



Reading Notes

Legend of the Golden Snail Graeme Base

SYNOPSIS:

*'Snailing ship, rise and shine,
Hoist your sails and trim them fine,
Taste once more the salty brine,
For with this spell I make you mine!'*

Inspired by the tale of a magical Golden Snail banished to the Ends of the Earth by a Grand Enchanter, a young boy called Wilbur sets out on a daring voyage to find the legendary snail and claim it as his own. Along the way he encounters many strange creatures and overcomes many challenges. Finally he reaches the Ends of the Earth but what he finds there is not quite as he imagined...

Graeme Base, creator of classics *Animalia*, *The Eleventh Hour* and *Uno's Garden*, takes readers on a stunning magical journey through a land of vivid imagination featuring a bush that grows butterflies, a crab as big as an island, a boatload of earwig pirates – and a giant snail with billowing sails!

WRITING STYLE

This magical tale has a very traditional format, which begins with the main protagonist sharing his fantasies with the reader and then drawing the reader into a journey through his imagination. The narrative is third person, as if the reader is being guided through the journey as a bystander – a comforting position away from danger, yet totally immersed in the adventure.

As usual, Graeme's story runs wild with crazy beasts and plants to stimulate children's imaginations and this is superbly juxtaposed against the parable-like aspects of the story such as helping others in need and the karmic nature of good deeds – a recognised universal theme of many books.

The symbol of the snail is also supported by a strong visual element – a hidden snail in each page – and the text encourages the reader to search for this secret symbol.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graeme Base is one of the world's leading creators of picture books. *Animalia* received international acclaim when it was first published in 1986 and it has achieved classic status with worldwide sales of more than two million copies. It is now an animation series being screened in Australia and the US.

The Eleventh Hour was made joint winner of the 1989 CBC Awards. It is currently in development as a major feature film, as are the much-loved *Sign of the Seahorse* and *The Worst Band in the Universe*. Other perennial favourites by Graeme Base include *My Grandma Lived in Gooligulch* and *The Discovery of Dragons*.

Graeme's recent picture books, *The Waterhole* (an ingenious fusion of counting book, puzzle book, storybook and artbook), *Jungle Drums* (an African fable with a look-and-find element, about one little Warthog and three magic wishes) and *Uno's Garden* (a search-and-find counting book about sustainability) were huge successes when they were published in Australia, the USA, Canada, Italy, France, Denmark and the UK.

In 2003 Graeme published his first novel for young readers. *TruckDogs* was short-listed for the 2004 CBC Book of the Year Awards and Graeme is currently writing a sequel called F.E.T.C.H.

Graeme's latest book for Penguin is *Enigma* - a highly original story with a cryptic puzzle for readers to decode.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

Once again, Graeme Base has produced a picture book that displays true artistic merit. His illustrations are breathtaking and engaging to young (and older) readers, infused with drama and miniscule detail. Wilbur's journey is suspenseful and will keep readers enthralled to the very last page!

STUDY NOTES/ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHERS

THEMES:

- being kind to others
- if you help others they will help you
- use your power for good rather than evil
- don't exert power over the weak and helpless
- being true to yourself

The book also provides a wonderful vehicle through which to discuss the use of:

- illustrations – especially colour and special relationships
- emotions
- language – especially the use of rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, plays on words, repetition

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

Pre-reading exercises:

- Discuss the title. What sort of themes, characters and plot do we expect to find in 'legends'?
- Read or view some simple 'legends'. (Simplified Greek legends such as Jason and the Golden Fleece; 'The Hunting of the Snark' etc would be useful here). What are the common themes, characters or plot lines? Answers may include:
 - innocent hero
 - harsh and cruel tormentor (often with magical powers)
 - fantasy or magic
 - a quest or dangerous journey to rescue someone
 - rite of passage
 - finding your inner strength
 - good vs evil
 - heroic victory
- What is a *Grand Enchanter*? What sort of qualities would a Grand Enchanter have? Are these admirable qualities? If you had magical powers what powers would you want to have? Discuss the notion of the difference between powers that can be used for good and those that are used for evil.
- Examine the end pages. Look at the names of the various places on the map. What do each of these titles mean? What would you expect or predict you might find in each of these locations?
- Make some predictions about the sorts of things that might happen to a little boat on this particular journey.

Reading exercises:

The Grand Enchanter

- Read the original story of *The Grand Enchanter*.
- What parts of the story do you think really captivated Wilbur?
- What sort of person is the Grand Enchanter?

- Why does Wilbur wish to be a Grand Enchanter?
- Why does Wilbur wish to find the Snailing Ship?

