

Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

Once there was a boy

Written and illustrated by Dub Leffler



Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

OVERVIEW

Once there was a boy is a beautiful story about friendship, trust and forgiveness.

A boy who lives alone on an island spends his days picking fruit, climbing mangrove trees and watching the sun light up the sea. His life is simple and uncomplicated. A young girl suddenly appears on the island. She is asked not to look under the boy's bed, but when she eventually succumbs to temptation, she breaks his heart. The reconciliation at the end of the book helps readers to understand the importance of sharing and thinking about other people's feelings.

THEMES

Friendship

- Friendship is an important theme in the text. So too is the idea that sometimes, friends make mistakes.
- The boy and girl have known loneliness and solitude. For them, this friendship brings a new sense of warmth.

Trust

- The girl hurts the boy's feelings by betraying his trust. She earns back his trust through her actions.

Sharing

- The two new friends learn that sharing is an important part of friendship.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

- Friends forgive one another.
- Reconciliation is not always easy but the end results are worth the effort.

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Once there was a boy is written in third person, past tense. Its simplicity and innocence is seamlessly reflected in the sparse, perfectly nuanced language. This story can be enjoyed by a wide range of ages, including adults, as it is about the innocence of young friendship, temptation, broken hearts and forgiveness. Dub Leffler uses analogies such as the heart as friendship that gives this text sophistication and depth.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

These notes have been written in context with the Australian Curriculum. The appendix highlights a selection of relevant cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and content descriptors across a range of year levels that the following activities address.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR



Dub Leffler is one of thirteen children and grew up in the small town of Quirindi, south of Tamworth in New South Wales. He is descended from the Bigambul and Mandandanji people of south west Queensland.

Dub began his visual arts career as an animator and has worked as a muralist and art teacher. He has collaborated with internationally recognised illustrators such as Colin Thompson, Shaun Tan and Banksy. Dub has illustrated several children's books including Magabala Books' *Deadly Reads for Deadly Readers* series (2012).

In 2015, Dub was one of six Indigenous creators selected to showcase their work at the National Book Festival in Washington DC as part of First Nations Australia Writers' Network's (FNAWN) first delegation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers to the United States.



CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Before reading *Once there was a boy*, view the book trailer on YouTube. Make predictions about the text based on the trailer. After reading the book, reflect on the trailer. Discuss the choices made in the structure of the trailer. What important elements of the story have been included? Which have deliberately been left out? Why? <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYO-ZaWCMwl>
- Examine the contrast between the colours used in the endpapers and those used on the title page and last page of the book. What do these colours represent?
- What clues does the title page give about the story?
- The artwork used throughout *Once there was a boy* is beautiful. Take the time to carefully examine the illustrations, in particular the textless pages. What is being told on these pages? Why has the author chosen these junctures of the story to be told through illustrations alone? Compose appropriate sentences for these pages that would suit the style and mood of the narrative.
- What messages do you think the author is conveying through this book?
- Which is your favourite illustration in *Once there was a boy*. Why? Share this with a small group.
- Have you ever felt like the boy or the girl in *Once there was a boy*? Write a reflection explaining how you felt and why.
- Share with a friend a time when you have been tempted to do something you were told not to do. How did you feel when you were discovered? How can you relate to the way the girl feels?
- When the boy discovers his broken heart, why does he throw the pieces into the sea? What is he thinking about as he sits watching the ocean?
- What do you think the boy is looking for as he watches from the crow's nest of the ancient boat?
- What observations can you make about the relationship between the boy and nature? Use examples from the text to help explain your answer.
- From a distance, the boy sees someone coming onto his island. Imagine you are the boy. Write about this moment. What are you thinking? Do you have any reservations? What are you hoping might eventuate from this encounter?
- Discuss the use of colour in *Once there was a boy*, for instance the use of soft, muted tones to represent the sunrise and the pink sand as the girl approaches.
- The boy decides to collect his favourite fruit to share with the girl. What does this tell us about the boy's character?
- The girl eats all the sapotes that the boy drops. What does this tell us about the girl? How might the boy have felt at this time?
- Discuss the following statement in relation to *Once there was a boy*: 'The girl is like Goldilocks'.
- The girl falls asleep in his softest hammock. Does the boy want the girl to stay or not? Discuss.
- If the girl was asked not to look under the boy's bed, why did she disobey?
- Look carefully at the page opening in which the girl's legs and feet are visible from under the boy's bed. The text tells us that 'the girl's imagination started jumping up and down.' Discuss the illustration in relation to the text. Can we see her imagination jumping up and down or do we as readers have to visualise that? Why is this illustration such a powerful one? Discuss.
- Before reading on, brainstorm what objects might be in the box.
- Put objects in a box and use as stimulus for on-demand writing tasks.
- How is the girl looking in the box similar to Eve eating the apple in the Garden of Eden?
- Why is the boy's heart kept in a box? Why isn't it with him? What is the author really saying about the boy's situation? Discuss analogies and how Dub Leffler has used analogies in this book.
- Does the author want us to dislike the girl or feel sorry for her? Discuss how point of view is portrayed.
- Why did the girl vanish as soon as she broke the boy's heart?
- Examine Dub Leffler's use of body language in his illustrations to represent emotions and plot development.
- The textless page opening in which the girl sits silently in the mangroves is very powerful. Now she too is alone. What do you think is going through her mind as she sits so quietly by herself?



