

These notes are for:

- Years 4, 5, 6 & 7
- Middle Years
- 8+ Years

Key Learning Areas:

- English – Poetry/Verse Writing

Example of:

- Prose Poetry
- Rhyming Poetry
- Junior Fiction
- Verse Novel
- First Person Narrative

Experience of:

- Illness – Dementia
- Grief
- Elderly/Grandparents
- Loneliness

Values addressed:

- Doing Your Best
- Care & Compassion
- Understanding
- Inclusion

Themes:

- Poetry
- Individuality & Identity
- Grief
- Isolation

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

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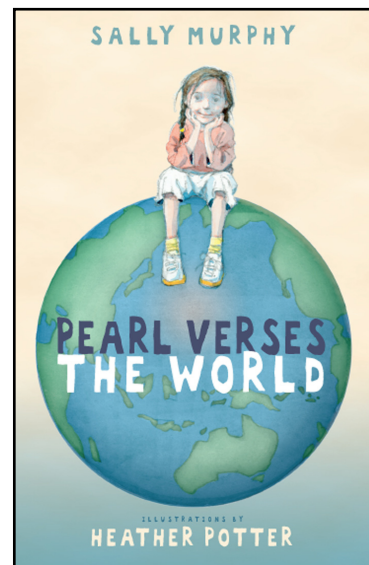
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Pearl Verses the World – Overview

Pearl Verses the World

By: Sally Murphy
 Illus. By: Heather Potter
 ISBN: 9781921150937
 ARRP: \$14.95
 NZRRP: \$ 16.99
 No. of Pages: 80
 May 2009



Outline:

Pearl Verses the World is a moving illustrated verse novel about a girl dealing with isolation at school, and with her grandma's illness at home.

At school, Pearl feels as though she is in a group of one. Her teacher wants her to write poems that rhyme but Pearl's poems don't. At home, however, Pearl feels safe and loved, but her grandmother is slowly fading, and so are Mum and Pearl. When her grandmother eventually passes away, Pearl wants life to go back to the way it was and refuses to talk at the funeral. But she finds the courage to deliver a poem for her grandmother that defies her teacher's idea of poetry – her poem doesn't rhyme; it comes from the heart.

Author/Illus. Information:

Sally Murphy is a mother, wife, teacher, speaker, website manager, reviewer, and, of course, author. She was born in Perth and still lives in Western Australia. In 2001 she decided to dedicate herself to her dream of becoming a children's author and has now published 27 books. Sally is also a children's book reviewer who runs a review site www.aussiereviews.com.au.

Heather Potter has illustrated several books for children. Heather often illustrates as a team with her husband Mark Jackson. Their first Walker Book together was the picture book *Not Like Georgie* by Scott Hatcher (2008). Heather lives in Melbourne.

How to use these notes:

These notes were prepared by Melissa Hamilton with additional poetry notes by Sally Murphy. This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

**Sally Murphy on *Pearl Verses the World*:**

"I was getting ready for bed one night when some lines of poetry came to me. I grabbed a pen and wrote them down. This happened a couple of times before I realised there might be a story happening. After a few weeks I sat down at my computer and started writing. I didn't know where the story was going – it just evolved. Pearl was very insistent (and persistent) that I write her story.

I do think the story was influenced by my own reactions to losing people I loved, and by watching other people cope with grief. When I wrote the scene where Pearl finds out her grandmother has died, I cried and cried and cried. When I was editing, I cried again every time I worked on that scene."

Heather Potter on *Pearl Verses the World*:

"I think the saddest moment is when Pearl looks into her grandmother's eyes, half-believing that she'll find something of the spirit that was once there, but those eyes have emptied as she's fallen away. Like Pearl, we all at times dream for things that can never be."

Classroom activities for *Pearl Verses the World*:**Before reading *Pearl Verses the World*:**

- Ask students to view the front cover of *Pearl Verses the World*. The title is a 'pun'. Ask students to identify what the pun is and then to create or find (using the internet) some other puns.
- Ask your students to identify some of the different countries depicted on the cover of *Pearl Verses the World*. Which countries are missing?
- Read the blurb aloud. Ask students which different voices are used to create it? Who might these voices be? Do they think the book will be in the first person or third person?

Guided Reading Activities:

The following activities refer to specific pages of the book. Each activity asks that the page is read. This can either be read aloud by the teacher, in readers' theatre style, by individual students or it can be read quietly by each student in the class.

