

TEACHER'S NOTES FOR *SOMETIMES LOVE IS UNDER YOUR FOOT*

By Colin Thompson

Published by Scholastic Press, 2008

COLIN THOMPSON was born in London and went to boarding school in Yorkshire, returning to London to attend grammar school. He attended arts school for two years.

Colin has worked as a silk-screen printer, a graphic artist, a documentary maker for the BBC, a stage manager, a ceramicist and a weaver. In 1990 he began writing and illustrating picture books. He has gone on to create more than fifty, including *The Last Alchemist*, *The Violin Man* and *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley* (awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year in 2006). As well as picture books, Colin writes short stories, novels, scripts and poetry.

In 1995 Colin came to Sydney to visit a school to talk about his books. Two weeks later he decided he loved the place so much that he moved out to Australia. He now lives in Bellingen, NSW, with his wife and a collection of animals and gadgets.

Find out more about Colin and his books at: www.colinthompson.com

SYNOPSIS

In Brian's family, everyone loves each other, but they don't tell each other so. Kevin, the dog, loves Brian above all the other members of the family. He dreams of curling up on Brian's lap and watching the soccer, but the most attention he gets is when Brian occasionally steps on his tail.

All this changes when Brian becomes terribly ill. Suddenly he needs the love of his loyal dog. He comes to appreciate the love that has been right there under his feet all along.

CREATING *SOMETIMES LOVE IS UNDER YOUR FOOT*

Colin Thompson describes himself as having a very strong work ethic. He usually works on several projects at once, picking up one for a few hours and then another. The idea for *Sometimes Love is Under Your Foot* just came to him, and he sat down and wrote it. For

him, the process of writing a picture book is the same as it is when he writes a novel, only quicker. He redrafts the story several times until he feels it is right then begins the illustrations. As he illustrates, he makes some changes to the text to make the two elements work together.

Illustrating the book was the same sort of natural, intuitive process for Colin. Small details, like the references to pies on the characters' shirts and the bananas hanging on the coat hook, were added because he felt like it. He doesn't analyze why he includes certain elements of the illustration, but just lets them flow, making changes until the book feels right.

To create the illustrations for *Sometimes Love is Under Your Foot*, Colin used an Apple Mac computer, using a graphics table and Photoshop. He no longer uses pencil and paper even to draw roughs before he begins work on a story. Using a computer allows Colin to do things that are difficult or impossible to do with a pen and paper and to move images around on the page easily. Although he loves creating illustrations with a computer, Colin loathes pictures that look like they were made with one. The illustrations for this book make use of a wide variety of textures – the sketchy figures, the richness in texture of the teddy's fur, the typing on the quilt, the gritty quality of the newspaper and the smoothness of Kevin's dream bubbles and of the scene where Brian and Kevin sit in the moonlit room. For Colin, 'a computer is just a tool the same as a pen or pencil, just a lot more expensive and a lot more versatile and a lot more fun. It also has the great advantage of allowing you to correct your mistakes.'

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

- Read the story to the class, turning the pages slowly. Ask students to think about the book, and say what they think happened and what their feelings about it are.
- Discuss how we can sometimes take another person or an animal's love for granted. How does Brian take Kevin for granted? Why does becoming ill make Brian finally notice Kevin? How does Kevin feel when his love is acknowledged?

- Look at Brian on the first and last pages of the book. How does he change?
Discuss the meaning of the sentence: 'Brian was a man who went through life in big shoes.'
- People don't always have to say they love someone or something for us to know it. How does Kevin show his love for Brian? How does Brian show his love for Kevin? Can students think of other ways people show their love for each other, or the way they show love for their pets?
- Kevin is small and Brian only notices him when he steps on his tail. Even if Kevin doesn't feel important in the family, he is. Discuss how pets like Kevin are important in families. What would students miss if they didn't have pets?
- There are some wonderful pictures of Brian's family and of people and their pets in this book. Have students make portraits of themselves and their pets. They can make their illustration on a computer if they would like to.
- In this book we see the world through the eyes of a dog. Try writing a day in the life of your pet, or a short diary that includes the highlights of their day.