- If the girl had stayed rather than vanished, do you think the boy still would have thrown his heart into the ocean? Discuss.
- How has the girl broken the boy's heart?
- When the boy throws his heart away, the waves are choppy and fierce. How does this reflect his mood and emotions at this part of the story?
- Discuss the powerful white page with the simple text, 'she reached out and gently placed something into the boy's lap'? What do you think she will place there? Why has Dub Leffler chosen to have a 'pictureless' page towards the end of the book?
- Why has the girl given the boy her heart? What is she really saying?
- What lessons can you learn from the boy? What qualities does he have that are admirable?
- Write your own story entitled *Once there was a girl*, telling the story from the girl's point of view.
- The language used to tell this story is simple, yet powerful. Discuss the language features of *Once there was a boy*, including the sparse and particular choice of vocabulary.
- For older students, create your own book trailer for *Once there was a boy*.
- Compare *Once there was a boy* with John Heffernan's *The Island*. How are these stories similar and different?
- Write a review or blog about *Once there was a boy*.
- Retell the events of *Once there was a boy* either in your own words, through a story map or an illustration.
- In small groups, dramatise *Once there was a boy*.
- Share your personal response to *Once there was a boy*. How did the story make you feel? Would you recommend it to others? Why?
- Use *Once there was a boy* to help teach language features, punctuation, sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary as outlined in the Language strand of the Australian Curriculum: English.
<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Curriculum/F-10?layout=2>



APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

<p>Cross Curriculum Priorities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Sustainability</p>			
<p>General Capabilities Literacy, Intercultural Understanding, Personal and Social Capability, Critical and Creative Thinking</p>			
<p>English - Year Level Description The range of literary texts for Foundation to Year 10 comprises Australian literature, including the oral narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the contemporary literature of these two cultural groups Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read and view spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is to entertain, as well as some texts designed to inform. These include traditional oral texts, picture books, various types of stories, rhyming verse, poetry, non-fiction, film, multimodal texts and dramatic performances. They participate in shared reading, viewing and storytelling using a range of literary texts, and recognise the entertaining nature of literature.</p>			
Year Level	English - Language	English - Literature	English - Literacy
F	<p>Understand that punctuation is a feature of written text different from letters; recognise how capital letters are used for names, and that capital letters and full stops signal the beginning and end of sentences (ACELA1432)</p> <p>Recognise that texts are made up of words and groups of words that make meaning (ACELA1434)</p> <p>Explore the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories and informative texts (ACELA1786)</p>	<p>Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences (ACELA 1575)</p> <p>Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a text (ACELA 1578)</p> <p>Recognise some different types of literary texts and identify some characteristic features of literary texts, for example beginnings and endings of traditional texts and rhyme in poetry (ACELT1785)</p> <p>Respond to texts, identifying favourite stories, authors and illustrators (ACELT1577)</p> <p>Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts (ACELT1783)</p> <p>Retell familiar literary texts through performance, use of illustrations and images (ACELT1580)</p>	<p>Listen to and respond orally to texts and to the communication of others in informal and structured classroom situations (ACELY1646)</p> <p>Use interaction skills including listening while others speak, using appropriate voice levels, articulation and body language, gestures and eye contact (ACELY1784)</p> <p>Use comprehension strategies to understand and discuss texts listened to, viewed or read independently (ACELY1650)</p>



<p>1</p>	<p>Recognise that different types of punctuation, including full stops, question marks and exclamation marks, signal sentences that make statements, ask questions, express emotion or give commands (ACELA1449)</p> <p>Identify the parts of a simple sentence that represent 'What's happening?', 'What state is being described?', 'Who or what is involved?' and the surrounding circumstances (ACELA1451)</p> <p>Explore differences in words that represent people, places and things (nouns, including pronouns), happenings and states (verbs), qualities (adjectives) and details such as when, where and how (adverbs) (ACELA1452)</p> <p>Know that regular one-syllable words are made up of letters and common letter clusters that correspond to the sounds heard, and how to use visual memory to write high-frequency words (ACELA1778)</p>	<p>Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students' own experiences (ACELT1582)</p> <p>Discuss features of plot, character and setting in different types of literature and explore some features of characters in different texts (ACELT1584)</p> <p>Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication (ACELT1586)</p>	<p>Respond to texts drawn from a range of cultures and experiences (ACELY1655)</p> <p>Engage in conversations and discussions, using active listening behaviours, showing interest, and contributing ideas, information and questions (ACELY1656)</p> <p>Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning about key events, ideas and information in texts that they listen to, view and read by drawing on growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features (ACELY1660)</p> <p>Create short imaginative and informative texts that show emerging use of appropriate text structure, sentence-level grammar, word choice, spelling, punctuation and appropriate multimodal elements, for example illustrations and diagrams (ACELY1661)</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Identify visual representations of characters' actions, reactions, speech and thought processes in narratives, and consider how these images add to or contradict or multiply the meaning of accompanying words (ACELA1469)</p> <p>Identify language that can be used for appreciating texts and the qualities of people and things (ACELA1462)</p> <p>Understand that simple connections can be made between ideas by using a compound sentence with two or more clauses usually linked by a coordinating conjunction (ACELA1467)</p> <p>Understand that nouns represent people, places, concrete objects and abstract concepts; that there are three types of nouns: common, proper and pronouns; and that noun groups/phrases can be expanded using articles and adjectives (ACELA1468)</p> <p>Identify visual representations of characters' actions, reactions, speech and thought processes in narratives, and consider how these images add to or contradict or multiply the meaning of accompanying words (ACELA1469)</p>	<p>Compare opinions about characters, events and settings in and between texts (ACELT1589)</p> <p>Create events and characters using different media that develop key events and characters from literary texts (ACELT1593)</p>	<p>Construct texts featuring print, visual and audio elements using software, including word processing programs (ACELY1674)</p> <p>Create short imaginative, informative and persuasive texts using growing knowledge of text structures and language features for familiar and some less familiar audiences, selecting print and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose (ACELY1671)</p>



