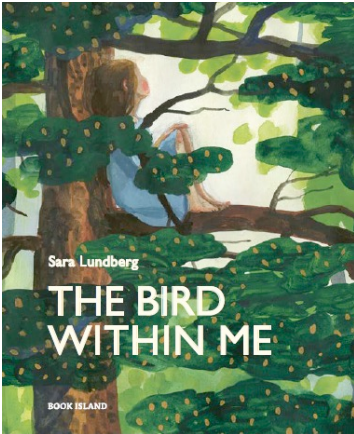


## The Bird Within Me

*Written and illustrated by Sara Lundberg*  
*Translated from the Swedish by B.J. Epstein*  
*Published by Book Island, 2020*



What do you do when it feels impossible to live the life that is expected of you? What do you do when you long for something that you can hardly name?

Berta is a twelve-year-old girl growing up on a farm in a small village in northern Sweden in the early twentieth century. She loves drawing and painting more than anything else, and secretly dreams of being an artist. But her mother is sick and Berta is needed on the farm. She knows that she needs art, that she has to express herself. But how can she make her dreams a reality?

Based on the paintings, letters and diaries of the Swedish artist Berta Hansson (1910–1994), *The Bird Within Me* is an exquisitely told story of family and obligation and following your dreams, which will appeal to all ages.

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These teaching notes provide detailed suggestions for exploration of Sara Lundberg's wonderful book. The suggestions are designed to support thought, talk, exploration, and creative responses. Although they are detailed and extend across the length of the book, teachers are encouraged to make selective use of these notes, rather than work through systematically. In her hugely influential book, *Looking at Pictures in Picturebooks* (Thimble, 1993), Jane Doonan describes the active engagement required to make 'deeper meaning' from pictures, or series of pictures. Doonan offers the following:

*...pictures present something of a puzzle, and our attitude towards  
To them must, above all, be open-minded...  
...There is no guarantee that we will be able to make sense of all  
We are being shown.* (p.11)

Doonan follows these thoughts with a series of questions, based on Maurice Sendak's *Outside Over There*. The questions point to just some of the pathways of exploration that the reader(s) might take. In much the same way, these notes contain a lot of questions. These present one way, or another, of exploring the text. Each set of questions offer potential starting points. As readers explore the events, ideas, and themes of the book in greater depth, teaching should be responsive, following lines of enquiry developed in class, and aiming to develop a deeper understanding of this very rich book.

# Organisation of Notes

section header and brief summary

paired images indicate the start and end of the section under discussion

## 'like a sleeping bird'

*meeting Berta, her sisters and getting a flavour of her daily life*

from here



to here



Detailed discussion outline with notes on the book, discussion prompts, and questions.  
*Questions are presented in italics.*

Bullet lists offer:

- a range of teaching choices
- points for exploration or discussion

### Going further

Blue lozenges offer suggestions for extending the discussion by further developing ideas, exploring alternatives, complexity of images/text, and more.

### Additional exploration

Pink lozenges offer brief suggestions of further opportunities for discussion based elsewhere in the same section of the book.

### Suggested writing opportunities

Green lozenges offer suggestions for writing activities based on discussion and other exploratory techniques.

## 'like a sleeping bird'

meeting Berta, her family, and getting a flavour of her daily life

from here



to here



- Take time to consider the first three spreads individually, starting with the spread pictured top left. Allow time to look carefully at each separate spread in its own right. Use the guidance notes above to support the noting of individual elements, and the complete picture. Discuss the thoughts and feelings that they evoke; readers might:
  - Comment on what is right there on the page – e.g. how Berta is positioned in the trees; the pattern of the trees around her and what they convey in terms of space, sense of freedom, relationship to the rest of her world;
  - Speculate in relation to the world presented in the book, its locations and the characters within it, or make speculations/predictions relating to the remainder of the narrative/ book and what might be expected in terms of character behaviours; events; themes; outcomes.
  - Ask questions that arise from what is depicted in text and image. Seemingly basic questions should be helpful: *What is she doing in the tree? Why is she talking about birds?* Other questions open up rich possibilities for further discussion: *What differences are there between how she is presented in the trees in the first and second spread?* List some observable differences and encourage the readers in exploring why these choices of presentation may have been made.
- Bring together this work by considering these first three spreads as though they were a film. Explore the movement from the first picture to the second. There is a distinct shift in position and perspective. *What does this do to the tone of each? How does it feel when we really think about the move from one to the other?*

## Going further

Seek contradictions across the pictures. *In which of the two pictures does Berta seem to be most comfortable? Or most free?* Readers will most likely identify the more open space and potential to move and explore in the first picture.

In contrast, the second picture presents Berta as almost caged in by the branches. They cut across the image of her body, presenting her in sections. They also serve as a barrier between us (and perhaps the Dad referred to in the text) and Berta.

