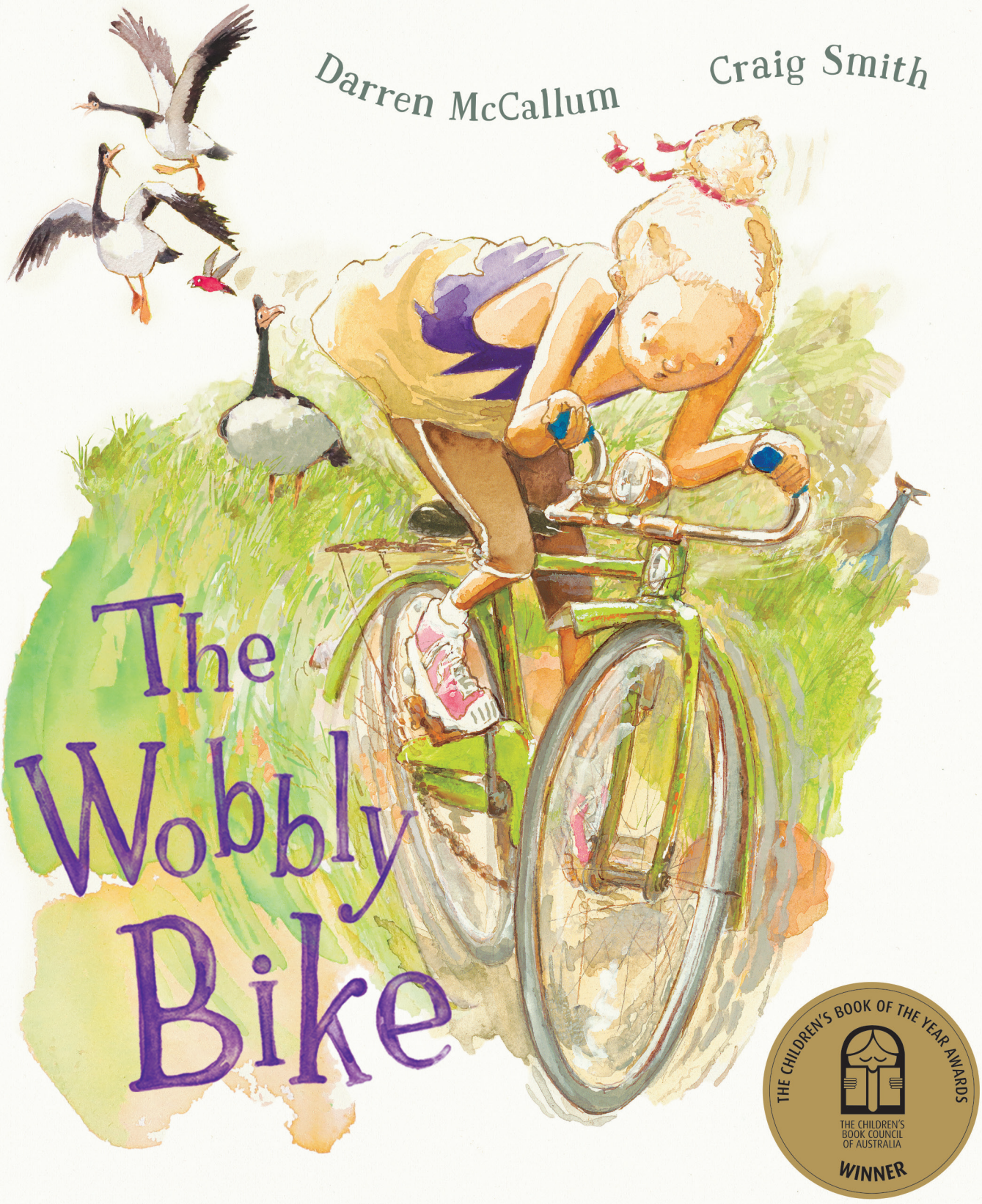
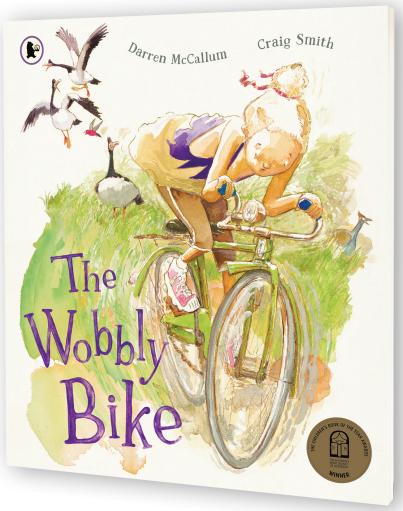


TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger

WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT the BOOK



THE WOBBLY BIKE
CREATORS: DARREN MCCALLUM & CRAIG SMITH
ISBN 9781761601774 PAPERBACK
JULY 2026

The wonderful wobbles of learning to ride a bike, set amidst the vibrant colour and culture of Australia's 'Top End'

How do you fix a wobbly bike? Could it be the tyres, the terrain, or maybe it might be a new rider? A joyful, multi-layered story, celebrating the unique culture of Australia's urban "top end", the precious roles of grandparents in families, the fact that kindness and encouragement, combined with practice, are the key to success, bound together with gentle humour... because laughter is always the best medicine.

For ages: 4+ years

ABOUT the AUTHOR

Darren McCallum is a father of two young girls who, with his wife Melissa, live in the Northern Territory. He is a tradesman with a love of nature, stand-up comedy and poetry. The seed for this story was planted by Darren's daughter Summer, who referred to her bike as 'the wobbly bike' when her training wheels were removed. There are many layers to this story that are very close to Darren's heart: the importance of inclusion in our society; the precious roles of grandparents in families; the fact that kindness and encouragement, combined with practice, are the key to success; and humour, because laughter is always the best medicine.

ABOUT the ILLUSTRATOR

Craig Smith was raised in country South Australia, later training in Adelaide at the South Australian School of Art. In an illustration career spanning over 45 years, he has illustrated many books. The 1970s and 80s were a time of upheaval in many spheres of Australian life, and exciting growth in the cultural industries. Then, and now, Craig has embraced the opportunities to illustrate stories on many themes in an identifiably Australian way. One compelling theme in front of Australians now is caring for the environment in which we all live and share. This story and illustrations were initially workshopped in Darwin, thus enabling the fabulous multicultural mix of that city to be brought forward.

THEMES

Perseverance and practice, learning new skills, family and intergenerational relationships, community and friendship, encouragement and kindness, humour and resilience, Australian life and landscapes, connection to place, confidence and independence.

CURRICULUM AREAS

English: Responding to literature, discussing characters, settings and events, exploring rhythm, rhyme and repetition, identifying humour in texts, creating imaginative responses, vocabulary development, speaking and listening.

HASS (Geography): Australian environments and communities, features of the Top End, ways people live in different parts of Australia.

Visual Arts: Exploring colour and movement, responding to illustration style, creating artworks inspired by the book.

Health and Physical Education: Persistence and resilience, learning physical skills, safety when riding bikes, building confidence through practice.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures:
The book supports discussions around diversity and inclusion; respect for different experiences and perspectives; relationships, care and community.

SYNOPSIS

The Wobbly Bike is a warm and joyful picture book about learning, persistence and the special bond between grandparents and grandchildren. Set against the vibrant backdrop of Australia's tropical Top End, the story follows a young child struggling to ride Pop's old bicycle, which seems to wibble and wobble wherever it goes. As the rider wobbles past cats, birds, mango trees and neighbours, it becomes clear that perhaps the bike itself is not the problem after all. With gentle encouragement from Pop and plenty of practice, the child slowly gains confidence and discovers the secret to mastering the 'wobbly bike'. Told with humour, rhythmic language and richly atmospheric illustrations, this charming story celebrates resilience, community and the joy of learning something new.

WRITING STYLE

Darren McCallum's writing style is playful, rhythmic and perfectly suited to reading aloud. Through repetition, rhyme and carefully chosen sound words such as 'wibble wobble', the text captures both the movement of the bicycle and the fear and joy of learning a new skill. Humour runs throughout the story, balanced by an underlying message about perseverance, patience and encouragement. The author's storytelling celebrates everyday family life and the importance of community, allowing young readers to recognise themselves in the experiences of the characters.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Craig Smith's illustrations are vibrant, energetic and full of warmth and movement. Created using gouache and inks, the artwork captures the tropical environment of Australia's Top End through rich colour, expressive brushstrokes and lively detail. The illustrations convey the wobbling motion of the bike, often using exaggerated angles and sweeping lines to create a sense of movement and humour. There are small visual details on each spread – animals, neighbours, plants and everyday moments – that build a strong sense of community and place. The loose, expressive style gives the book a feeling of spontaneity and joy, complementing the playful rhythm of the text.

BEFORE READING

Looking at the cover illustration:
- What do you notice about the bike?
- Why do you think the story is called *The Wobbly Bike*?
- How does the character seem to feel?

