

These notes are for:

- Primary - Years 3-6
- Middle Years - Years 6-7
- Early Secondary - Year 7

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Music
- HSIE/SOSE
- Art

Example of:

- Picture book/visual text
- Biography
- Narrative non-fiction

Experience of:

- Social and cultural perspectives
- Historical context
- Visual literacy
- Symbolism
- Tragedy

Values addressed:

- Honesty & Trustworthiness
- Care & Compassion
- Doing Your Best
- Integrity

Themes:

- Music (opera)
- Romantic love
- Ambition
- Grief

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

Walker Books Australia Ph +61 2 9517 9577
 Locked Bag 22 Fax +61 2 9517 9997
 Newtown, N.S.W., 2042

For enquiries please contact Leonie Jordan:
 leonie.jordan@walkerbooks.com.au

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Song of the Dove - Overview

Song of the Dove

Author: Errol Broome
 Illustrator: Sonia Kretschmar
 ISBN: 9781921529245
 ARRP: \$29.95
 NZRRP: \$31.99
 No. of Pages: 32
 April 2011



Outline:

Song of the Dove is the compelling story of the Italian composer Bellini's rise to fame, and his forbidden love, Maddalena.

Bellini is a young music student in Naples. He gives singing lessons to the beautiful Maddalena and they form a strong bond: a bond similar to that of a pair of love birds. When Maddalena's family forbids them to marry, they are forced to only write to each other of their love and trust. Then, when Bellini leaves Naples to compose his famous operas, their love is put to the ultimate test.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Errol Broome

Errol grew up in Perth, and after an Arts degree at the University of WA, began her career as a newspaper journalist. Reporting taught her to write clearly – and to stick to the facts. After starting a family, Errol decided to tackle a long held ambition – to write a book – and began with short stories which won several prizes. More than thirty books followed, including *Dear Mr Sprouts*, *Gracie and the Emperor*, *My Grandad Knew Phar Lap* and *Away with the Birds*. Many of these were short-listed for and winners of awards, as well as being widely published overseas. *Song of the Dove* is her first picture book with Walker Books Australia.

Sonia Kretschmar

The child of German immigrants, Sonia first developed an appreciation of illustration through the storybooks sent to her by her grandmother. At the age of four she decided to become an illustrator after she successfully drew her first duck. She went on to study Visual Communication at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Sonia's work has appeared in many magazines and books, including the award-winning *Tensy Farlow and the Home for Mislaid Children* written by Jen Storer. Sonia is based in Melbourne, Australia.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

Errol Broome on writing *Song of the Dove*:

“I was reading about Beethoven, whose music I love, in a book of anecdotes on the lives of great composers. Bellini followed Beethoven. And there I came upon a story.

I loved this story, which was as romantic as Bellini’s music; sad, yes, but with some comfort at the end. Mostly true, partly legend, it stayed with me and I couldn’t let it go. The white dove that Bellini is said to have seen towards the end of his life was the trigger for the book and also lies at the heart of it.

In most of my writing, I use the idea “what if” to get the story going, and shoot off in a new direction. In *Song of the Dove*, the story does not change. It is still as true as we know it to have been. I simply wove the dove throughout the text, and now I see the book as a metaphor. Maddalena became the white dove.”

Sonia Kretschmar on illustrating *Song of the Dove*:

“I was attracted to the story because, in these days of disposable relationships, it is timely to remember that some bonds can endure, and indeed inspire stories centuries afterwards. The backdrop of opera lends itself to heightened emotions, theatricality and self-expression through Art as an ultimate state of existence, and I was hoping to capture some of this in my images.

The 1830s were a very Romantic time, and immersing myself in the story was an opportunity to research the styles of the day. Whilst I wasn’t incredibly strict with the details (for example, I would assume that hats and gloves would have been worn at all times when out), I have tried to be as faithful as possible to the kind of clothing and design that would have been around. One of the key themes I worked with was to try and find as many ways as possible to incorporate bird motifs into the designs, in lace, fabrics and jewellery. I also tried to find as many reference pictures of Vincenzo Bellini as possible so that my illustrations would have some resemblance to the real man. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any photographic or painted representations of Maddalena so she is how I imagine her to be.”

Classroom Activities and Discussion Questions**Before Reading**

- What do you think of when you hear the word “dove”? Think particularly about feelings and ideas doves might be associated with. Can you think of any stories where a dove has an important role? (Hint: think about the Bible.)
- Look up the word “symbol”. In small groups, brainstorm a list of common symbols. Create a poster with images of these symbols and an explanation of what each represents.
- Apart from the doves, what common symbol can you see when you look closely at the cover of the book? What does this symbol represent?
- From the cover, where and when do you think this story is set? What gives you this impression?
- What type of person do you think the girl shown on the front cover is? Consider her age, where and when she might have lived, her social status (whether she is wealthy or poor) and her personality. Compare your impression of her with a classmate’s. Are your ideas similar or different? Why?
- What is the first thing you look at on the cover of the book? Then where does your eye go? And then where? This is called “the reading path” (the way your eye travels about an image.) Why do you think it is called this? Sketch a rough copy of the book cover and draw your reading path on it.
- Listen to the book being read aloud without looking at the illustrations. Then, read the story while viewing the illustrations. What extra information do the pictures give you? Do the pictures change your attitudes towards characters or events at all? Provide examples.