Allow space for readers to offer their responses. *Do they feel removed from Berta? Or connected? Or a mix of the two?*

If necessary, challenge initial thoughts. Ask readers to consider alternative views of the pictures. *What might suggest danger or risk in the first picture? How might the second picture offer security or protection? Protection from what? Encourage responses that go beyond the more literal/obvious answer "Dad". Is Berta drawn to something in the trees? Or is Berta escaping something? Might it be both?*

Now might be a good time to return to the cover. Some contemplation of this perhaps more straightforward image should help to support an understanding of themes of escape, freedom, dreaming – as well as Berta's strong connection with the natural landscape of her childhood home, as covered in the Afterword towards the end of the book.

## Additional exploration

- You may wish to extend discussions already outlined above by moving on to consider the shift in perspective from looking at Berta in the tree(s) to seemingly looking at Berta's family from Berta's point of view:
  - Consider the separation that occurs – Berta's hand cradling her clay bird on the left of the gutter, and her family on the right. *Where is your eye drawn? How is space used? What might this suggest?*
  - Consider the colouring used across the page. *Which colours are stronger? Which colours are softer? Where does this occur and what might it suggest about the various family members?*
  - Consider the size and placement of each family member. Consider their various expressions, their posture, and what they seem to be doing. *How might this add to our impressions of Berta, her family, and her role within it?*

The final two spreads of this first section of exploration mark a critical transition towards more explicitly addressing the role of art in Berta's childhood and across the rest of her life. The richness of these two spreads, and the themes that they are concerned with extend across the book.

- The following list of possible talk prompts is based on the spread that shows an art lesson at school.
  - *Tell me your thoughts on the schoolmaster's approach to teaching the children to draw.*
  - *Why do you think the schoolmaster is cross in response to Berta's observation, and her request?*
  - *How do you think the other children view Berta? Might they have different thoughts? What does the illustration suggest to you?*
- The final spread of this section is echoed across the book. It is part of a series of double page illustrations that show us a pair of hands that we assume are Berta's. Each of these illustrations, and the text that accompanies them are concerned with art or the act of creation in some way. On this spread the text reads:

"What do things  
look like?  
Really?  
I often think  
about that."



*Boy in a Peaked Cap, Berta Hansson, 1940s*

Here you may wish to explore the following prompts: *What do you think Berta means when she says "What do things look like? Really?" Tell me what thoughts you have based on the lesson at school and Berta's own relationship with art.*

## Suggested writing opportunities

- Begin a personal reading journal that will allow readers to capture responses to the book, and any of the discussions around it. Entries might include quite straightforward accounts of responses to the text, or summaries of points from discussion. Readers may wish to write more personal, less structured responses, or may write creatively based on inspiration from the book.
- Write personal recounts from the point of view of Berta. Use the exploration of the cover image and the first three spreads to explore the various emotions and thoughts felt by Berta in her moments of escape, and when the day-to-day life of the farm intrudes. Encourage children to think beyond a simple contrast of good and bad. What does Berta love about her home and family? The afterword may be helpful here.
- Revisit the lines: “Well if I were a bird,  
I could fly off.  
Away from our village.  
To something else.”

Develop imaginative ideas to create a poem that explores the various forms that this idea of ‘something else’ could take. Support composition through questioning, for example: *Where would you go? What would it look like? What would you do?* Ideas can be imaginary, based on real-life experience, or on research of places of personal interest.

- Revisit the two spreads that introduce the reader to Berta’s family. Explore different family members’ feelings about life on the farm. Consider how they view Berta’s behaviour. Encourage empathetic responses that go beyond more obvious ideas, such as Dad being strict in running the farm. Ideas could be developed through role play or improvisation with readers taking on different roles in groups. Allow time for ideas to be developed to support rounded characterisation.
- Revisit the spread that focuses on Berta in the pasture. You may wish to share Robert Frost’s poem *The Pasture*. Explore in writing what it is about being in the pasture with the cows that inspired Berta to sketch, and Frost to write. *Is it simply being in the open space away from home? Or something more?*
- Write two contrasting diary entries recounting the art lesson. Readers might explore a range of perspectives for example, writing as: Berta; a kindly classmate; a not-so-kindly classmate; the schoolmaster (consider whether the schoolmaster might be better humoured in the privacy of his own diary or whether he really was exasperated with Berta).
- Begin to gather thoughts under the heading: What is art and why does it matter?

