These notes are for:

- Ages 8+
- Upper Primary
- Lower Secondary

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Visual Art
- Drama
- Music

Example of:

- Picture book/visual text
- First person, present tense narrative
- Allegory

Values:

- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Understanding, tolerance and inclusion

Themes:

- Identity
- Growing up
- Family
- Choices
- Belonging
- Acceptance and Exclusion
- Difference

Vampyre

Vampyre

Author: Margaret Wild
Illustrator: Andrew Yeo
ISBN: 9781921529221
ARRP: $29.95
NZRRP: $31.99
Pages: 32
September 2011
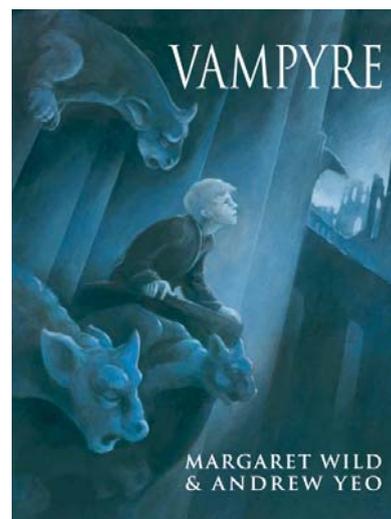
Synopsis

I am Vampyre. Feared. Despised. I live in darkness. I long for light.

From the depths of his vampyre world, a vampyre boy reflects on the joyous days of his childhood and his current life as a vampyre.

This monumental picture book takes the reader on an intensely emotional journey from a world of darkness to light. Sophisticated illustrations and evocative prose are seamlessly interwoven to create a rich and nuanced text perfect for class study. The book operates as a powerful allegory, exploring complex themes of identity, choices, belonging and growing up.

Author/Illustrator Information

Margaret Wild is one of Australia's most highly regarded and awarded children's book authors. Some of her works include *There's a Sea In My Bedroom*, *The Very Best of Friends*, *Old Pig*, *The Midnight Gang*, *Nighty Night!*, *Fox* and *Woolvs in the Sitee*. Margaret has two titles in the Walker Classics series: *Going Home* and *A Bit of Company*, both illustrated by Wayne Harris.

Andrew Yeo is a talented new illustrator from Sydney, Australia. *Vampyre* is his first picture book.

How to use these notes:

These notes provide a variety of discussion questions and activities that can be used with *Vampyre*. Please select according to the level, learning style and targeted outcomes of your students.

Margaret Wild on *Vampyre*

"I don't write much fantasy, so I never planned to write a story about a vampire boy. But when I stumbled across the word "vampyre" this unusual spelling sparked my imagination. It seemed ancient and evocative, and I also liked the fact that "pyre" with its connotations of burning was part of the word.

At the back of my mind, too, was the pressure that some parents put on their children to join the "family business". So I wondered what would happen if a vampire teenager decided he was going to take a different path and how would he achieve it …

When I wrote the story I was aware that there were many "vampire" books around, so I was delighted when Sarah Foster, the publisher of Walker Books, liked this story and wanted to publish it. She teamed me up with a brilliant new illustrator, Andrew Yeo. This is his first book and I think it's an incredible piece of work – very moody and beautiful and I love his use of dark and light.

I haven't actually met Andrew yet. This may seem surprising but it often happens with the creation of a picture book, for various reasons. He worked very closely with the art director and editor, and I was shown his work at progressive stages, from pencil roughs to finished artwork."