Page by Page - Questions to ask while reading

Pages 1-2 (“Bellini walked beside the Bay ...”)

- Where is the story set? What country is this in?
- What adjectives would you use to describe Bellini at the start of the story? Make sure you consider both what the author writes about him and how the illustrator represents him.
- Why do you think Kretschmar has included a picture of a mermaid on the first page of the book?

Pages 3-4 (“Bellini knocked on the door ...”)

- What year do you think this story is set? Why?
- Vectors are lines which draw the eye in a particular direction. They can be visible or invisible. Where are Maddalena and Bellini looking on page 4? What is the illustrator emphasising through this vector?
- A simile is a language technique where one thing is compared to another. For instance, “as high as the moon” and “moved like the wind.” What similes can you find on page 4?
- Strong verbs are used to suggest Maddalena’s grace and Bellini’s skill on the piano. Make a list of these verbs.
- “Signorina” and “maestro” are both Italian words. Why does the author use these? From their context (how they are used in the story), can you guess what they might mean? Look up the correct meaning in a dictionary.
- Predict what you think is going to happen next in the story.

Page 5-6 (“With each lesson ...”)

- How are Bellini and Maddalena similar to the doves they see nestling in the square?
- What is the main vector on page 6? What does this draw the reader’s attention to?

Pages 7-8 (“Maddalena’s parents were shocked ...”)

- Why do Maddalena’s parents object to her marrying Bellini? What is your response to this? Is this a reasonable reason for not allowing them to get married?
- Describe the characters’ body language and facial expressions on these pages. What emotions and relationships is Kretschmar trying to emphasise?
- Page 8 features a framed picture of a crow. What might this represent? Where is the crow looking? Why is he facing this direction?

Pages 9-10 (“The young couple met in secret ...”)

- What pledge (promise) do the lovers make on page 9?
- Where are Bellini and Maddalena positioned on the page? Would the scene have felt different if they were positioned in the centre? Or further back so we could see their whole bodies? What about if we saw the scene from a different angle – higher, or lower or from the side?
- What are the main colours in this scene? What mood or atmosphere do they create?
- How does the illustrator create a feeling of secrecy in this picture? (Hint: think about the framing.)

Pages 11-12 (“After his second opera ...”)

- Look closely at the letters shown on page 11. Is there anything about them which is familiar? (Hint: think about the cover of the book!)
- Identify two ways Kretschmar highlights the divide between Bellini and Maddalena on page 11.
- What is significant about Maddalena’s jewellery? What does this suggest?
- Page 12 features scenes from Bellini’s operas. From the pictures, what do you think these operas might be about? What sort of characters could be in them?

Pages 13-14 (“At last, Maddalena’s parents ...”)

- From looking at the parents’ facial expressions and body language, what do you think they are feeling about Maddalena’s marriage?
- Why do you think Bellini chose not to come back to Naples immediately after receiving Maddalena’s letters? Could there be reasons other than those mentioned by the author on page 14?
- Comment on the woman at the edge of the right page. What does she look like? Why might she be presented in this way? Does she remind you of any other picture in the book? (Hint: look at page 1.)
- Where is Bellini looking? What does this suggest?

Pages 15-16 (“The ninth opera opened ...”)

- Although the text suggests Bellini has forgotten Maddalena, how does Kretschmar remind us of her in this illustration?
- How do Kretschmar’s illustrations convey the vastness (huge size) of the opera house?
- From its context (how it is used in the story), what might the word “bravo” mean? What might the audience call out if they wanted to hear more music?

Pages 17-18 (“Still, Maddalena waited ...”)

- How do the pictures reinforce the connection between Maddalena and the doves? Think about line/shape, positioning, gaze and body language.
- “Personification” is the term for when an animal or object is described as having a human ability or feeling. What example of this can you find on page 17? What mood or feeling does this create?
- How does Kretschmar convey Maddalena’s loneliness and dejection on page 17? (Hint: consider colour, clothing, body language, and the significance of the weather.)
- Why might the last sentence on page 17 be written in italics?
- “Foreshadowing” is when a later event in a story is hinted at. What might the red spot of ink on page 18 foreshadow?
- What would you have done in Maddalena’s situation? Do you think Maddalena might have behaved differently if she were living today?

Pages 19-20 (“From Bellini, Maddalena heard nothing ...”)

- “On the Bay of Naples, boats heaved at anchor.” What earlier part of the story does this sentence remind you of? Why does the author include it here?
- What is the significance of the white dove hiding her head under her wing?
- Describe your feelings when you read this section of the story. What makes you feel this way? Consider both words and illustrations.

Pages 21-22 (“In Paris, Bellini began work ...”)

- What might the white dove Bellini sees represent? Why does he see it?
- How does Kretschmar draw attention to the dove through Bellini’s gaze and body language?

