

Teachers' Notes

Imagine a City

Written and
Illustrated by Elise Hurst

Teachers' Notes by Rae Carlyle



IMAGINE A CITY

❖ Elise Hurst ❖

OMNIBUS BOOKS

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Introduction

Imagine a City tells the story of two children travelling with their mother by train to a fantastical city and the things that they do and see while there. The text is a clear and simple verse relating what they see in the city, while the illustrations contain a wealth of intricate and imaginative detail. Every double page spread has hidden elements of fantasy and wonder to be found, if only one looks a little closer. There are fish that fly, storm clouds filled with whales, and giraffes crossing over bridges high above the city streets that are bustling with people, rabbits and other animals. *Imagine a City* draws the reader into the world it is showing ... and the surprise at the end only makes the magic come closer to home.

About the Author/Illustrator

Elise Hurst is a fine artist and illustrator of children's books who lives in Melbourne with her husband and twin boys. She wrote and illustrated *The Night Garden*, which was shortlisted for the 2008 CBCA Awards. She has illustrated many other books for children and also sells her artwork at markets, in exhibitions and through her online shop. *Imagine a City* had its origins in a series of pen and ink drawings that Elise collected over the years in a small hardback sketchbook. Some of the groups of characters or scenes in *Imagine a City* come from the original notebook; each larger picture in the book is composed of many different situations or stories that together make a mysterious but harmonious whole.

From Elise: 'I first started working in this style in a series of tiny sketchbooks, trying to capture moments of story and create odd characters without the fetters of a complete narrative. I soon found that I was drawn to certain things that were often quite surreal but which followed a kind of logic to me. For example, the way that creatures in the sea seem to fly through the water translated quite naturally to having whales in the skies of my work and fish darting around people's ankles. Similarly, bears standing on their hind legs look quite human in proportion, and have such soulful and engaging faces that it was easy to imagine them in suits and hats and holding down normal jobs. Of course, I drew on a long history of anthropomorphism in storytelling and art. Most people are quite familiar with the idea of talking cats and striding bears, of noble lions and quizzical rabbits. As a picture book writer and illustrator, this is my world and it is, to me, quite normal.

'While I was drawing in my sketchbooks, I also found that I was setting my characters in a particular period in time. In part, it came from a sense of nostalgia for my favourite childhood books, but also because I felt that my characters fitted most beautifully into a time when the pace was different from today's – when technology was more about steam and crank-handles, when libraries were sacred places and instead of disappearing into a TV show, we dived into books full of ideas and adventure and transporting language and infinite

possibility. I also simply love the design of the era from the 1920s to the 1950s and I will happily take any chance I have to incorporate it.

‘The book was written with a simple storyline first. This was just to work out the basic narrative flow and provide a framework for the pictures. The difficulty lay in trying to capture the spontaneous and unfettered nature of the drawings of my sketchbook and yet have them fit within a narrative. It was not easy. In the end, the story was rewritten after the artwork was finished in a moment of pure inspiration. What I had agonised over for months and months, and many a sleepless night, coalesced into a lyrical and simple text all inspired by the word *Imagine*. It was extremely exciting. This is by far the most ambitious book I have ever created and also the most satisfying. It allows me to share a world that I have been discovering, one tiny image at a time, and which I love so much. It is, for me, the world as it might be. It is the city of my dreams – a place of inspiration and story, of friendships and surprises, where everyday life is just a little extraordinary.’

Elise has a website and blog at www.elisehurst.com

You can find a book trailer for *Imagine a City* at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poV0p3Q1joU>

Activities

English

Imagine a City is a fantasy book. Fantasy books tell stories about worlds, places, and things that do not really exist. A fantasy story might have magic, or strange creatures, or animals and people who do things that just aren’t possible in the real world.

There are lots of different things happening in the pages of *Imagine a City* that make it a fantasy story. These include:

- Animals dressed in clothes who are acting like people.
 - Paintings that escape from their frames.
 - Whales swimming in the storm clouds.
 - People flying with their umbrellas when the wind blows.
 - Magic carpets.
 - The illustrations in books flying or leaping from the page when they are opened.
1. What other things can you find in the pages (words or illustrations) of *Imagine a City*, which help to make it a fantasy story?
 2. If you wrote a fantasy story, what sort of wondrous things would you like to include? As a class, see how many magical and amazing ideas you can come up with.

3. Draw a picture of a scene from a fantasy city that you can imagine. Write a brief caption to describe what is happening in your fantasy picture.
4. Assemble everyone's pictures into a fantasy book written by your class.
5. If you could choose one storybook that you have read, and have the illustrations come alive like they do in *Imagine a City*, which book would you choose and why? Visit the library and choose a book whose illustrations you would like to have come alive. Share your book with the class, and explain why you chose it.