Learning something new:
- Have you ever learned to ride a bike, scooter or skateboard?
- Was it easy at first?
- How did you feel when you kept trying?
- Who helped you learn?

AFTER READING

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

WIBBLE WOBBLE WORDS

- The story is filled with playful sound words and repetition: for example, wibble wobble, wobbles left, wobbles right. How do these words sound when you read them? How do they help you imagine the bike moving?
- The text uses rhyme and repetition to create a playful rhythm. Which words rhyme?
- How does the rhythm make the story fun to read aloud? Can you clap along to the beat of the sentences?
- As a class, create a short rhyme about riding, wobbling or playing.
- Why do you think the author repeats words and phrases?
- Can you think of other ways to describe the wobbly bike? For example, a shaky, quaky bike.
- Create your own movement words for different actions:
  - a bouncing ball
  - a slippery fish
  - a playful puppy
  - a racing bike
- Illustrate one of your ideas.
- The bike in the story wobbles, but lots of other things wobble too! What else wobbles? (Jelly, custard, a toddler learning to walk). Think of something that wibbles and wobbles and write a poem about it.

WOBBLY HUMOUR

The wobbling bike causes all sorts of chaos — scaring Popcorn the cat, swerving around Nana and frightening birds at the birdbath.

- Which parts of the story are funny?
- How do the pictures add humour?
- Why is humour important when learning something difficult?
- Write and draw your own funny 'wobbly bike/scooter/skateboard' adventure.

IN THE TROPICS

- Look at the front endpapers of the book. What can you see? Who can you see?
- How do the front endpapers help to set the scene?
- Does the setting look like anywhere you know?
- The story is set in Darwin, in Australia's Northern Territory. Darwin is a vibrant, tropical city, known for its warm weather, interesting plants and animals and rich mix of cultures. Find Darwin on a map of

Australia. Why do you think this part of Australia is called the 'Top End'?
- What clues in the illustrations tell you that the story is set somewhere tropical? Hints: stilt houses, tropical plants and trees, etc.
- Is the setting different to where you live? How?
- What colours has the illustrator used to show the heat and tropical atmosphere?
- How does the setting help create the mood of the story?
- What details in the illustrations help show community and neighbourhood life?
- Why might bikes be a good way to get around in this environment?
- Have you ever visited Darwin or the Top End? If so, share your experience with the rest of the class.
- Create a project poster about Darwin or somewhere in the Top End, such as Kakadu National Park. Include maps, climate, plants, animals, landmarks and interesting facts.
- Research some plants and animals that live in the Top End, such as frangipanis, mango trees, crocodiles, cane toads or boab trees.
- Compare Darwin's climate to the climate where you live. Which place is hotter? Wetter? More tropical?
- Create a class mural showing life in the Top End, including homes, wildlife, bikes, trees and community life, OR:
- Create a class mural of your own neighbourhood or community. Include homes, plants, animals, places where people gather and play. You might like to paint the mural from a bird's eye view, just like the back endpapers in the story.

EXTENSION – BEAUTIFUL BOABS

The rider wobbles past a boab tree during the story. Boab trees are amazing! Some are thought to live for hundreds – and even thousands – of years. Boab trees are important to many First Nations peoples, who have long used different parts of the tree for food, medicine, tools and shelter.

- Why do you think boab trees need thick trunks?
- How are boab trees different from trees where you live?
- Why are trees important to people and animals?
- What animals might live in or around a boab tree?
- Why do you think people remember and recognise boab trees so easily?
- Create a collage boab tree using torn paper, paint or natural materials.
- Write a creative piece about a secret inside a boab tree.
- Measure the circumference of a tree in the school grounds using string or a tape measure. Compare it to the enormous trunks of boab trees.
- Create a class fact file about boab trees with labelled diagrams and interesting facts.
- Some boab trees have been important meeting places and landmarks for communities for generations. Discuss why certain trees or natural places can become special to people over time.

MOVING PICTURES

The illustrations in *The Wobbly Bike* are full of action and energy, helping readers feel as though they are wobbling along with the rider.Why do you think boab trees need thick trunks?