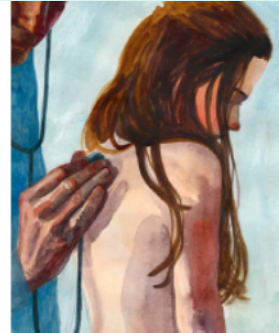
## 'kind brown eyes'

introduction to Berta's mother, their relationship, and her mother's illness

from here



to here



- Consider the shift of focus in the first illustration of this section. Much like the beginning of the book, we return to looking at a simpler image of a single figure. Mum occupies the centre of the picture and the framing almost seems to point to her (even to the point that lines of shadow seem to radiate from the very centre of the page, starting at Mum's neck, and moving out across the pillow). *What does this add to our first impression of Mum?*
- Discuss how the words and picture work together to characterise Mum, and Berta's relationship with her. Consider what the line 'Mum is in bed as usual when I get in' might say about the nature of life at home. This is our first introduction to the inside of Berta's home. *How does it contrast with the representation of life outside amongst nature, and on the farmstead?*
- Consider the importance of hands in the illustrations that we have encountered so far: Berta reaching out in the initial wordless image of being high in the trees; Berta cradling her clay bird as we look down on the family; the various objects the girls are holding as they go about their chores; the focus on Berta's hands as she sketches people and carrots. Discuss how Mum handles Berta's clay bird. Make links to the text:

"She looks at it. For a long time. She carefully strokes  
The small cracks in the dry clay and says:  
"Oh! It is lovely..."

*In what ways are the sense of touch important to Berta and to Mum? In what ways are they the same and in what ways are they different?* Encourage readers to draw upon what the earlier section of the book, and from the text. Older readers might explore the references to touch, and to infection, and to the pain that Berta feels in not being able to hold her mother. These conversations require forethought as to suitability, and sensitive handling throughout. *In what ways does Berta's art offer a means of connection? What different connections can you think of, for example a simple connection between mother and child; connections with the outside world?*

Readers may want to note the ways in which hands have been represented so far in the book, and may wish to make a note to keep an eye out for this key motif across the rest of the book.

## Going further

Follow up the discussions relating to the importance of touch and the recurring image of hands. Remind the readers of the five senses. You may wish to link explicitly to work on Living Things in science. These web pages lend themselves to an interesting consideration of quite why touch matters so much to humans:

<https://www.livescience.com/60752-human-senses.html>

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/hands\\_on\\_research](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/hands_on_research)

Further links within these pages provide more information relating to the sensations and processes associated with touch. Links can later be made to Berta's references to 'tingling', 'bursting' and 'bubbling'. An interesting line of enquiry might spring from the question: why do we sometimes feel things on the inside even when we are not touching anything that might cause these feelings? (This may need to be carefully worded according to the audience). Explore the Latin roots of the word sense: sentire – feel; sensus – faculty of feeling, thought, and meaning.

Explain these terms so that readers are able to consider the multiple meanings at play in both Berta's circumstances and her love of nature and art. Consider the many ways in which we might use the word 'feel' and 'feeling'. In what ways is feeling/are feelings important in Berta's story?

Build a word family, beginning with simple suffixes (sensed, sensing, senses) and moving on to less common suffixes (sensation, sensational, sensory). Take this opportunity to revise the rules for adding these suffixes. Provide age-appropriate exemplification and practice using in sentences either orally or in writing. Ensure that repeated, meaningful encounters occur soon after this initial discussion in order to support retention of these terms.

Extend these explorations by asking readers to consider whether we all sense things in the same way. Berta seems to see things differently to those around her. In what ways? Does everyone sense things differently?

## Additional exploration

- In the next spread we see Berta and Mum in the same room albeit separated in a sense by the book's gutter. *In what other ways are Berta and Mum separated? In what ways are they connected?* Note Berta's drawings on the wall. These are returned to in the final section of these notes. For now, allow time to consider the various subjects and styles of Berta's art work. *What does this tell us about Berta? Think about her interests, and how she may be exploring her own sense of the world about her. Does it matter that she seems to have so many different ways of representing the world? What do these images add to our understanding of Berta and her journey so far?*



## Additional exploration

- Read aloud the text from the bedroom spread. Linger on the closing idea:  
“I imagine that...  
...everything I do  
with my hands -  
keeps her alive.”

*What might Berta mean by this? How could her creations ‘keep her alive’?*

- Provide an explanation of the reference to ‘tuberculosis’.
- Explore the spread devoted to Uncle Johan. Consider the interplay of words and image. *How is ‘the room that smelled safe and comfortable’ represented in the illustration? How has Sara Lundberg given this moment a magical air? How has she made it look like a precious memory?* Discuss the closing statements: ‘To everyone else, Uncle Johan was a regular farmer, but to me he was a magician.’ *What does Berta mean by this? In what ways was Uncle Johan a magician? Might farmers be magicians in their own way?*

You may want to turn to the fourth page of the Afterword and read the brief passages describing Uncle Johan and the rest of ‘artistic side of the family’. Note the references to creativity (and the role of hands and fingers) and the feelings associated with artistic endeavours.

