

Study Notes:
**THE SORRY TALE
of FOX & BEAR**

THE SORRY TALE OF
FOX AND BEAR

Story by Margrete Lamond

Art by Heather Vallance





DIRT LANE PRESS is a not-for-profit publisher that produces and promotes quality narrative illustration for all ages. Collaborating with established authors and artists, Dirt Lane Press seeks to publish stories that stimulate unique ways of seeing, new ways of thinking and brave ways of feeling. As a committed advocate of quality illustration for young readers, Dirt Lane Press regularly showcases reproductions of both local and international high-end illustration.



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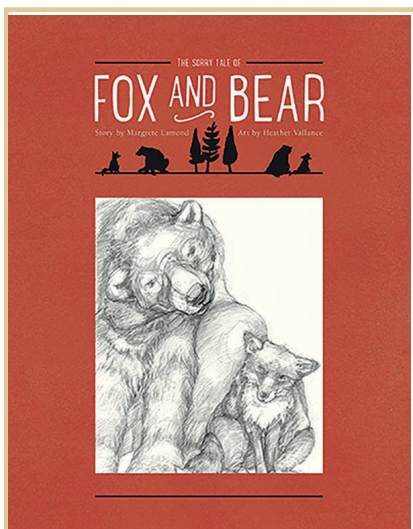


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We first found *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* on Instagram and were captivated by Heather's illustrations. We are absolutely delighted to have been able to bring this future classic to the UK audience and thank **Dirt Lane Press** for their permission to offer their Study Notes for use in UK homes, classrooms and libraries. Please respect the author's copyright - these notes are for home and educational use only and may not be re-published or sold in any way.

We hope you enjoy *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* and would love to have your feedback. You can reach us on Info@oldbarnbooks.com or [@oldbarnbooks](https://twitter.com/oldbarnbooks) on twitter and instagram.

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THE SORRY TALE OF FOX AND BEAR

Text by MARGRETE LAMOND

Illustrations by HEATHER VALLANCE

Published by Old Barn Books

RRP£12.99
SPECIFICATIONS 72-pages; illustrated story-book,
270 x 210 mm
THEMES Friendship, loyalty, cruelty, fairness,
trickster tales, traditional tales, animal stories
CATEGORY Younger reader

UK isbn: 9781910646434

The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear is the story of a cruel falling out between two friends, how the fall-out occurs, and what happens next. It is outrageous, passionate and poignant, and the bittersweet ending is as ambiguous as any friendship in real life. Framed in the present and told in alternating past and present tense, *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* borrows characters and events from several traditional sources and is told with wit and verve by Margrete Lamond, with darkly brooding charcoal illustrations by acclaimed artist Heather Vallance.



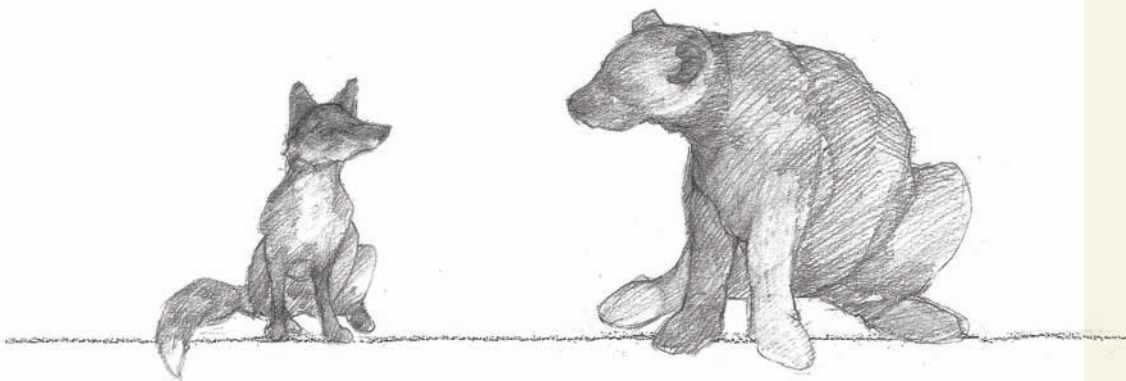
MARGRETE LAMOND loves to re-purpose traditional tales for modern audiences, injecting them with a fresh, contemporary twist. She especially loves tales that are a little bit dark, a little bit unusual, and maybe even just a little bit odd. Her books include *Tatterhood and Other Feisty Folktales*, illustrated by Peter Sheehan; *The Nutcracker*, illustrated by Ritva Voutila; and *Frankenstein*, illustrated by Drahos Zac.



