

Teacher Notes
Fog a Dox
written by Bruce Pascoe
Magabala Books

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler (Teacher Librarian)

Synopsis

When Albert Cutts brings home three orphaned fox cubs from the bush, his half-dingo dog Brim is not so sure she wants to nurse them along with her new pups. But loyal and obedient, that is what Brim does. Two of the three foxes soon go back to the wild, but not Fog, who grows up to be a dox — half dog, half fox.

Fog a Dox is a beautifully written tale of friendship, rescue and hope. It combines descriptive and poetic language with a raw, honest narrative voice.

THEMES

Friendship

- Albert lives alone but has a trusted and loyal friend in his dog, Brim.
- Fog becomes a loyal friend to Albert too.
- Dave feels that he has no friends, however a special friendship forms between Dave and Albert.
- Once Dave rescues Albert, others find a new respect for Dave.
- Dave adopts one of Brim's pups.
- Maria becomes friends with Dave and Albert.

Indigenous Culture

- Aspects of Indigenous culture are embedded in the text, such as:
 - Kinship
 - An innate trust in and respect for nature
 - Indigenous language — Maap Nation

Loneliness

- Dave is lonely. He adopts one of Brim's pups for company.
- Dave has learnt not to speak as no one will listen to him anyway.

Nature

- Albert loves wildlife, in particular birds. One of his favourites is the eastern spinebill.
- The river plays a special role in nurturing the friendship and sense of peace and hope between Maria, Albert and Dave.

Hope

- Maria is dying from leukaemia. Her doctors are using a new drug. This offers a glimmer of hope.

Prejudice

- Albert is concerned that people will prejudge Fog because he is a fox and he calls Fog a dox to protect him.

WRITING STYLE

- *Fog a Dox* is written in third person, past tense. The narrative voice is arresting, the story being told from various points of view. The narrative of Brim and Fog are perfectly nuanced.
- Bruce Pascoe uses beautiful figurative language throughout the text. He also uses excellent vocabulary and description. The dialogue is realistic.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- The first paragraph gives the reader a glimpse of the author's writing style and what is to follow. Examine the play on words at work in these two sentences. Speculate about Albert's character and the story after the first few pages.

- Discuss the fact that Albert loves nature yet cuts down trees for a living. How has the author carefully positioned the reader to understand Albert's job.
- Albert gets annoyed by the lyrebird imitating his kettle whistling. View David Attenborough's clip of a lyrebird imitating various sounds. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjE0Kdfos4Y
- Re-read the description of Brim on pages 9–10. Analyse how the author has described her character and relationship with Albert (for example, Brim would stop and have a little dog-think). What are your favourite parts of this paragraph? Why?
- On page 11, Brim is narrating, explaining how she can count. Examine the author's technique of switching voices so seamlessly between various characters.
- Albert uses the Maap language for some words. Keep a record of these as they arise throughout the text.
- Re-read the passage on page 17 that describes the relationship between man and dingo. What does the author mean when he says they respected each other but they'd never be mates? Is this the case with human-to-human relationships as well? Discuss.
- Explain how the author has interwoven Maria's story with that of Albert and Dave. Discuss the way in which these two narratives meet at the bush hospital.
- Albert and Dave help Maria. How does Maria help them? Discuss.
- Re-read page 22. Why can't Albert kill the fox cubs?
- How are choughs like Indigenous people? (See page 25.)
- An underlying theme of *Fog a Dox* is that of the misunderstanding and mistreatment of mixed-race beings, for example Brim is half dog, half dingo; Fog is half fox, half dog. How does this reflect the way in which society has treated people of mixed race in the past? If age-appropriate, discuss the Stolen Generation.
- Re-read the passage in which Albert shows the baby foxes to Brim for the first time. Discuss the author's descriptive techniques. (See page 28.)
- What does the author mean when he says, 'some people could find enemies everywhere'? (See page 36.)

