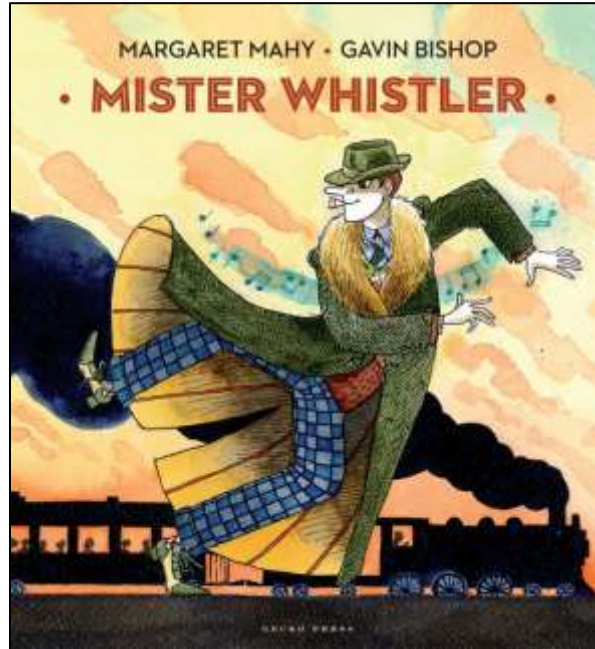


Teaching Notes: *Mister Whistler*

by Margaret Mahy and Gavin Bishop



Synopsis

Absentminded Mister Whistler always has a song in his head and a dance in his feet. One day in a rush to catch the train, he is so distracted that he loses his ticket. Is it in the bottom pockets of his big coat or the top pocket of his jacket? Perhaps he slipped it into his waistcoat. Where is Mister Whistler's ticket? While searching for his ticket Mister Whistler removes his layers of clothing, all the while dancing to the tune that only he can hear in his head. He unwittingly becomes a spontaneous busker and the crowd at the train station is so taken with his performance that they throw money into his discarded hat to show their appreciation. Mister Whistler eventually finds his ticket, gets dressed, collects his money and boards the train, where he promptly loses his ticket again! Luckily, thanks to the tune in his head and his dancing feet, he has money on hand to buy another one.

The Author



Margaret Mahy is one of the world's best and most famous children's authors. She was born in Whakatane in 1936, and wrote her first story at the age of seven. She won numerous awards for her work, including the prestigious international Hans Christian Anderson award in 2006. Margaret lived in Governor's Bay, New Zealand until her death in 2012.

The Illustrator



Gavin Bishop is equally distinguished as an author and illustrator. He has exhibited internationally, from Japan to Czechoslovakia, and was an international judge for the 2003 NOMA Concours competition for Children's Picture Book Illustration. He has won many awards. Gavin lives in Christchurch, New Zealand.

Themes

This hilarious, lively picture book by two of the luminaries of New Zealand children's books has several themes. One of the main themes explores the human state of absentmindedness and how it can lead to unusual and crazy happenings. Mister Whistler's absentmindedness leads him to lose his ticket which drives the main action of the book as his search for the ticket ends in a merry dance.

Another theme evident in the book is the love of music and dance that some people naturally have and cannot live without. The need to express this love and to share it with others - in Mister Whistler's case somewhat spontaneously - can in turn bring joy and entertainment to those around them.

The theme of being yourself and dancing to your own rhythm in life is also illustrated throughout the book. Mister Whistler's personality traits of absentmindedness and a pair of dancing feet cause him to lose his ticket. However these same personality traits are beneficial in the end as the effect of his dancing for the crowd means he gets the money which he needs in order to buy another ticket.

Activities:

1. Look at the cover image and title. What do you think this story might be about and when might it be set?
2. Mister Whistler loves dancing. What do you love doing? Talk about your hobby or passion with your class.
3. Mister Whistler's lively tune raced round and round in his head making him 'scatterbrained'. Choose a popular song that gets stuck in your head. Hum or whistle the tune to your classmates and see if they can guess what it is.
4. Figurative language is used to convey ideas that might otherwise be difficult to express. One type of figurative language is a simile. The author uses animal similes to describe the ticket, such as 'His ticket flapped like a mad moth to the back of his mouth.' Find another animal simile describing the ticket from the book. Think of some more examples of similes using five animals and five inanimate objects you can see around you.
5. Onomatopoeia is a word which imitates a noise or action. When Mister Whistler takes off his coat the author uses the word 'Swish'. This is

- onomatopoeia. What other examples of onomatopoeia can you find in the book? Think of some more examples.
6. The author uses alliteration when she describes Mister Whistler's sheets as 'twined and tangled'. What is the definition of alliteration? Think of ten more examples of this figure of speech each starting with a different letter of the alphabet.
 7. Mister Whistler is described as being 'Neat as a pin'. What does this tell us about his appearance? Think of some other common expressions used to describe people's appearances.
 8. Make a list of what Mister Whistler has in his pockets. Then list what you have in your pockets. Pick one of the objects listed to write a descriptive paragraph and/or poem about.
 9. There is a series of illustrations of Mister Whistler as he gets dressed. Either draw a series of yourself getting dressed and/or design and make a Mister Whistler paper doll and his set of clothes.
 10. Why did the people at the train station put money in Mr Whistler's hat? In pairs or groups make up a routine and perform it for your class. Also find out what the busking laws are for your local area and where you would be allowed to perform your routine for money.
 11. The illustrations are by Gavin Bishop. What do you like and/or dislike about them? Design your own illustrations for the cover and/or one page of text.
 12. Gavin Bishop's illustrations evoke 1940s New Zealand. Research this era. For example, look at fashion, buildings, transport, etc. Look at the illustrations in the book. How has Bishop interpreted the era in the

- illustrations? Compare and contrast the similarities and differences with our modern day era.
13. What is Mister Whistler's personality like? Do you like the character Mister Whistler? Why/why not? Write a character study on him.
 14. The book has an interesting ending. Do you like the ending? Why/why not?
 15. Choose either the author or illustrator and write a short biography.
 16. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. What do you like about the book? Why? What did you dislike about the book? Why? For example, using stars or numbers 1–10.