Pages 23-24 (“Together, forever ...”)

- “Together, forever, after the tenth opera.” What earlier statement does this sentence echo?
- Did you expect the story to end in this way? Why or why not?
- After reading the biographical information about Vincenzo Bellini, do you view the story differently? Does it make a difference knowing that the characters were real people?
- Without the note at the end, would you have guessed this story was biographical (the true story of a person’s life)? Does it seem like a real story or a made-up (fictional) one? Why?
- In your opinion, can fiction ever be as powerful as a true story? Explain your answer.

Endpapers

- Look at the endpapers of the book. Describe the colours the artist has used. What mood do these colours create?
- How are the second set of endpapers different to the first? Why do you think the artist may have made this change?



After reading - Activities and Discussion Questions

- In small groups, research one aspect of Italian life in the early 1800s. For example, clothes and fashion, transport, food, work, houses, recreational activities, women's roles and school and education. Present this information to the rest of the class.
 - Draw a self-portrait of yourself in 1830. What might you have been wearing? How would your hair be styled?
 - Research Vincenzo Bellini on the internet or in a library book. Create a timeline showing the main events in his life.
 - Draw Bellini's journey from Naples to Milan and then to Paris on a map.
 - Did your attitude towards Bellini change over the course of the story? How? When did this change occur?
 - Why do you think Maddalena's picture is on the front cover of the book rather than Bellini's? How would it have been different if Bellini's picture had been shown instead?
 - How do you feel about Maddalena at the end of the book? Sorry for her? Frustrated? Angry? Overall, do you consider her someone we should admire or pity?
 - Errol Broome writes: "To me, Maddalena is not *like* a white dove. She *is* a white dove." What do you think she means by this? Discuss the difference between a simile and a metaphor. Which is stronger in your opinion?
 - Kretschmar has woven the symbol of the dove throughout her illustrations. Make a list of all the doves you can locate in the text.
 - Analyse Kretschmar's use of formal and informal framing techniques in the illustrations.
 - "...(Y)ou sing like a bird," says Bellini on his first meeting with Maddalena. Write a "simile poem" about Maddalena from Bellini's perspective.
 - If you had to compare yourself to a bird or animal, which would you choose? Why?
 - Design a bird pattern that could be made into a stencil.
 - Choose a historical figure you're interested in and write a picture book about an important event in their life. Read this to a younger class at school and explain why you chose this particular person. What do you admire or find interesting about them? What message do you get from their life?
 - *Song of the Dove* is described as a "love story" on the front cover. In your opinion, should a romance end "happily ever after"? Justify your opinion.
 - Select a double-page spread from the book (pages 15-16, 19-20 or 21-22 would work particularly well.) Discuss the positioning of characters and objects. Would the scene have had a different feel if they were positioned in an alternate place? Or further back or closer, so that we saw all or only part of them? What about if we saw the scene from another angle – higher, or lower or from the side?
- Experiment with drawing the scene in different ways. Choose the version you think is most effective and compare it with a friend's. How is their version different to yours? Discuss the reasons you chose to present your pictures the way you did.
- Imagine you were Bellini or Maddalena. On the worksheet provided, write one of the letters they might have sent to each other while Bellini was in Milan.
 - Write a letter to somebody you have not seen for a long time and are missing (this could be a real person or an imaginary one.) Copy your letter out in old-fashioned script on nice writing paper or parchment (you could even make this yourself!) Roll it up in a scroll and tie a red ribbon around it.
 - On page 13, Maddalena's parents agree to let her marry Bellini. In pairs, script the conversation they might have had before they gave their daughter their permission. Perform this conversation to the class.
 - Look at the scenes from Bellini's operas on page 12. Choose one of them and write a story about what the opera might be about.
 - In small groups, reasearch the plot of one of Bellini's operas. Present the plot as a comic strip. Share your work with the rest of the class, then collectively see if you can identify any of the operas alluded to on page 12.
 - Imagine you were the woman in the green dress on pages 15-16. Write a diary entry describing your evening at the opera house.
 - Listen to an excerpt from one of Bellini's operas. Write down words that come to mind as you listen. Listen to it again, writing down the pictures or images that appear in your mind. Listen to it a third time, writing down the feelings or emotions you experience. Use this material to write a "mood poem" which captures the feel of this music. Alternately, create an artwork reflecting the mood.

Equipment:

- black pen
- scissors
- teabag and water
- red ribbon
(approx 30cm long)

Instructions:

- Imagine you were Bellini or Maddalena. On the stencil provided, write one of the letters they might have sent to each other while Bellini was in Milan.
- Once you have finished and edited your work, follow the steps below to give your letter an old-fashioned appearance!
 1. Soak a teabag in hot water for 1 minute. Remove it.
 2. When the teabag is cool, drag it lightly over the page. Your page should become a light brown colour.
 3. Once the page has dried, cut around the edges of the stencil.
 4. Gently crumple up the page then smooth it out again.
 5. Roll your letter up into a scroll and tie a red ribbon around it.

Song of the Dove

