

# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Bob Graham on *Silver Buttons*

When I sat at my desk and looked at an old drawing I had made of our dog Maggie, I had no idea I was about to make *Silver Buttons*. Something about that quick sketch I really liked—a small white dog with big black patches, looking over her shoulder with a concerned look on her face. I can't take full responsibility for the drawing. I hadn't meant to show her looking worried, it was an accident. Something to do with the shape of the black patch over her eyes and where her eyeballs happened to be.

"Why is she so worried?" I asked myself.

"Because she might be about to be stepped on," I replied.

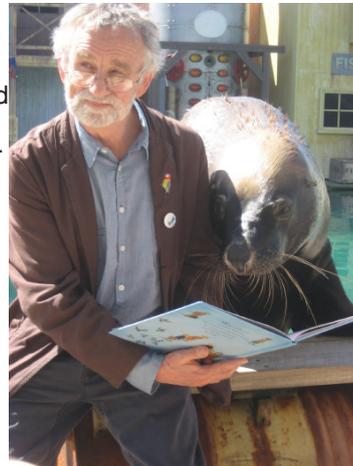
"By who?"

"By a baby, I guess," came the answer to myself.

"...a baby taking his first step," I added.

So I drew the baby hovering over the dog. Yes, that made perfect sense: small dogs have a right to be worried.

And I kept asking myself, "Where is his mum?," and drew her in the kitchen.



I added some of our grandchildren's toys and drawings too. And I gave him a sister and a house and a street to live in and neighbours. Then I surrounded him with parks and tall buildings, and I put some people inside, people just getting on with their lives at this moment when the baby takes his first step.

I stopped my story before it went clean out over the horizon and finished up in China.

I loved making this book probably more than any other. It was just like dropping a stone into a lake of very still water and watching the ripples spread out.

## Discussion Questions and Activities

Before reading *Silver Buttons*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author/illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

What do you think the story might be about from hearing at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover illustrations? How do you think the title and cover illustrations related to each other? Write your own story using the title *Silver Buttons*.

What is purpose of a blurb? Read the blurb on the back cover. Do you think this blurb is giving an overview of the whole story or just a snippet? Use the blurb as a story starter to write about what happens after Jonathan takes his first step.

Read the book aloud to the class without showing the illustrations. Ask students to make an image in their mind of what the words are describing. Read the book again showing the illustrations to the class. How do the illustrations change the story? Have a class discussion on whether the images were similar or different to what each student had pictured in their mind. As an extra activity, before showing the illustrations, have each student draw the duck that Jodie draws on page 1 based on the description alone.

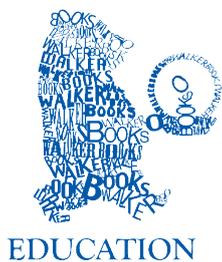
Is *Silver Buttons* an imaginative, informative or persuasive text? Is it a combination of more than one of these types of text? How can you tell?

Most stories start after the title page. Where do you think this story begins? Look at the pages before the title page. Why do you think Bob Graham decided to start the story here? Compare this to other picture books that start after the title page. How does this change how you read the story?

Look at spread 6 ("Out in the street, Joseph Pascano ..."). There are a lot of people and houses on this spread. Who do you think lives in the houses? What can you tell about the people walking on the street?

There are many connections between the pages of *Silver Buttons*, such as the jogger appearing in the window of spreads 1 and 4 and on the street on spread 5. Allow students to read through the book at their own pace and discuss how each spread is connected to the spreads either side of it and other spreads throughout the book.

The entire book takes place during the space of time it takes for Jodie draw the last silver button on the duck's boots. Think about all the things that could be happening at this very moment. This could be run as a collaborative class discussion, or as students working individually making their own lists. Start by thinking about what other people could



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be doing in your school, then think about what your parents would be doing, then some people in your city and some people in another country. Explain to the class and discuss how everyone in the world is different and the activities you would be doing are influenced by your age, location, interests, family and many other factors.

What symbols or clues does Bob Graham use to show that the whole book is taking place over the space of one minute?

Look at Jodie and Jonathan's house in spreads 1 and 4. What can you tell about their family from these spreads? What have they been doing that day? What are their interests? Where do you think they live?

In spread 5, Jodie and Jonathan's mum is playing "Merrily Kiss the Quaker's Wife." Search for a recording of this song on YouTube and listen to it as a class. Ask if any students play a musical instrument and if so, ask them to tell the class about it.

Look at spread 8. Why do you think the soldier is saying goodbye to his mum? How do you think they are feeling based on their body language and the expressions on their faces?

Look at spread 10. Do you have any special games you play with your grandparents? Why do you think the old lady carries everything she owns in two paper bags?

Compare spreads 13 and 14 where a tanker begins its journey all the way to China and Jonathan finishes taking his first step. Why do you think Bob Graham put these two spreads next to each other?

While Jodie is drawing the last silver button, her brother Jonathan takes his first steps, which is a milestone for a child. What does the word 'milestone' mean? What are some other milestones that children reach as they grow up?

What different communities can you identify in *Silver Buttons*? Think about ethnic and cultural groups, subcultures etc. Are there any other groups you would have included if you were illustrating the book?

## Visual Arts

The illustrations on some spreads take up the entire page whilst illustrations on other spreads only take up a small area and are surrounded by white space. Find examples of these and discuss why you think they were illustrated in this way.

As a class, create your own version of *Silver Buttons*. Ask each student to write and illustrate a page or spread about something that could be happening while Jonathan is taking his first steps and Jodie is drawing the last silver button.

How is colour used in this book to convey:

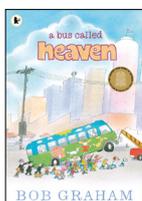
- Mood
- Setting
- Character
- Time

Look at different types of colours. How is colour used to convey meaning? Find a colour ad in a magazine or newspaper. Discuss how colour is used. Re-create the ad using a different colour scheme.

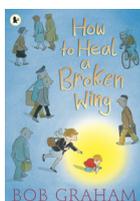
## Writing activities

Write a letter to Bob Graham giving your thoughts on the book. What did you like about it? What did it teach you? Edit your letter then send it to Walker Books Australia to pass on to Bob!

## Other books by Bob Graham



**A Bus Called Heaven**  
9781406343717  
AU\$16.95/NZ\$18.99  
Classroom ideas available



**How to Heal a Broken Wing**  
9781406325492  
AU\$16.95/NZ\$18.99  
Classroom ideas available



**April Underhill, Tooth Fairy**  
9781406339604  
AU\$16.95/NZ\$18.99