

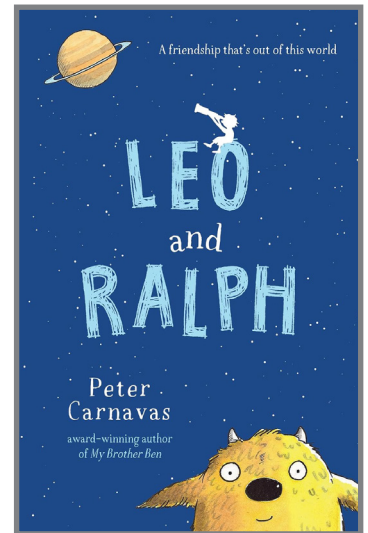
# Leo and Ralph

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR  
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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

Leo has no friends. With a head full of questions and big wonderings, his words come out too slowly and no-one at school listens to him for long before running off to play. Unable to navigate playtime, Leo retreats to the safety of his imagination and secret place under the stairs. That is until he meets Ralph, a short, furry alien who lights up Leo's world. But Leo's family worry that Ralph may be preventing Leo from making a real friend.

When they move to the country for Mum's new job, Leo must say goodbye to Ralph. It is the hardest thing he has ever had to do.

## ABOUT THE CREATOR

Peter Carnavas writes and illustrates books for children. His books have been published widely across the world and have won many awards, including a Queensland Literary Award and the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature at the NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Peter lives on the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, with his wife, two daughters, a dog and a cat.

## THEMES

- Friendship; Imaginary Friends
- Alienation
- Vulnerability
- Acceptance
- Space

## STUDY NOTES

- The story (Prologue) places readers partway through the story before being taken back to the beginning of Leo and Ralph's friendship (Chapter One onwards). After finishing *Leo and Ralph*, discuss the effectiveness of structuring the story in this way.
- Like the Grimbles they have invented, Leo and Ralph like to speak in backwards sentences. Try doing this with a friend. As you read, track the recurring line: 'Tomorrow you see'. How does this offer hope for Leo's future?
- Using the illustration on p 7, write a journal entry in the role of Leo about seeing the white balloon for the first time.
- Why does Leo feel he 'never seemed to fit neatly into the jigsaw puzzle of other kids' (p 8)? Have you ever felt this

way? Share in a reflection.

- Leo's 'head was filled with questions' and he felt that the other kids 'didn't care for the size of his thoughts or the time it took to share them' (p 9). With a partner, devise other Leo-type questions. Share with another pair, choosing your best three questions. Why are these your best questions?
- Why does Leo become so excited that the sky 'goes on forever' (p 11)? How is this like his imagination and wonderings? Why does Leo often feel 'the sky filling his chest' (p 14)?
- At the start of what chapter are we told that Leo 'looked up'? (p 12) He continues to do so throughout the story. How is the sky an important motif throughout *Leo and Ralph*?
- Leo's dad explains that Pluto is no longer a planet because it's too small. Why does Leo think 'That's not fair' (p 14)? How does this connect with Leo's smallness?
- Why do Leo's eyes twinkle when his dad says, 'Just because you can't see something, doesn't mean it's not there' (p 14)? How is this idea repeated in the book?
- Using the descriptions on p 18, sketch one of the aliens that Leo draws. Now, draw your own alien. Next, use words to describe it. Swap your description with a friend and sketch one another's. Using your friend's drawing as feedback, revise your writing to be as clear and precise as possible.
- Why does Leo feel it would be 'easier to . . . imagine a friend falling from space' than to try to make a friend at school (p 20)?
- In the role of Leo, write a reflection about one of your days at school.
- Discuss the language features used in the 'Saturday morning sounds' on p 25. What are your family's 'Saturday morning sounds'? Write your own description.
- Using playdough, make the Gronk and other aliens Leo creates on p 26. Like Leo, take photos of your creations. Consider making a short clay animation/stop motion to show the role of these aliens in Leo's story.
- What tips does Peg give Leo about making friends? What other advice do you have for him about friendship?
- On Family Day, why does Leo '[drag] his feet like they were made of moon rock' (p 36)?
- Why does Leo feel that the kids at school 'pretend he didn't exist' (p 36)? Is this true?
- When Leo spends the day at home with his dad, why does he feel that 'Inside his belly, a thick lump of worry [has] washed away like a fistful of sand in the ocean' (p 40)? Why does the thought of going to school make Leo feel so worried? What strategies could he use to feel less this way?
- Leo is asked which animal he feels like when he's at school and is then asked to draw what he feels like (p 44). He draws himself as an alien who is on the other side of the page from all the other children. How does this reflect the theme of alienation in the text?
- In the role of Ralph, write a journal entry about your first few days with Leo.
- What makes Ralph such a good friend for Leo? How might he be holding Leo back?
- Why, when he tells his mum about Ralph, does Leo feel like a 'blown-up balloon but one that was ready to pop' (p 62)?
- Why, when asked if he will stay forever, does Ralph reply, 'As long as you need me' (p 66)? Make predictions about whether Leo will always need Ralph.
- How do Leo's family make room for Ralph in their lives? Give examples from the text to support your thinking.
- Write instructions for some of Leo and Ralph's made-up games such as Asteroids (pp 60–61), Bounce the Moon, Moon Walk (pp 68–69) and Other Worlds (pp 73–74). Alternatively, write instructions for a game you and a friend have made up.
- How does buying the telescope help Leo? Why, when he leaves for the country, does Leo throw it in the bin?
- Make predictions about the story using the following excerpt: Ralph's horns drooped . . . "Because if you ever see a Ralphora ship—" He paused, then shook his head. "Never mind." (p 78)
- Examine the language features used to describe the excursion to the farm (see pp 86–89). Why, from the moment they arrived, might Leo have been 'lost in the sky' (p 86)? How is this episode a turning point in the story?
- In the role of Leo, write a journal entry about saying goodbye to Ralph.
- What do you think is Leo and Ralph's 'secret promise' (p 99)?
- Write a list of all the things on the drive to Dundle that remind Leo of Ralph. What does this tell us about their special