- Discuss the final spread of this section. Note the similarities between how Uncle Johan and the doctor is characterised. *In what ways is the doctor like Uncle Johan? How important is it to meet people that share your interests or care about the same things that you do?* Encourage children to look beyond the stated similarities relating to art. Consider the presentation of the doctor’s hand. *Is medicine an art or a science? What makes you think/say that? How might doctors be compared with magicians?*

## Suggested writing opportunities

- Write an interior monologue from Mum’s point of view. Describe how she feels on being handed Berta’s blue clay bird. *How does it feel in her hands? What does she notice about the way it feels? What does it remind her of? What thoughts does it conjure up?*
- Invent a dialogue between Mum and Berta. Choose the speech carefully. Draft then craft your chosen words. Less is more. Berta is sketching and Mum is looking at the paintings. *What might they say? What might they think but not need to say? How will you fill the moments of quiet as they both simply enjoy their time together? How will you keep your reader interested?*

### Suggested writing opportunities

- Use the details from the Afterword together with the spread that focuses on the visit to Uncle Johan. Map out the emotional journey from being upset about leaving home, and leaving Mum in particular. Consider how you might feel on the journey to Uncle Johan's house. Consider how Uncle Johan 'looked...with concern' and then your feelings on entering the room that 'smelled safe and comfortable'. Write a personal recount or diary entry demonstrating an understanding of the emotional journey across these changes in setting. *How will you provide your final section of writing with the same warm glow that Sara Lundberg gives to the scene of Uncle Johan painting?* (Note once again the connection through touch as young Berta places her hand on Uncle Johan's knee).
- Invent a character who is both an artist and a musician. *How will their art and magic work together?* You could develop these ideas into a character description, a section of a story, a whole story or a playscript.

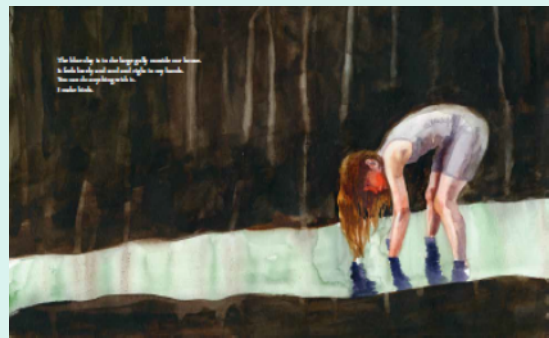
## 'a tingling in my hands'

Berta's introduction to art and the joy she finds in creating

from here



to here



- Consider carefully how much time to devote to the first spread of this section. Make links with the National Curriculum's Programme of Study for art ('ensure that all pupils...know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms') and local arrangements for the study of R.E. Any such links should be meaningful and foster knowledge and understanding of the original artworks, their biblical roots, their significance to notions of humanity and their place in art history.
- Berta describes how Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* relates to the feelings that she senses in her own hands. Many of the themes discussed so far begin to come together here: inner feelings; touch – or in the case of Michelangelo's iconic work – the significant absence of touch; inspiration; creation. Explore the art work in context by taking a virtual tour here: <http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/cappella-sistina/tour-virtuale.html>. Support children in appreciating the scale and wonder of the frescos. Ideally, time should be set aside to explore further and learn more about the history and significance of Michelangelo's work. *What feelings does Michelangelo's work evoke?*

### Going further

- *What connections can you identify between The Creation of Adam and the events, ideas and themes of the book explored so far? What else on this spread links to earlier spreads in the book?*
- Keep a note of your observations here and consider how they might be developed as you move on through the book.

### Additional exploration

- Explore the illustration that shows Olof snatching Berta's picture. Carry out a freeze frame activity in which the readers arrange themselves into a reproduction of the scene. Use this drama technique as a means by which to explore the inner thoughts of the children represented in the picture. *How does each child feel? What clues does the illustration provide to help us to know how they might be feeling?* Linger on Berta's feelings. Use the text alongside the picture to discuss her private doubts about her work, and then her feelings when Olof reveals her pictures. *What emotions does Berta's red face suggest? What might this mean for how she feels about her art work?*
- Discuss the more abstract presentation of Berta as she walks home. *What effect does the words and illustration in combination have on you? How does it make you feel? How does it suggest Berta might have felt?*
- Contrast the closing words and illustration of this section, in which Berta fishes out clay from the gully and makes birds. *How have Berta's feelings changed across the course of this section? What does this tell us about the importance of art and creating to her? Does art have to have an audience to be important?*