Creative Activities

6. In the story *buses are fish and the fish fly the sky*. Make a mobile or a classroom display of flying fish. Use cardboard templates for the basic fish shape, cover them with foil, and either paint or use permanent marker to draw on the scales. You can also glue on sequins, glitter, and beads. Decorate them with any brightly coloured or shiny craft materials you have at hand. Remember, be imaginative – your fish can have red feathers for fins or crepe-paper streamers for a tail if you want!
7. Design a flying bus that you would like to ride in. Paint or draw a picture of your bus, and then present it to the class. Remember, in a fantasy world, it can be anything you can think of – A flying unicorn, a giant mouse, or even an enormous bouncy ball! Share your picture with the class, and discuss which ones you would like to ride in, and which look just a bit scary!
8. Make a magical snow globe world of your own in a jar. Use a clean empty jar. Put a big lump of plasticine inside the lid to hold your objects. Draw little pictures of a magical city, and the people and things in it. Laminate the pictures, and then cut them out. Be sure to draw them small enough to go in your jar! Push the cut-out pictures firmly into the plasticine. Alternatively, you can use a hot glue gun to attach the pictures to the inside of the jar lid, and then mould plasticine around the base to help keep them upright. You could also use small plastic toys as well. Put glitter in the bottom of the jar, fill it all the way to the top with water, and then carefully screw the jar's lid on so your city is inside the glittery water. Make sure that it is screwed on tightly enough that it doesn't leak. Gently turn it over and you will have a magical city in a glittery world!
9. Write a story as a class, where every sentence starts with the word 'Imagine'.
10. Make a wall display of pictures of fantastical things drawn by the class.
11. Make a banner to go across the top of one wall of the class, which shows a fantastical cityscape. Use a long piece of paper from a roll, and get everyone to draw pictures of buildings, creatures, and vehicles using crayon. Paint over the top of the crayons with a variety of dye to create a magical scene.
12. Learn and sing a song about fish. See if you can change the words or write a new verse where the fish fly in the sky!
13. Create a dance based on the story.

Science and Technology

Science is the study of the way the world we see around us works. Scientists spend a lot of time studying and observing all the things that they can see around them and trying to work out the natural laws that control how everything in the world happens. Some things we can imagine are scientifically possible, but have just not been invented yet, like boots with rocket jets attached, or giant spaceships that can travel to other planets.

Other things are scientifically impossible – like fish swimming in the sky or magic carpets flying around the museum.

14. See how many things you can find in the pages of *Imagine a City* that are scientifically impossible. Make a class list of all these things.
15. As a class discuss ways in which scientists, inventors, and engineers might be able to make machines that can act like some of the things pictured (for example, giant helium balloons shaped like fish, or umbrellas with jet rockets under them).
16. Draw a picture of a fantastical creature or object that is really a machine. Be sure to include labels that explain how it works and what it is made from. Share your design with the class!

Analysing the Visual Narrative (For Older Readers)

The artist tells us that this book began with a large collection of tiny drawings that featured different characters and scenes.

These fragments are scattered throughout the book. They might be pictures of groups of people sharing a meal or playing a board game, an owl reading to some sparrows, someone reading a book while flying with an umbrella, or someone making fairy floss out of clouds.

17. Look through the pages and find a small story being played out. Discuss who these characters are, how they might know each other, and what they are doing in the picture.
18. Write a short story about something you can see in the book (which is not a main character).
19. Look at the rooftop café and watch the people eating cloud fairy floss. What would different clouds taste like? How would a cloud be difficult to eat? Can you

imagine another food made of clouds? Design a meal made of things that look like food but are fantastical.

20. If you were to go walking with a tiny animal by your side, what would it be? What tiny animal matches your personality? Would it be an angel fish, a sparrow, a turtle, a cloud of butterflies, a spiky lizard? Or would you wear a coat that had colourful fish for buttons? Draw yourself with your tiny animal.
21. On the page with the flying carpet, the artist has created the inside of a shop which is based on a *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities. It is a place full of treasures, scientific instruments and historical items from other times and places. What treasures can you identify? Some of the items pictured are: musical instruments, a fez, an early hominid skull, fossils, a torc, a narwhal horn, an orrery, a plague doctor's mask, a Viking ship, an Egyptian pharaoh's statue, Moroccan lamps, a suit of armour, a sword, some arrowheads, an urn, a genie's lamp and a globe. Try to identify these objects in the picture and find out more about the ones that are unfamiliar. Make your own *Wunderkammer* as a class – what curiosities would you like to include? Make your own fossils and treasures.

Visual Art Techniques

The artwork in this book is created with black pen and shading. Sometimes these lines are parallel (hatched), or crossing each other (cross-hatched). Look at the different times that these techniques are used and identify when the lines change direction. How do they help to show the shapes of what they are on? These lines create areas of tone to make objects look three-dimensional. The changes of direction and pattern help to separate objects that are the same tone (darkness) and to give them different textures.

22. Do a drawing in just black line. Photocopy the drawing and see how many ways you can colour it to change the mood of the drawing. Can you make it look happy or scary, strange or boring, transform it to night or daytime, summer or winter?
23. Set up a box with a lamp next to it. Try to draw the shape with cross-hatching showing the different shaded sides so that it looks three-dimensional. Now draw windows and doors on your box so that it becomes a city building. What details can you draw on it to help tell a story about who lives there? Are windows open or shut, is there washing on a balcony, a curtain blowing out, people peeping, someone flying a kite or a cat watching the birds?