



Miaka



Teachers' notes

Written by Anne-Louise Channon
Illustrated by Beatriz Martin Vidal
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Anya lives a happy, carefree life in Russia with her mother, father and beloved pet bird, Miaka. But when hard times come and her father's crop fails she must leave the farm to go and live with the baker and his wife in the local village. Life at the bakery is harsh but as long as she can earn enough to feed Miaka, Anya endures it. Then, one night, she overhears the baker make a terrible bargain that will devastate her life...

From the author:

The inspiration for *Miaka* was rooted in the fairy tales of Hans Christian Anderson and a belief that fairy tales are important for children to hear. Fairy tales are timeless and elegant; they encourage reflection and creativity in children, as well as teaching good values and a sense of humility. In a world that is increasingly materialistic and technologically driven, I believe this is hugely important. I also believe that fairy tales are more than the sum of their words and images, and that they touch something deep inside us.

I honestly can't say where the bird, *Miaka*, came from. I know the themes of love and friendship and sacrifice were uppermost in my mind, and once I'd pictured the

bird and the girl and the setting, then sat down to write, the story just flowed. I can't say any more than that!

"If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales." Albert Einstein

Before Reading

What do you imagine this book may be about?

What does the look of the cover suggest to you about the style of story that *Miaka* may be?

After reading

Miaka draws on the traditional story telling style of the fair tales. Can you think of any fairy tales that are like *Miaka*?

What are some of the features of fairy tales? Does *Miaka* have these?

Fairy tales are often a reflection of the society and time when they were written. *Miaka* is a story written in the 21st century but sounds like a story written long before. When do you think the story is set? If it is a modern setting what do you think it is reflecting in Russian society, and the modern world in general.





'Go, dear Miaka,' she cried, her throat thick with tears.
'Go where the grass is green and the sky blue. Go where you can be free and food is plentiful.'

The bird hopped to the edge of the cage. With a faint chirp he slid down onto the snow and stretched his wings. As she watched he tilted his head towards her.



But her most prized possession was a glorious bird called Miaka.
For hours at a time Anya would sit with the bird, teaching him to talk and stroking his feathers.
He would perch on her arm, eating grain from her small, pale hand, all the while chirping merrily.
Anya loved him.

Fairy tales were often seen as moral stories to teach people lessons. What might be a lesson that one could learn from the story of Miaka?

What do you think Miaka symbolises for Anya? In general birds in fairy tales can represent freedom, salvation and peace. Is this true for Miaka?

Do you think Anya is a strong or weak female character? What is her role and how is she treated? What does Anya's final act say about her as a character?

Discuss the use of the parent's illness and absence as a literary device.

What role do the baker and his wife have to play in the reader's understanding of right and wrong, or fairness and kindness?

Illustrations

The author does not state what type of bird Miaka is but the illustrator has drawn Miaka as an owl. Why do you think she chose an owl?

What effect does it have that the illustrations only show Anya and Maiaka, never the adults?

Look at the colour palette that the illustrator has used. Why do you think she has used so few colours?

How does the tone of the colours change throughout the book and how does this affect your reading of the story?

What is the emotional effect of the use of gold?

Writing

What might a modern version of Miaka set in Australia be like? Using the same themes as those in Miaka compose a contemporary fairy tale.

Our interpretation of events is clouded by our emotions and values. Even though the story of Miaka is written in the third person, it uses Anya's point of view to interpret events. For example, the baker and his wife come across as mean and greedy. Perhaps however this is just how Anya sees them because they represent to her a separation from her parents. How might the story be different if it was told from the point of view of the baker and his wife? Could they be seen as kind and charitable?

Write your interpretation of the ending of Miaka?