Andrew Yeo on *Vampyre*

"The illustrations attempt to capture an internal desolation evocative of the text, drawing inspiration primarily from the introspective atmosphere of Rembrandt, and coupled with the melancholy grandure found in Romanticism's aesthetics and its sensibilities."

watch light hide dusk shun
sun emerge birds darkness despised
moonlit sleep seek
vampyre vanish waking weep destiny sing
abyss feared
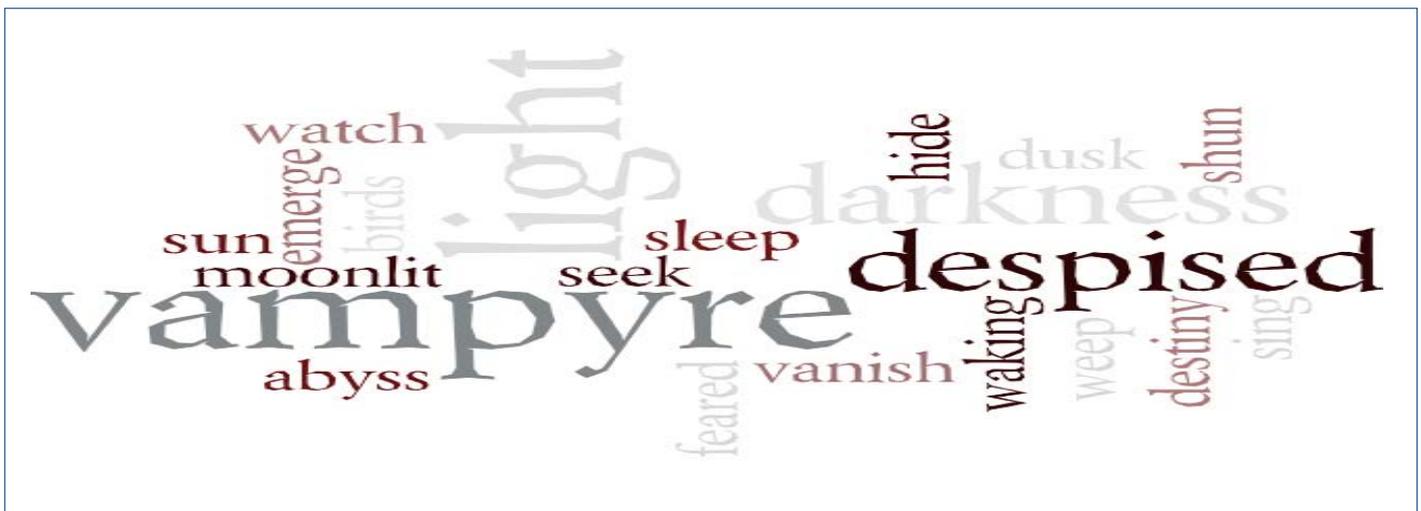
In the Classroom

Before Reading

- Brainstorm vampires in small groups. Write down things you've heard about them; books or movies they feature in; feelings they arouse; objects, places or colours you associate with them – anything at all.

- From looking at the cover, what do you expect this story to be about? What genre do you think it will be? (A genre is a type of story such as a thriller, romance, horror or comedy.)

- When and where do you think the story is set? What gives you this impression?

- What is your impression of the character on the front cover? Who do you think he is? Do you think he's a character you'll like? Will he be completely different to you or will you have things in common? Explain your answers.

- What are the main colours used on the cover? What mood or atmosphere do they create?

- Write a short story inspired by the cover of the book. Your story may describe events that occurred immediately before or after the scene, could show the character's thoughts and feelings or could explore a mood.

- Listen to the teacher read the first page of the book aloud without showing the class the illustrations or cover. Create your own illustrations for the page, thinking carefully about the mood you want to create and how you can use colour, style, positioning etc. to do this. Show your work to the class, explaining what you chose to represent and why. Afterwards, look at Andrew Yeo's illustrations. How are they different to yours? What ideas or feelings do you think he was most interested in?

After Reading

Personal Response

- Write a journal entry/reflection after reading the book. Some questions to consider could be:

  - What did you feel while reading the book?
  - Which parts of the story made you feel most emotional?
  - Have you had any experiences like those in the story?
  - Do you know anyone who is like a character in the story?
  - Does anything in the story remind you of a television program, film or other book? For example, a character, the setting or something that happened in the plot.
  - If you were telling this story, what would you change?
  - Why do you think the author wanted the story to end as it does? Were you satisfied with the ending?
  - What do you think is the main message of the story?
  - Are there any questions you have for the author or illustrator?
  - If you could speak to the author or illustrator, what comments would you make?

