

## These notes are for:

- 5+yrs
- Primary / Secondary

## Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Art
- HSIE/SOSE
- History

## Example of:

- Picture Book
- Wordless Text
- Rhythm
- Repetition
- Poetry

## Experience of:

- Reflecting on text
- Shared reading/viewing
- Reading & Writing
- Speaking & Listening
- Viewing & Creating
- Research

## Values addressed:

- Care & Compassion
- Respect & Responsibility
- Understanding & Tolerance
- Fairness & Appreciation
- Strength & Courage

## Themes:

- Belonging
- Identity
- Environment
- Animal Cruelty
- Philosophy
- Visual Literacy

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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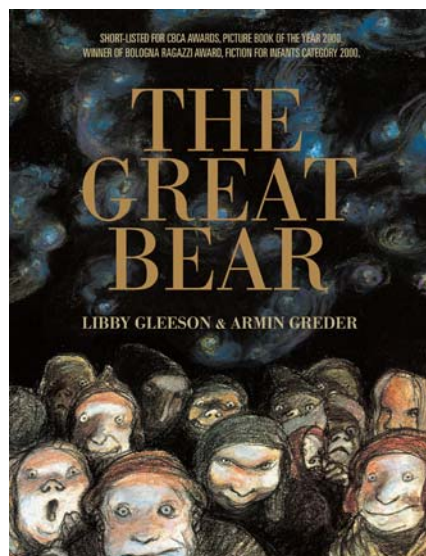
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## The Great Bear



### The Great Bear

By: Libby Gleeson  
 Illus. by: Armin Greder  
 ISBN: 9781921529696  
 ARRP: \$16.95  
 NZRRP: \$18.99  
 No. of Pages: 40  
 May 2010  
 Artwork Media:  
 Compressed charcoal & pastels



## Outline:

A heartfelt story of a cruelly treated dancing bear who finds the courage to stand up for herself. The circus bear spends her days in a cage and her nights performing for a crowd. The crowd taunts her as she dances – poking her with sticks or throwing stones. Can she ever break free? From the award-winning team of Libby Gleeson and Armin Greder comes a story with a powerful visual narrative.

Short-listed for the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards, Picture Book of the Year 2000. Winner of the Bologna Ragazzi Awards, Fiction for Infants Category 2000.

'This book owes its extraordinary power to the splendid images which contain many sophisticated allusions to an impressive pictorial tradition extending from Honore Daumier to the German expressionists, whilst at the same time offering a coherent perspective full of engaging and seductive appeal.' Bologna judges' report.

Part of the Walker Classics series – new editions of classic Australian and New Zealand picture books. Featuring a fresh new design and additional notes from the author and illustrators, as well as comments from children's book authorities.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

**Libby Gleeson** grew up in a number of country towns in Australia. She trained as a teacher, but gave it up to travel and to write. She lived in Europe and England for five years, but has since returned to Australia, where she writes full-time. Libby has written more than thirty books including picture books, junior fiction, fiction for older readers and non-fiction. Libby's work has received high acclaim both internationally and in Australia and has won many awards. Libby received the prestigious Lady Cutler Award for Services to Children's Literature in 1997. Some of her other books include the picture book *Cuddle Time*, illustrated by Julie Vivas, and the illustrated fiction title *Happy Birthday x 3*.

**Armin Greder** was born in Switzerland and migrated to Australia in 1970. He learned to draw at school, not in art classes but during maths and grammar, in the back of exercise books. Armin apprenticed as an architectural draftsman but instead of becoming an architect he taught technical drawing and enjoyed other creative outlets for his work. Armin is an internationally renowned illustrator who has illustrated many distinctive picture books, several of them written by Libby Gleeson. Armin's many awards include Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year 2002 for *An Ordinary Day* and the prestigious nomination for the Hans Christian Andersen Prize 2004 for his body of work.

## How to use these notes:

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the text *The Great Bear*. Multiple copies of the text are recommended for shared reading. This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

**Classroom Ideas for *The Great Bear*:****BEFORE READING *THE GREAT BEAR*:**

- View the cover and title. Identify the following:
  - The title of the book
  - The author
  - The illustrator
  - The publisher
- Discuss the following: What is the role of the author?; What is the role of the illustrator?; What is the role of the publisher?
- From the front and back cover what information can you learn about the book? What do you think this book is about? How do you think the book will begin/end? What type of book is this and where would you expect to find it in your library?
- What is the purpose of a blurb? What information does the blurb of this book provide/not provide?