- Why did Dave want a pup with a warm and cuddly personality? (See page 38.)
- A powerful tool in writing is to connect with the reader's emotions. How does the author do this through the character of Dave? (For example page 40 when Dave chooses the pup.)
- Re-read pages 46–47 in which the author talks about heroes. Is Albert a hero? Is Dave? Fog? Discuss, giving reasons for your opinions.
- Albert is concerned that Fog will be prejudged because he is a fox. Discuss the broader theme of prejudice and the way in which the author has so cleverly interwoven this theme into his text.
- Why is Dave 'like a man practising having a friend'? (See page 53.)
- What does Albert mean when he says to Maria, 'might is better than won't'? (page 109). Discuss this in light of the wedge-tailed eagle that is the Maap's spirit bird — 'When we see him, everything's alright.' (See page 110.)
- Keep a journal of poetic devices used throughout *Fog a Dox*. Discuss the contribution that figurative language makes to the text. Allow students to discover these as they read. Examples include:
 - Personification
 - butterflies winking at him (page 15)
 - twigs betraying Albert with their crunch (pages 18–19)
 - the wind shrieked at them, biting at their faces and hands (page 79)
 - Similes
 - as reliable as the sun (page 9)
 - beak like a pair of tin snips (page 14)
 - like an enamelled prince (page 15)
 - coughs liked to march together like a band of scarlet-eyed horticulturalists (page 18)
 - pads of little paws were pink and soft as a baby's toes (page 22)

- choughs talking to each other like women down at the shops (pages 22–23)
- pads as pink as geraniums (pages 26–27)
- as still as fox cubs terrified by the smell of dog and man (page 27)
- Vera could slip into it [gloom] like a hand into a warm glove (page 32)
- rise in her mind like a bubble of gas in a swamp [self-pity] (page 32)
- his lips were as useful for speech as an earthworm for a tent peg (page 37)
- like a scrambling scarecrow on the loose (page 56)
- like construction cranes having afternoon tea (page 57)
- like a vicious little assassin (page 64)
- loomed like a dark shroud (page 67)
- like a piece of ribbon dancing (page 68)
- as crisp as moonlight (page 72)
- he lolled like a dead sheep (page 73)
- it whistled like a kadaitcha through the bridle rings (page 79)
- as inscrutable as a fox (page 108)
- like bookends beside the frail girl (page 111)
- Imagery, assonance and alliteration
 - hearts going pumpity pump, drumpity drump (page 27)
 - their fat pink tummies fit to burst (page 32)
 - they crook crook cricked into voice (page 35)
 - as if a blowtorch was strafing it with a naked flame (page 64)
 - gone in a flash of white tail tip, disappearing like the mist of his name (page 68)

- a nightjar called, its weird whooping chuckle rippling and looping through the starlit clearing (page 71)
 - as if a knife had cut his throat (page 72)
 - wind changed its tone to a banshee wail that whined through the limbs (page 78)
 - heard the percussion of perfectly synchronised horses hoofs (page 80)
- Compare *Fog a Dox* with Narelle Oliver's picture book *Fox and Fine Feathers*. Oliver's book also uses many poetic devices, as well as including a fox and birds such as the spoonbill, lyrebird and nightjar. Compare how these animals are portrayed in both texts. Margaret Wild's and Ron Brook's *Fox* is another picture book to use as a comparative tool with *Fog a Dox*.
 - Bruce Pascoe has used sophisticated vocabulary in the parts of the text, whilst in other places the writing is simple and naive. This reflects the differing points of view of the narration. Discuss this technique and how the author has done this so seamlessly.
 - Record any vocabulary you may not be familiar with. Using the context of the sentences, discuss the meaning of such words. Use a dictionary to define these words if necessary. Examples include:

convivially p. 18	truculent p. 19	tor p. 19	acid p. 21
tremulous p. 22	capacious p. 29	maudlin p. 31	reproof p. 35
frivolous p. 35	latent p. 42	finicky p. 48	awry p. 49
self-effacement p. 52	sociability p. 52	tentatively p. 54	undulating p. 56
cajoled p. 57	diligence p. 59	resolute p. 62	fluidity p. 68
perfunctory p. 69	incapacitation p. 69	vulnerable p. 69	delirium p. 71
predicament p. 72	bedlam p. 76	abysmal p. 79	synchrony p. 79
cacophony p. 79	insolence p. 84	derelict p. 84	vermin p. 85
sceptical p. 96	strenuous p. 99	elusive p. 99	inscrutable p. 108