

Teacher Notes

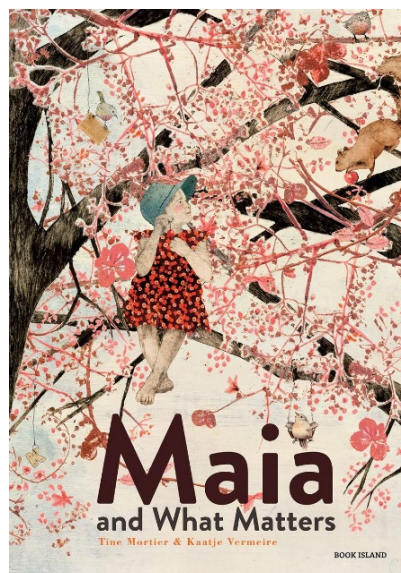
Maia And What Matters

Written by Tine Mortier and illustrated by Kaatje Vermeire

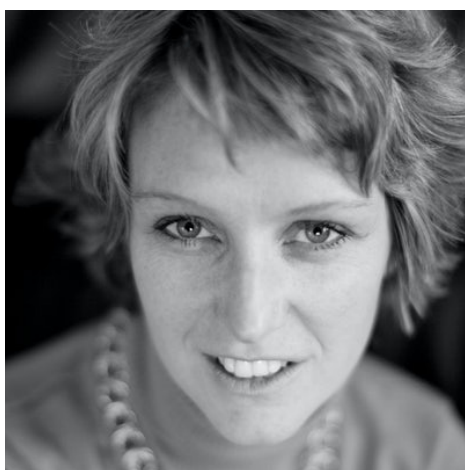
Translated by David Colmer

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Tine Mortier is a Belgian children's author. She currently lives in the Costa Rican jungle with her family. She has previously worked as a translator and copywriter, as well as teacher of creative writing and drama. Her first work, *Zoeperman*, a picturebook about a child who wants to save the world, was published in 2005.



Kaatje Vermeire is a Flemish illustrator, who studied Graphic Design, Advertising and Graphic Arts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, Belgium. Her artwork is based around a combination of collage, painting and drawing. *The Woman and The Boy*, published in 2007, is her first book. Her books have been translated into several languages.



Synopsis

Maia And What Matters tells the story of the relationship between a young girl, Maia, and her Grandma. They are very similar characters in many ways; they are both fun-loving, greedy for sugary treats and always on the lookout for adventure. When Grandma has what appears to be a stroke, everyone apart from Maia struggles to understand her. Unsure how to respond, Maia tries to bring Grandma back to life with lots of drawings and gifts of flowers. It's also how she copes with her own feelings and demonstrates her love for Grandma. When Grandpa, a secondary character about whom we know very little, dies sitting in his chair, Maia helps Grandma escape from the hospital so that she can go and see him one final time. After saying goodbye, Grandma turns to Maia and finally manages to ask for cake. At this point, the reader has the opportunity to reflect on how much the relationship between the two characters has changed.

Notes by Jon Biddle, primary teacher and English lead, Empathy Lab advisor, and coordinator of the national Patron of Reading scheme. Twitter: @jonnybid

Themes covered

- old age
- illness and death
- inter-generational relationships
- friendship
- empathy

Links to other children's literature

All of the books listed below could work as companion pieces alongside *Maia And What Matters*. They handle difficult issues with sensitivity, and provide numerous opportunities for discussion and sharing.

Picturebooks

King of the Sky by Nicola Davies

The Old Woman Who Named Things by Cynthia Rylant

If All The World Were... by Joseph Coelho

Badger's Parting Gifts by Susan Varley

Mum's Jumper by Jade Perkin

The Scar by Charlotte Moundlic

Grandad's Island by Benji Davies

Grandma by Jessica Shepherd

Duck, Death and the Tulip by Wolf Erlbruch

Shorter stories

Special Delivery by Jonathan Meres

Armistice Runner by Tom Palmer

Longer stories

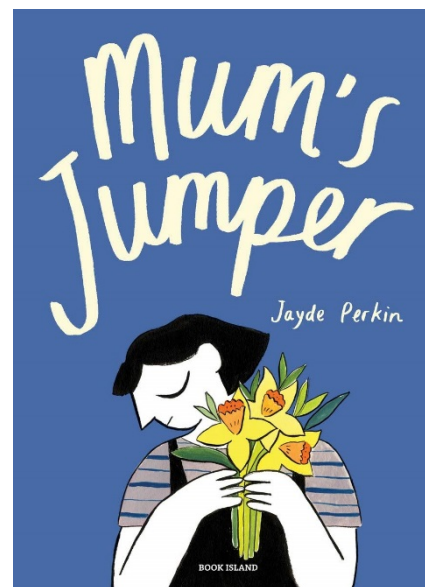
The Road to Ever After by Moira Young

Artichoke Hearts by Sita Brahmachari

The Memory Cage by Ruth Eastham

Sputnik's Guide to Life On Earth by Frank Cottrell Boyce

Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson



Things for the children to look out for during reading

- Cherries - Maia was born under the cherry tree (the opening line), Maia and the animals seen holding cherries in various objects including bowls and hats, also on the washing line and on a plate- ask them to think about the overall colour scheme of the book, including Maia's dress- what does it all link back to?
- The squirrel - can be found in the background on most pages - does it have hidden importance in the story?

