



“Family Forest” Teachers Notes

Notes by Bec Kavanagh

Book written by Kim Kane, Illustrated by Lucia Masciullo
Published by Hardie Grant Egmont, 2011

Synopsis

Family Forest is the story of a family. But not a regular family. This family has half sisters, whole sisters, dads, mums, step-mums, big brothers and more!

In this beautifully illustrated book, Kim Kane explores what makes up a modern family and the language that we use to describe the people in it. The illustrations on each page deliberately misunderstand the text as the young narrator attempts to describe his family. This creates a wonderful dialogue between text and image which encourages the narrator and the reader to consider the way they describe and interpret various family structures.

Family Forest is a colourful light-hearted book that will encourage dialogue, but looks at unusual families in a way that encourages acceptance and will make readers realise that there is no such thing as a ‘normal’ family.

Themes

Family
Language
Stereotypes
Judgement/ acceptance

Questions/ Comprehension

- What different kinds of family does the narrator have?
- Are there any terms in the book that you don't understand? Look them up and discuss the definitions in class.
- Are there other family members that you can think of that are not used in the book?
- Why do you think the author has called the book Family Forest rather than Family Tree or Family Branch?
- Discuss in class the relationship between picture and text.
- How do the illustrations in Family Forest misunderstand what the narrator is saying?
 - How does this make the narrator work harder?
 - How do the illustrations support what the text is saying?
- Find moments in the book where the illustrations are the same and the text and moments where they are different.
 - Why do you think this is?
 - How does it affect the way that you understand the story and the family?

Activities

Talk about the idea of family trees in class. Individually create your own family tree, going back at least four generations.

- How is your family different now from the top of the tree?
- Is it more complicated?
- Be creative, make your family tree into a forest if you need to.
- Include anyone that you consider part of your family, with brief subheadings explaining who they are.
- When these have been illustrated, they can be pieced together to make a family forest for the whole class!

In the book, some of the illustrations are deliberately different from the text. This is to show the stereotypical image of certain family members (for example, the stepmother as a witch). Discuss stereotypes in class. Based on the list that you have created of different family members, choose one or two as class and write or draw a response to that family member. So if you have chosen 'step-dad', draw or write a short story on the kind of character you think of when you think of 'step-dads'. Share your responses in groups or as a class. Discuss the different ways that you have interpreted the same word.

- What different kinds of family does the narrator have?
- In this book, the narrator is trying to make us understand the members of his family. Choose a member of your own family and put together a project on them to present to the class.
 - Your project could include an interview, video, old photo's, talking to other family members, or anything else you can think of.
 - Try to think about how they fit into your family.
 - Have you learnt something about them that you didn't know before?
 - By talking to them, are there more people that you can add to your family forest?
- As an extension activity, look at some of the other books that you have recently read.
 - Do any of them contain families?
 - What kinds of families are they?
 - Are any of them as complicated as the family in Family Forest?
 - Why do we need more books with different types of families?
- Look at the language used to describe family members in the book.
 - Do you think it's easy to understand?
 - Can you come up with more descriptive or clearer words for family members?
 - Look at your family forest. Do all of the people on there have a descriptive title?
 - Could you come up with new words for the new types of family members?

