

Teachers Notes - *All the Colours of Paradise*

Written by Glenda Millard, illustrated by Stephen Michael King

Published by ABC Books, a division of HarperCollinsPublishers

Synopsis

In this fourth gentle story of the Silks, the focus is on the newest Silk, Perry Angel, introduced in the previous book *Perry Angel's Suitcase*. It is about a closed up little boy unfurling, relating to others, trusting others, being helped by the understanding of others and finding himself. Perry has to learn social rules about responding to people and to practise using polite speech. While he may not be the best speaker or reader, and sometimes uses his hands instead of speaking, Perry has other talents, not merely the artistic ones he displays at the end of the novel.

Perry's situation is mirrored in the wider community of Cameron's Creek. Mr Kadri knows what it is like to find it hard to understand the language and to be in a new, strange place. Mr Jenkins knows loss and needs to find a new place for himself after the death of his wife. The Silks have had their share of sadness too. The story is a celebration of community, of how caring for one another brings in young and not so young, wise and naïve, old and new.

Themes

- Building a community in which everyone has a valued place whether that community is the family, the school, the wider town.
- Allied to this and not at all contradictory is also allowing each person the right to express themselves in their own way, allowing them the time and space to be themselves and to find how they best express their feelings and identity.
- Also fundamental to the story is that families are built, and can embrace those who are not blood related: love is the cement.
- Friendship is central, such as that language-less but empathetic relationship between Perry and the old, deaf dog Blue.
- We are all responsible to, and care for each other. We all need a place where we belong and can be ourselves.

- Stories and pictures are valuable ways of understanding ourselves and the world.

Writing Style

The style the author has written in is deceptively simple, capturing a childlike point of view of the everyday world, and which is rich in detail of the remarkable in the ordinary. It is full of imagery, especially simile and metaphor, such as 'love is like chocolate, melting in the quiet dark inside you.' It also has the leisurely pace of life in a small country town. It is third person, omniscient so that we can get into the thoughts of various characters. It is also carefully constructed so that it supports young readers in making predictions about what might happen and why. Importantly it leaves gaps for readers to fill.

Author Motivation

There are a number of ideas that informed the writing of *All the Colours of Paradise*. Among them, requests from readers of the previous Kingdom of Silk books for more about the background of some of their favourite characters.

But perhaps the major influence was the disparity between the joy I experience while working and playing with words and the times when exactly the right word to express an idea is so frustratingly elusive. This experience evolved into the consideration of what it would be like to permanently experience difficulty communicating, either verbally or in writing. Added to this strand of thought was my admiration for certain illustrators, whose work so aptly and beautifully portrays ideas and emotions, notably Stephen Michael King, to whom this book is dedicated.

Essentially the theme of *All the Colours of Paradise* is self-expression. I decided that Perry Angel, one of my characters from a previous book, would be the one to demonstrate a unique ability to express himself by means other than verbal or written communication; in Perry's case, by drawing. Perhaps the book is also a quiet comment on society's expectation of the way knowledge should be acquired and intelligence expressed.

There is another, more subtle, thread running through all the Kingdom of Silk books: an acknowledgement that grief and loss are part of life, something the Silk family are acutely aware of. But they are equally conscious that there is a time for everything. As an acknowledgement of this, in *All the Colours of Paradise*, I have woven the words of a well-known poem into the story. I think it epitomises the Silks' wise acceptance that *to everything there is a season, a time to be sad and a time to dance*.

I hope that Perry Angel's triumph in *All the Colours of Paradise* will give readers a reason to dance the Spanish Fandango.

Author/Illustrator Background

GLENDAL MILALRD was born in the Goldfields region of Central Victoria and has lived in the area all her life. The communities she has lived in and the surrounding landscapes have provided a rich source of inspiration and settings for many of her stories.

Apart from writing, some of Glenda's favourite things are Jack Russell Terriers, hot-air ballooning, making and eating bread and pizza in the wood-fired oven that her husband built in the back yard and reading books which either make her laugh or cry.

STEPHEN MICHAEL KING has rapidly become one of Australia's most popular and best selling author/illustrators.

