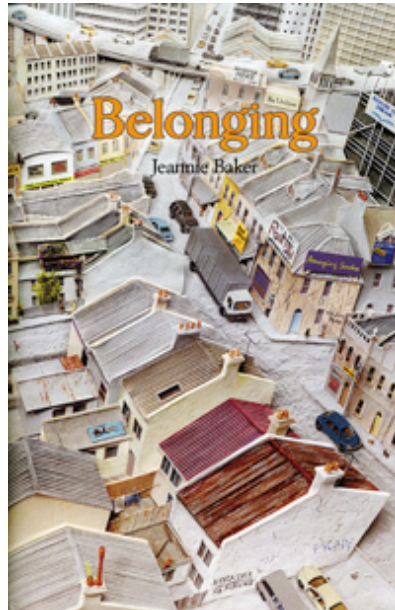


TEACHER NOTES

BELONGING

by Jeannie Baker



Belonging is a wordless picture book that shows the gradual re-greening of a suburban environment and encourages the propagation of local indigenous plants in the community. *Belonging* and its companion title *Window*, each use the device of a window in a house, through which to observe environmental and community changes. Each window reflects the changes over a two-year period.

Belonging offers a positive and optimistic view of the community. In the first few windows, we see a typical urbanised, over-built environment with few trees, and no community atmosphere. As the years progress, we see individuals attempting to beautify their immediate surroundings and eventually their street. As we see the environmental changes take place, we also notice that the residents of the neighbourhood are getting to know each other as a community.

Without using words, the pictures ask us to think about how we could improve our own communities and improve our quality of life by living in a better environment.

In *Belonging*, we are introduced to the main character, Tracey, as a tiny baby being held in her parents' arms. As the years progress and Tracey grows, she develops an interest in the garden—first propagated by her neighbour when Tracey was still a child—when the neighbour gives her a plant as a present. It is Tracey's determination to change her own backyard that brings about the change. In the last few pages, we see that the change is indeed phenomenal, but not out of reach of our own capabilities. The very last image is of Tracey's Forest, the plant shop Tracey and her husband open.

The book can be read on many levels: as an environmental statement or just as an interesting picture book. Either way, with its meticulous detail readers are sure to find a different detail, image, or approach each time they look.

Teaching Notes

- Jeannie Baker's artwork presents a very hopeful view of the future. Create two different views of the future 50 years from now—one in a positive way and the other in a negative way. Get the class into groups to discuss their views of the future. Think about how the future is represented in popular culture.
- After the above activity, students could create their own work in response to their reading *Belonging*. They could do it in a variety of different mediums: collage, drawing, painting etc. Consider staging an exhibition of the students' work. They could ask visitors for their interpretations of works and compare this with their own intentions.

- Do you know of any community schemes such as working to bring back native plants, bush regeneration or the restoration of old buildings? Consider documenting these schemes and having students respond by creating posters or artwork inspired by the project.
- In her artwork Jeannie Baker refers to the political movement 'Reclaim the Streets'. Research this group and find out what is the motivation behind the movement. Extend this by researching what local political action groups exist in your area. You could focus on social justice groups, environmental groups, urban renewal groups etc.
- Get students to look out of a window in their home, and write down and describe what they see. Ask them to keep a journal of descriptions for one week. Ask them to take note of what has changed since the first day? Has there been any repetition over the days? Did they see people, animals, birds or insects in that time?
- From the above activity, gauge whether any stories have to take shape with a main character. In groups, students could try to write a story from their observations. Their main character could be human or a talking insect. See if they can find a climax to their story and decide on an ending.