<p>3</p>	<p>Examine how evaluative language can be varied to be more or less forceful (ACELA1477)</p> <p>Understand that a clause is a unit of grammar usually containing a subject and a verb and that these need to be in agreement (ACELA1481)</p> <p>Understand that verbs represent different processes, for example doing, thinking, saying, and relating and that these processes are anchored in time through tense (ACELA1482)</p> <p>Identify the effect on audiences of techniques, for example shot size, vertical camera angle and layout in picture books, advertisements and film segments (ACELA1483)</p> <p>Learn extended and technical vocabulary and ways of expressing opinion including modal verbs and adverbs (ACELA1484)</p>	<p>Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on the authors' reasons (ACELT1594)</p> <p>Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (ACELT1596)</p> <p>Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts, and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative (ACELT1599)</p>	<p>Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning and begin to evaluate texts by drawing on a growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features (ACELY1680)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features and selecting print, and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose (ACELY1682)</p> <p>Use software including word processing programs with growing speed and efficiency to construct and edit texts featuring visual, print and audio elements (ACELY1685)</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Recognise how quotation marks are used in texts to signal dialogue, titles and quoted (direct) speech (ACELA1492)</p> <p>Understand differences between the language of opinion and feeling and the language of factual reporting or recording (ACELA1489)</p> <p>Recognise how quotation marks are used in texts to signal dialogue, titles and quoted (direct) speech (ACELA1492)</p> <p>Understand that the meaning of sentences can be enriched through the use of noun groups/phrases and verb groups/phrases and prepositional phrases (ACELA1493)</p> <p>Explore the effect of choices when framing an image, placement of elements in the image, and salience on composition of still and moving images in a range of types of texts (ACELA1496)</p>	<p>Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)</p> <p>Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension (ACELT1605)</p>	<p>Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts (ACELY1692)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features (ACELY1694)</p> <p>Use a range of software including word processing programs to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements (ACELY1697)</p>



<p>5</p>	<p>Understand how to move beyond making bare assertions and take account of differing perspectives and points of view (ACELA1502)</p> <p>Understand the use of vocabulary to express greater precision of meaning, and know that words can have different meanings in different contexts (ACELA1512)</p>	<p>Present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage, and reflecting on the viewpoints of others (ACELT1609)</p> <p>Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses (ACELT1610)</p> <p>Create literary texts using realistic and fantasy settings and characters that draw on the worlds represented in texts students have experienced (ACELT1612)</p> <p>Create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors (ACELT1798)</p>	<p>Identify and explain characteristic text structures and language features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text (ACELY1701)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures, language features, images and sound appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1704)</p> <p>Use a range of software including word processing programs with fluency to construct, edit and publish written text, and select, edit and place visual, print and audio elements (ACELY1707)</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects (ACELA1518)</p> <p>Understand the uses of commas to separate clauses (ACELA1521)</p> <p>Understand how ideas can be expanded and sharpened through careful choice of verbs, elaborated tenses and a range of adverb groups/phrases (ACELA1523)</p>	<p>Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)</p>	<p>Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)</p> <p>Use comprehension strategies to interpret and analyse information and ideas, comparing content from a variety of textual sources including media and digital texts (ACELY1713)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience (ACELY1714)</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Understand the use of punctuation to support meaning in complex sentences with prepositional phrases and embedded clauses (ACELA1532)</p>	<p>Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621)</p> <p>Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches (ACELT1622)</p>	<p>Use comprehension strategies to interpret, analyse and synthesise ideas and information, critiquing ideas and issues from a variety of textual sources (ACELY1723)</p> <p>Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language, visual, and audio features to convey information and ideas (ACELY1725)</p> <p>Use a range of software, including word processing programs, to confidently create, edit and publish written and multimodal texts (ACELY1728)</p> <p>Use prior knowledge and text processing strategies to interpret a range of types of texts (ACELY1722)</p>

