

Teachers' Notes

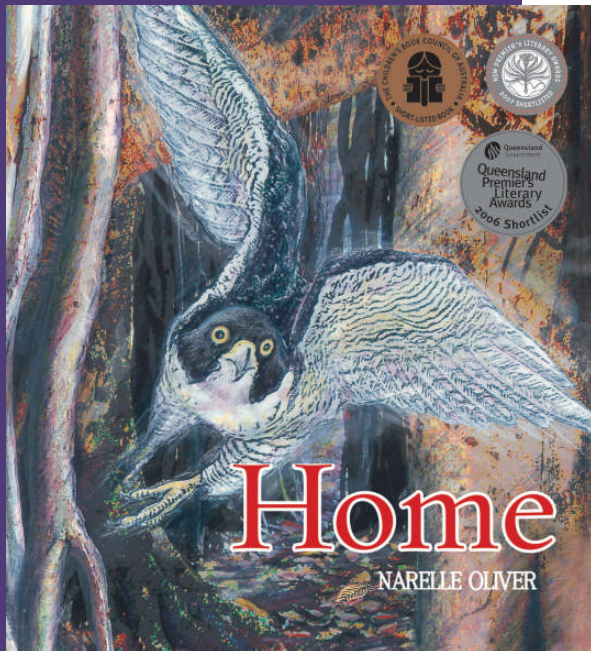
Home

Written and illustrated
by Narelle Oliver

Home won a NSW Premier's Literary Award and was shortlisted in the 2007 CBCA Awards, the 2006 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and the 2007 Wilderness Society Environmental Award for Children's Literature.

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OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Picture Book
Title	Home
Author/Illustrator	Narelle Oliver
Extent	32pp
Age	4+
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Previous publications

Fox and Fine Feathers
(Omnibus Books, 2009)
Dancing the Boom-cha-cha Boogie
(Omnibus Books, 2005)
The Very Blue Thingamajig
(Omnibus Books, 2003)
What a Goat!
(Omnibus Books, 2003)
Mermaids Most Amazing
(Omnibus Books, 2001)

About the Story

Wild creatures frequently suffer displacement from their natural environment. They may be victims of disasters like flood or bushfire, or their habitat may be overtaken by development – roads, farmland or the creeping suburban sprawl. As a result many of them are forced to adapt to urban life – and they often do this with surprising success.

For years the peregrine falcons whose story is told in *Home* have nested high on a cliff edge and hunted the surrounding woodland for the smaller birds that are their prey. When bushfires destroy their familiar hunting ground, the pair must find a new home. They follow the track of a river into a city, and later that day they find ‘a new cliff’ with ‘a neat edge for a look-out and good stones for a nest’.

In the morning the male falcon sets out to hunt for food. His search takes him through the urban environment, which he interprets as being similar to the countryside he has left. Tall buildings are towering cliffs. A hot-air balloon with a hawk motif is a gigantic bird waiting to attack. Racing sculls on the river resemble creatures with many legs. It is all bewildering and frightening for the falcon but, undeterred, he flies out over the water until he comes to a bridge with twin peaks that to him seem like mountains. ‘There may be eagles near these mountains. Perhaps there will be eagle chicks.’

Inside the bridge he makes his first kill. He takes his catch home to his hungry mate, who has already laid an egg on her stony nest. Soon their meal is gone, and again the male flies off, ‘watching for another flicker of feathers’.

About the Author

Narelle Oliver was born in 1960, and grew up in Toowoomba, Queensland. Her father was a keen amateur photographer and her mother was a watercolourist and art teacher. As a child Narelle was constantly exposed to the delights of artistic creativity, and not surprisingly she herself enjoyed drawing, painting and reading. A highlight of her childhood was regular family trips into the countryside to gather ideas and material for various artworks.

When she began to study for a Bachelor of Education degree, Narelle majored in design and printmaking. It was during this period that she discovered the world of contemporary children's picture books. After graduating she taught for several years at the Queensland School for the Deaf, ‘living and breathing picture books and sign language’. She

also tutored in the Language and Children's Literature courses offered by the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland.

Narelle's first book, *Leaf Tail*, the story of a lizard, was published in 1989. The project took her more than three years to complete. Like most of her books, it was inspired by natural environments she has explored, and her interest in natural history. It was followed in 1991 by *High Above the Sea*, a CBCA Notable Book, and *The Best Beak in Boonaroo Bay*, which was shortlisted for the CBCA's Picture Book of the Year in 1994. In 1995 *The Hunt* was published: it won the Picture Book of the Year award in 1996, and was also shortlisted in that year for the Wilderness Society Environment Award for Children's Literature. *Sand Swimmers*, published in 1999, was also extremely successful, being shortlisted in 2000 for the Queensland Premier's Award and the CBCA's Eve Pownall Award for Information Books, winning the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales Whitley Award (Best Book for Older Readers, 1999), and winning the 2000 Wilderness Society Environment Award. *Mermaids Most Amazing* was a CBCA Notable Book in 2001, and Narelle's *Baby Bilby, Where Do You Sleep?* was judged an Honour Book in two sections of the CBCA's 2002 awards – a rare distinction. *The Very Blue Thingamajig* won the BILBY Award, an Australian children's choice award, in 2003, and more recently *Home* won a NSW Premier's Literary Award and was shortlisted in the 2007 CBCA Awards, the 2006 Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and the 2007 Wilderness Society Environmental Award for Children's Literature.