Stephen describes drawing as something that he simply can't live without! 'As far back as I remember I loved to draw. All I needed was a stick and a nice patch of dirt and I was happy for hours. When I was ten years old I became partially deaf and experienced difficulty communicating with people. Drawing and dreaming became my escape ...

'I work from a small studio in my backyard surrounded by my growing

forest of trees. Our house is in a tiny township near the Hawkesbury River in Sydney and we are surrounded by national park. My favourite pastime is sitting on my front step and dreaming of the veranda I will build one day.

‘I work mainly with watercolours and ink, although I do occasionally use coloured pencils. I work fast so my ideas stay fresh and my brush and linework fluid.’

Editorial Comment (Belinda)

As the fourth book in the beautiful, award-winning ‘Kingdom of Silk’ series, we were thrilled when Glenda told us she was working on a new title in the award-winning ‘Kingdom of Silk’ series. This book continues the story of Perry Angel – surely one of the most touching characters in a children’s book for many years. Glenda’s work always highlights the best of human nature without shying away from the problems that day-day-to life can bring. There is such a sense of hope and so much beauty in all of her books. Stephen Michael King’s whimsical illustrations are the perfect match for Glenda’s lyrical stories.

Marketing and Promotion

- Publishing in September to follow the success of *Perry Angel’s Suitcase*
- Advertising in major children’s literature journals
- Author appearances at bookshops and festivals

Study Notes

Language:

- One of the pleasures of reading is to discover new words. Have a class chart or a wiki where new and favourite words from the book can be added, such as ‘sophisticated’, ‘phenomenon’, ‘fact’, ‘fiction’, ‘condolences’, ‘nosegays’, ‘posies’, ‘newfangled’, ‘namesake’.

- P46 has Perry's description of number 7 – invite children to write some more, such as '8 is like two snakes curled up together on a frosty night'.
- P15 'Magnificent Multifunction Levitator' models that language can be playful. Have the students invent other useful devices and give them names. Display the names around the classroom, and see who can work out what the contraption does from its name.

Story

- Perry likes true (as in real life) stories, such as Violet's story of indigo's birth. Talk about different types of stories. Can made up stories be true? For example, *All the Colours of Paradise* is a made up story.
- P41 Perry thinks about the picture book as having 'the written part, the painted part and the other part which had no name – the secret part that felt like chocolate melting in the quiet dark inside him'. Talk about what that secret part might be

Problem solving –

- Discuss possibilities of how to help Mr Jenkins fill in his days. See if anyone comes up with Nell's solution.

Prediction: is an important strategy of being an active reader and this book offers opportunities to practise this

- p64 what is the window of opportunity that Nell has noticed for Mr Jenkins?
- p101 who is coming with Melody and why doesn't Annie want her to come?
- p110 will Perry go with his other mother or stay with the Silks?

Art

- much in this book is about the expressiveness of art making, so activities that express feelings through art are appropriate, such as Perry's large purple blanket. This is an opportunity to introduce to

young readers the important concept of symbolism and especially metaphor.

- Perry draws pictures of feelings instead of things he sees (p10): isn't that what great artists do? Find out. For example, Picasso, Dali.
- Paint or draw 'Mr Kadri's heart weighs heavier than a necklace made from the moons of Jupiter' (p59).
- Draw or paint Indigo's decoration for Saturday breakfast (pp74).
- Paint or draw the scene at the Colour Patch Café (p103).
- P110 Set up a door (real or mock up) in the classroom and paint Perry's twelve scenes. On the other side, paint scenes of the class's choosing (emphasise cooperation and community that is at the heart of the book). Before the art activity, show and discuss examples of paintings that act as metaphors for experiences. Talk about the relationship between colour and mood. Picture books are invaluable here.

Ideas to talk about

- 'a friend is someone who loves you even when you do something wrong'.
- What is the language of pictures? (p60)
- Why were the teenagers cruel to Perry? Did they mean to be?
- What is Paradise?
- 'Words are just words and they can only change things if we let them.'
- What has Perry learned by the end of the story?

Activity after reading to celebrate the story

- Have a colour-themed food day like Indigo's.
- Discuss and vote on the colour to be the theme.
- Why is it important for everyone to be happy with the decision?