- How do the illustrator's lines and brushstrokes make the bike seem wobbly?
- Which pages feel the most energetic or busy?
- How does the design of the text add to the sense of movement and energy?
- How are the rider's body positions used to show movement and balance?
- How do the wheels, handlebars and angles of the bike help create the feeling of motion?
- Can you find examples where the movement is funny or exaggerated?
- Which illustration is your favourite? Why?
- How do the illustrations help you imagine the rider's feelings as they learn?
- Choose one illustration and use your body to copy the rider's pose. How does it feel?
- Draw a picture of yourself doing an action (running, jumping, dancing or riding). Use curved, swirling

or zigzag lines to show movement.
- Use crayons, paint or pencils to experiment with different kinds of movement lines. Which lines make something look fast, slow, shaky or smooth?
- In pairs, create short freeze-frame performances showing different stages of the rider learning to balance on the bike.

AS EASY AS RIDING A BIKE

- At the beginning of the story, what do you think is causing the wobble? Do your ideas change as you read? Do you think the bike really wobbles? Why or why not?
- What advice does Pop give?
- Why is practice important?
- Can you think of something you can do now that was once difficult?
- Look at the spread towards the end of the book (pages 12-13) that says, 'keep practising when learning something new'. What is Pop doing? What is Nana saying? How does this reflect the idea that you need to 'keep practising'?
- Draw or write about a skill you learned through practice. Examples might include:
  - swimming
  - reading
  - tying shoelaces
  - climbing
  - drawing
  - riding a bike
- Finish the sentence: 'At first I couldn't _____, but now I can _____.'

POP AND NANA

The relationship between the girl in the story and Pop and Nana is warm, patient and encouraging.

- How does Pop help the girl in the story?
- What makes Pop encouraging?
- What do we learn about this family from the pictures?
- What special things do grandparents or older family members teach us?
- Create a 'Someone Who Helps Me' portrait and a sentence about an important adult in your life.

COMMUNITY LIVING

The story shows how much fun living in a community can be. Throughout the book, we see neighbours, family and other children sharing spaces, helping each other and spending time together outdoors. As a class, brainstorm what the word 'community' means.

- Who is part of your community?
- Talk about how a school is also a community — a place where people learn, play and work together and help each other feel safe and included.
- What different communities are you part of?
- How do people in a community help one another?
- What makes a community feel welcoming and friendly?
- Which parts of the story show people spending time together?
- How would the story feel different if the girl learning to ride the bike were completely alone?
- Why are kindness and encouragement important in a community?
- Create a class 'Community Web'. Write the word 'community' in the centre of a large sheet of paper and add all the people, places and groups that are part of your community.
- Draw a picture of your community, including places that are important to you, such as parks, shops, libraries, playgrounds or schools.

- Work together to create a class mural showing people helping each other in a community.
- Interview a family member about their community when they were growing up. What was similar and what was different?
- As a class, make a list titled: 'Ways We Can Be Good Community Members'.

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES AND THE TOP END

The Wobbly Bike is set in Darwin, on Larrakia Country in Australia's Northern Territory. The book acknowledges the Larrakia people, the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which Darwin stands. The Top End has been home to First Nations peoples for tens of thousands of years. It is a place rich in cultures, languages, storytelling, art, music and deep connections to Country. The tropical landscapes seen throughout *The Wobbly Bike* — including boab trees, birds and outdoor community spaces — are all part of environments that have long been cared for and understood by First Nations peoples.

- What does the word Country mean in First Nations cultures?
- Why is caring for Country important?
- How can stories help people stay connected to place and community?
- What clues in the illustrations show the importance of the natural environment?
- Why is it important to learn about the Traditional Owners of the land where we live and learn?
- Find the Traditional Custodians of your local area using an AIATSIS map (aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia) or local council resources.
- Listen to or read First Nations stories connected to animals, plants or seasons from northern Australia.
- Make a class list of ways people can care for Country, such as protecting waterways, respecting wildlife and reducing rubbish.
- Create a map showing some of the different First Nations groups and languages of the Northern Territory.
- Many First Nations groups recognise six or more seasons based on weather patterns, plants, animals and changes in the environment. Research First Nations seasonal calendars from northern Australia and compare them with the seasons where you live.

BE BIKE SAFE

- What safety rules should bike riders follow?
- Some of the characters in the story wear helmets. Why is it a good idea to wear a helmet?
- What safety rules should bike riders follow?
- How can you encourage someone who feels nervous about trying something new?
- Make a class poster titled: 'How to Be a Safe and Confident Bike Rider'.

BIKE GRAPH

- Survey the class:
  - Who can ride a bike?
  - Who is learning?
  - Who rides with family members?
- Turn the results into a simple graph.

WALKER BOOKS CLASSROOM

Free education resources written to the Australian curriculum.

classroom.walkerbooks.com.au