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Front cover

What do you notice when you look at the front cover? Does it give you any emotions, or remind you of anything else?

What clues are there about Maia's personality?

What are the different animals doing? How do you think Maia feels about wildlife?

How realistic do you think the illustration is?

Activity: Draw yourself surrounded by some of your favourite animals. Where would you like to be? Which animals would you like to be surrounded by?

Title page

Who might be sitting next to Maia on the branch? How do you know?

Pages 4-5

Why are we looking down on Maia from above? What else might look down on her like this?

How does the first line of the story link to the front cover?

Why are some of the phrases written in bold type?

Pages 6-7

Have you ever been told what your first word was?

Why might Maia and Grandma be holding their hats?

What does Maia have in her other hand?

Activity: Talk to somebody at home about what they can remember about you as a baby. Do they have any funny stories to share about things you said or did? Do you have any stories about younger brothers or sisters?





Pages 8-9

What do we learn about the relationship between Maia and Grandma from the artwork and text? Why do you think they enjoy each other's company so much?

Why is it important to have friends? Can someone in your family also be a friend?

Activity: Think about all your friends at school. What characteristics does a good friend have? Draw and write about your ideal friend, thinking about why they're special.

Pages 10-11

Does this page give you the same feeling as the other pages? In what way is the atmosphere different? Can you spot any links to other pages?

Why what does the word 'stumbled' mean? Why do you think Grandma stumbled?

Who is Maia sitting next to? What are they talking about?

How might Maia be feeling at hearing the news about Grandma?

Pages 12-13

Does Grandma look the same?

What is Maia showing her Grandma? Why?

Who do you think the portraits in the background are of? What is trailing from underneath?

'Grandma was sitting up straight on a white bed on wheels with a kind of fence around it'.

Where do you think she is?

Pages 14-15

Why isn't there any red on this page?

Is Maia coping with her Grandma being unwell? How do you know?

When Maia is angry, she stamps her foot on the floor and kicks the bed. How do you behave when you are angry or upset?

What could you do if a member of your family is ill? How can you show them that you care?

Pages 16-17

What is Grandma surrounded by?

Why is Maia drawing her Grandma so many pictures? Why do you think she chooses to draw a ship and a bird? What could they represent?

Why doesn't Maia care what the nurses think?

Does Maia understand Grandma? How do you know?

Activity: Grandma is finding it very hard to communicate. Can you empathise with her and write about what she might be thinking? Will she be frustrated, angry or sad? What other feelings might she be having? Choose ways to demonstrate these feelings; you could write a poem, create a piece of art or act them out.

Pages 18-19

What has Maia put on the washing line? If you were putting some special objects on a washing line for a member of your family, what would you choose?

Why do you imagine Grandpa just pretended to understand what Grandma was saying? How do you think he feels about not being able to understand her?

Why can nobody apart from Maia understand Grandma properly?

Activity: Create a washing line of objects that are important to the class. What might it include?

Pages 20-21

What is Maia's first reaction when she learns Grandpa has died? Why do you think she reacts in this way?

Does the broken teacup on the carpet really matter? What could it represent?

How has the illustrator used colour and shadow to help us understand what has happened?



Pages 22-23

Who do you think Mum could be phoning and writing to?

How is Maia trying to comfort her Grandma?

What is the squirrel holding on to?

Pages 24-25

Why is Maia angry?

What is the fence that Grandma climbs over?

Is it always wrong to break the rules?

Activity: Think about the conversation between Maia and the nurses. What will they say to each other? Write it out and read it aloud with a partner.



Pages 26-27

How can you describe the expression on Grandma's face? What is she thinking about?

What might Maia want to say?

Why does Grandma smile at Maia?

Have you ever had to say goodbye to someone or something important? How did it make you feel?

Activity: Write what might happen when Maia and Grandma go for cake. Who will do most of the talking?

Activity: Write a goodbye letter from Maia to her Grandpa, telling him about all the things she will miss about him. Also, try to explain about how Grandma is feeling and why she wanted the chance to say goodbye to him properly.