- Have a four corners debate in response to the statements below:

  - It is more important that you be true to yourself than loyal to your family.
  - The vampyre boy should not have left his family.
  - The vampyre boy goes out into the sun because he does not want to exist any more.
  - This is not a story about a vampyre at all.
  - You can't change who you are.
  - The story has a happy ending.

  Designate a corner of the room to represent each of the following responses: "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree". After each statement is read, students should stand in the corner that best represents their point of view. Students then explain why they have chosen their particular corner. As the debate proceeds, students may change corners to show that their point of view has altered.

Discussing the Themes

- Belonging is an important theme in the book. What are some groups you belong to? (For example, family, clubs, friendship groups and cultural groups.) Why is it important to belong? What are some of the benefits or advantages of belonging? Is it possible to be a member of a group, and yet not feel a sense of belonging? In your opinion, is it possible to be different and still belong?

- In pairs, discuss a time when you felt you didn't belong. What was this like? How did you respond?

- What people or groups in our society might experience a sense of not belonging? (For instance, the homeless, migrants, the elderly, students seen as "nerds" or "bookworms".) Why might they feel this way?

- Write the following terms on the board: belonging, acceptance, rejection, exclusion and outsider. As a class, discuss what these terms mean. How do they apply to *Vampyre*? For instance, at what times in the book does the main character feel a sense of belonging or acceptance? When does he feel he doesn't belong? Why does he feel this way? When does he experience rejection?

- In her comments on page 2, Wild writes: "At the back of my mind … was the pressure that some parents put on their children to join the 'family business'. So I wondered what would happen if a vampire teenager decided he was going to take a different path and how would he achieve it …"

  Does anyone in the class have a family business? If so, discuss this with the rest of the class. What sort of business is it? Do you help out with it in any way? How important is this business to the family? What would happen if you, or anyone else in the family, decided they didn't want to be involved?

- Are there any traditions that are important in your family? For example, following a religion, marrying someone from a certain background, voting for a particular group, celebrating a religious or cultural event, giving your children or pets a particular name … What would happen if you decided you didn't want to support this tradition any more? Do you know anyone who has made a decision like this? How has their family responded?

- What is one of the toughest choices you've made in your life? (Or possibly one you're thinking about at the moment.) Why was it so difficult? Are you happy with the decision you've made? Discuss these questions with a parent or older person.

  If you had read *Vampyre* while you were making this decision, do you think it would have helped you or given you a different perspective on the decision? Why or why not?

- While on the surface, the story is about a vampire boy who makes a decision to leave his family and go out into the sun, it also has a deeper meaning below this. Discuss the term allegory (a story with a deeper symbolic meaning). Can you think of any films you've seen or books you've read that could be allegories? What might *Vampyre* be about below the surface? Some ideas could include:

  - growing up/moving from childhood to adulthood
  - making difficult choices which others may not support
  - choosing your own path in life
  - developing your own identity as an individual.

  Why might Margaret Wild have decided to explore these ideas through an allegory about a vampire, rather than writing about them directly? How could reading *Vampyre* assist people who are in one of the above situations? (For example, making a decision their family doesn't support, moving from primary school to high school etc.) Does knowing the story is an allegory make you look at it differently? How?

Creative Writing

- Decide which word you feel is the most important on each page. Arrange these words on the page to create a poem summarising the text. Compare your poem with another class member. Have they chosen the same words as you? Discuss the reasons for your choices.

- Compose a diary entry for the vampyre boy as he prepares to leave his family and go outside. Focus particularly on his feelings and motivations. Why did he make this decision? Is he feeling sad? Frightened? Regretful? Hopeful? Determined? What are his feelings towards his family? What does he think will happen when he goes outside?