- Read page 8. Pearl says that her class is made up of groups. Ask students to discuss if there are any groups at your school. How many people do they think you need to make up a group?
- Ask students to read the words on page 9. "Swirling, Swinging, Swaying". Define 'concrete poetry' and where possible show examples. Ask students to write down other verbs, showing the movement that they describe with the arrangement of the letters.
- Read page 11. What type of poem does Pearl write? Ask students to research limericks or find examples of them and then have a go at writing their own.
- Read page 13. Have students think about how many people live in their house and who the members of their family are. Divide the class into groups to discuss their thoughts. Then ask students to report on whether they have similar or different family units to their classmates.
- Read pages 20-21. Ask students to view the images on this page and identify which situations are real and which ones aren't. Then ask students to draw or write a passage about themselves, where they are imagining they are something or somebody different.
- Read page 22, when Pearl searches for a good book. As a class list the different types of books that are in your school library. For this activity it might be helpful to visit the library and ask students to search for different types of books. Then ask students to choose their favourite book and share it with the class. For this task they could present at the front of the class, create a Powerpoint presentation including information about the author/illustrator, or create a pamphlet/poster advertising the book.

Classroom activities for *Pearl Verses the World* continued:

- Read pages 27-28, where Pearl describes that her grandmother is ill. Ask students in groups to discuss the following questions:
Why do they think Pearl's granny is ill?
Have they ever had someone take care of them?
Have they ever had to take care of someone or something?

Ask students to define the word 'dementia' and research the symptoms of dementia. There are some helpful resources available from the Alzheimer's Australia website:
<http://www.alzheimers.org.au/content.m?infopageid=4438>

Ask them to think about Pearl's situation and how they would feel if this was happening to them. What could they do in a situation such as this to help?
- Read page 36. "A hiss like an angry cat comes from the ballet group." This sentence is a simile. Ask students to identify the difference between a simile and a metaphor (a simile 'is like' something, a metaphor 'is' a substitution). Ask students to create more sentences that have similes.
- Read page 38. Pearl begins to write a poem about someone she knows. Ask students to write a poem about someone they know. They can use any form of poetry that they like.
- Read page 39. Pearl lists some words that rhyme. Ask students to think of some words and write these down on separate pieces of paper. Then divide the class into small groups, each group sitting in a circle. Give each group a piece of paper with a word on it. Now ask the students to go round the circle rhyming with this word. How far do they get? Were some words more difficult than others?
- Read pages 49-52. Pearl is given the news that her grandmother has died. Discuss with students Pearl's reaction to this situation and the meaning of grief. Ask students to create a list of different emotions that Pearl might be feeling at this time, e.g. shock, sadness, fear, anger. Ask students to brainstorm ideas for coping with grief, e.g. talking, writing, drawing.
- On page 54 Pearl remembers her grandmother by breathing in 'her lavender smell'. Ask students to write down smells or sounds that remind them of people or situations. Have students assign a smell or sound to each of their family members.
- Ask students to read page 59. Why do they think people are bringing cards, flowers and food to Pearl's house? Discuss the word 'compassion' – are these people being compassionate even though it is upsetting Pearl?
- Read pages 62-63, where Pearl remembers a discussion between her and Granny about poems that didn't rhyme.

"A poem comes
When it is needed
And writes itself
In the way that it needs
To get its point across."

Is the book *Pearl Verses the World* one long poem? What is the point that it is getting across? Ask students to discuss what they think the main point of this story is. Is there more than one?
- Read the description of the church on page 67. Ask students to describe a building or familiar place in a similar way.
- Read Pearl's poem about her granny on page 70. Ask students to write a poem about someone close to them using a similar style to Pearl's poem but using the present tense.
- Read pages 74-76. Pearl feels as though she is no longer in a group of one. Ask students to discuss whether they think Pearl was ever in a group of one and how her loneliness made her feel.
- Read page 78, where Pearl describes herself as feeling happy-sad. Ask students to discuss what they think this means and if you can be two emotions at once.

After reading *Pearl Verses the World*:

- After reading *Pearl Verses the World* ask students to write a review of the book, paying special attention to the themes and issues that it raises. To extend their book report they can research the author.
- Learn more about the author and illustrator. Visit Sally Murphy's website - www.sallymurphy.net
There is also helpful information on both Sally Murphy and Heather Potter at the back of the book.