### Suggested writing opportunities

- When you grow up what do you want to be? Make a plan. *What will you do to achieve your goal? What might stand in your way? What will you do to overcome that?*
- Write a brief report on something that has had a profound effect on you, something that has made you feel something 'like electricity' running through you. It could be a piece of art, a film, or a piece of music. It could be an event, or a place that means something to you or that is overwhelmingly beautiful or exciting. Describe the thing that made you feel that way and try to put into words what it made you feel.
- Use the freeze frame activity to support you in writing either some of the thoughts or feelings that the various figures in the classroom scene may have had.
- Imagine you are Berta's best friend, and that you both trust one another very much. So much that you can be very honest. Imagine that you are walking home with her. *How will you support her in dealing with the obstacles that she sees in achieving her dream of being an artist?* Imagine the conversation that you might have. Remember that good friends listen. Make some notes on what might be said between the two of you and then write Berta a letter of advice and encouragement. Try to be realistic in how you approach this task.

## 'a bursting and a bubbling in my body'

older sister Julia prepares to leave and Berta considers her future

from here



to here



- Consider the relationship between Julia leaving to study in Karlskoga and how she is presented. Note the differences between the left-hand page and the right-hand page. Consider the use of white space around Julia and how this contrasts with the background for the two younger sisters. *Does this suggest anything about their relationship to the space around them, their home?* Explore how the figures are arranged, their posture and facial expressions.
- Moving onto the next double page spread, take careful note of the text and allow time for the readers to process what is written and how this relates to the image. *What do you think Berta is creating? Why is she working with this particular text? Does it connect in some way to the spread immediately before it? How does it connect to the rest of the book and what Berta has shared about her role in the world?*
- Move on to the spread that begins with an announcement that it has turned cold. *What feelings does this section of text evoke overall?* Think about the cold, and the lack of access to clay, and the closing reference to Mum. *How does the illustration complement the writing?* Consider the composition of the illustration. *What is there? What is missing?*

### Going further

- From the first three spreads of these occasions, consider the various situations depicted:
  - Berta and her sisters: *Who is missing? How might they be behaving? What would they be saying to each other? How would they be saying it?* Consider exploring through role play and group improvisation.
  - Berta carrying out chores: *Who is missing? How might Berta be acting? Is she talking to Nisse? What might she be saying?* Once again, exploration through role play and improvisation may be illuminating.
  - Berta alone with her art work/crafting: *who is missing? How might this influence how she feels? And what she is thinking?*
- In these three spreads we have seen Berta with her sisters, at work, and alone. *What other situations have we seen her in?* Encourage readers to think about her different feelings and emotions in these different scenarios.

## Additional exploration

- The illustration that shows Berta waiting outside of her mother's bedroom extends beyond (bleeds along) all four edges. Allow time for readers to consider how Berta is positioned where she is gazing and the colouring used to represent her. Explore how image and words work together to convey the growing feelings in Berta, her sense of potential. You may wish to relate this to the quote used for this section header: 'a bursting and a bubbling in my body'. Revisit the double page spread in which Berta is cutting into the newspaper. Consider how emphatically she rejects the idea of being a housewife. *How does the text reinforce this? What might be going through Berta's mind as she listens at her mother's bedroom door?*
- Allow time to explore the illustration on the next double page spread (Berta at the dinner table). Read the text and explore the opening sentences: 'His words lie like a sheepskin wrapped around my heart.' *Whose words?* Discuss what Berta means by this. You may wish to spend some time considering how Berta is presented in the spread that shows her outside Mum's bedroom and at the dinner table. Consider what can be seen on the page first, and then discuss how the two spreads present her differently. *What might we learn from what is said? What might we learn from these two illustrations? How might Berta be feeling? How might dad be feeling?*
- The next spread returns to the image of Berta's hand as she interacts with art and texts. Michelangelo's *The Creation of Man* features once again. Remind readers of previous discussions relating to this piece of art and its significance. Allow time to explore Berta's words as she relates Eve's situation to her own. Explore the background images and Berta's use of collage. *How does this relate to the themes discussed so far? What might we learn from Berta's artistic explorations?*
- The next spread with Berta and Dad at church builds on the theme of creation in biblical terms. Consider the words. Look carefully at how the text is broken up using enjambment. Discuss how the use of punctuation and enjambment might provide us with a deeper insight into Berta's feelings, for example:

"I have heard this story so many times  
and I know it inside out."