The Legend of the Golden Snail

- What clues are there right from the start of the journey that Wilbur will not be a very good Grand Enchanter? (eg his mother's warning: *be sure to wear your hat*).
- Why does Wilbur stop to water the butterfly buds? What does this reveal about his character?
- Why does he stop the fight with the monstrous sea-creature on the coral island?
- What does he do to the earwig pirates?
- What do each of these reveal about Wilbur's character?
- Are these the actions of a Grand Enchanter?
- What does this suggest about Wilbur's journey?
- What are the dreadful doldrums? In what way is this a play on words? Why is Wilbur feeling so unhappy? Why is he upset when he suspects he won't make a very good Grand Enchanter?
- How does Wilbur manage to survive each danger on his journey?
- What message does this send about how we should treat others?
- Why is Wilbur so disappointed when he discovers the golden shell at the Ends of the Earth?
- Why did Wilbur decide that he did not want to be a Grand Enchanter?
- Why does Wilbur ask the Golden Snail to take him back to the Spiral Isles?

Themes:

Good vs Evil

- Wilbur faces many temptations on his journey. At many points he is forced to choose between doing good or evil. What options does he face at each location?
- What sort of qualities would you find in a Grand Enchanter? (From pre-reading activity).
- What sort of qualities would you expect in a Gallant Captain? In what ways does Wilbur prove himself to be a Gallant Captain?
- What benefits does Wilbur experience by choosing to do the right or kind thing?
- Imagine that he remained determined to be a Grand Enchanter. What would a Grand Enchanter have done at each point?
- How would this have changed the story?

Being true to yourself

- Wilbur sets out to sea with one goal, but his ambition changes as the story goes on. What might this suggest about our own lives?
- Whilst it is great to have goals, is it good to stick to them determinedly no matter what the situation?

Legends

- In what ways is this story typical of the genre of myths and legends? What characteristics does it have in common with those discussed in the pre-reading activities?

Magic

- What aspects of this story are magical or mystical?

Illustrations:

- Examine each illustration carefully. When Wilbur is in his house, how do you know that he has a love of the sea? Make a list of all the nautical images you can find on these pages.
- Examine the page on which Wilbur sets out to sea. Where do you think the story is set? What images suggest this? What do you know about the importance of the sea in this culture?
- When Wilbur heads out to sea and all you can see is the vast expanse of ocean and Wilbur and his cat in their little sailing boat, what feeling do you get? Why?
- Do you predict that their journey will be a success? Why?
- Consider the illustrator's use of colour. How does the colour on each page help to convey a mood or message?
- Discuss the use of colour to create mood. What colours represent different moods?
- Have students divide a blank page into 4 squares. In each square, write a different emotion eg happiness, sadness, peace, anger. Working on one square at a time, have students draw lines or shapes in each box, in appropriate colours for that mood (eg flowing swirls of blue, green and yellow for peace; angular stabs and slashes of black and red for anger etc). As a class, discuss the choices that were made and the reasons for them.

Language Development:

The book lends itself beautifully to a range of language extension activities.

- Discuss the names of each of the locations on the map and their meaning.
- Alliteration: What is alliteration? What is the effect of using alliteration in the names of each location?
- Puns or plays on words: why is the ship called a *snailing ship*? What image does this create in your mind?
- Discuss seafaring language or language associated with stories set at sea eg *hoist your sails and trim them fine; the salty brine*
- Vocabulary: maze, doldrums; earwigs; slithering; spiral; isles; enchanter; banished; recited; blossoming; transformed; monstrous; betray; courageous; ensnared; slumber

Activities:

- Write some alliterative phrases that describe places with which the students are familiar eg a beach, a mountain, a river, a rainforest etc. Try to evoke meaning in your phrase as well as alliteration eg shimmering sands
- Write acrostic poems using the words or places in the book

General Activities:

- Encourage the children to say the words of Wilbur's journey with you as you read them aloud. Reinforce the rhyme, rhythm and alliteration used.
- As you read the story, students could move around the classroom, creating appropriate actions for Wilbur's journey – explore movements for the words slithery; guided; wild storm etc.

- Have students read passages aloud. Convey the meaning of the words through their expression and delivery.
- Students can create their own story in which characters have to follow a set route or pattern to get to their destination and back again. Encourage them to both tell and act out the story.
- Create another encounter Wilbur may have had on his journey. Consider what temptation he may have faced and decide which option he will choose (between good and evil). Try to describe the location and its inhabitants in the same style as Graeme Base.
- Create a *Legend of the Golden Snail* board game. What happens at each location? What happens to the player. Try to include options for the wrong decision and the right decision (eg You join the earwig pirates. Move back 3 spaces; and You rescue the lantern fish. Move forward 3 spaces).