

World

AUTHOR

MARTINE MURRAY

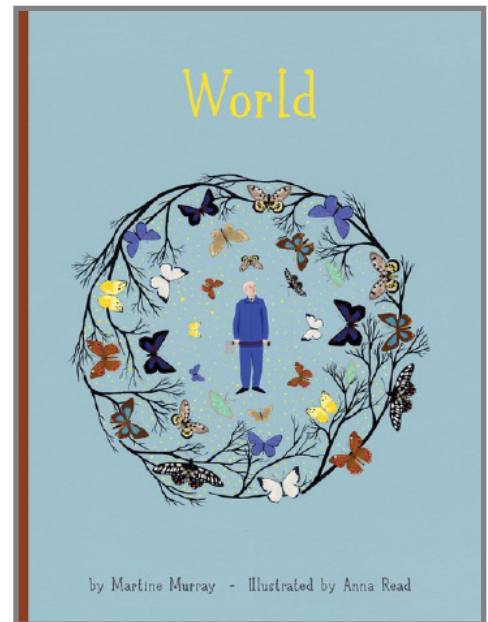
ILLUSTRATOR

ANNA READ

SCIS: 5461505

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

A man approaches a tree with an axe and the tree speaks to him. What ensues is a conversation in which the man tries to show the tree what a real world consists of. He points out the roads, the buildings, the ships and supermarkets but what he sees is his own loneliness amidst them. In quiet response, the tree reveals the deep and sustaining complexity and vitality of the 'world' it houses.

Set at an imagined edge of the city and the natural world, this story asks what have we become possessed by and consequentially, what have we forgotten?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martine Murray is an acclaimed Australian author and illustrator whose work has been translated into more than 20 different languages. Her first novel *The Slightly True story of Cedar B Hartley* was on the White Ravens international list of outstanding children's books, and was shortlisted for the Victorian, NSW, Qld Premiers Awards and the CBCA Award. Her picture book, *Mannie and the Long Brave Day* was shortlisted for the Prime minister's award. Her novel *Molly and Pim and the Millions of Stars* was shortlisted for the CBCA and her last two books *Marsh and Me* and *Henrietta and the Perfect night* were both the honour books on the CBCA shortlist.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Anna Read is an artist whose work spans painting, ceramics, music, theatre and garden design. Always deeply committed to and informed by her connection to the natural world, Anna is a founder of StudioSu in Castlemaine, Victoria.

WRITING STYLE

The book is written to appeal to all ages, while the language is simple the themes are complex. The art of a picture book like this is to convey a moral value without speaking of it, without imposing any weight, that is to exist as a story in which the moral dimension is playfully or tenderly implied, but not told. The writing does this by being vivid and particular with the details, those hallmarks of modernity for instance, which when gathered, elicit a sense of the excesses and superfluities of modern life, which is contrasted with the enduring and self-sustaining, complex reciprocities of life withing the ecology sustained by the tree. Also, while the book is supposedly a conversation between the tree and the man, the tree speaks without speaking, it need only offer its magnificence in the face of the superficialities the man is positing as proof of a real world.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations here are detailed and rich, while also being evocative. Different perspectives are used to help suggest the reversal of insight or psychological position for instance. When the man asks the tree if he can live in the trees' world he looks up into the trees branches. Here the tree has become king. When he later surrenders to this world, he leans into the tree's trunk and the animals gather around him, to suggest that the world includes him, that he too is an animal. The illustrations are also very Australian. The tree is a gum tree and the flora and fauna accurately represent those animals, insects and birds that do gather in this particular ecology. This is further supported by a diagram at the end of the book which shows through arrows and text, the interconnectedness of life within the tree. A who-eats-who of the river red gum world. Then there are drawings of every animal, insect and bird that has been represented in the book, so that children can seek out and familiarise themselves with bird and animals. These are beautiful and accurate representations of our local fauna.

STUDY NOTES

Tree

- This book is a homage to the tree. Ask the children if there are trees they love. Have they ever hugged a tree? Discuss the possible relationships that could be cultivated with a tree.
- Ask them to go into a garden and find the names of the trees that are there.
- Ask them to draw a map of their gardens or local parks, locating the trees and naming them.
- What would they say to a tree if they could? Ask them to write a poem that is addressed to a tree.
- Choose one tree and sit still beneath the tree for long enough to see some of the bird life or insects which visit it, noting what they see and what they hear and smell.
- As a class, go on a walk to the playground or local park or botanical gardens and all sit beneath one tree, in silence, listening and watching and then drawing and or discussing what you saw and heard.
- Talk about pre-history when early man lived in trees. Why would they have lived in trees? How did the tree protect them?
- Write down all the things a tree gives us—fruit, nuts, shade, wood, oxygen, places for birds, etc.
- Write down all the things a tree does—photosynthesis, stabilise soils, provide habitat, rain, forest, etc.

Ecology

- Ask children to draw a diagram showing photosynthesis. Include people and animals in the diagram.
- Ask children to choose one creature—a bird, animal or insect—and present to the class what it does within its own ecology, what it eats, who eats it. Is it endangered? Why?
- Have a discussion about who we depend on and who do those we depend on, depend on? Where does our food come from? How does it get to us? Are there problems with this?
- Draw a diagram of your own ecology. What do you eat? Where does it come from? Trace the food back to its source.
- Where do you live? Where are you within your family? How does your family fit into, or rely on, or give to larger communities/neighbourhoods? Is there a school community and how does that fit into your life?
- Go to the back of the book and choose one of the animals/birds insects and find it in the book. Research the following about your chosen creature survives:
 - What does it feed on?
 - What feeds it?
 - What sort of habitat does it like?
 - What endangers it?
 - Can you find a way to hear its song?
- Draw your favourite bird in this book and then write a short poem about the bird to go with the drawing. Talk about why you like this bird.

The city

- This story shows that even though there are so many people in a city, they can still feel lonely. Why do you think this is?
- How did we used to live? How would life in a village or small tribe be different? Discuss these questions.

- The main character in the book seems to live alone. Perhaps there are people nearby who also live alone.
 - Do you know your next-door neighbours? Or the people opposite? Or any people in your street?
 - How could people living in the same street get to know each other better? Could you write a letter to your neighbour? Or do a drawing of a tree and leave it in their letterbox?
- The man believes that the more stuff you have the happier you will be. Is this true? What really makes you happy? Write a list and discuss in class.
- When do we have enough? Are there things you have that you don't need? Write a list of everything you have and then circle the ones that you really need. Include the people, friends, animals in your life.
- Talk about waste. What happens to stuff we throw out? How does this affect the natural world? How is this different to nature?