friendship?

- Leo's mum says, 'Everything feels strange when it's new' (p 107). Write a reflection to share a time when something new felt strange to you.
- How is Leo feeling about the move to Dundle? Why might he have a sense of guilt about this move? Is this justified?
- Make predictions about the fact that the pool is empty. After finishing the text, discuss the use of the pool as a catalyst for Leo's growth.
- How is Leo's new school different from his old one?
- Why doesn't Leo want The Plan to work?
- Why does Leo ride his bike so fast after the first day of school (p 128)?
- Make predictions about the importance of the tower to Leo and Ralph.
- How is Gus different from the other children Leo has known? In what ways is he the right 'fit' for Leo?
- How are Gus and his soccer ball like Leo and his imaginary friend?
- Discuss Ms Pengari's statement that 'It won't be long till someone likes the way you don't fit.' (p 145). Share a circle time that discusses the importance of this idea.
- What does Leo mean when he says, 'It was another lie wrapped in a truth' (p 152)?
- Why are 'All the days in front of [Leo] . . . as blank as an empty sky' when Ralph does not return when expected (p 154)?
- How does Ralph know about Gus? What do you think might be the real purpose for Ralph's visit?
- Why does Ralph encourage Leo to kick the soccer ball back to Gus?
- Why is Ralph so happy when Leo and Gus play with the old telescope?
- Discuss how the telescope helps connect Gus with his dad using the following quote: 'I could look at the moon every night, and Dad could look at it too. We'd be in different places, but we'd be seeing the same thing at the same time.' (p 190)
- Why is Gus keen to teach Leo how to kick the soccer ball? How does Gus use his dad's wisdom to help Leo?
- Why, when Ralph disappears, does Leo tell Gus to go home? Why can't Leo keep both Gus and Ralph as friends?
- Why does Mum encourage Leo to tell Gus the truth about Ralph (pp 216–218)? How does Leo feel about this? How do we know?
- In what ways is Ms Pengari a 'good fit' as Leo's teacher?
- Why, when Leo shares the truth about Ralph, does he feel 'He had opened the cage that held his secret' (p 227)? How does Gus react to Leo's secret? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- Gus eventually shares the truth about his dad. Why do you think this helps Gus to better understand Leo and his need for Ralph?
- How does sharing his love for space with the Dundle community make Leo feel (pp 240–241)? How do we know?
- Discuss Leo's revelation that becoming friends with Gus has come from within himself: 'All Ralph's thoughts and all his words . . . had come from . . . Leo' (p 247). Why does Leo think 'In the deepest pocket of his heart, [he] knew all along that this moment would come, because he had designed it himself' (p 248)? Discuss the role of planning when writing stories.
- Why, as Ralph enters the spaceship, is his furry foot 'the colour of a golden sunrise' (p 249)?
- Why, although he'll miss Ralph, is Leo not sad when Ralph finally leaves (p 251)?
- At the pool, Leo takes photos of his new friends—Rafi, Mia, Nicola and Gus—on his polaroid camera. Take photos of your friends and add to your own small flipbook. Flick through this book whenever you need a friendship boost.
- What is the significance of the rain that makes the town sparkle at the end of *Leo and Ralph*?
- As a class, create a story map of *Leo and Ralph* using the chapter headings as a guide. Consider plotting the graph along a map of outer space.
- Using evidence from the text to support your thinking, create character profiles comparing Leo and Gus. How do they help one another? What does this share about the power of true friendships? Why are they such compatible friends?
- Who is your 'Gus'? Share in a reflection.
- Why does Leo often feel he has a jellyfish in his stomach? What physical symptoms do you get when you feel worried?

- Keep track of the white balloon motif throughout the text. How does the author, Peter Carnavas, use this together with the sky and Gus's soccer ball to tell this story?
- How do Leo's family help him throughout the text?
- Peter Carnavas uses descriptive language and figurative language throughout *Leo and Ralph*. Discuss the impact these devices have on the text. Ask students to select descriptive passages to annotate, identifying the language features used to create such vivid depictions.

AUTHOR OF NOTES  
**CHRISTINA WHEELER**