*How does the summary of the story of Adam and Eve fit into this story of Berta's life? Does it give us clues as to what might happen later?*

*Why does Berta comment that Dad sighs deeply enough to be heard? What might this tell us about Dad?*

- For the final spread of this section, you may wish to keep discussion simple and focus on what drives Berta to secretly visit the doctor's house. Consider the way in which this clandestine visit has been presented. *What might Berta mean when she says, 'If we saw me, I would die.'? What does she mean? Why is she so surprised that 'someone' has painted the paintings that she so admires? What does the light coming from the doctor's window suggest, set against its darker surroundings?*

### Suggested writing opportunities

- Invent a dialogue between the three sisters as Julia prepares to leave. Try to reflect some of Berta's beliefs and personality based on what we have learned so far. Gunna, a year older than Berta has been quiet throughout. Berta described her as 'sometimes careless'. *What sort of character do you think Gunna is? Is she as quiet as the book seems to suggest? What is she thinking? How can we show aspects of her character through what she says?*
- Explore the art of collage. Find an artist that makes use of this form. Write a brief biography for them. Choose a favourite piece of their art. Describe it and explain why you like it so much.
- Write an interior monologue for Berta as she stands just outside her mother's bedroom door. *What is she thinking? What is she feeling? Try to weave in questions that she might be asking. Can you share snatches of what she overhears from Mum and the doctor's conversation?*
- Explore Dad's feelings at the dinner table (hot seating might be helpful here). Write down Dad's thoughts and feelings. Try to show the range of thoughts he might have as he is juggling various roles (husband, father, carer, and farmer).
- Read the story of Adam and Eve. Write a summary, capturing the key events.
- Building on the earlier monologue relating to waiting outside Mum's bedroom, write in role as Berta standing outside of the doctor's house. Think carefully about Berta's thoughts and feelings. Don't forget to include basic details: *Is it cold outside? Does the inside of the doctor's house feel inviting?*

## 'something must have broken'

the death of Berta's mother and what follows shortly after

from here



to here



- Consider the gentle nature of the opening spreads: the light and space of the winter scene ('a day without shadows'); the way in which mum is presented in soft monotone. Read the text and explore how Berta might be feeling at this point in time.
- On the following page, the dress tells as much of the story as the text. *What does it tell us about Mum that she reassures Berta about her dress rather than her own situation?*
- The gentle tone continues into the next spread, despite events in the house. Consider how Berta is presented with the cow. *We cannot see Berta's expression, but what might we draw from how the cow is presented?* Explore the text. Consider the rhythmic properties of the text. *How might we read it aloud? Softly or emphatically?* Explore these contrasts and consider which is more suited to this section of the text.

### Going further

- Take time to explore the spread that shows the edge of Mum's bed and the open door. Allow time for quiet contemplation and thought. Keep discussion open-ended.
- Readers may wish to comment on where this spread sits in the story of Berta's life so far, and the various ways in which this is a pivotal moment for the family.
- The image is a bleed across all four edges. *What does this lead us to think about what is going on in the house? Who is where? What are they doing? Where is Berta? She is commenting on Mum, but is she there with her?*
- Consider the use of light and dark. Does the open door and the light pouring in call to mind any other images? Where does it seem to be leading us as readers?



## Additional exploration

- The next two spreads are light on text but say a great deal about how Berta continues to feel about life on the farm. Explore the text and the accompanying images. Pay particular attention to where Berta is placed in the image, and how this echoes some of the earliest scenes. *Does this change, add to, or reinforce the views we have of Berta's nature? What other echoes are there in either the text or the images?* Consider carefully every word. *Have we heard any of these words or phrases before? If there are connections to be made, what might they tell us about Berta at this difficult time?*
- Explore the shifts in Berta's feelings across the next two spreads. Encourage readers to think about the reference to the sickness that 'lives on'. *Is Berta talking about tuberculosis? Or something else? Or more than one thing?* Think about the choice of colours across these spreads.
- For the first time we see Berta apparently contemplating her own hands, and no obvious signs of creation. Her work and tools sit to the edges of the spread. Explore what this might mean in conjunction with the negative feelings that Berta expresses.
- Explore the images across the next two spreads. Once again consider how these interact with the text. Take time to mull over the conversation with the doctor. Read it aloud and consider how intonation and stress might suggest new beginnings for Berta.

## Suggested writing opportunities

- Write two paragraphs describing the winter scene. In one, write as though you are a participant, playing in the snow, or skating on the ice. Capture what it feels like to be enjoying this 'day without shadows'. In the second paragraph, write as though you are an observer, watching the fun and games. Are you passing and simply stopping to view? In which case, you may wish to try to convey brief impressions. *Are you sitting and taking a lingering look at the scene?* In that case, pick one or two activities to describe in real detail (actions, reactions, comments on how people appear to be feeling) and include some details around how it makes you feel about your own life.
- Write a brief monologue as Mum, imagining Berta on her graduation day. Describe the scene using a range of senses, and try to convey your feelings of pride and happiness.
- Write a note to Mum to tell her what you feel about her. Share some precious memories that you have chosen to celebrate in writing. You may wish to add drawings as Mum loved them so.
- Write a personal recount of your encounter with the animal with 'kind, brown eyes.' How will you capture the stillness of the moment? Did you imagine the animal to be talking to you?