HEATHER VALLANCE was originally trained in botanical illustration. She shows her drawings in solo and group exhibitions, including the esteemed Kedumba Drawing Award, and her art hangs in both private and public collections. She has taught art in remote communities, and in regional schools and galleries, and currently teaches drawing, painting and printmaking at tertiary level.

SYNOPSIS

The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear tells the story of an unequal friendship between a fox and a bear. Fox is 'quick and slick and sly' and Bear is, by his own admission, 'dumber than a pile of rocks'. The narrative focuses on the events that lead to the crumbling of the relationship, which is steadily undermined by power games and practical jokes.



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Written in the form of a letter from Bear to Fox, the text is Bear's chronicle of steadily worsening tricks in which he reminds Fox of their former bond and of the destructive actions that severed it. In between his recollections and reproaches are short accounts of how Rooster and Hare strive to be Bear's new friend now that Fox is no longer around. But if Bear is not impressed by Fox's insensitive deeds, he is even less impressed by the grandstanding, posturing and slanderous approaches of Rooster and Hare.

A note of regret permeates the narrative. It becomes clear that Bear intensely misses Fox, despite Fox's wickedness. It also becomes clear that, while Bear portrays his former self as a semi-bumbling fool, his new self—the Bear who writes the letter—is wiser and sadder and less likely to put up with nonsense. Rooster and Hare's shrill impertinences finally get too much for Bear, who makes it clear he is not in the least interested in being their new friend. When another potential friend approaches Bear, however, the newcomer is so similar to Fox that Bear's heart melts and he agrees to the start of a new friendship. The newcomer shakes off his disguise and Bear's letter ends abruptly and ambiguously. The reader is left to assume it is a chastened and contrite Fox who has returned to beg forgiveness, and to wonder whether the friendship will now resume on a more equal footing.

THEMES

The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear explores friendship and the many and complex issues of which friendship consists. It represents friendship between unequal individuals, friendship that is abused, friendship as status and friendship as the prize of competition.



POSITIVE THEMES

- Forgiveness
- Acceptance and tolerance
- Loyalty and faithfulness

Bear tolerates Fox's mischievous pranks because these are part and parcel of the friend he loves so dearly. Bear also tolerates his own apparent stupidity, acknowledging 'it doesn't matter' that Fox is quick witted and Bear slow witted, because that is just 'how it is'.

NEGATIVE THEMES

- Insensitivity
- Malevolence
- Boastfulness and conceit
- Fickleness and unreliability

Many of the negative aspects of friendship are embodied in Hare and Rooster, who are conceited and narcissistic. They wrongly presume that Bear's feelings about Fox align with their own malicious assessments, and are blind to Bear's sadness. Nor do they notice Bear's growing aversion for themselves.

Hare and Rooster are determined to disparage Fox's character in order to make Bear prefer them as friends, but they are impervious to the fact that at the same time as deriding the Fox they hope to replace, they insult the Bear they are attempting to befriend.



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ACTIVITY: ASPECTS OF CHARACTER

Invite the class to split into small groups and assign each group a character from the narrative. Ask them to consider the following questions about their character:

- How is the character described in the text?
- How is the character shown in the artwork?
- What actions does the character perform?
- What does the character say?

Use their answers to determine what each character's qualities and values are.

