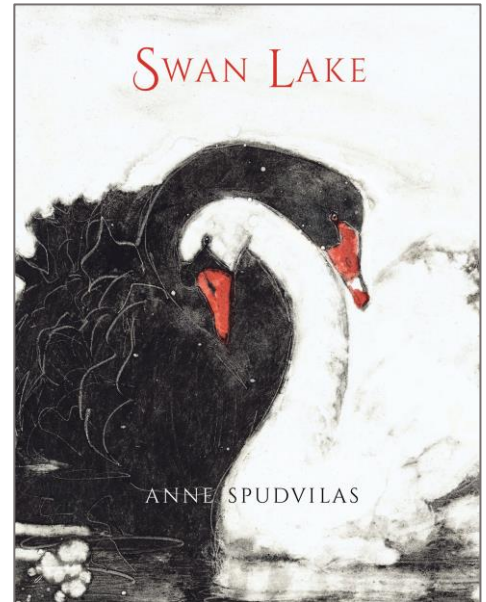


# Swan Lake

By Anne Spudvilas

November 2017 ISBN 97817433184541 hardback  
Recommended for 10–14 year olds



## Summary

'Anne Spudvilas is one of Australia's most talented visual artists. Her illustrations are full of emotion and beauty. Anne's *Swan Lake* is simply enchanting and sublime!' Li Cunxin, author of *Mao's Last Dancer* and Artistic Director, Queensland Ballet.

The iconic ballet *Swan Lake*, the tragic love story of a princess transformed into a swan by an evil sorcerer, has been revered for more than a century. In this atmospheric adaptation, Anne Spudvilas reimagines the classic tale of passion, betrayal and heartbreak in the dramatic riverscape of the Murray-Darling.

*Swan Lake* will send shivers up your spine ... Inspired by the birds and the bush surrounding her home on the Murray River at Wentworth, Anne Spudvilas has created powerful images using a variety of techniques including charcoal drawing and printmaking to tell her own version of the classic ballet.

## From the author

'I have always loved *Swan Lake*. As a child, I spent hours lost in my mother's book *Stories of the Ballets*. There was a particular black and white photographic plate that I returned to again and again. It was a scene from *Swan Lake* – Pyotr Tchaikovsky's classic ballet. It's story of first love, good and evil, betrayal and loss, that for me holds the traditions of our oldest fairytales.

'The setting of the lover's story beside the deceptive serenity of the lake and the image of the swans emerging from its waters as young women were powerful ideas that I brought with me to my new home on the Murray-Darling confluence. The words of Orlando Gibbons re-ignited my passion for *Swan Lake* and so began the journey of creating a version of the ballet in pictures, to tell this wonderful story with the added inspiration of my own riverbank and its abundant bird and plant life.'

Anne Spudvilas

## Use in the curriculum

This picture book, seemingly 'simple' yet sophisticated in execution, can be used in a wide range of classrooms—across subjects and age groups.

In upper Primary cross-curricula classrooms, it introduces a 'classic'; validates ballet and physical expression; extends visual literacy; and stimulates imaginative expression.

In Secondary classes, it can be studied as a near-wordless visual text (English); support study of the actual ballet *Swan Lake*; or be analysed as a piece of visual art (The Arts).

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## Pre-reading exercise

Place a piece of paper over the title and show the front cover of Anne Spudvilas' *Swan Lake* to your class. Ask students to quickly jot down what they think the story might be about. Encourage students to share their ideas with the class and explain what in the picture made them think the story would be about that.

Now reveal the book's title and talk about what the class knows about the story of *Swan Lake*. Talk about the story's themes of love, and the battle between good versus evil, and how these themes are depicted in the image of the black and white swans here.

Turn to the book's back cover and ask students to read the blurb to discover how this version of the story will differ from others.

## Visual literacy exercises

**Colour** – Discuss with students the power of colour to influence our emotional and physical responses. Start by talking about the colour red being used frequently in fast food advertising, and theories that companies use this colour because it stimulates hunger and makes us feel excited and active.

Now ask students how the colours within *Swan Lake* affect their reading of the story. Discuss the mood created by the muted browns, black and white that make up most of the scenes involving the prince and the Swan Queen in Act 1. How do splashes of red in Act II change the mood of this section of the story?

**Saturation and contrast** – Explain to your class that these terms refer to the relative lightness or darkness of objects within a design and ask them to think about the role that they play in the book. The Swan Queen is often shown as predominately white and the Sorcerer and his daughter predominantly black. Compare the image of the Swan Queen as a swan flying near the palace window with that of the Sorcerer as an eagle attacking the Prince. NB: it is interesting to point out to your class that the meaning of black and white can be determined by culture. For instance, a predominantly Anglo society might associate white with purity and goodness while some Asian cultures associate it with death.

**Medium** – As well as colour, the use of charcoal creates different moods: a very soft, dreamy mood when it is applied lightly and smudged, an ominous and dramatic mood when it is applied heavily and scratched with a sharp instrument. Compare the way the charcoal has been applied to heighten the drama of the Sorcerer drowning with the romance of the Prince and Swan Queen being engulfed by the lake.

**Balance and harmony** – Ask students why they think that the artist decided to show the first image of the Prince's face on the far left of a double page spread and the Swan Queen's face on the far right two spreads later. Now turn the page and describe the effect of their coming together on this two-page spread.

**Negative Space** – Have your class define this design concept and explain how and why it is used on the front cover image of *Swan Lake*.

## Extension activities

Re-read the book's back cover blurb to your class, '...Spudvilas reimagines the classic tale of passion, betrayal and heartbreak in the dramatic riverscape of the Murray-Darling'. Ask students if they feel that this retelling is particularly Australian and what within the illustrations makes them think that. Next, ask students whether they prefer it when classics are 'reimagined' and why.

Direct students to the very back of the book and the lyrics of *The Silver Swan* by Orlando Gibbons.

The silver Swan, who, living, had no Note,  
 when Death approached, unlocked her silent throat.  
 Leaning her breast upon the reedy shore,  
 thus sang her first and last, and sang no more:  
 "Farewell, all joys! O Death, come close mine eyes!  
 More Geese than Swans now live, more Fools than Wise."

Ask students how these lyrics 'complement and extend' their reading of *Swan Lake*.

Performances of the madrigal, *The Silver Swan*, can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DVSnc-80fQ>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgmDgNtuOpQ>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASjzLrhxd3Q>

## About the author

Anne Spudvilas is a multi-award-winning illustrator of children's books and an established portrait painter and printmaker. Her first picture book, *The Race* by Christobel Mattingley, was awarded the Crichton Award for Illustration and was a CBCA Honour Book. Her bestselling books include *The Peasant Prince* by Li Cunxin, which won the NSW and Queensland Premiers' Awards in 2008, and *Jenny Angel* by Margaret Wild, which was CBCA Picture Book of the Year in 2000. Anne's move to the Murray River has inspired her latest book, an illustrated retelling of the classic ballet story *Swan Lake*. She lives in Wentworth, where the Murray and Darling rivers meet, surrounded by birds and river red gums.



Photo credit: Jennifer Douglas