**EMOTIONS & MEANING IN THE TEXT**

- Read the book aloud in class. After the first reading give students the opportunity to openly discuss their thoughts and feelings towards the text. Use the following questions to help prompt the discussion:
  - What is this story about?
  - Where is this story set?
  - Who are the characters in this book?
  - Is there a message in the text?
- Ask students to discuss emotions in relation to this text:
  - How does this story make you feel? Write a list of words to describe your emotions.
  - From the text and illustrations how do you think the bear feels? Write a list of words that convey the emotions of the bear.
  - Are there any similarities between the emotions you feel as a viewer to the emotions that the bear feels?
- Look at the different facial expressions of the villagers. What different emotions do they convey? Write a list of the different emotions that you can see. Can you think of any others that are not included in the book?
- Libby Gleeson, in an article (that can be viewed at [http://www.libbygleeson.com.au/great\\_bear\\_vs\\_school\\_reader.html](http://www.libbygleeson.com.au/great_bear_vs_school_reader.html)) makes the following comments about *The Great Bear*:
 

"I wanted the reader to feel the bear's anguish and to understand the desire to break free." – Libby Gleeson

Do you feel that this has been achieved? What aspects of the book emphasise anguish and freedom? Create a table with two columns and the headings 'anguish' and 'freedom'. Under these headings list features of the text and illustrations that represent these words.
- Use art, drama and music to explore the emotions that arise from this text:
  - Ask students to use movement to convey the anguish and then freedom that the bear feels. What other emotions from the text can be explored through movement? e.g. fear, anger
  - Ask students to select pieces of music that would be suitable for different parts of the text.
  - Ask students to draw and experiment with textures and colours that can represent the emotions in this text.

**VISUAL LITERACY**

- The Great Bear* can be viewed as being divided into two parts. The first part showing the anguish and enslavement of the bear; the second part showing the empowerment and strength of the bear. Discuss the following elements of the book and how these show the changes in the story:
  - Layout: How does the positioning of the text and illustrations change throughout the story?
  - Text and illustrations: Where is text omitted from the story? How does this impact the story?
  - The size and positioning of the bear: How does the depiction of the bear change?
- As a reader where are we positioned throughout the story? How does this help us empathise with the bear? Choose one of the images of the villagers staring out at the viewer. Ask students to imagine they are one of these villagers and draw or describe what they see.
- How does 'the sky' in the book represent a place of freedom? How is it inviting? Look at the emphasis placed on the sky in this book. Write your own description of the sky and how it evokes the feeling of freedom. Think of other places or spaces that make you feel free. Describe and/or draw these.
- The Great Bear* includes a section that is wordless, yet the story continues. Discuss why you think there is not text in this section. Choose another picture book from the school library. What do you know from the pictures that is not in the written text?
- Compare and contrast the illustrations of the sky, by Armin Greder, to Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night". How have these two artists used different media to create the effect of light and convey mood and atmosphere. Armin Greder used compressed charcoal and pastel for his illustrations. Experiment with this media to create your own night sky.

## Classroom Ideas for *The Great Bear*:

### TEXT & LANGUAGE

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- Discuss the text and language features of *The Great Bear*. Ask students to select sections of text that identify the following: alliteration, repetition, rhythm.
- How does the text change as we build up to the wordless section of the book? How has the author used short/sharp sentences to build up to a climax? Ask students to tap the rhythm of the text as you read the book. Are there gaps and silences in the text? Are there moments in the text that are louder than others? How do these features convey emotion and build tension? Discuss.
- View the double page spread with the word "Roar". Discuss why this word is written so big and how this makes you read the word aloud. Ask students to write different words as they sound e.g. small, angry, happy etc.
- What narrative style is this story written in? Is it first, second or third person narrative? How does this contrast with the placement of the viewer to the illustrations? Discuss.
- Mimic the following text to create your own passage about an everyday event or movement. You could choose walking to school or making breakfast.
 

"Sticks poke.  
Sticks prod.  
Chains yank.  
Stones strike,  
                    strike,  
                    strike."

