

Teaching Notes

Koala Sees the World by Gordon Winch

Illustrated by Tony Oliver



Koala is a questing spirit and sets off to see the world, far beyond her safe habitat in the grey gum forest — an animal Ulysses in many ways. She finds that the ‘worlds’ of the animals and birds she meets have many disadvantages as far as she is concerned and some are decidedly life threatening.

Adventures abound until she meets a man who promises a world that would be the end for Koala. She retreats in haste to her home in the grey gum forest and finds contentment there. ‘All I had to do was open my eyes.’

The themes in the book run deep: adventures create unknown dangers, it is worthwhile listening to the old and wise; wild animals are facing extinction; the Australian bushland is remarkable and varied; home after all may be the best place.

The art in the book is filled with Australian wildlife created as real characters with real personalities. Kookaburra, Wombat, Kangaroo, Platypus, Lyrebird, Jabiru, Crocodile and Diamond Python are all there, together with many other creatures, that are found in various corners of Tony Oliver’s pages: kingfishers, geckos, frogs, fish, owls, bats, possums and parrots — and many more. It is a remarkable landscape, somewhere between reality and fantasy.

Teaching with the Book

Koala Sees the World is ideal for shared, guided and independent reading. Its story rhythms, its rounded narrative and its fascinating characters will provide interest for all readers. Motivation to read is built in.

Before Reading

1. Talk about koalas: what they are, where they live, what they eat.
2. Discuss the various animals and birds that live in the Australian bush; in what ways they are unique.
3. Discuss the problems facing all animals in the wild; reduction of habitat, predators; the threats of extinction.

4. Point to features of the book: the cover (front and back), the publisher, the illustrator, the title page, the double page spreads, the postscript.

Reading the Book

1. Read the book to the students to produce the maximum enjoyment. Build up the suspense.
2. Have the students join in with the deliberately repeated lines:
I want to see the world, _____.
Can you tell me where it is?
3. Refer to the art on each double page spread: its creativity and originality; its capture of the essential qualities of the creatures Koala meets; the other creatures on each page.
4. Refer to the way the narrative is told: orientation, complication, resolution and coda.
5. Read with feeling; show the build up of tension (Crocodile, Diamond Python, Man)
6. Capitalise on the rhythms of the language: *And he lifted his head and laughed until the hills and the valleys and the sky were filled with sound.*
7. Focus on the place where each creature lives; why Koala didn't like each place; why Crocodile and Diamond Python frightened her; why man's world frightened her even more?
8. Ask the students why they think Kookaburra had laughed at the beginning of the book and why he had laughed at the end.
9. Read the postscript and talk about its importance: conservation of wild life; what more it tells us about koala, the species.

After Reading

1. Ask the children to recall their favourite page(s). What is the most scary page?
2. Have the children make an Australian wildlife picture collection. Bring in or draw pictures of the animals and birds.
3. Read more about koalas (*phascolarctos cinereus*); what makes the koala special; what their most remarkable features are.
4. Ask what we can do to protect our precious wildlife and our precious land
5. Re-read the book with the children.

Further Work

- Use the book to extend the students' language. Discuss interesting words: 'gloomy', 'cavernous', 'spectacular', 'grinding', 'twinkling', 'habitat'.
- Work on grammar and punctuation: direct and indirect speech; past tense in a narrative, word families: (creeping, crawling, sliding, scratching, biting things); exclamations: (Help! Help!); statements: (I want to see the world, Kangaroo.) Questions: (Can you tell me where it is?)
- What other books about Australian animals or birds are in the library (fact and fiction)?