

## **Once Upon a Picture by Sally Swain**

Once Upon a Picture by Sally Swain is a stimulating, superbly illustrated picture book. It introduces the works of four major artists, Van Gogh, Renoir, Rousseau and Klee, to people of all ages. The teacher notes are extensive and contain exciting cross curricula activities. The book can be approached on two (or more!) levels: as art appreciation for art students in years 5 – 12 and as a foundation experience for younger students to expose them to the works of some of the masters. It inspires the imagination and provides a springboard for higher level thinking. Using this book as a stimulus for De Bono's six thinking hats would be ideal.

**Debra Bristow, Buddina State School, QLD**

Sally Swain's autobiographical notes tell us that she believes passionately in encouraging the Fine Arts of Focussed Daydreaming and Wonder. She has certainly done a great job in encouraging those Fine Arts with this disarmingly simple but beautifully complex book. Sally Swain's appropriations are cleverly done and in each of the sections there's plenty of scope for discussion, both of the original art works as well as imagination kickstarts for further work in a variety of KLAs.

My favourite parts were on Klee's "Twittering Machine" with the final romantic, music-in-their-hearts image and Rousseau's "Tiger in a Tropical Night (Surprised!)." The way the tiger's stripes are washing off in the rainstorm as the question's asked, "What makes a tiger a tiger anyway?" and he ends up with multicoloured patches instead, is brilliant!

I've only two suggestions regarding a second printing of this book. One is that the spidery script is a bit difficult to read, especially against the deep blue of the Renoir section. Perhaps a little bigger, or a little bolder, would help. The second is that Sally Swain's WONDERFULLY helpful and comprehensive teachers' notes be incorporated in the book itself. They're too valuable to lose. (And the poster's great too!)

I thoroughly recommend this book for all Infants and Primary collections.

**Julie Davies, Sutherland Shire Christian School, NSW**

"Once Upon a Picture" is a wonderful, colourful creative way to introduce art to young children and develop art aesthetics with older students. Sally takes us on a journey into four artists' worlds, Renoir, Klee, Van Gogh and Rousseau, blending backgrounds with complimentary styles of text.

Each of the characters comes alive, and engages the reader by asking simple questions about the subjects, such as what the girl with the hoop (in The Umbrellas) wants to do.

This book provides rich opportunities to compare the different artistic styles, colours, themes and ideas and is a great stepping off point into studying art within the classroom.

Suitable for children at both primary and high school.

Art: Exploration of the use of colour – Vincent Van Gogh's yellow and blue.

Computer generated art using KidPix to draw their own bedrooms

Use KidPix to generate line drawings like Paul Klee's work.

Art – Line drawings with black text, painted backgrounds.

SOSE – What makes a tiger a tiger anyway? Research tiger facts and paste them on a painted jungle scene.

Research - explore jungle animals, tigers and their habitats; camouflage as a tool for survival.

Research the artist's biographies. Present your research creatively on a painted background in circles like the author.

After researching about Van Gogh listen to the song "Starry, starry night" and discuss how the songwriter has used music and lyrics to portray mood.

English – adjectival phrases – use descriptive words to describe the scenes.

Write stories about the four adventures.

Discuss how emotions are shown in the paintings. Use the artists' style of painting and paint an emotive scene.

Poetry, use different styles of poetry to describe the paintings ie: haiku, diamond poems.

**Rhyl Bignell, Kilparrin Teaching and Assessment Unit, SA**

Sally Swain, the author/illustrator of this beautiful picture book is both a very talented artist and interesting story teller with a unique approach to captivating her readers. This picture book is a book of four short stories. Each story emanates from a famous painting which Swain presents on the title page of the book. Painting by painting, Swain cleverly draws the reader's attention to a circular section of the work - about the size of a hand-held magnifying glass. The reader is drawn into speculating about what will happen next and the fun begins as each story unravels.

