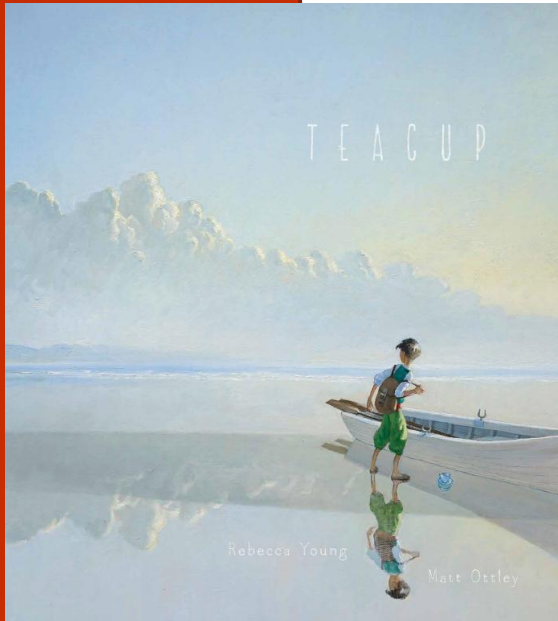


TEACUP

REBECCA YOUNG | MATT OTTLEY (Illustrator)



Once there was a boy who had to leave home . . . and find another.

An unnamed boy with a boat and a backpack leaves home to find another. In the boat with him, he takes a book, a bottle, a blanket and a teacup full of earth scooped from the place he used to play in. His journey takes him over wild seas and under blue skies, until one day he lands on a new home and waits ... for a whisper.

From the Author: My aunty arrived here by boat, shortly before my dad was born. Throughout the highs and lows of her journey, and in her new

home, she never let go of where she came from. Instead, she carried it, cared for it, shared it. When my brothers and I were young she gave us stories of her past, warm bowls of jook, and Cantonese swear words. She showed us that you can find old memories in new places, and old friends in new faces. **Teacup** was a story that emerged from a need to write for her.

Matt Ottley has given so much to **Teacup**. The hope and tenderness throughout is heart-felt and boundless. Just take a look at the boy's posture in the final spread—one of my favourite illustrations. You can feel the joy of the exhale to come.

From the Illustrator: What spoke to me most about the text for **Teacup**, when I first saw it, was quite simply that it was the most beautiful picture book story I'd ever read. It is such a huge story about the human spirit, about loss and grief, love and joy, about beauty and also high adventure. Yet it's told in such a spare, minimal way, like a piece of poetry, that there was room for me to interpret the words in so many ways, which is an artist's dream. I've also wanted, for a long time, to do some paintings about the sea, about the drama of sea and sky, so **Teacup** was a perfect project for me to do that with.

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TEACHER NOTES

- Read **An Ordinary Day** by Libby Gleeson and Armin Greder. Compare the theme of the imagination in this book and **Teacup**.
- Why do you think the boy has left his home? As a class, talk about some of the reasons people emigrate. Are any of the students from migrant families? Ask them to speak to their parents or grandparents about what led their families to emigrate and then share their findings with the class. What do their stories have in common? What features are different?
- For advanced students, examine migration patterns to Australia over the past 60 years on a world map. Mark the movement of people in each decade in a different colour (eg the Italian migration in the 1950s marked in red, the Vietnamese migration in the 1980s marked in blue). How do these patterns change? What factors can students identify that lead to mass migrations (eg war, famine, economic downturns)?
- Why do you think the boy carries a teacup full of soil from his homeland? What could the teacup, the soil and the tree that grows from it be symbolic of? Why do you think the author chose **Teacup** as the title of the story?
- If you had to leave your home and take four items with you, what would you take? Why? Create a diorama of the possessions you have chosen, and include hints about what sort of journey you are about to take (eg the boy's journey in **Teacup** might include sand from the beach, a model of a boat, etc). Which of your possessions would have the highest significance (ie what would be the 'teacup')? Why?
- Suggest that each student ask at home whether there is a broken cup or saucer that they can have and bring to school – preferably one with a pattern on the china (and one that their parents don't want returned). Break the china into small pieces and make a class mosaic of a boat.
- What is the difference between a refugee and an immigrant? With sensitivity to the students' own circumstances, talk as a class about their perception of refugees and 'boat people'. What do they think of when they hear of someone arriving in Australia by boat? Why?

How might this perception of boat people affect the way they see the boy and girl in **Teacup**?

- Turn to the spread in which the boy dreams of the trees at home. What is being conveyed in the picture here? Is this scene real, imagined, or a combination of the two? How do the text and the illustration work together to create this effect?
- Turn to the spread where the whales call out to one another. How does this image differ from the ones preceding it? Why do you think the illustrator shows the sky reflected in the almost flat, mirror-like surface of the ocean? What effect does this have on the image, especially when you see the boy's boat floating on the reflection?
- What do you think is meant by the words 'things can change with a whisper'? In pairs, discuss this phrase. Try writing a scene together in which things change with a whisper.
- How does the tree grow in the middle of the boat? Is this a realistic scene, or is it an imaginary scene? Discuss this as a class (hint: it might help to talk about magic realism). Is it important for the tree to be real? Why/why not?
- Read **Teacup** aloud. The first eleven spreads are written with lyrical language. Look how the text is laid out on the page to create movement and rhythm. Now turn to the twelfth spread, where the boy reaches land. How does the language change on this spread? How does the layout of the words 'there was a bump' create a different tone than the preceding pages? What effect does this have on your experience of the boy's journey?
- What do you think the boy is waiting for in his new home in particular? Do you think he is waiting specifically for the girl with the eggcup? Or could he be waiting more generally for a change or a catalyst? Explain your answer.
- Where do you think the girl with the eggcup has come from? How has the illustrator shown that she might not come from the same place as the boy (eg look at her dress, the design of the boat, etc)?
- Turn to the final page. There are no words here, but the story continues. What is suggested by the illustration? How is it possible to tell a story without words?

- How are reflections used in **Teacup** and what do you think they symbolise? Think about how the boy changes as he travels. Is he the same person he was when he left home? Why/why not? Is your reflection the same person as you are?
- Is the journey in **Teacup** physical or metaphorical? Can it be both? What does the story tell you about journeys? This activity could tie back to discussions about emigration and refugees. How can a journey fundamentally change who you are?
- Matt Ottley used oil paints to create the images in **Teacup**. Investigate this medium further. Oil paints are particularly effective in creating texture in a flat image. Go through the book again, taking particular note of where the image shows texture (eg in the clouds, in the waves). Try creating your own images using oil paints, and try to preserve the texture of the image as you go (for example, a painting of a tree done in oil paints could try to convey the rough texture of the bark).
- Ask your students to research scenes in children's books where a character goes on a sea voyage in an object that is not a boat. [Two to start them thinking: 'My bed is like a little boat' by Robert Louis Stevenson; Winnie-the-Pooh in an upside down umbrella.] Make a poster collage of the images.