

## **Fox by Margaret Wild & illustrated by Ron Brooks**

Once you read “Fox” you will never forget it. It is a visual and literary feast for readers of all ages. It has won many awards and been translated into many different languages. The talents of author Margaret Wild and artist Ron Brooks come together again to delight and move us with a simply stunning visual and textual experience.

“ Fox” is a modern fable presented in the picture book format that deals with love, friendship, jealousy and betrayal. The illustrations are pure magic. Mostly double-page spreads lathered in lashings of reds, orange, browns, blacks and sometimes blues and greens; scratched and etched with passion, they depict movement and a variety of intense emotions. The setting, the Australian scrub is brought to life, its dusty, sparse, tree-scattered landscape captured beautifully in the brushstrokes of talented Tasmanian children’s book artist, Ron Brooks. The lettering, physically etched into the artwork by Brooks using his left hand, appearing somewhat haphazardly arranged on the pages, imitates the unsteady jiggety-hop of Magpie and the innocence of her relationship to Dog.

Dog and Magpie are friends out of choice and necessity. Dog is blind in one eye and Magpie can no longer fly. Dog becomes her wings and Magpie Dog’s eyes as they run through scrub, past yellowbox and stringbark trees. They are content and at peace. Then Fox arrives in the bush. “Fox with his haunted eyes and rich red coat. He flicks through the trees like a tongue of fire...” He brings with him the smell of rage and envy and loneliness. Dog welcomes Fox into their home and offers him food and shelter. Always the outsider, unable to fit in, Fox quietly begins tempting Magpie to take a ride on his back. Undermining their friendship and love for each other, Fox desires to destroy Magpie and Dog, one way or another. Margaret Wild’s story, her precise choice of just the right word at just the right moment, is haunting and beautiful. Guaranteed to evoke a response from the youngest child to most advanced adult reader, “Fox” is a roller-coaster ride of emotions that, quite simply, will make you weep.

The printable Teacher’s Notes (16 pages) produced by Janet Anderson are comprehensive and offer a number of responses to the text at a variety of different levels

<http://www.allenandunwin.com/Teaching/fox.tns.pdf>. Drama, role-play, painting, narrative writing and deconstruction as well as numerous visual literacy activities could be explored through the reading and further examination of “Fox”.

If you have not purchased a copy of “Fox” (or half a dozen) for your school Resource Centre then you are depriving your students of an enriching and memorable literary and visual experience. This is my favourite picture book ever, a picture book that comes highly recommended.

**Denise Tarlinton, Kurwongbah State School, QLD**

A remarkable book that would ‘touch’ many readers in a wide range of ways!

Two ‘disabled’ characters, Magpie with damaged wing, and Dog, blind in one eye, meet and establish friendship and compromise to enable purposeful survival. Fox threatens their tranquil existence through tempting loyalty! Eventually a temptation that magpie cannot resist.

A well written book which visits many aspects of our ‘social’ world – friendship, differences, affectation, loneliness, acceptance, loyalty! A book that would stir the feelings in a multitude of readers, feelings determined by personal experiences and background. A book that could be incorporated across age groups leading to successful, beneficial learning’s and discussions, resulting in enrichment of understanding of the participants.

A superb book where words and illustrations combine together to present a rich, meaningful adventure.

Within the classroom this resource could be incorporated in numerous subjects but most importantly would be the use to:

Learn about yourself, emotions and social group behaviours.

This could be fostered in numerous activities ranging through learning areas such as: visual arts, performing arts, literacy, SOSE, music.

Learnings from this book are limited only by one’s imagination.

**Lisa Ward, Tamrookum State School, QLD**

A wonderful book that is far more than a picture book for younger readers.

Fox would be enjoyed by many ages of students. There are numerous aspects of the short story which could be utilised to analyse the meaning and importance of relationships. The story line, the friendship of Magpie and Dog is extended to building respect and meaningful relationships between two characters. The introduction of Fox adds an element of building trust and recognising the worth of others.

The text style is an interesting addition. The use of informal script and text layout are a welcome aspect of the overall book.

**Leanne Banfield, Hartz Support Service, TAS**