



With Nan

Written by Tania Cox
Illustrated by Karen Blair

Published by Windy Hollow Books 2012

Teachers' notes

When Simon goes on an afternoon walk with Nan, they discover many interesting animals camouflaged in the bush.

A note from the author:

I was born in a small North Qld town called Ayr where I grew up on a farm with my parents, a big bossy sister, two mischievous little brothers, a nonna, a nonno and lots noisy chooks, toe-pecking roosters, cuddly dogs and snobby cats. The inspiration for *With Nan* came from my late afternoon walks around my family's farm and nearby creek where I saw lots of leaves flying, rocks hopping and ground scurrying away. I had to look very carefully because there were quite a bit of ground slithering away too – large ones! Many years later, when I was reading a wildlife magazine about someone's walk through a forest, I began to think about my own childhood walks. It was at this moment I started to write *With Nan*. I wanted the main character to be a young child going for a walk. But I thought Simon was too young to go by himself, so I sent Nan along with him. I was so happy to see a dog in the illustrations, because our family dog would come on my walks too.

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A note from the illustrator:

Karen Blair grew up in Perth, Western Australia, enjoying a childhood of drawing, playing and exploring with her brother and sister. She has fond memories of creating houses for lizards from rocks and finding frogs in the stream at her family farm. She now lives with her husband and two cheeky cats in Fremantle, WA, where she works from her home studio.

I did the illustrations for *With Nan* with charcoal and watercolour. I chose charcoal because it is made from burnt wood and has a connection to the bushwalk element of the book, it is also wonderful to draw with to keep lines loose and lively. I wanted to keep the colours minimal and simple, so the shapes, textures and lines could play a bigger part. I also wanted to create a feeling of space and exploration, so the backgrounds are very minimal. There is just enough to camouflage the animals. The reader's imagination can fill in the rest.

Illustrating a 100-word book was a wonderful challenge! It allowed me space to explore a visual narrative, or a story told in pictures. I felt that the relationship between Nan and Simon was loving and playful, so it seemed natural to have them





playing a little game of mimicking the animals they were discovering. The setting afternoon sun was the perfect backdrop to create silhouettes for these “cameo” pages, so Nan and Simon appear almost as shadow puppets against the sunset.

Before reading

What does the cover suggest the story may be about?

By looking at the title and the illustration, where do you think the book is set?

What do you think the boy and his Nan may be about to do?

After Reading

As Nan and Simon walk through the bush they come across many different animals. Can you identify these animals?

What things do you know about camouflage?

Can you come up with a list of some other animals that use camouflage to protect themselves?

Discuss also with children how people can be camouflaged by dressing the same colours and patterns as their surroundings.

In the illustrations we see Nan and Simon acting out the movements of the animals. Read the story through again and act out the different animals.

Related art activities

‘I Spy’ of what can be seen in the bush.

Draw your own camouflage pictures using the animals in the book or others that you have come up with.

Collect leaves and twigs and use them to make collage illustrations. What can you turn the leaf or the twig into?

Can you do illustrations using charcoal and watercolour?

There is not much dialogue in the story. Can you re-write the story incorporating dialogue between Simon and Nan?

Write a diary entry by Simon talking about his day with Nan.

Extension activities

On Tania’s website, www.taniacox.com you can find the names of the animals found in the book. Can you find out more about these animals, their habitat, what they eat and who their predators are?

Invite a wildlife officer to talk to the class about camouflage and Australian bush animals. Or perhaps visit a zoo or wildlife park to further investigate animals and camouflage.

For more classroom activities visit www.taniacox.com