- Write an acrostic poem inspired by the book using the title "Vampyre".

Language and Structure

- As a class, identify the various stages of the plot then present this information on the worksheet provided.

- Consider the author's spelling of the word "vampyre". Why do you think she has used this spelling instead of the more familiar "vampire"? How does this spelling create a different effect or feeling?

- Why do you think the author decided to write her story in the first person? ("I am Vampyre.") In pairs, try retelling the story in the third person (as if it were happening to someone else). How does it feel different?

- Most stories are told in the past tense, yet most of *Vampyre* is written in the present tense. Why do you think Wild does this? Rewrite selected section of the text in the past tense. How does this change the meaning and impact of the story? Which version is more powerful in your opinion?

- In what way is the language in *Vampyre* similar to a poem? Do you think the text is more like a poem or a story? Consider sentence structure, word choice and the author's use of language techniques such as repetition, metaphors and imagery (descriptive language).

- Use "wordle" or a similar program to create a word cloud for the book (http://www.wordle.net/). What are the most frequently used words? (These are the ones that appear largest in your word cloud.) Does this activity help you understand the main ideas of the story better?

Visual Literacy

- Look at the font (lettering) used on the front cover. What adjectives would you use to describe it? Create a Word document on your computer and type the title "Vampyre". Use the font tab to see what the title looks like in different fonts. You may also like to see whether it looks different in capital letters and lower case. Choose the three fonts you think are most appropriate for the book. Print them out and present them to the class, explaining why you have chosen them.

- Look at where the boy is positioned on each page. For instance, in the middle or at the edges of the page. Why do you think he is positioned in these places? (Hint: think of a group of children in a playground. Where would those who don't belong usually be standing? In the middle of the group or at the edges?)

- On a number of pages in the book, the vampyre boy is shown surrounded by gargoyles. Look for examples of this. Why do you think the illustrator has drawn him in this way? Could he be trying to highlight the way the boy is seen as a monster by the villagers? Does the boy look happy amongst the gargoyles? What might he be thinking?

  Look for other illustrations where the boy is shown among a group of people, animals or objects. What is he surrounded by in each? From looking at his body language and facial expressions, how do you think he is he feeling in each picture? Does he seem to belong or not belong in the group?

- A "demand" is a type of eye contact where a person or animal in a picture is looking directly at you (the viewer). Find one example of a demand in *Vampyre*. Why do you think the illustrator has used a demand at this point in the story? Does it make you feel more connected to the character?

- Light and dark are an important part of the book's illustrations. Look for images where darkness is stronger, and then for images where light is stronger. Why do you think the illustrator has decided to emphasise this contrast? (Hint: read the first page of the book.)

- How are the colours different on the last page of the story? Why has this change occurred? Do the colours create a positive or negative feeling about the vampyre boy's future? Think also about the significance of the final line of the story.

- In his statement on page 2, Andrew Yeo writes that his illustrations were influenced by the artwork of Rembrandt. Research this artist on the internet or in the library. When did he live? How would you describe his style? What sort of things did he paint? Create a portfolio of Rembrandt's paintings that may have inspired Andrew Yeo.

- Design a new cover for the book. Write a reflection explaining how your cover shows an understanding of the book's subject (what it is about), themes and mood.

Responding through Performance

- In small groups, prepare a list of questions you would ask different characters from the book. Characters could include the vampyre boy, his mother and father, one of his siblings and a villager. The questions should focus on their motivations (why they did certain things) and how they felt at different parts of the story. Brainstorm possible answers to these questions.

- Individually, choose one of these characters and in this role, answer questions from the rest of the class.

- As a class, brainstorm a list of emotions or feelings the main character might have experienced during the story. For example, loneliness, rejection, acceptance, fear, happiness, sadness, despair, confusion, determination and hope.

- Find your own space in the room. As the teacher says each emotion, use your whole body to express this idea. Next, try to reveal this emotion just through one part of the body. For instance, the hands or face. Then try to mask or cover up this emotion. Transform these different emotions into a dance about *Vampyre*.

