

Hope is the Thing

AUTHOR

JOHANNA BELL

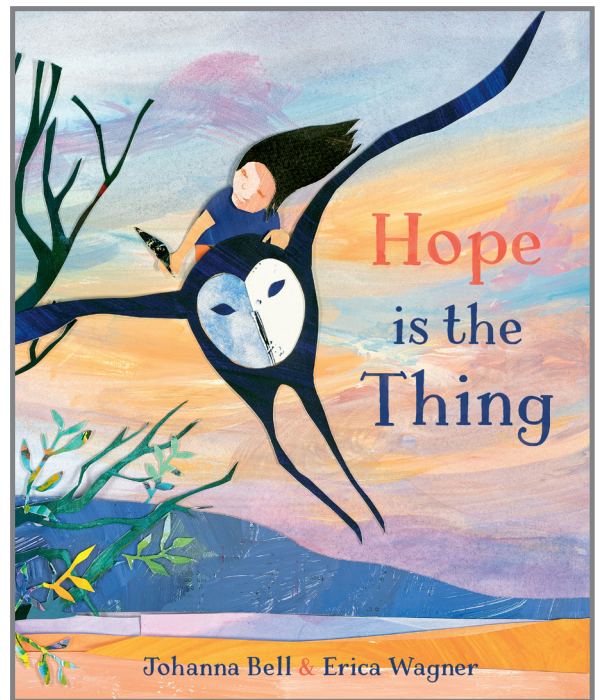
ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

Hope is a kookaburra singing the sun

Hope is the emu learning to run . . .

Let your imagination soar in this joyful ode to the world of birds and the healing power of nature.

Sparked by the Emily Dickinson poem “*Hope*” is the thing with feathers, this lyrical text accompanied by glorious mixed media collages reflects and celebrates the diversity, ingenuity and wonder of birds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johanna lives in Garramilla/Darwin where she writes fiction and runs a community arts business called StoryProjects. In 2019, she and Erica Wagner co-facilitated a six-month story camp where their mutual love of birds led them towards *Hope is the Thing*. Johanna is also co-author of *Too Many Cheeky Dogs, Go Home Cheeky Animals!* and *Cheeky Dogs: To Lake Nash and Back*, illustrated by Dion Beasley, and *The Colour Catchers*, illustrated by Laura Stitzel. She is currently working on a verse novel for adults which is also inspired by birds.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Erica Wagner is an artist, publisher and creative consultant to storytellers. Her collages are inspired by the natural world and are made by layering and repurposing discarded paintings and sketches. While Erica has worked as an editor and award-winning publisher of children’s books for many years, *Hope is the Thing* is the first picture book she has illustrated.

STUDY NOTES

- Before opening *Hope is the Thing* look at the title and cover design and ask questions such as:
 - What does the word ‘hope’ mean to you?
 - Can you think of some words to describe how you feel when you have hope?
 - What is the opposite of hope?
 - Do the colours here remind you of hope? Can you explain why?
 - How does the illustration make you feel? Can you explain why it makes you feel that way?
- Turn to the first double page illustration featuring the young girl with her scissors and bottle of glue. Ask students what artwork might involve these two objects. Encourage students to look very closely at the image to find all the

different materials used here.

- Turn to the page featuring the text,

Hope is the dash

past magpie's nest

Hope is a feather

From night parrot's chest

Ask students why the illustrator might have decided to use the long strip of map with an image of the girl riding a bike here, and the text from a book to create an image of a magpie's nest.

- Explain to students that colour plays a very important role in creating mood in an artwork. For instance, dark colours can evoke feelings of sadness, while light, bright colours make us more likely to think of joyous things. Now look very closely at the colours featured in *Hope is the Thing* and encourage discussion of the mood they create and its relationship to the theme of Hope. Note that colour plays a role in the text, too. The word Hope appears in a bright colour that makes it stand out from the rest of the black text.
- Read the story once to the class, allowing plenty of time for students to look at the illustrations on each page. Re-read the story but ask students to close their eyes and concentrate on the words alone and see if they can hear patterns emerge and the flow of the words. Encourage them to note the words that stand out.
- Explain that *Hope is the Thing* features poetic text where a small number of words combine with writing techniques such as repetition, imagery, changes in sentence length, as well as word choice, to express deep emotions. Encourage students to discuss the importance of:
 - Repetition – 'Hope is . . .', emphasises the key message.
 - Imagery – why might the author have chosen birds (both generally and specific species) as a symbol of hope?
 - Sentence length – how does the last sentence in the story differ to the rest of the poem? Why might the author have decided to change at this point in the story?
 - Word choice – explain that some words appeal to our senses more than others. Use the following example and ask students how the underlined words increase the impact of what is being described. To illustrate your point, replace the words soaring with flying and nesting with sitting and ask students which version they prefer and why?
- *Hope is the Thing* began as a creative writing prompt. Using Emily Dickinson's famous poem, 'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers, Johanna Bell led a group of creators to write multiple sentences starting with 'Hope is'. Try this with your class. Explore different topics by using prompts such as, 'Friendship is . . .', 'Love is . . .', 'Family is . . .'.
- For older students: Read Emily Dickinson's poem and discuss the similarities and differences between the poem and the picture book, taking special note of the poetic techniques already discussed in class, as well as themes and punctuation.
- Spend a class outside in the school playground dedicated to finding out more about local birds. Encourage students to identify them, make a note of their size, colours/markings and any distinctive sounds they make. Go to birdlife.org.au for help in identifying birds and loads of fascinating facts about them.
- Encourage students to create their own collage artworks based on the bird life and environments of their own areas. The collage approach used in *Hope is the Thing* is perfect for children to experiment with colour, composition, elements of art (tone, scale, texture, line, shape, form, etc).