference texts include *Exploring How Texts Work* (2nd Ed) by Beverly Derewianka, *A Literature Companion for Teachers* (2nd Ed) by Lorraine McDonald, and *Investigating Model Texts for Learning* by Sally Humphrey and Emma Vale.

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