

TEACHER NOTES

First Flight

Written and illustrated by David Miller

Title: *First Flight*
Author / Illustrator David Miller

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author / Illustrator: David Miller studied art and design in Melbourne and worked as an art director before starting his own graphic design and illustration studio in a mud brick building in the Yarra valley. Sixteen years ago he saw the light and started writing and illustrating picture books. His works include the CBC shortlisted *Snap! Went Chester* by Tania Cox, *Boo to a Goose* written by Mem Fox, *Where There's Smoke* by Robin Lovell, *Lofty's Mission* by Krista Bell and his own titles *Refugees*, *Big and Me* and *Rufus the Numbat*. David's most recent book for Working Title Press, *Millie's Special Something*, written by Tania Cox, was published in 2012 and featured the colourful detailed paper sculptures he is well known for. For *First Flight* David has chosen a soft palette of watercolour and colour pencils to render the temperate bush landscape. David loves the bush, where he lives with his wife Sylvia and is an officer in the local volunteer fire brigade. When his three children were small, David wrote and illustrated books just for them. Now his books are for everyone and he has fun drawing with his grandchildren.

SYNOPSIS Early one morning, when laughing kookaburras call Joey, a little yellow-bellied glider, out from his nest he has no idea what adventures lie ahead. He learns to fly. He meets many different bushland creatures. He protects himself and stays safe until his parents find him at the end of the day. The next day he slept soundly in his nest.

WRITING / ILLUSTRATING STYLE David Miller is the both the author and the illustrator of *First Flight*. He has created a simple story in words and pictures for young children. Set in the Australian bushland, *First Flight* is about building your own identity as you grow and learn within a family, and out in the wider world. He used watercolour and watercolour pencils for the illustrations in *First Flight*. He has created a pattern or structure that follows a regular rhythm and incorporates single pages, and double page spreads. All of the double pages are full bleeds. The single pages are a mixture of vignettes, boxed illustrations and full bleeds. The words and the pictures are expressive and combine to portray mood, drama, thoughts and feelings.

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The story starts slowly – ‘*Dawn broke as sleepy night animals snuggled down...*’ The illustrations in the opening double page spread reflect the sleepy, snuggling tone of the text. The breaking dawn is reflected in the warm muted yellows and browns, and the bright, light greens. The dark black-brown hole is inviting. The parents are shown looking down at the nest, but Joey is more alert, looking out of the picture. This is a silent, visual clue as to what is to happen later.

On the next page there is a note of excitement. Joey is enticed out of his nest as ‘*...laughing kookaburras called Joey, the little glider, outside.*’ A full-bleed single page illustration of the kookaburras contrasts with the picture of Joey on the opposite page. This illustration is contained inside a white border, and Joey is inside the dark hollow of the tree. But we can see how eager Joey is to scramble out – look at his perky ears, his sparkling eyes, his sniffing nose, and his claws clinging to the edge of the nest.

Out on the tree branch Joey sees other bushland creatures starting their day. ‘*... the honeyeaters flittered and the shrill cicadas basked in the warm sunshine... (and) long ribbons of bark rattled in the gentle morning breeze.*’ David Miller has used several adjectives or describing words in the poetic, lyrical text - *flittered, shrill, basked, warm, fluttered, long, rattled, gentle*. The pages depicting the honeyeaters and the cicadas replicate the layout of the previous illustrations, with a full page opposite a drawing enclosed in a white border

The next illustration, a full-bleed double page spread, shows Joey out on the end of a thin branch watching butterflies flutter and listening to the bark rattle. The illustration places little Joey in a vast landscape, and emphasises his vulnerability, in contrast to the text, that focuses on the butterflies and the bark. The words and the picture work together to set the scene for a surprise.

‘*Suddenly, a pair of cockatoos screeched by, giving Joey a fright.*’ This next double page spread is a bold close-up of the ‘*cockatoos screeching by*’, and Joey, wide-eyed and clinging to a flimsy piece of bark. Joey starts falling, but saves himself by spreading ‘*his feet out wide and glided for the very first time.*’ This is the ‘first flight’ of the title and occurs half way through the book rather than at the end as may have been expected. Joey’s first flight is depicted boldly as a double page, full-bleed spread. The second half of the book follows Joey through the rest of the day until the sun goes down.

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Joey is frightened. He finds a place to hide. He keeps *very* quiet. He watches and listens. Here the words and pictures work closely together. The pictures show what Joey sees from his hiding place. Joey's wide round eyes peer out from the darkness. The words express what sounds he hears. '*A frog croaked. Bok-bok, bok-bok, bok-bok.*' *An echidna passed by.* '*Scuffle-scuffle. Dig-dig. Scrape-scrape.*'

Finally David Miller brings the story full circle. The ending of the story resonates with the beginning, through both the words and the images. At the beginning the dawn breaks with a warm golden light. At the end of the day sun has set and the sky is twilight blue. At last Joey is reunited with his parents. That night he flies again! (His second flight). And the next morning he doesn't hear the kookaburras calling him outside, because '*He was sound asleep.*'

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- This story with its simple text and expressive illustrations, invite adults and children to look at and read this book together.
- Before reading the story with a large group of children, spend time reading with individuals and small groups. This will provide an opportunity for children to share their own responses to the story, and for educators to draw attention to how the words and the pictures work together to tell the story. 'This is what the words say.' 'The picture shows us what is happening and sets the scene.'
- Every page of this book invites discussion. For example look at the first page. Talk about how the words and picture set the scene for what is to follow. Give the children time to look at the picture. The educator could talk with the children about why the gliders are coming home as dawn is breaking.
- Talk about the colours David Miller has used to depict the early morning colour and light. Talk about why Joey is looking out of the picture. 'Let's see what is happening on the next page.' Then look back at the first page, ask a question or make a comment, 'I think he can hear those kookaburras laughing.'
- Don't let talking get in the way of the enjoyment of the story. Discussions like this should be relaxed and natural, and take place over time. They can be a simple and friendly way of drawing the children's attention to specific elements of a picture storybook.

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- This is a way to help young children expand their understanding of how stories work. It will help them to work with educators to transform their natural active ‘story making through play’ into the more abstract form of the written / depicted story telling.
- Invite the children to read along with you, particularly with sounds that naturally invite participation ‘*Bok-bok, bok-bok, bok-bok.*’ ‘*Flick-flick, flick-flick.*’
- Talk with the children about the describing words that David Miller uses throughout the book, and how these extend our understanding of what the different creatures look like, how they move, or how they sound.
- Use the palette of colours that David Miller uses to make pictures of the setting – sky, land, trees, fallen logs, time of day, leaves and grass.
- Collect, and add natural materials that can be added to the pictures – bark, grass, leaves, sticks, sand, stones, etc.
- Compile the drawings together as posters or friezes.
- Look closely at, and talk about the pictures of Joey as he is falling and flying. Talk about the shape of his body in the different drawings, the curve of his back and tail, the position of his feet, the expressions on his face.
- Draw your own pictures of Joey falling and flying. Ask the children to tell their own stories about what is happening. Record these to go with their pictures.
- Have a movement group where the children can flitter, flutter, bask, fly, flick-flick, bok-bok, and scuffle-scuffle and sleep like the animals in the story.
- Look at the pictures of Joey hiding under the log. Talk about how the illustrations show how he feels. Create your own hiding away pictures.
- Dramatise the story of Joey.
- Find out more about all of the animals – talk about daytime and nocturnal animals.
- Find other books written and /or illustrated by David Miller. Compare how he has illustrated his other books with how he has illustrated Joey.
- Enjoy this lovely book!