## 'something snaps'

*Berta makes a stand for her future*

*from here*



*to here*



- Berta says that she does not know how much time has passed. *How is this reflected in the first illustration? Do we have any clues to draw upon in terms of how the landscape has changed since the last illustration of the outdoor world? What impressions do you have of the people working in the fields?*
- Explore the next two pages in depth. Take time to read the words and explore the pictures.

### Going further

- Begin by considering Berta's perspective, looking down on the soup. *What feelings does this image suggest? Consider Berta's hands and compare them to the various ways that they have been presented before. She is creating something once again, but does anything seem different this time?*
- Consider the text on the opposite page. Explore the structure of lines 4, 5, 6 and 7. *What effect does the repeated use of 'I ought to...' have on you? What does the line 'But I'm stuck' suggest to you? What do you think might happen? What would you do if you were Berta?*
- Consider the way in which the next four lines set up the next page. Read gently. Read slowly. Turn the page and linger on the image. Allow a good amount of time to contemplate and think. Encourage readers to share their thoughts if they wish to. They may wish to comment fairly simply on the picture itself: its composition; the arrangement of the figures of mum and Berta – Berta on top of the bedspread and Mum beneath it; their expressions; their hands; the colours used; the overall layout. Readers may wish to comment on the place of this image in relation to the rest of the book, and then to the immediate situation of Berta in the kitchen.

## Additional exploration

- Explore what Berta means when she says that something snaps. *How is this different to the time when she said that something was bubbling and bursting inside of her? How is it different to when she said that something must have broken inside of Mum? What might Berta mean? Consider the significance of Berta's dress. Have we seen it before?*
- In the move to the next page, consider the change to how Berta is placed in relation to the text. Consider how she is presented. Ask readers whether they think Bert is really reading her book at the moment. Promote empathy by putting readers straightforwardly into Berta's shoes: *How would you be feeling at this point? Would you be able to concentrate on your book? Would you be tempted to remove the pot from the stove?*
- Take time to consider the perspective offered on the next spread. *Why might Sara Lundberg have chosen to present Berta and her father in this way? Consider what Berta says to Dad. What might Berta mean? How might Dad feel to hear this? Encourage readers to think about what has happened across the past two sections. Should Berta have said this to Dad? Why? Why not?*
- Allow plenty of time to consider the final image of this section. Support readers in exploring how the two characters are framed. *What stands between Dad and Berta? What adds a feeling of heaviness or being trapped in this image? What do readers notice about the stillness of Dad in contrast with the active presentation of Berta? How does Sara Lundberg give Berta the illusion of motion? Where is Berta running to? What will she do there?*

## Suggested writing opportunities

- Create a first-person narrative sequence that begins in the present day of being in the kitchen as Berta. Making careful use of verb choices, write a flashback to an earlier memory of a happy time with Mum. Bring this memory to life as vividly as possible through rich descriptive detail and emotionally honest descriptions of how you felt at the time. You may wish to challenge yourself by writing up a separate paragraph narrating the memory in the present tense from Mum's perspective
- Imagine a situation in which you have made a difficult decision to do something that requires bravery. Describe the situation, explain the dilemma and share your decision. Try to provide details of the possible outcomes and how you might deal with them.
- Retell the scene of Berta reading as the soup burns and the arrival of Dad and the men from the field. Experiment with the dialogue that might take place between Berta and Dad. Try out various combinations that reflect their characters and how these might influence what they say in this moment. Reflect the events in the book by keeping dialogue brief and to the point.

## “wings that are trying to get free”

*Berta prepares to move out and grow into her dreams*

*from here*

*to here*



- Read through the first two spreads of this section allowing time to look at the illustrations in depth, and to consider their relationship with the text.
- Continue to read through the next two spreads. Discuss Dad’s change of heart. *How does Sara Lundberg’s writing convey Dad’s affection for Berta? Why do you think Dad has had this change of heart?*

### Going further

- Linger on the spread that focuses on Berta’s return to the gully. Berta seems to suggest that the bird makes itself. Why might she think that? Explore the image of the bird coming to life and wishing to be free. Allow readers to share and build on one another’s ideas in relation to how this image has developed across the book. Remind readers of the title. *Why is Berta scared that she might be the one stopping the bird from flying? What might that mean?*

### Additional exploration

- Consider the importance of Berta’s family being together at her graduation from school. *In what ways does this school scene differ from those earlier in the book? How is Berta presented in this spread? How do you think she is feeling? How does it make you feel?*
- Read the text that accompanies the image of Berta standing on the doctor’s doorstep. *In what ways does this show that Berta still believes in a sort of healing power in art? What might this suggest to us about Berta’s journey since the death of Mum?* Linger on the last sentence. This is not a complete sentence. It simply tells us where Berta has finally arrived (it may be helpful to remind readers of her last visit to the doctor’s house). Consider the illustration. Once again the focus is on Berta and we cannot see the doctor’s expression. *How might he react to Berta’s visit? What is Berta likely to be feeling at this point?* Note that the depiction of hands seems to be significant; this time less about creating and more about sharing what has been created.

