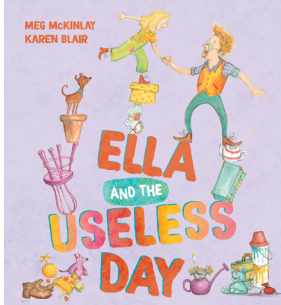




# Walker Books Classroom Ideas



## Ella and the Useless Day

Meg McKinlay  
Karen Blair  
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\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Outline:

A heartwarming picture book about community, sustainability and how one neighbour's rubbish is another's treasure.

Ella's house is full of things . . . useless things! At least that's what she and Dad think. But when they decide to have a clean-up day, something very curious happens. Maybe what is useless to them is treasure to someone else?

## Author/Illustrator Information:

Meg McKinlay is the author of eighteen books ranging from picture books and young adult fiction through to poetry for adults. Her books for Walker include *How to Make a Bird* illustrated by Matt Ottley, which won the CBCA Book of the Year 2021, and *Duck!* illustrated by Nathaniel Eckstrom. Raised in central Victoria, Australia, in a TV- and car-free household, Meg was a bookish kid, in love with words and excited by dictionaries. On the long and winding path to becoming a children's writer, she has worked a variety of jobs including swim instructor, tour guide, translator and teacher. Meg is now a full-time writer and lives near the ocean in Fremantle, Western Australia, where she is always busy cooking up more books. Find her online at [www.megmckinlay.com](http://www.megmckinlay.com) or Twitter and Instagram as @MegMcKinlay.

Karen Blair grew up in Perth, Western Australia. She made her first picture book when she was nine for a Year 5 project, and by the time she was in her 20s and living in the UK, she knew it was her dream to continue. She now lives in Fremantle, Australia, with her husband and two cats and works part-time as a primary art teacher. Find Karen online at [www.karenblair.com.au](http://www.karenblair.com.au) or on Instagram @karen\_blair\_illustrations.

## 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.



# Walker Books Classroom Ideas

## Before Reading

View the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title
- The author/illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb

What do you think the story might be about from looking at the title only? Do your ideas change after seeing the cover? Write your own story using the title *Jigsaw: A Puzzle in the Post*.

## Exploring the Book

Who do you think the audience for this book is? Why?

Is *Ella and the Useless Day* an imaginative, informative or persuasive text? How can you tell?

Write a book review on *Ella and the Useless Day*. Include what you liked about the book, who you think would enjoy it the most and mention any other books you think are similar.

On the whiteboard or on a large sheet of paper, place an image of the cover of *Ella and the Useless Day* and surround it with words that describe the book. Include words that describe what you liked and what you disliked about the book.

In the story Ella and Dad 'searched and scrambled and sorted', 'poked and picked and piled', 'hunted and hoisted and heaved'. Why do you think these words have been grouped together? Alliteration is words that repeat the same letter or sound at the beginning. Why do you think Meg McKinlay chose to use alliteration in the book?

Have you ever had a clear out at home like Ella and Dad? What are the reasons you needed to do a clear out (old, broken, outgrown etc)? Do you think that all the items you cleared out were useless or are the items only useless to the person who doesn't want them anymore? What did you do with

all the things that were cleared out? After reading the story, are you inspired to look for other ways to clear out unwanted or useless belongings?

As a class, brainstorm as many options as you can think of to reuse 'useless' items rather than taking them to the tip (i.e. selling, donating, recycling, upcycling, trading, refurbishing etc). You may like to explore the library resources and learn more about recycling. Can you find a book on upcycled arts and crafts?

As Ella and Dad move through the town towards the tip, their neighbours ask for the useless things and seem very excited to have them. Without looking at the end papers, can you think of reasons why each person wanted an apparently useless thing? Use your imagination and be creative! Once you have some ideas, look through the end papers to discover what everyone did with their useless things. Did you have the same ideas or were they all very surprising creations?

## Exploring the Illustrations

Analyse one of the double-page spreads from the book. Questions to ask could include:

- What do you look at first? Why? Then how does your eye travel around the page? (This is called the "reading path".)
- What techniques and materials has Karin Blair used? (For example, pencil, watercolour, ink.)
- What perspective has he used? Is the picture shown close-up or from a distance?
- What objects are big and small? Why are they shown this way?
- What objects are in the foreground (front) of the picture? The background? Midground?
- What are the dominant colours? What mood (feeling) do these colours create?
- Where are the people in the picture looking? Why are they looking there? What effect does this have?



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How do the illustrations add to the story? How would the story be different if there were no illustrations?

Imagine you received one of Ella and Dad's useless things. What would you turn it in to? Draw a picture of what you would turn your useless item into.

## Further Activities

How do you think the useless thing came to belong to Ella and Dad in the first place? What do you think they used it for and why? Write a paragraph about the origins of your useless item.

What does the inside of your house look like? Draw yourself at home with your family: and make sure to include lots of objects and belongings that can be found in your house too!

Do you know the people who live in your neighborhood? Think of something kind you could do for a neighbour, such as baking, writing a letter or drawing a picture. Ask an adult's help to deliver your gift.

Have you ever had an adventure in your community with a parent or a family member? Write a story or draw a picture about an adventure you would like to have.

Find other books by Meg McKinlay at your library, and compare them to *Ella and the Useless Day*. How are they similar or different?

Write a letter to Meg McKinlay 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 Meg!