### HSIE/SOSE

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- When and where is this story set? Using visual cues and information provided at the back of the book discuss place and time. Do you think this is a real or fictional place?
- Research Medieval Europe. When was this time and what would life have been like then? Research topics such as:
  - Food
  - Transport
  - Entertainment
  - Clothing
 Does any of this information change your perspective and feelings towards the villagers in *The Great Bear*?
- View the page with the text 'A circus bear. A dancing circus bear.' As the book suggests the circus has been around for many years. Research the history of the circus. When did it begin and how has it changed. List the similarities and differences between the circus in the book to a popular circus now.
- The Great Bear is also the name of a constellation in the Northern Hemisphere, the Latin name is Ursa Major. Research this constellation using the following questions as starting points:
  - Find a picture of this constellation and trace or draw your own image of it – carefully showing where the stars are and the outline of the bear.
  - What are some of the mythological stories based around this constellation?
  - What other constellations do you know of that depict animals?

### ANIMAL CRUELTY

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- In *The Great Bear* what is the role of the bear to the people around it? What is wrong with this situation? How are they cruel to the bear? Discuss.
- Discuss the importance of animals to our lives. Use the following headings to develop your discussion.
  - Animal roles in society
  - Animals for emotional support
  - Animals for biological/ecological discovery
- How can we prevent animal cruelty? In groups, research organisations that aid in the prevention of animal cruelty.
- View the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Can any of these 'rights' be applied to animals? Create a ledger for the rights of animals.
- Make an animal rights poster/pamphlet. You could use the plight of the bear or choose another animal. How can you use colour, type and imagery to arouse emotions in the viewer?

## Classroom Ideas for *The Great Bear*:

### PHILOSOPHY & CRITICAL THINKING

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- How can the ending of *The Great Bear* be viewed as a metaphor for the bear striving towards its dreams and goals? Discuss what the dreams and goals of the bear might be, then write a list of your own.
- What is fair? How has the bear been treated unfairly? Have a group discussion about what it means to be fair. Remember to listen to one another carefully and not to dismiss anyone's ideas, thoughts or feelings. Have you ever said something 'isn't fair'?
- Do the villagers in this story act responsibly? What are our responsibilities to animals and the world around us? Make a list of these.
- Discuss and list the values that are emphasised in this book e.g. responsibility, fairness, justice, compassion. After you have related these to the book ask students to relate them to their everyday lives.
- *The Great Bear* shows the plight of the bear and its desire to break free and the important topic of animal cruelty. What is a topic that concerns you? This could be a topic in your local community e.g. the environment, bullying. Write a short story or create an illustration that conveys the importance and emotions surrounding your chosen topic.
- How can a reader interpret this story differently? How is the text multi-layered? For example the image of the bear at the end of this story has been described as a representation of suicide, a metaphor for the bear's freedom or related to mythology and the constellation of Ursa Major (The Great Bear).

Discuss the multiple meanings in *The Great Bear* and the effectiveness of each of these. Then, discuss your own personal response to the story.

### AUTHOR / ILLUSTRATOR COLLABORATION

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- Read the notes at the back of *The Great Bear*. How did the author and illustrator collaborate on the story? Do you think the story would have been as effective if they had not discussed their ideas? List the advantages of openly discussing your ideas.
- Read the notes at the back of *The Great Bear*. Libby Gleeson says that the idea for this story came from a dream. Create your own dream diary and write down what you can remember. How can you use your dreams to create stories? Discuss how *The Great Bear* still evokes the feelings of magic and dreams.
- What do you feel the author and illustrator are hoping to communicate to the reader? What do you believe is the main point that is being conveyed? Discuss.
- Visit your local library and make a selection of picture books based on whether you think the illustrations and story work well together. How do the illustrations add meaning to the text and visa versa? Discuss.

### AFTER READING THE GREAT BEAR

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- Discuss the following with students:  
  - Who would be most likely to read this book and why?
  - Who would you recommend read this book and why?
- Write a review for *The Great Bear*. Remember to include a description of the story and your personal feelings/thoughts about the book.
- Find other books in your library that are wordless or use minimal text e.g. Jeannie Baker's *Belonging*, Bob Graham's *How to Heal a Broken Wing*. Compare and contrast these to *The Great Bear*. What are the advantages of having minimal text? Discuss.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation on *The Great Bear* and the author and illustrator. You can find more information about Libby Gleeson at her website [www.libbygleeson.com.au](http://www.libbygleeson.com.au)  
  - Be sure to include your review, information about the author/illustrator, an image and a synopsis of the book.
- What are the awards that *The Great Bear* has received? Why do you think that this book has won acclaim? Research these awards and other books that have received them.