Narelle is unusual among Australian illustrators in that she writes all her own books. Interestingly, she has published a book that she has written but *not* illustrated! – a title in the Omnibus Solo series, *What a Goat!*, illustrated by fellow Queenslander David Cox.

Narelle lives in Brisbane with her husband Greg, an environmental scientist, and their children Jessie and Liam.

Writing Style

Home is based on fact, and is given further substance by the addition on pages 30 and 31 of scientific notes and a list of source material. Where the text moves away from non-fiction, however, is in the device of showing events through the perspective of the birds themselves. This at once makes us feel closer to them and their plight, and allows the author to describe everything, literally, from a bird's-eye view. She does this not only by comparing the built landscape with a natural one, but also by describing things according to how they look (their shape and colour) rather than on their actual function. For example, the falcon sees cars as

‘shiny beasts [that] chase each other, whining and hissing and honking’. Multi-windowed office buildings are cliffs that ‘gleam like water’, and children playing in a playground are blue and red animals. This deliberately limited point of view is matched by a very direct writing style, using short, simple sentences.

Author/Illustrator Inspiration

Narelle Oliver says: ‘I read about the peregrine falcons nesting on a high-rise building in inner-city Brisbane in the local paper a couple of years ago. The article described how they usually nest on cliff faces in the wild, and so they often choose to nest on high-rise buildings which mimic cliff faces if they come to live in the city ... That got me thinking about how the falcons would perceive all the features of a big city (cars, people, hot air balloons, rowboats, to name a few) from *their* frame of reference if they had never seen those things before, and had only lived in the bush.

‘When the Library Services Division of the Brisbane City Council commissioned me to write and illustrate a picture book which reflected the city of Brisbane in some way, this was the perfect opportunity to write and illustrate a book about inner-city life (and I used Brisbane scenery) from this particular angle.

‘I love to illustrate birds because, using my favoured linocut print medium, they make great subjects with their strong beak shapes and beautiful feather patterns ... They provide lots of potential for interesting views, movement, and variation in perspectives in a short space of time.

‘And, of course, there is always such drama in the hunting by a bird of prey. Often they try and try to catch things, flying at great speeds and only nearly missing their quarry, until the final climax where they are successful – which makes for a build-up of tension and final satisfying resolution for a story.’

About the Illustrations

The illustrations were made using a combination of media. Narelle took many photographs of the city and was given permission to visit the nest site of the peregrine falcons on the 27th floor of the Admiralty Towers building. She took many photos from up there, even lying on the stones on the balcony to get the right perspective for the last illustration (the mother falcon with her egg).

The photos were used as backgrounds for the illustrations. They were manipulated on computer (but only to a limited degree) to accentuate colours and shapes, then printed out and coloured by hand with coloured pencils, watercolour paints and pastels.

The images of the falcons were completed as linocut rubbings. 'I cut the falcon in lino, and then put the linoblock under a sheet of thin paper and rubbed a coloured pencil over the top – just as in a coin rubbing. This method achieves a softer effect than linoprinting, but you still get the same interesting feather patterns. I thought the softness would contrast more effectively with the harsher inner-city landscapes, and suggest the difference between the birds and their new inner-city environment of predominantly stark lines and geometric shapes.' The falcon linocut rubbings were cut out with scissors and collaged to the hand-coloured photographic backgrounds.

Study Notes for Teachers

1. *Home* is the perfect book for introducing concepts of environmental change and animal adaptation. Here are some possible topics for discussion and/or study:
 - Discuss the main effects of urbanisation on the natural environment.
 - Discuss the varying ability of wild creatures to adapt to change. Why do some species thrive and others become endangered or even extinct?
 - List those non-domestic animals and birds that traditionally live close to human beings in towns and cities (e.g., rats, mice, pigeons, sparrows), and those that have adapted in more recent times (e.g., peregrine falcons, foxes). Make up 'food chains' to show hunters and prey in the city and in the wild.
 - Research the life cycle of the peregrine falcon (or any other wild creature). In what ways have they learned to adapt to urban life?
2. Children can use the Internet to further expand on themes in *Home*:
 - Visit the website Animal Adaptations:
http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/eco_info/topics/climate/adaptations/index.cfm
for games and activities about how animals adapt to their environment.
 - Visit <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/kids/> a website aimed at showing kids how they can protect their natural environment.
3. Students can respond creatively to the text:
 - Imagine you are a falcon and describe what you see as you fly down a busy city street. Think about the way a bird sees things, and how it interprets what it sees.

- Take a photograph of a place that interests you or find an image on the Internet. Print this out and using it as a background for your artwork, draw in an animal. Use the illustrations in *Home* as a reference.
 - Create bird mobiles to hang in the classroom. Visit these websites for instructions:
<http://www.geocities.com/ynex/mobil.html>
<http://crafts.kaboose.com/origami-flying-bird-mobile.html>
4. If you liked *Home*, write and tell Narelle Oliver why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write and ask her about it! Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can send your letter to the following address:
- Narelle Oliver c/- Omnibus Books, 335 Unley Rd, Malvern SA 5061
5. For information about Narelle's other books, visit her website:
www.narelleoliver.com/