- In small groups, create a tableau (a sculpture created from the body) to symbolise one theme from the book. (For example, belonging, rejection, family, choices or identity.) Consider body language, posture and facial expressions. Perform your tableau to the class, and have the audience try to identify the theme being communicated.

- Compose a soundscape to represent the main character's journey. Work in small groups, with each group taking responsibility for one double-page spread of the text.

  - Work out what the emotion the character would be feeling on your page.
  - Brainstorm the different noises/vocal sounds/instruments/body percussion sounds that could be used to show this emotion. (Try to be creative and use everyday objects around you, as well as proper instruments).
  - Work out what volume and pace would be appropriate for this emotion.
  - Record your section of the soundscape. (It should be approximately 20 seconds long.)
  - After each group has recorded their piece, play all the sections of the soundscape in order.
  - Write a reflection on the soundscape. Did it sound as you imagined it would? What sounds or instruments worked well or didn't work well? Did the different parts fit together smoothly?

Other Visual Texts with a Deeper Meaning
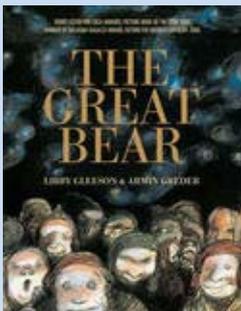
The Great Bear
Author: Libby Gleeson
Illustrator: Armin Greder
ISBN: 9781921529696 (PB)
AU$16.95/NZ$19.99

The circus bear spends her days in a cage and her nights performing for a crowd. The crowd taunts her as she dances – poking her with sticks or throwing stones. Can she ever break free?

This powerful text uses a deceptively simple narrative about a bear to raise complex issues about freedom, dignity and self determination.

– *Short-listed for CBCA Picture Book of the Year, 2000*
– *Winner of the Bologna Ragazzi Award, Fiction for Infants category, 2000*

Into the Forest
Author: Anthony Browne
ISBN: 9781844285594
Paperback
AU$16.95/NZ$18.99

One night a boy is woken by a terrible storm. In the morning Dad is gone and Mum doesn't know when he'll be back. The boy is asked to take a cake to his sick grandma. "Don't go into the forest," he is warned, as always. But this time the boy does.

This is an atmospheric exploration of fear and anxiety by a Children's Laureate and Hans Christian Andersen Medal Winner.

"*Into the Forest repays many readings. So little said but so much implied; that is the certain delight of Anthony Browne's picture books, a right feast for the imagination.*" – Magpies magazine
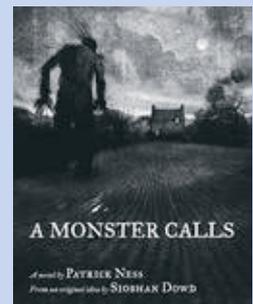
A Monster Calls
Author: Patrick Ness
Illustrator: Jim Kay
ISBN: 9781406311525 (HB)
AU$27.95/NZ$31.99

The monster showed up just after midnight. As they do. But it isn't the monster Conor's been expecting. He's been expecting the one from his nightmare, the one he's had nearly every night since his mother started her treatments, the one with the darkness and the wind and the screaming...

From Carnegie Medal-winning author, Patrick Ness, comes this poignant and darkly mischievous fable about fear, grief and coming to terms with loss.

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VAMPYRE

PLOT ANALYSIS

After reading *Vampyre* (Margaret Wild & Andrew Yeo), use the table below to show what happens at each stage of the plot. Copy the table into your workbook if you need more space.

Orientation (where the characters are introduced and the setting of the story is established)	
Complication (where the conflict or main problem in the story is introduced)	
Rising action/ sequence of events (the events that move the story along and create suspense – this is the longest part of the story)	
Climax (the high point, or most exciting moment of the story)	
Resolution (where the story is concluded)	