

# Farmhouse

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR  
**SOPHIE BLACKALL**

SCIS: 5417673

ISBN: 9780734421654

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Step inside the dollhouse-like interior of *Farmhouse* and relish the daily life of the family that lives there, rendered in impeccable, thrilling detail. Based on a real family and an actual farmhouse where Sophie salvaged facts and artefacts for the making of this spectacular work, page after page bursts with luminous detail and joy. Join the award-winning, bestselling Sophie Blackall as she takes readers on an enchanting visit to a farmhouse across time, to witness the way that history spins stories.

## ABOUT THE CREATOR

Sophie Blackall AM is an award-winning illustrator of over 50 books for children, including the New York Times bestselling Ivy and Bean series, the 2016 Caldecott Medal winner, *Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear* and the 2019 Caldecott Medal winner, *Hello Lighthouse*, which she also wrote. She is the four-time recipient of The New York Times Best Illustrated Picture Book Award and has worked with UNICEF and Save the Children, UK on global health and literacy initiatives. Originally from Australia, she now splits her time between Brooklyn, New York and the Catskill Mountains, where she has built a retreat for the children's book community called Milkwood Farm. Find out more about Milkwood Farm here: <https://www.milkwoodfarm.org/>.

In June 2022 Sophie was awarded the Order of Australia (AM) for significant service to children's literature. Learn more about Sophie here: <https://www.sophieblackall.com/>.

## STUDY NOTES

### HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

- How important are stories in keeping those who have passed, alive in our memories?
- Aspects of the Swantak family's life in the 1930s to 1940s are described as this story is told. Invite students to choose any of these topics and to examine the book closely to ascertain what it reveals about this sub-topic. Then invite them to write or illustrate a summary of the aspects of this topic which the book reveals. They include:
  - farm chores (milking cows and mucking out their stalls, fishing for trout, picking apples, baling hay)
  - housework (shaking the rug, washing the floor, preparing food, setting the table)
  - food and meals (home-made pies, soup, bread, trout)
  - leisure activities (sewing, knitting, playing with toys, reading, playing the organ)
  - schoolwork (the boy is reading a text at the kitchen table in one frame while holding the baby)

- illnesses (the baby 'lay with a fever and a spotted tongue')
- pets and farm animals (cats, cows, ducks, horse)
- This home is a farmhouse with an exterior landscape depicted in the opening frames and with scenes which relate to the work done on a farm. The interiors also reveal how this farming family relate to this landscape. Discuss the differences between this home and an urban dwelling, and to how a family might live in such a dwelling.
- This home contains many items of furniture which also denote the period in which this work is set and the rustic hand-made quality of many items. There are iron beds, antique wooden chairs, a chaise longue and a decorative parlour organ. Invite students to examine each page and to identify furniture which is unusual or interesting.
- The family's clothing is typical of the era, and of the lifestyle. Dresses are comfortably shaped and are patterned in florals and checks; men and boys wear overalls; Sophie Blackall rescued actual frocks of the residents and there is an image of them at the end of the book. Research clothing of the 1930s to 1940s and compare them to the clothes we wear today.
- Paper from shopping catalogues gives a hint to how people shopped in these days with no automotive transport readily available. What other facts or details did you discover in the collaged texts in this book?
- The animals that have invaded the abandoned farmhouse are typical of this environment, for example, squirrels, swallows, moths, raccoons, mice, bats, wasps and a bear! Research the wildlife of this region and the other animals you might find there.
  - If a house were abandoned in your local area, which animals might be likely to visit the abandoned house to take shelter there?

### ENGLISH AND LITERACY

- The first thing to note about this text is that it is written as one long uninterrupted sentence. This style of narrative reflects the passing of time evocatively. Such narratives allow a writer to engage in a lyrical meditation on a personal history. Invite students to write a short story in this style.
- This story is also reminiscent of traditional cumulative tales which consist of lists of events escalating via repetition, and then culminating in a resolution. For example: *There was an Old Lady who Swallowed a Fly*. Use this style of cumulative tale to tell a story about events which have occurred in your family life.
- The text also contains an irregular pattern of rhymes, for example, 'where they pored over books about planets and stars, then climbed into beds where they dreamed of Mars (or they dreamed of cats or the distant sea and whispered secrets, played truth or dare, and lost their teeth and brushed their hair'. Create rhyming sentences like these using one of these rhyming groups that appear in the text, write another word to rhyme with each of them:
  - crawl, hall
  - lied, cried
  - played, made
  - dare, hair
  - flies, pies
  - floors, chores

### VISUAL LITERACY

- The text appears variously on the left and right hand panels or beneath the illustrations in each double page spread. How does the layout of the storyboard and the format and design of the book influence your reading of it?
- Creating characters entails studying facial expressions and 'body language'. View for example the baby crawling towards the photographer in the second frame, with the children gathered on the staircase for their portrait. What does this tell you about each of them? Or view the naughty child on the left-hand side of the fourth double page spread, having been discovered painting the cat. Study each image for insight into how characters are conveyed visually.
- Try to match the children in the family with the adults they become who are depicted later in the book. What clues do the illustrations contain which reveal which adults they might become?

- Research the American Folk Art of this region and other areas in the US. Study how it was used in homes of this era. See the ninth double page spread in this book where the children are picking apples from a tree. This image is very reminiscent of folk art images of trees. How does this picture book incorporate folk art in its images?
- Prediction is an important part of picture book reading. The reader's perspective in observing strong left to right movement across a double page spread is also important in a picture book, encouraging the reader to follow the action sequentially in a filmic way. Encourage students to read and predict from hints in the visual and written text, what might appear on a subsequent page.

### CREATIVE ARTS

- The children in this book cut patterns out of potatoes to print on the walls of their family home as a pattern of flowers and leaves. Conduct this activity with students to create patterned wrapping paper or a wall hanging.
- Create a poster to advertise this book.