

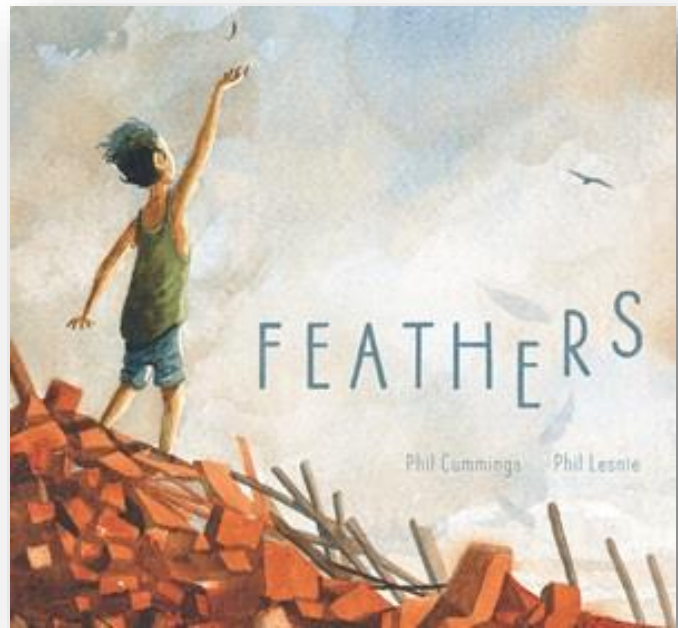
Feathers

Author

Phil Cummings

Illustrator

Phil Lesnie



A bird takes flight, heading for warmth in the south, crossing over invisible borders and devastation. As it flies, the bird drops feathers, and they are caught by people who need them the most.

Themes: birds, migration, refugees, natural disasters, resilience, home, safety.

TEACHER NOTES

- The bird in the book is a sandpiper. Research the sandpiper and discuss it in class. What does it eat? Where does it live? Where does it migrate to?
- The author, Phil Cummings based the book on the sandpiper bird and its migratory pattern. It follows the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. Research the Flyway and the different birds that follow it.
- Plot out the East Asian-Australasian Flyway on a map. Phil Cummings said he based the three feathers on devastated countries that the Flyway passes over: China, which had an earthquake in August 2014; Myanmar, which has had a history of civil unrest;

and Cambodia, a country which is often shaken by floods and droughts. Mark out these countries on the same map, and see how they match up with the Flyway path.

- Look at the disasters that happened to China, Myanmar and Cambodia. Discuss how this would affect the people that live there.
- Phil Lesnie, the illustrator, says his favourite part of illustrating a book is making the sky. Look at the different skies in the book. He never paints a plain blue sky. Paint a sky like Phil Lesnie. Use different methods and colours and textures. As a class, sit outside and take inspiration from the sky you see. Put as many different textures in it as you can.
- The bird flies over lots of different countries and sees different things. If you were a bird, where would you fly?
- Choose a scene from the book and recreate it however you want – with watercolours, paints, pencils, collage etc. Try to keep as much detail as possible from the book.
- At the end of the book, Mia thinks she's lucky. Do you think you're lucky for living where you live?
- Take one of the characters from the book and paint some scenes from their life. What do you think their home looks like? What do they do for fun? How do they use the feathers?
- Birds aren't the only animals that migrate during the change of seasons. What other animals go south or north when the weather changes?
- When birds migrate, they fly for a very long time without stopping. Create paper airplanes using different online tutorials to create different types of planes. Use these planes to have a race and see whose paper plane can fly the furthest.
- Research different types of birds and the skills each of them have. Some have big beaks, some can fly very long distances and some can't fly at all. Which bird would you want to be?

- Looking at all the different types of skills and natural ability that birds have, create your own bird. Eg, the beak of a toucan, the wingspan of an albatross. Where would it live, what would it eat and what would it be called? Draw and colour in your bird and create a mural on your classroom wall of everyone's different birds.

WRITING STYLE

Phil Cummings writes *Feathers* from the bird's point of view, flying its migratory path. It dispassionately describes homes turned to rubble, war and flooded lands, and leaves the reader to piece together what has happened with Phil Lesnie's detailed artwork.

ILLUSTRATING STYLE

Phil Lesnie uses watercolours as his medium of choice. Despite the runny nature of watercolours, Phil manages to include detail and specifics. In painting *Feathers*, Phil said, 'I was out of my depth painting it, and I was wracked with self-doubt — there were so many real stories in this book. How could I possibly do any one of them justice? But in *Feathers* there was an answer for this too, and I recited it to myself any time I felt like it was too hard: "You're so lucky".'

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The spark for *Feathers* was an idea I had tucked away in the bottom of my drawer for over fifteen years now. I was watching a documentary on the migration of butterflies and made some notes. I was fascinated by the distances such a gentle, seemingly frail creature could travel. Then, years later, I was on holiday, walking around a coastal wetland here in South Australia. I read some of the nature information boards that were positioned throughout the wetland and coastal dunes. I read about migratory birds and the distance they travelled. I collected more information from the local visitor's centre and then went home to research the routes these birds take. I found maps of their Flyways and saw the countries they would pass over in their journey across the world. As I

researched the countries I found news of natural disasters, civil wars and the plight of refugees.

Then, I sat at my computer, gazed out of my window to the peaceful tranquillity of a perfect, Australian spring morning and started to write *Feathers*.

Australia has always been known as the lucky country. As I worked, my thoughts were peppered with images that I had seen of children in areas of devastation, political turmoil, poverty and natural disaster and how some of them would still find the innocent resilience to find a way of being playful, imaginative, and hopeful.

–Phil Cummings

It's not difficult to see what drew me to Phil's writing, but it's difficult to describe it. Partly it's that it made me cry very hard, and my worst impulses compel me to inflict that upon others. And partly it's that sandpipers are amazing, flying incredulous distances in their migration. But mostly, it's that as I was reading it, the Australian government was doubling down on its preternaturally cruel treatment of people fleeing persecution and violence. To me, Phil's text was less a salve than it was a silent prayer to an idea of home, shelter, and safety, delivered one feather at a time to people seeking it. I'm personally pretty unfamiliar with prayer, but for the plea I find at the heart of *Feathers*, I was happy to sit out the year with it like a monastic scribe.

–Phil Lesnie

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Award-winning author Phil Cummings was born in Port Broughton and grew up in the mid-north town of Peterborough in South Australia. The youngest of eight children, he has worked as an apprentice mechanic, a waiter and more recently a primary school teacher. Phil has published more than 60 books for young readers since his first picture book. Recently, *Ride Ricardo*, *Ride* was named an Honour Book by the CBCA, 2016.

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Phil Lesnie is a Sydney-based illustrator of children's books. He is also a children's bookseller. It's almost as if he likes books or something. He works primarily in watercolour because even mistakes look lovely in watercolour.