WRITING STYLE

SOURCES

- Folk tales
- Animal tales
- Trickster tales



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The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear is based on a number of individual Norwegian folk tales that author Margrete Lamond has rearranged and shaped into an original narrative. The Norwegian folk tales (*Norske Folkeeventyr*) were first collected and disseminated in the 19th century by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe. They contain many animal tales, trickster tales, ogre tales, as well as legends about troll sightings in the Norwegian backwoods and mountains. Lamond has plucked characters and events from several of these stories to weave into a new narrative.



1896 edition of the collected tales



Jørgen Moe (1813–1882)



Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1812–1885)

Margrete Lamond employs a pared-back approach to her story-telling. Like the original folk tales from which she derives her inspiration, she avoids long descriptions of setting, character or emotions, and instead relies on action and dialogue to express the themes and emotions of the story. Her adoption of Bear's voice to tell the story further reflects the folksy origins of her text.

FORM

- Letter writing
- Oral storytelling
- Direct address
- Recount of events
- Comment on the present

The folksy voice and tone of the narrative offsets the complexity of the author's narrative strategy. *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* is written in the form of an extended letter, written by Bear to his estranged friend, Fox, and this means that much of the narrative is in **direct address** (or in the **second person**). Lamond jumps between **first**, **second** and **third person** address as the narrative

follows Bear's ruminations and reminiscences. Bear refers to himself in first person, addresses Fox directly in second person, and refers obliquely to Hare and Rooster in third person.

Tenses also jump back and forth between **past** and **present** as Bear remembers the past and comments on the present. In the final line, Bear even predicts the **future**.

ACTIVITY: TYPES OF RECOUNTS

Initiate a discussion about how *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* is ultimately a **recount** of events from Bear's perspective. Comment on the different aspects of a recount:

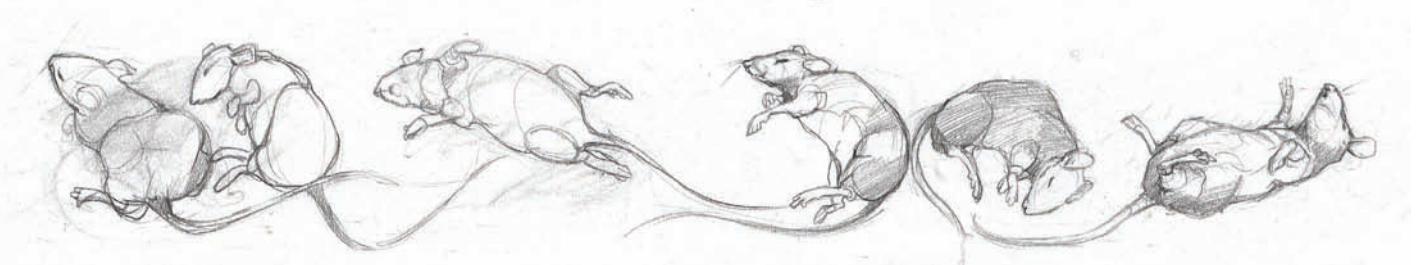
- Its purpose is to retell an event that has already happened
- Its structure includes an orientation, events in chronological order and a conclusion.
- There are **personal**, **factual** and **imaginative** types of recounts. Which type of recount is this text?
- How does this text subvert the **chronological order** of a traditional recount, in particular chronological order and the **conclusion**?

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Margrete Lamond describes the creative process behind the writing of *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear*:

'It isn't always easy to remember the moment I first think of a story. What usually happens is I get a kind of yearning to tell a tale. This yearning grows and grows until I have to sit down and start writing. Sometimes I have a specific story to tell, but at other times it is a 'story-less' yearning, and that's when I have to go looking for an existing story that fits the particular flavour of yearning that I'm feeling. My sources for this kind of storytelling are usually traditional tales, or old classics, or lines from a poem, or even an interesting painting.

'I tend to like telling stories that are a little dark and brooding, and that have an undercurrent of sadness. Norwegian stories often have a note of sorrow and remoteness, so for this story I read right through two big volumes of Norwegian folk tales, in the original Norwegian, looking for tales that touched my heart with the right shades of feeling.

