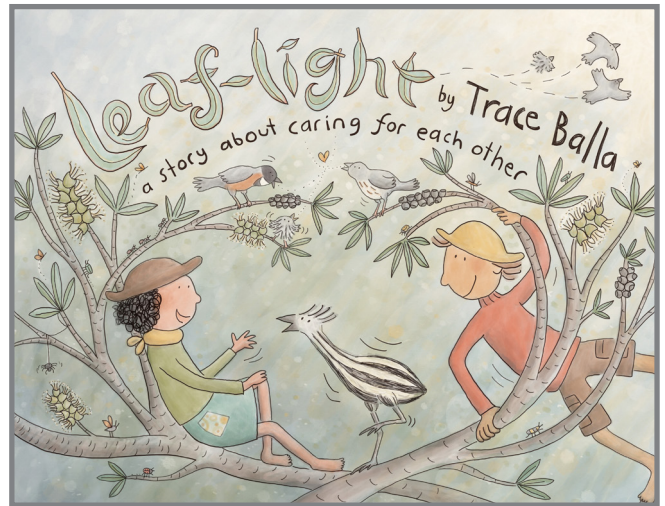


Leaf-light: a story about caring for each other

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
TRACE BALLA



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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary

SYNOPSIS

Miri is feeling a bit lonely but her mama won't let her get a pet. So, when her best friend Wingo and his big family next door adopts an emu egg—which soon hatches into an adorable baby emu with a sneaky habit of doing anything to spend more time with Miri—both families get a bit more than they bargained for. Throw in a new treehouse, a beautiful subplot about a family of rufous whistler birds, a dramatic flood, and a whole lot of trademark Trace Balla style and heart-warming detail, and this story is shaping up to be another delight for Trace's many dedicated fans across Australia and beyond.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Trace Balla is a well-loved Australian children's book author, illustrator and writer of song lyrics who lives on Dja Dja Wurrung Country. She has won the CBCA Book of the Year Award, the Readings Children's Book Prize, the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature, a Comic Arts Awards of Australia Bronze Ledger and an Honour Award for the inaugural SCBWI Australian Picture Book Illustrator Awards. She has also been shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards (twice), Adelaide Festival Awards for Children's Literature and ALIA Graphic's Notable Australian Graphic Novel Award.

Trace's stories explore themes of connection to Country and community, nature, friendship, gratitude, grief and human rights. She also loves to inspire others, of all ages and from all walks of life, through her talks and workshops, which explore creativity and caring for the planet. Trace does freelance illustration work, from logos to murals, and has a bookshelf ever-filling with her nature journals and other reflections.

Find out more about her at traceballa.com.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *Leaf-light*, ask students to consider the title and illustration to answer the following questions:
 - Where might the two characters be sitting?
 - How might this location connect with the title, Leaf-light?
 - How does the font used in the book's title connect with the location and the meaning of the title? (Hint: look closely to see what each letter is made from.)
 - Other than humans, what other animals can you see in the illustration?
 - What do you think the subtitle, 'a story about caring for each other', might mean?
 - Do you think the 'each other' in the subtitle only refers to the people in the illustration?

- Open the book at the front endpapers. How is the map similar to other maps you might expect to see in a story? How is it different? Think about the language used in the map. What has the creator, Trace Balla, decided to include and not include in the map (for instance, no street or road names)? How has she shown the deep connection that the people and animals in the story have with Djaara Country?
- We first meet Wingo in the story saying, “Notherway, ’notherway!’. What do you think he (and his Nana) means by this? What other way might they be alluding to? Can you find other times in the story when a character talks about ‘another way!’?
- Why do you think Wingo is happy to take home the honeypots on p 6 but decides against digging up the bulbine lilies on p 8? Can you find other examples of people caring for Country in the story?
- When Miri rides her bike to Laylah’s house on p 27 she is bringing mandarins from Swee’s tree and a hand-sewn apron from Mama; when she leaves, Laylah gives her weeds for Swee’s ducks. These are just two examples of Miri’s caring community. Can you find others in the story? Can you think of things that you could share with your friends and neighbours to help them?
- Study the double-page spread on pp 16–17 featuring Wingo’s home. Find as many examples as you can of old ways and new ways coming together in the spread.
 - How might learning ‘old ways’ and adapting them to the modern world repair Culture and aid reconciliation?
- Why do you think Wingo decided to take down the planks from the fence that divides his and Miri’s backyards?
- Turn to the back endpapers and make a list of all the things that are created with the planks to make life better for everyone.
- Words such as ‘sob’ and ‘shiver’ are used on p 59 to tell us how Miri is feeling. How do the illustrations on the page further communicate her emotions?
 - How does the story of the little whistler chick mirror Miri’s situation at this point? What do you think Trace Balla might be saying here about our connection to everything on earth?
 - Why do you think the little whistler chick helps Miri to understand that Barramal does need to be free? Turn to p 70 to see how Trace Balla uses imagery to show the similarity between both birds.
- What do you think Wingo’s dad means when he tells Laylah, ‘We don’t own this land—we’re just looking after a patch of it.’?
- What ‘other way’ do you think everyone has found by the end of the story? How does this ‘other way’ differ from the suburban life many of us live in Australia? Would you prefer to live in Miri’s community?
- Find out more about emus in First Nations Culture. Why are they significant and what is the Big Emu in the sky?
- Spend a lesson outside in your own school playground and try to sketch and label everything you see—including birds, animals and insects. Like Miri, see if you can capture on paper the sounds being made by the things you see.

This project is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

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AUTHOR OF NOTES

CAROLYN WALSH