

The Garden of Broken Things

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

One day, curious Sadie follows a cat into the tangled vines behind the lonely house at Number 9, Ardent Street.

Deep in the undergrowth, past all the twisted, rusted things, Sadie finds the cat sitting on the lap of a woman, bent with time and weariness.

Sadie has found the Garden of Broken Things.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Freya Blackwood is a multi-award-winning illustrator and writer. Her picture books are beloved for her warm and perceptive drawings. Since publishing her first picture book in 2003, Freya has worked with writers such as Libby Gleeson, Margaret Wild, Jan Ormerod, Nick Bland and Danny Parker.

In 2010, Freya won the UK's most prestigious prize for illustrators, the Kate Greenaway Medal, for her book *Harry and Hopper*. And in 2015 she did what no other creator has ever done, taking out three CBCA Book of the Year awards in a single year. *The Unwilling Twin* was shortlisted for Picture Book of the Year in the 2021 CBCA Awards.

Freya lives in Orange, New South Wales, with her daughter, Ivy.

THEMES

- Belonging
- Identity
- Natural World

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

Looking at the cover, students might suggest that this looks more like a wild space, jungle or the bush, than a garden.

- What do their own gardens look like?
- Have they ever planted seeds or seedlings?
- Have they ever seen a really overgrown garden that might look like this?
- Why might a garden become so unkempt and rampant? Encourage responses such as no-one to care for it or

house is empty.

- Would someone like their garden to look like this intentionally? Why?
- Freya Blackwood often tells stories within stories in her illustrations. Consider the front matter (half title page, imprint page and title page) and note what can be seen, including small differences in the four images. If appropriate, introduce the term 'vignettes'.
 - What story, or sequence of events, is unfolding here?
 - Write sentences to describe these.
- Like many illustrators, Freya Blackwood has a very individual, distinctive style. Utilise a bulk loan of Freya's books and compare the illustrations across these. Guide students to identify techniques and media, such as sketch, linework, ink, watercolour, oil paint and colour palette. Use an anchor chart to record observations of any similarities such as use of colour and line or facial features/body shapes.
- Invite students to draw or paint their ideal garden. Ask students to consider:
 - What they would grow in it.
 - Would it be kept tidy or allowed to grow wild?
 - What kind of plants would they grow? Would they have flowers? Vegetable plots? Trees? Jungle vines? Grass or lawn?
 - What other objects might they include in their garden? Eg. swings, trampolines, pond, pool, climbing frames?
 Follow up with a gallery walk to compare and discuss with their peers.

WHILE READING

- Closely examine each double-page spread before reading the text, and note interesting points eg. the condition of 9 Ardent St, the odd objects in the 'garden' such as the tree that has grown up through a chair, and the clothesline that is covered with vines. Invite the students to speculate on why the house and garden appear so.
- Why are the older children scared of the house, yet Sadie is not? What reasons can students suggest eg. perhaps they have read stories about haunted houses?
- There is a view that cats are curious creatures. This led to the proverb 'Curiosity killed the cat'. What does this proverb mean?
- In this story, the cat is a trigger for Sadie's curiosity, as she stops to chat with it, then follows it. Is this a good or bad idea? Invite students' views on this topic.
 - Discuss whether students have ever found themselves in a position where curiosity lead them into a new experience or place.
- How can a house be 'lonely' with windows like 'sad eyes'? Introduce personification as a figure of speech and in illustration/images.
 - How has Freya Blackwood created the 'sad eyes' of the house at 9 Ardent Street?
 - What purpose do you think she has in giving the house this human-like expression?
- What 'things from the past' can students identify in the garden? Would it be possible to estimate how old the house is, using any of these clues?
- What do students think about the old woman's appearance when Sadie first sees her? Consider her posture and positioning, the colours used (resembling moss on a pale statue), the fact that she does not move even when the cat jumps on her lap or Sadie touches her.
- What is suggested by the line 'she brushed some cobwebs from the woman's face'?
- Freya Blackwood is also very skilled at creating different moods with her illustrations. Conduct a group discussion on how she achieves this: how colour, shading and tone create these moods, and what impact this has on the readers' emotions, throughout the book.
 - What mood, emotion or story is suggested on pp 11–12?
- Discuss the use of expression, colour, tone and shading here, compare the left-hand page to the right eg. sombre colours as opposed to the warmth of the light streaming from the house, the mother's outstretched arms, and the expressions on the faces of Sadie's family.
- What conclusions do the students reach about the woman on the bench? Invite them to justify their opinions.

AFTER READING

- Ask students to write descriptive text about their ideal garden and pair with their artwork.
 - Their ideas about what makes an 'ideal' garden may have changed after finishing the book.
- Use a simple story arc/map worksheet and have students draw or write the events in the narrative, along with setting and characters. (Level this activity according to students' ability e.g.: Level 1—Beginning, Middle, End; Level 2—Setting, Characters, Beginning, Problem, Obstacles, Climax and Resolution)
- On the final pages of the book, the children have made the garden 'a wild and joyful place', and yet it has not changed much from when they found it scary. Discuss as a class what message you think Freya Blackwood may be trying to convey about:
 - Old and broken things
 - Overgrown and wild spaces
 - The elderly.
- Write a backstory for the woman on the bench. Point to consider:
 - Who was she? What was she like?
 - What about her husband?
 - Did she raise children in the house?
 - How long had she lived there?
 - What was her favourite part of the garden and why?
 - When did she lose her husband?
 - What happened after he died?
 - Why is she sitting on the bench when Sadie finds her?
- Write the events of *The Garden of Broken Things* from the point of view of the cat. Things to consider:
 - Did the cat belong to the woman on the bench?
 - Did it deliberately lead Sadie to the bench?
 - Why did the cat choose Sadie of all the children?
 - How does it feel about the children now being visitors to the garden?
- The final illustration shows Sadie and the other children on the bench with the cat. The woman that Sadie met there has gone. Write the story of what has happened to her. Think about:
 - What ideas or themes is Freya Blackwood exploring in *The Garden of Broken Things* and how might you similarly explore these ideas in this story.
 - How or why might she have been freed from the bench?
 - Where is she now?
 - Is she happy or sad about what has happened to the garden?

AUTHOR OF NOTES

SUE WARREN AND JEMMA MYORS