

Mopoke

By
Philip Bunting



Mopoke starts with a small and unassuming owl sitting peacefully on a branch beneath a clear and starry sky. With every turn of the page, the setting remains the same peaceful tree, while the text is a gently humorous exploration of playing with and adapting the word ‘mopoke’. The illustrations follow the text and, with the exception of a solitary surprise wombat, each new version of the somewhat bemused mopoke is the clear star of the scene.

RECOMMENDED READING LEVEL: Mid Primary

TEACHER NOTES

- At the end of the story, Bunting writes that “‘Mopoke’ is the Australian nickname for the Southern Boobook, our smallest and most common species of owl. Mopokes are known for their love of peace and quiet and for their eponymous “mo-poke” call.’ Either online or in the school library, see what else you can find out about mopokes. Make a poster showing your findings and share it with the class.
- Which owls are native to your local area? Research which owls you might be lucky enough to see at night where you live and find out what they eat and what they look like.

- Several of the different ‘pokes’ rely on the reader having a certain amount of knowledge of cultural references for them to be understood. For example, the ‘fee-fi-fo poke’ requires knowledge of the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, while the ‘fropoke’ relies on an awareness of a particular hairstyle. Discuss with the students the meanings of some of the less obvious ‘pokes’, asking them to hypothesise as to the meaning of any that they do not already know.
- Ask the students to draw a picture of a mopoke, using the mopoke in the book as inspiration. Have them colour and cut out their mopokes and hang them from strings to make a mopoke display in the classroom.
- Look at the repeating pattern of feathers inside the front cover of the book. Use it as inspiration to design a feather of your own. Draw your feather onto the flat part of a potato that has been cut in half and then carefully use a butter knife to carve away everything from the top surface that isn’t your feather. Use your potato stamp to make an artwork. You might want to make a decorative border for a photo frame, or to stamp a pattern on a large piece of paper to use as wrapping paper, or on a smaller piece of paper as the front of a birthday card, or simply as a decoration.
- What are some other words that rhyme with ‘mo’? Use one of these words to invent and illustrate a ‘poke’ of your own.
- Look carefully at the picture of the wombat. How might a wombat end up in a tree at night? What would he feel like being perched on a branch? Write a short story from the point of view of the wombat telling how he ended up in a tree full of owls.
- Ask students to share with the class which ‘poke’ they think is the funniest. Discuss what makes the different ‘pokes’ funny and why one person might have a different favourite to another.