The four paintings are well known ones by the master painters Renoir, Klee, Van Gogh and Rousseau and are all very different. Amazingly, not only is Swain able to duplicate the particular style and technique of each artist but is able in a sense to extrapolate what would be likely to happen next if the viewer was able to move on from the particular moment captured by the painting.

The paintings are presented on the title page which could almost be a table of contents for the book. Not only is this book a great resource for teaching visual literacy and developing imagination, story writing and communication skills in children but it is also a fantastic way to approach art appreciation with children.

**Jane Hayes, Eleebana Public School, NSW**

This is a fabulous book to use as a springboard to classroom activities in thinking, creative writing, drama and explorations in art. It encourages us to understand why we look at particular paintings in an art gallery in a particular way. By exploring the finer details of paintings, we might come to understand why particular paintings are famous, why it evokes particular responses from people.

Sally Swain has taken four famous paintings by Renoir, Klee, Van Gogh and Rousseau and then posed a question about each. For example, in Renoir's 'The umbrellas' she wonders about what the girl with the hoop might want to do. This could then lead to children asking their own questions about other aspects of the painting or coming up with different ideas. The last page of the book gives four more paintings which children might use for similar activities.

Philosophical questions abound in this book - what makes a tiger a tiger anyway? Why does an artist give a painting a title and when we know the title does this change the way that we view a painting? What is in an artist's minds when they paint a picture?

There are copious teacher notes by Sally Swain herself which are available from the publishers: <http://www.allenandunwin.com/Teaching/tronceuponapicture.asp>

This beautiful and very original book should be in every school library and can be used at all levels.

**Ruth Jones, Larapinta Primary School, NT**

"Once upon a picture", written and illustrated by Sally Swain, invites the reader into the world of four famous European artists through their paintings: Renoir's "The Umbrellas", Klee's "The Twittering Machine", Van Gogh's "The Starry Night" and Rousseau's "Tiger in a Tropical Storm (Surprised!)". Swain poses a question about each image which encourages the reader to wonder and imagine:

- What does (the girl with the hoop) want to do?
- Why a machine would twitter?
- About the moon and stars, and
- What makes a tiger a tiger anyway?

Through her illustrations, Swain offers some possible answers to these questions using the style of the original artist.

As a flight of sheer fancy this book engages, delights and rewards the eye. As a vehicle for encouraging possibilities, it models a simple process which parents and educators may readily adapt for their own purposes. I suspect, however, that many adults will value it as a tool for encouraging an appreciation of the arts and artists in young readers. This reviewer keenly awaits the chance to take up Sally's invitation: "Next upon a picture YOU might wonder....." offered through vignettes from additional Rousseau, Klee, Van Gogh and Renoir works.

**Kerry Gestier, Catholic Schools Office, NSW**

Sally Swain shares with us, her love of Renoir, Klee, Van Gogh and Rousseau's paintings. Sally introduces the artist's paintings and encourages us to wonder more deeply about what could be happening within it. Swain explores possible narrative ideas to encourage us to do the same when we look at art. She uses painting techniques to reflect each of the artist's paintings.

She brings the characters from the paintings to life and demonstrates ways to play with ideas and our imaginations. The little girl, in Renoir's painting, plays with a hoop, rolls it through the grass and then makes us smile as she plays in the mud. Swain used circle compositions to reflect the hoop.

Swain brings a sense of adventure to Klee's painting with the dark images of the man cutting the tree up.

Swain immerses us in the joy of Van Gogh's painting, "The Starry Night." She shows us how we may imagine the boy is swept up into the night sky and how we can all appreciate the magnificence of the stars.

Swain encourages us to look at art with humour. She shows us how to be playful with the stripes on the tiger in Rousseau's painting.

Once Upon a Picture is a fantastic demonstration of how young and much older people may appreciate paintings and art. It is like a well crafted lesson on imaginative ways to look at art. A teacher merely has to share this book with their class and encourage their students to look at paintings in the same way.

**Andrea Potter, Art Teacher, TAS**