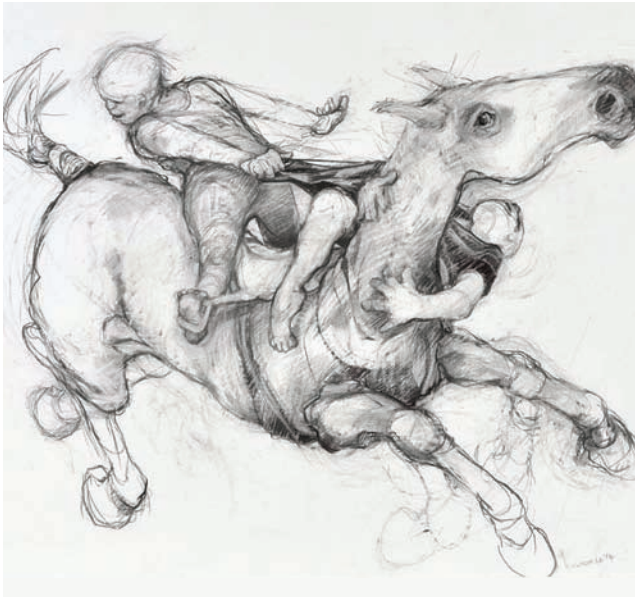


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'The tale that intrigued me the most was a story of forgiveness between a Mr and Mrs Fox. I couldn't stop wondering about the way we love our friends, and how we invite them back into our lives even after we have thrown them out. I was also very fond of a Bear character that appeared in a number of tales, and so I decided to change the fox-and-fox story into a fox-and-bear story. But it was just a simple tale, and I wanted to explore the two characters in a deeper way, so I kept collecting different characters and situations until I had a whole collection to choose from. Then I condensed the many characters into the Fox, Bear, Rooster and Hare of this story, arranged and rearranged the events, and then I kept rearranging, reinventing, changing and making things up until eventually *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* was born!

'The most important choice for me in telling this story was getting Bear's voice right. I felt that the only way I could fully express his complex character, his deep love for and loyalty to his friend Fox, and his profound sense of betrayal, was to have him speak to Fox directly. This immediacy makes Bear's love and pain more personal and vivid for me as a writer, and also—I hope—helps the reader to see Fox through Bear's eyes, and even to love Fox as much as Bear does ... even though he possibly doesn't deserve to be loved at all.'

ILLUSTRATOR STYLE



'Fall from Grace', one of the winners in the 2016 Kedumba Collection Award © Heather Vallance.

Heather Vallance is a studio artist whose practice is focused on large-scale pencil and charcoal drawings of eccentric characters and animals. She was invited to illustrate *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* on the basis of her emotionally vivid animal drawings. Her animals are always doing something energetic and unusual, and tend to reveal secret inner selves in their faces and actions. The illustrations in *The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear* are drawn in pencil and charcoal. Vallance employs an almost sculptural technique, and uses erasers as a creative tool to further develop texture and light, and through which she conveys the intense emotions of the story. Her powerful, confident pencil lines express intense energy and movement as well as stillness and sadness.

As an exhibiting studio-artist, Heather found the process of illustration to be very different from her usual practice. When preparing works for an exhibition, Heather operates alone in her studio, and allows the creative process to guide the direction of her images. Illustrating a book, on the other hand, involves the author, the editorial team, the marketing people and the designers, all of whom have suggestions to make and whose suggestions often need to be taken on board and incorporated into the illustrations.

Heather Vallance's style has some of the hallmarks of the illustrator who first created visual images of the characters in the Norwegian folktales, Theodor Kittelsen (1857 – 1914). Both artists tend towards realism, and both work in black-and-white, with strong textural mark-making that evoke the rugged drama of the wild Norwegian landscape.

The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear is Heather Vallance's first venture into narrative illustration.



An illustration of the Fox and Bear characters by Theodor Kittelsen (1857 – 1914)

ACTIVITY: ILLUSTRATING EMOTION

The Sorry Tale of Fox and Bear aims to elicit a range of emotions in the reader, including shock, compassion and disgust. Ask the class to examine the illustrations of one of the characters and to describe (a) the expressions on the character's face,

and (b) describe the feelings the children themselves get when observing these expressions.