## Additional exploration

- Linger on the wordless spread set in the doctor's house. *Where is Berta looking? How is she feeling? Is she especially interested in a particular piece of art? Why might that be? Tell me about Berta's thoughts and feelings at this moment. What does her posture and the hint of her face tell us? What about the doctor? There are two chairs but he seems to have been at home alone. Might this tell us something about his relationship with art?*
- Follow up any discussions around the last spread by asking readers to reflect on the few wordless spreads across the book. *What were their focus? What role did they play in the overall story of Berta's life? What do they have in common? How do they differ? Are they better off without words, or would you add some words if you could?*
- In the final spread focusing on Berta's hands, consider the abundance of images of her own work and how they radiate out across the page. *What might this suggest? Where does Michelangelo's work sit in relation to these other images? What might that suggest? Read the text and explore the continuing imagery around feelings on the inside and the further reference to birds. Tell me about how Berta is feeling now. What do you think lies ahead for Berta? What might it mean for Berta to 'be who I am'?*
- Allow readers time and space to contemplate the final wordless image. Encourage them to make connections with similar images from across the book. *What does this new perspective suggest? What do they notice in this picture? How well does it bring this story of Berta's early life to a close?*

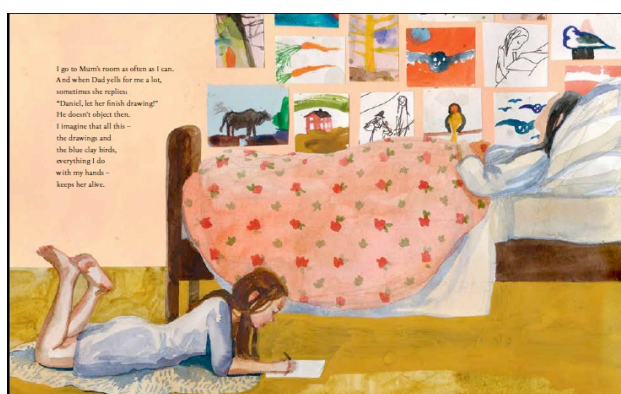
## Suggested writing opportunities

- Use the opening spread of this section (Dad sitting in the distance; the text telling us that 'Dad is so quiet'). Note the various thoughts and questions that you think might be going through Dad's head. Try to think about how Dad has been presented across the book: his views; his work; what he expects of Berta. Try also to think about what it might be like for Dad to be facing life as a parent on his own. Turn these notes into an internal monologue or a diary entry. You might even turn it into a private letter written to Mum as a way of getting his feelings down on paper.
- Write a first-person recount of visiting the gully, scooping out clay and modelling the bird. Use rich sensory description to bring to life the sensations Berta would feel. Use the spread to inform your ideas.
- Write a diary entry setting out your visit to the doctor's house. Be sure to capture the awe and wonder felt on viewing his paintings. You may wish to link this to the visit to Uncle Johan's house.
- Use the final spread to inspire a poem or descriptive piece describing the various locations in the book from the point of view of a bird flying high above it all. Try to capture its sense of freedom and the possibilities presented as it travels onwards, away from the farmstead and surrounding areas.

## Thematic Follow Up: Berta's relationship with art

Having read the book, you may wish to further explore the role and importance of art in Berta's life, in our own lives, and as part of the human experience. Of course this is a big topic. Exploration might begin by revisiting the book:

- Allow time to consider the range of images/artworks displayed across the title spread. You may wish to revisit this first encounter of this collection, and then compare this with the second encounter in Berta's mother's bedroom. Ask children to compare the two. *How are they the same? How are they different? Explore what it might mean to have them represented in these two ways? Does this tell us anything about Berta's relationship with her artworks? Going wider, what does it tell us about the role art plays in our lives?*



Revisit the third encounter with this collection. Encourage further commentary on the nature of Berta's relationship with art. Encourage open-ended discussion using prompts such as "tell me about..." Encourage elaboration and justification with follow-up prompts, such as "tell me more about that...go on...What makes you say that?" Explore points of challenge and agreement across the discussion.



To bring this section of exploration to a close, consider the final interaction with Berta's completed art. Explore picture and text, moving between the two. What do we learn here about Berta's continuing beliefs in the power of art? What other feelings does she have in the act of sharing her work? Explore readers' own experiences of creating, and perhaps sharing their own art. Consider deeper questions to open up wider thematic exploration, for example: *What is art? Does art have to be shared? What does art do for us as humans?*

