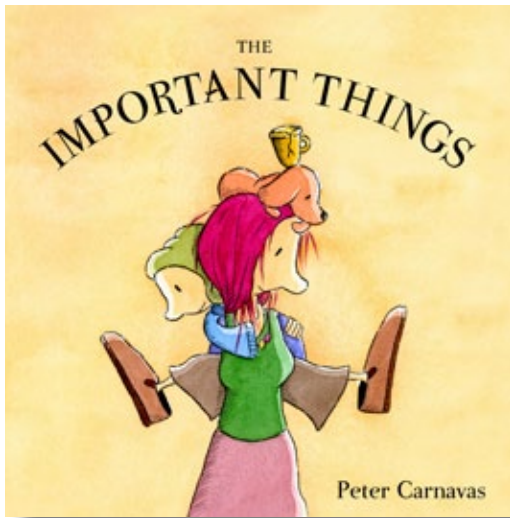


TEACHER'S NOTES

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THE IMPORTANT THINGS

Author/Illustrator: Peter Carnavas

Synopsis

The Important Things is the story of Christopher and his mother. Christopher's mother does everything, for his father has faded from their lives. When they give away a box of his father's old things, a series of events takes place to reveal the different in which Christopher and his mother deal with the absent father.

Memory, parents, emotional respect and the value of everyday yet important things are the key themes in this book.

Author/Illustrator style or medium

Peter has used watercolour and black ink for the illustrations in the book. As the story has moments of sadness throughout, he ensured the illustrations were still amusing and whimsical in some way, while painting with warm colours, to demonstrate that although there is an empty space in Christopher's life, he still has

a beautiful relationship with his mother. This is particularly evident on the front cover, with a warm yellow ochre shade flooding the background. Colour is again important in depicting some of the more emotional parts of the story. For example, white space is employed to convey emptiness and blue tones used when Christopher's mother is in quiet despair.

Author/Illustrator Motivation

Peter has always been interested in the stories behind everyday things and why these things may be important to us. People keep many things in their house as memory triggers: a vase may sit on the shelf to remind us of a late grandparent, or something as simple as a coffee cup may sit unused in the cupboard, kept only for the memory attached to it. This is the idea that inspired The Important Things. The nature of memory and how people deal with the same circumstance are key issues that Peter wanted to also explore in this book. In addition, the theme of the absent parent is something that Peter hopes will give children and parents an opportunity to understand each other's feelings.

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Author/Illustrator Background Information

Peter grew up as the youngest of four kids with two parents that somehow allowed and encouraged him to pursue his interests without him realising. He learnt the violin and guitar and was pretty certain he would one day become one of the world's greatest songwriters, sitting somewhere alongside Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Brian Wilson.

This didn't happen, so it was lucky he could draw little pictures of people.

Peter has always written stories and scribbled pictures. After making little books for family and then teaching for a few years, he began immersing myself in picture books. He immediately fell in love with the work of the great picture book creators: Quentin Blake, Stephen Michael King, Peter H. Reynolds, Freya Blackwood, Libby Gleeson, Shaun Tan, Armin Greder, Bob Graham and more.

Peter completed a picture book course with Dr Virginia Lowe and put together a dummy version of his book, *Jessica's Box*. A little while later, New Frontier accepted the book. His tale of a little girl's attempt to find friendship entered the world in April 2008.

Peter's second book, *Sarah's Heavy Heart*, was released in 2009.

The Important Things is Peter's third published book.

Educational Applicability

Memory, parents, emotional respect and the stories behind everyday yet important things are the key themes in this book.

Discussion topics

Before reading the book

Talk to the children about something small but important to you. It may be a necklace, a photo, a pencil, a picture painted by somebody you know. Talk about why that is important to you, even though it may not be important to other people.

Ask children to think of something they have at home that is important to them. Something small that wouldn't be important to anybody else. It may be a little toy, a teddy or doll, a friendship bracelet, a card that was made for them. Ask the children to try to explain why it is important to them.

Introduce the book and ask the children what they think the story might be about? Who do they think the characters on the front are? How are they related? Why is there a yellow coffee cup on the front cover?

As you read the initial pages, ask the children what the line means: for his father had faded from their lives. How can someone fade away? How do you think Christopher and his mother feel about this?

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As the important things reappear in the house, ask the children what they think is happening.

After Reading the book

What happened to all of the things that Christopher and his mother took to the shop? How did they find their way back home?

In the book, Christopher says, “I was trying to remember” and his mother replies “I was trying to forget.” What do you think this means? What was he trying to remember? What was his mother trying to forget?

How do you think the important things in the book – the slippers, the hat, the music, the cup – help Christopher remember his father?

Why do you think the owner of the shop wanted to help Christopher by giving him the important things? And why didn't Christopher just tell his mother he wanted them back?

Activities

My Important Things

1. Ask children to bring one important thing from home to share with the class. Discuss with them that it must be something important – not necessarily worth a lot of money – that is special to them, that other people wouldn't find important. Children can show their important thing and explain why it is important to them.

Why is this important?

2. Present children with an ordinary, everyday object. It may be a shoe, a hairband, and pencil case, a hat, a toy. Ask them to think of the story behind it and imagine somebody to which the thing might be important. For example, a hairband might be important to a little girl because it was given to her on the day her sister was born.

Art, Craft & Design

Important Things Chart

1. Make a class chart or wall full of the children's important things. They could draw and colour pictures of their important things, label them and stick them up on the chart.

The Many Uses of a Cup

2. At the end of the story, one of the important things, the coffee cup, is used as a pot to hold a flower. Ask students to design and make a different use for a cup, or for any other everyday object, such as a shoe or bucket.

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The Important Things – a play

3. Children could act out the story as a short play. In groups of four or five (someone might want to play the dog), they could perform the story, demonstrating how to use their body language to depict different emotions.

Further Research

Think of some other ways that Christopher could remember his father. Could he put more pictures on the walls? Write down everything he remembers so he doesn't forget? Who could tell him more about his father?

What if Christopher's father had faded away to another town and one wrote a postcard to Christopher? What do you think it would say?

Marketing & Selling Points

The story depicts a boy and his mother, with an empty space left by the absent father. Many children live with only one parent and this book gives them a tool to discuss how they feel about their families.

Children enjoy talking about the things that are important to them. This book gives children opportunities to discuss what is important to them and why.

Children will enjoy guessing how the objects are reappearing in the house after they have been taken to the secondhand store.



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