- In what way are the feelings on the page and the feelings of their subjective experience the **same**, and why?
- How are they **different**, and why?

STUDY NOTES

Compiled by Breanna Blundell

Unit suitable for: **Years 3 to 6**

General Capabilities: critical and creative thinking, literacy, personal and social, information and communication technology



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PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

BEFORE READING

ACTIVITY 1

Ask the children to bring in a photograph of themselves and a friend, or of an old friend. Place them in groups of 5 and have them answer the following questions:

- How did they meet their friend?
- What did they like about the friendship?
- Did they ever fight with their friend?
- If yes, how was the fight resolved?
- What is their favourite memory with their friend?
- What is a quality they admire in their friend?

PREDICTING

ACTIVITY 2

Based on the title, ask the children to predict what the story is going to be about. Then go to www.dirtlanepress.com/sorry and read the blurb on the website.

ACTIVITY 3

The title suggests that the tale of Fox and Bear is a 'sorry one'. Discuss what the term 'sorry' could mean in this context. Invite the class to write a short story about a 'sorry' tale.

CONNECTING TO SELF, CLASS AND TEXT

ACTIVITY 4

Read the story to the students. Revisit the children's predictions of what the story was going to be about and have a discussion about how accurate they were.

ACTIVITY 5

Instruct the children to write a short letter to someone they've played a trick on, or who has played a trick on them. Suggest they comment on whether it was a funny prank that everyone enjoyed, or whether someone was hurt by it. Invite them to explore ways of resolving the situation.

RESPONDING TO THE TEXT

ACTIVITY 6

Bear's sadness is not explicitly stated, but is gradually revealed. Select a chapter of the text and determine which words and phrases contribute to the reader's sense of Bear's sadness.

ACTIVITY 7

Hare's story about his marriage to the troll (in Chapter V) is similar to Remy Charlip's *Fortunately* (Simon & Schuster 1964). If possible, read Charlip's text to the class and then split the children into pairs. Invite one child to write down a 'fortunate' event and invite the other child to respond with an 'unfortunate' event until they have created a story.

YOUTUBE LINK: www.bit.ly/2t1Dzxc

ACTIVITY 8

Choose a section of the text and invite the students to rewrite it from Fox's perspective.

- What was Fox thinking/feeling?
 - Why would Fox decide to play a trick on Bear?
 - What outcome was Fox hoping for?
-

ACTIVITY 9

Have a discussion about Hare and Rooster's responses to one of Bear's stories. Were Hare and Rooster being good friends to Bear? Why or why not? Ask the class to come up with alternative ways in which Hare and Rooster might have responded to Bear's stories.

EXAMINING GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY

ACTIVITY 10

Fox and Bear have a competition in which they must name three different trees.

- Ask the children choose one of the six trees mentioned (oak, alder, ash, fir, pine, conifer) and to research it. Examples of elements to research are the height of the tree, what country it is native to, whether it belongs to a particular genus or species of tree.
- Ask the children why they think Bear lost the challenge.
- Was Fox telling the truth about Bear's choice of trees being incorrect?

ACTIVITY 11

There are many unusual words in the text.

- Split the class into groups and ask them to reread a section of the text, writing down any words that are unique or that they don't know the meaning of.
- Provide dictionaries for the class to find the meanings of unfamiliar words, and with thesauruses to discover alternative words.
- Ask the children to use the new words they have discovered in sentences.

ACTIVITY 12

Discuss the use of metaphor in the text. Bear refers to his friendship with Fox as a 'string of friendship'. The text also uses similes as a way of describing characters (for example, 'Fox was as mean as a spoonful of mustard'). Ask the children to choose a character from the story and to make up similes and metaphors of their own to describe their chosen character.

BREANNA BLUNDELL is a graduate from Charles Sturt University. She completed her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in 2017 and is an aspiring publisher of children's and young adult's literature.

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