Deserted p. 7
Proactive p.16
Confined p. 26
Broiling p. 34
Sprawling p. 49
Sudsy p. 55
Murmurs p. 61
Reassure p. 72

A Study of Prose Poetry Compared with Rhyming Poetry by Sally Murphy:**• Discussion Questions:**

What is prose poetry?
Pearl is not a 'rhyming type girl'. Why doesn't she like writing in rhyme?
What are some of the challenges of writing rhyming poetry?
Do you prefer rhyming poetry or prose poetry? Why?

• Activity

Reread Pearl's limerick about herself (page 11). Discuss what it tells us about Pearl.
Reread Pearl's opening poem about herself (page 7). Discuss what this one tells us about Pearl.

• Steps To Writing a Poem About Yourself

1. Start by making a list of things that are important to you.
2. Add to your list words or phrases people might use to describe you
3. Now think of one thing people might not know about you – a secret.
4. Using a list is a great way to build a poem. Pick and choose items from the list, thinking about which ones might go together – or create an interesting contrast. Which ones have similar sounds (consonance, assonance, alliteration)?

An Example

I like purple things
and puppies
and writing stories.
Walking in the rain in summer
and staying warm in winter.
Good books,
poetry,
and eating Turkish delight.
I like babies
and balloons
and bubbles.
I love to sing in the shower
but no one knows
I wish that I could fly.

• Exercise A

In your group, choose a book character or even a superhero and write a poem using steps one to four above. Keep the secret till last.

• Exercise B

Write your own poem about yourself. If you don't want to share a big secret, share something you wish for.

• Exercise C

Revisit the limerick in the book (there is another one on page 18). Can you write a limerick about yourself?

Dear Educators,

As someone who loves to laugh, I didn't expect to ever sit down and write a book dealing with loneliness, death and grief. But one night as I was getting into bed a poem came to me, speaking of loneliness and isolation. I wrote it down, and left it alone. Soon afterwards, other poems came to me, and I realised I had a story about a girl who was very sad and very lonely. There was a story which needed to be told and I needed to sit down and be the teller.

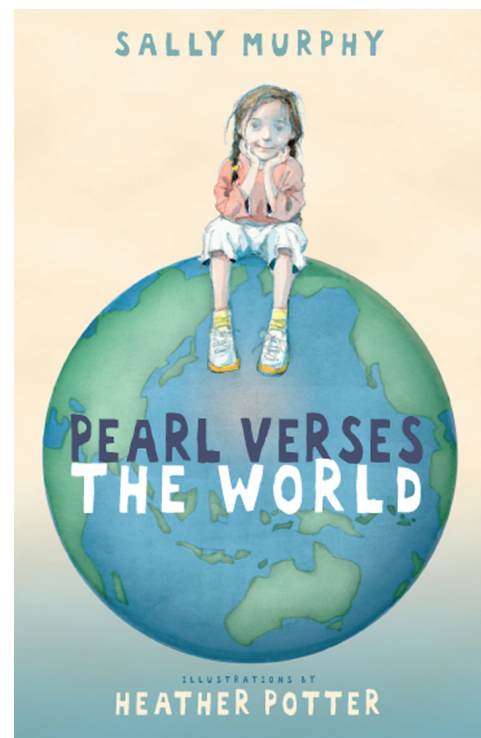
Pearl's story was easy to write in many ways. It was almost as if Pearl was channelling through me – she told me her tale, and whenever I felt that I didn't know what was going to happen next, I stopped writing and waited for it to come to me. And come to me it did; often when I was in the shower, or lying in bed, or doing something totally removed from writing. I gradually worked out why Pearl was sad, and why she felt lonely. She was watching her beloved grandmother fade away, and her grief had forced her apart from her classmates.

Having said that, Pearl's story was in other ways terribly hard to write. When I wrote the scenes dealing with Granny's death I experienced grief. A grief so real that I had to stop writing, curl into a ball and howl. Even long into the editing process I still cried. I also had to consider whether the book was too sad for child readers. Did I want children to cry as I had cried? The eventual answer was yes, I did need to share this story with children. They may cry when they read it – but hopefully they will also smile and even, perhaps, laugh out loud. Above all, I hope they will see that although they may experience loss or grief in their lives, life does go on and there is always hope. I also hope they will know it is okay to grieve, in their own way and in their own time.

I hope you will smile with Pearl, and that you'll share her story.

Best Wishes,

Sally Murphy



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Themes and Issues:

- Poetry
- Writing
- First Person Narrative
- Grief
- Death
- Loneliness
- Elderly/Grandparents
- Dementia
- Family
- Friendship
- Care & Compassion

**Teachers' Resources available
from Walker Books at:**
www.walkerbooks.com.au/Teachers