Teachers’ Notes

The Bush Concert
Written and Illustrated
by Helga Visser

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About the Story

The bush can be a punishing place to live, especially when there is little water and food to go round. The bird community is finding it hard to get by and the serious nature of the situation has dampened the mood. One day a committee of biscuit-eating galahs decides to put on a concert to cheer everyone up.

Birds flock from all over to entertain with their many talents. It’s a night of colour and splendour, with magicians, dancers, clowns and choirs coming together in show. Best of all is the rain that comes at the concert’s end. Nature’s volatile state is hard on those who share this earth; we define our character by how we live through these situations. The Bush Concert is a heart-warming frolicking tale of friendship and community spirit.

About the Author

Helga Visser is a retired commercial artist. She didn’t always get to draw what she wanted but now she has time for the art that she loves. As an eleven year old she came to Australia from Germany. A seasoned explorer, she has lived in several other countries too, but she is comfortably settled now and is happy to call Australia home.

Author/Illustrator Inspiration

Helga has always loved nature and animals and was inspired by the many birds who visited her backyard. She observed that like humans they have personalities, emotions and highs and lows, and she wanted to communicate and share her love of the many bird species through her art. Her great hope is that The Bush Concert encourages kids to feel for these animals and that it can be used to help children identify the many beautiful birds we have in Australia.

About the Illustrations

The drawings were done with ink and pastels. Some were done many times over until Helga got them just right. To represent the birds accurately, Helga consulted many reference
books. She also began a photography study, which gave her more sources to draw from. She confides that the writing proved a particular challenge as until now she hasn’t identified herself as a writer whereas drawing is something she has done all her life.

**Study Notes for Teachers**

1. *The Bush Concert* is an ideal book to discuss the importance of water:
   - Discuss why the birds are so despondent on the first page. Why are food and water so vital? How are they connected? Does everyone need food and water?
   - Talk about the word ‘drought’. What does it mean? Does it affect everyone? Could it affect one group more than another group? What do we do when there is a drought? The Australian Government has a water conservation website with educational resources for kids:
   - Make a chart showing how we use water on a daily basis. If we had a limited water supply, what are the most important things we would reserve it for?
   - Think of descriptive words to describe water.

2. *The Bush Concert* is a great starting point for drama games and creative fun:
   - Hold a concert where, like the birds in the story, everyone performs different acts. Kids could even dress up as birds and re-enact the concert from the book.
   - Pretend to be a bird. Talk, walk and act how you think a bird would. Choose a bird from the book and see if others can guess what type you are from your mannerisms.
   - Make a bird’s nest. Like a bird, gather bits and pieces of material from around you. You could use fabric ripped into strips, leaves, twigs, string, wool, etc. You need a balloon, a bowl, a paper cup, craft glue and some scissors. Blow up your balloon and turn it so that the knot faces down, then place it in your bowl. The size of your balloon is the size of your nest, so if you want a small nest, don’t blow your balloon too big! Pour some glue into a paper cup to use. Dip your materials into the glue and place them on the balloon. Start with the larger pieces and work down to the smaller ones. Layer all your bits and pieces around the balloon. You can use string to secure smaller pieces, like leaves. When you’re finished, set aside your nest to dry and once it has, you can pop your balloon.
• Now that you have a nest, you may like to fill it. Make a bird by curling colourful paper. For instructions visit http://familyfun.go.com/crafts/crafts-by-type/animal-bug-crafts/animal-themed-crafts/bird-crafts/curly-birds-840968/

3. The Bush Concert can be used as a reference for bird-watching activities:

• See what birds you can spot from the schoolyard. If a school camera is available you can take photos of the visitors to help identify each one. Take note of feeding and social habits. Are they eating any fauna in the playground? Do they travel in groups or move about independently?

• Visit a local bird wildlife sanctuary where, like Helga, you can observe a bird at play. Take some paper and pencils to sketch your favourite one. For a list of places in each state to visit, check out this website, http://www.birddealer.com/australianwildlife.html

• Make a bird feeder to hang in the schoolyard or at home. You’ll need a 1-litre plastic bottle, some twigs, a piece of string, an eye screw and some scissors or a craft knife. Have a teacher or parent cut small holes in your bottle. Stick twigs all the way through these holes, leaving the ends sticking out for perches. Poke more holes near the perches for the birds to pull the seeds out. Remove the bottle cap and twist a small eye screw into the top of it and then tie some strong string for hanging. When you’ve filled the bottle with birdseed, hang it from a nearby tree.

• Discuss the importance of feeding birds seed rather than foods their stomachs cannot break down, such as bread. Monitor the bird feeder and see how many different bird species visit.

4. This is a story about coming together. The Bush Concert is a great starting point to introduce the concept of community:

• Community can mean many different things: people who live in the same area, people who have a common interest, people who share and participate in activities. Talk about the different communities we belong to.

• Make individual charts showing the overlapping communities you can belong to.

• Australia has many multicultural communities. Explain that this means people from all over the world living together in one community. Using Helga’s bird chart at the back of the book, look through The Bush Concert to identify all the species of birds. Choose a bird and find out where it lives. Find out where your
family originally came from and together make a class list of all the different countries.

- The birds in the book organise an event to cheer up the bird community, where anyone can attend and no one is left out. Talk about the importance of belonging and having friends. Talk about all the things that cheer you up when you’re feeling sad.

5. Helga Visser’s *The Bush Concert* is a rhyming picture book. This is a terrific source for an introduction to rhyming words:

- Explain that rhyming words sound the same. They may have different sounding beginnings but they have the same ending sounds. Look through *The Bush Concert* and say aloud all the rhyming words.

- Play a game that teaches kids to think of words that rhyme. Point to something, like a body part, and say a word that rhymes with it and get kids to say what it is. So, point to your nose and say ‘rose’ and kids will respond with ‘nose’. Once this becomes familiar, turn the game around so that when you point to your head, kids will respond with ‘bed’ or similar.

- Use pictures to support the understanding of rhyming words. Have two columns of picture objects and ask kids to pair up corresponding rhyming words.