



FLIGHT

Written by Nadia Wheatley
Illustrated by Armin Greder
Published by Windy Hollow Books

Teachers' notes

Tonight is the night.

The family has to flee.

*They've been tipped off that the authorities
are after their blood.*

The title and cover image suggest that this picture book will relate a familiar episode of the Nativity story. According to the Gospel of Saint Matthew, after the Wise Men depart from Bethlehem, an angel comes to Joseph in a dream, ordering him "to take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt [...]; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him." (Herod was a cruel king, who ruled the land where Jesus was born.)

The Biblical story ends at that point, but the author of *Flight* has used that as the beginning of her contemporary version of the story.

About the author

Nadia Wheatley grew up in Sydney, where she still lives. In a literary career spanning three decades, she has written numerous award-winning picture books, novels, and works of history for children and adults. These include the classic picture book *My Place*, illustrated by Donna Rawlins, and the historical novel *The House that was Eureka*. *The Papunya School Book of Country and History* was the result of a five-year collaboration with Aboriginal students and staff at Papunya School (Northern Territory). In 2013 Nadia was nominated by IBBY Australia for the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing.

About the illustrator

Armin Greder was born in Switzerland. In 1971 he migrated to Australia where he worked as a graphic designer and later taught design and illustration at a tertiary art institution. Picture books he has illustrated include *The Great Bear*, *An Ordinary Day* and *I Am Thomas*; and he has written and illustrated *The Island* and *The City*. He is the recipient of a number of international recognitions such as the Bologna Ragazzi Award, and he has been nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award. He now lives in Lima, Peru.

BEFORE READING:

What does the title make you think of? Does the word 'flight' have a couple of very different meanings? What are they?

Looking at the picture on the cover, *where* do you think the book might be set? *When* do you think the book might be set (i.e. what historical era)?

Discuss the colours that the illustrator has used. Do you think this is going to be a story to make you laugh, or a story to make you think?

Have you read any other books written by Nadia Wheatley or illustrated by Armin Greder? Find examples in your school library.





ON FIRST READING

Read the words on the first page. Do you think this is going to be a picture book for young children or for older children and young adults? Why?

As you read the first few double-page spreads, what does the book's time frame (historical period) seem to be? Does this change as the story goes on? At what point does the reader become aware of a shift in the story's time-frame? How has the illustrator dramatized this?

Are there any other major shifts or surprises in the story? If so, how are they shown in both words and pictures?

How many nights and days are there in the story, up to the time when the travellers reach their refuge? How is time used in this story?

Describe the landscape through which the characters are travelling. Is it flat or hilly? What other features does the landscape have? Is the weather hot or cold? What sounds do the characters hear?

Draw a map of the journey, showing the various types of country through which the family passes.

Make a timeline of the journey, showing the various events that happen along the journey and how the characters feel at different times.

The young woman and the man don't seem to talk very much. Why not?

What difficulties do the characters have to face during the journey? Why is the loss of the donkey such a problem?

How does the story end? Do you think the characters will soon find a home?

FURTHER READING AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Literature

The blurb on the back cover of *Flight* describes the book as 'A fable for our times'.

What is a fable? What fables are you familiar with? In small groups, find picture book examples of fables (e.g. by Aesop or La Fontaine.) Each group relate a fable to the class. What do these fables have in common? Do they use a simple story to present a complex message?

If a fable is a simple way of presenting a complex message, what do you think is the message of *Flight*? How is the story a message 'for our times'?

What tense has the author used to present the story? Does this make the story seem urgent? Does it increase the sense that this is a story 'for our times'?

What are the differences between the characters of the young woman and the man? Do they have different roles and priorities during the journey? Rewrite the story in the first person from the point of view of either the young woman or the man.

Imagine what the little boy on the last page might be doing ten years after the story ends. (He would be about thirteen years old.) Write a diary from his point of view, describing his life over a few days and nights.

Essentially, *Flight* is a journey-story. What other stories of journeys have you read, both as picture books and as novels? What journey-stories (road movies) have you seen as films? Write a review of one of these books or films.

Art

The Biblical story of the Flight into Egypt ends with the Holy Family setting off by night into exile. This meant that the journey was literally an open book for Renaissance artists, who made the Flight such a familiar part of the Nativity story that the image of the Virgin with the babe in her arms, riding upon a donkey, has become a standard picture used on Christmas cards.

Using the internet, find examples of paintings of the Flight into Egypt by Caravaggio, Carpaccio, Giotto, Gentileschi, Brueghel the Elder and Rembrandt (and any other artists you can find). Also see if you can find Christmas cards that depict this story.

In small groups, present these pictures to the class. What sort of a story are they telling? In what historical era or period do these stories seem to be set? How are they different from the story told in the book *Flight*? Could you imagine the armoured tanks (depicted by Armin Greder) appearing in any of these pictures?

How has the illustrator, Armin Greder, used the landscape to show the difficulty of the journey? How has he used colours to set the mood of the story?

How has the illustrator portrayed the relationship between the story's two adult characters? How has he portrayed their relationship with the baby?

Find examples of things mentioned in the text but not in the pictures, and vice versa.

History

In the original story about the Flight into Egypt, the family are forced to become refugees, in order to escape the wicked king who wants to kill the baby.

In small groups, research the history of refugees who have come to our country at different times. (e.g. to South Australia from Germany in the 1840s and 1850s; to Australia from many countries of Europe in the 1930s and 1950s; to Australia from Vietnam in the 1970s; to Australia from many countries in the 21st century.) What reasons caused the refugees to flee their homelands? What challenges did they face on their journeys? What further difficulties confronted them when they arrived? Were they welcomed by the people already in Australia, or not? Present these histories to the class.

Using the text of *Flight* as a model, write an account of the journey of a fictional refugee family to Australia today. What do they think they will find when they arrive? Are their hopes justified?

Further Reading

Greder, Armin, *The Island* (Allen & Unwin, 2007)

Wheatley, Nadia, *Australians All, A History of Growing Up from the Ice Age to the Apology*, (Allen & Unwin 2013). This will help with the history question about refugees.

