

## TEACHER NOTES

### Bridie's boots

Phil Cummings / Sara Acton

Title: *Bridie's Boots*  
Author: Phil Cummings  
Illustrator: Sara Acton

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Author:** Phil Cummings was born in Port Broughton, South Australia, and lived on Yorke Peninsula and in the mid-north of the state until he moved to Adelaide in 1976 to begin a teaching career. His first book, *Goodness Gracious!* (illustrated by Craig Smith) was released in 1989. Since then he has published over sixty books for children which range from picture books, such as the popular Working Title Press title, *Boom Bah!* (adapted to the stage by The Windmill Theatre Company) to novels such as *Angel and Danny* and *Allen Was Here*, which was shortlisted for the children's literature awards at the Adelaide Festival of Arts in 2008. He has received a number of honours and awards in Australia and overseas for his work, including the Carclew Fellowship at the Adelaide Festival of Arts in 1998 and numerous Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book honours. Phil is an ambassador for the Premier's Reading Challenge in South Australia

#### **Illustrator:**

Sara Acton was born in the Cotswolds in England and always loved drawing, especially people and other strange creatures. She studied BA Hons Fine Art, and after graduating, decided to train as an Art Teacher, completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Art Education at Goldsmiths in London. After teaching and practicing art for many years in England and New Zealand she moved to Australia with her family. Sara now lives in a small seaside village near Sydney, where she enjoys writing and illustrating for children in her studio, whilst drinking tea and eating far too many biscuits. Her first picture book *Ben and Duck* won the Children's Book Council of Australia Crichton Award for new illustrators. Her other picture books include *Esther's Rainbow*, *Hold on Tight*, *Daisy and the Puppy* and *The Unexpected Crocodile*.

**SYNOPSIS** When Bridie receives a pair of gum boots wrapped in rainbow paper for her fifth birthday she is delighted. They are the best boots ever! Just right for splashing in puddles and twirling on tiptoes. But when she turns six Bridie decides her boots should go on a big adventure. *Bridie's Boots* is a delightful story about a little girl with big ideas.

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**WRITING** Phil Cummings says,

*I wrote this piece after another family incident involving my sister and her grandchild. My sister works helping out at a charity/aide shop and I heard her telling my great niece how every little donation, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, can help others in need.*

*And so I wrote this story*

He has written a warm, light-hearted book about a year in the life of a girl called Bridie. On her fifth birthday a new pair of gum boots arrive, 'wrapped in rainbow paper.' Bridie 'can do anything in her boots' – ordinary things, like splashing in puddles; and extraordinary things, like pretending to cross wild rivers, and dreaming of 'daring adventures and breathtaking escapes to faraway lands.' The poetic text leads us through a year,

*'Bridie wore her boots all through  
the long, wet winter but when winter  
was gone she put them away.*

*And there they stayed for days,*

*weeks,*

*months,*

*and almost a year.*

...to the day before Bridie's sixth birthday. But she has grown, and the boots don't fit anymore. She loved those boots, 'My poor boots,' she sighed. What will happen to them?' Phil Cummings evokes the loss we all feel when we have to give up something we have loved. As the story continues the problem is resolved in a way that introduces young readers to some of the big issues that face our world today, and touches on themes of the caring for each other, the environment, sustainability, international cooperation and poverty. The story concludes with five-year-old girl, in a faraway land wearing Bridie's boots, and they are a 'PERFECT FIT.' And six-year-old Bridie is thinking about 'the best boots ever' and wondering who is wearing them. She loved those boots.

**ILLUSTRATIONS** Sara Acton used ink, watercolour, pastel and collage for the illustrations in this book. Her artistic style is simple and playful, and beautifully captures the mood of the story.

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The drawings are deceptively simple. Phil Cummings' words *tell* us about Bridie. Sara Acton's energetic ink lines and strokes of colour *show* us who Bridie is. She is independent. She is creative, cutting up the wrapping paper to make paper boats. She uses her imagination - her boots *keep her feet dry crossing wild rivers*. She dreams of sailing in a paper boat, with her dog and her boots, on *daring adventures and breathtaking escapes*. Sara shows time passing in simple ways: Bridie's increasing height is written on the cupboard door, the seasons change, and she grows too big for her boots. The emotional tone of the story changes in the second half of the book when Bridie realises her boots don't fit anymore. The illustrations capture this mood change. Look at the double page spread of Bridie trying to get into her boots. In these four drawings, with the dash of a few lines Sara Acton changes Bridie's look from excited anticipation, to bewildered frustration. From here on the illustrations show Bridie as more mature, thoughtful girl who is thinking about and connecting with some of the bigger issues that face our world today. In contrast to the openness of the first half of book, the illustrations in the second half bring the outside world more into focus

### DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Share *Bridie's Boots* with small groups. Give the children time to look at the pictures, make their own observations, ask questions, and reflect on what might be happening in the story. Help the children to create their own 'sense' of the story. Take time to let the children linger over each page, or move on when they are ready.
- Share your own reflections with the children. Talk about how Bridie might be feeling, and what she is thinking. Talk about how we know this through the combination of the words and the pictures. For example: *Bridie hugged her boots tightly. 'My poor boots,' she sighed. 'What will happen to them?'*
- Talk about how giving her boots away opened Bridie up to the wider world.
- Ask the children if they have a favourite item that they can no longer use. How did they feel when that happened?
- When you read the story with the children, point out how the pictures show differences. For example, where Bridie lives in contrast to the faraway place where the boots are sent.
- Create pictures using Sara Acton's techniques. Do the drawing first, with crayon or waterproof

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ink and then add the watercolour over the top. The children can choose to do character studies, objects, landscapes, seascapes, buildings and other forms of shelter.

- Sara Acton has put in some visual jokes – look for them. What is the dog looking at in the cupboard? What is Bridie wearing on her head when she leaves the charity shop? Is this a replacement for the boots?
- This warm, light-hearted book introduces young readers to some of the big issues that face our world today. Talk with children about some of the issues raised in this seemingly simple story. These talks can be with individual children and/or small groups as you read the story with them, or with all of the children in a large group.
  - Recycling / Waste management - although Bridie has grown out of her boots they can still be worn, and loved by someone who is in need.
  - International cooperation – connections to the wider world
  - Natural disasters
- *Phil Cummings says, ...in terms of the message it's not just about shoes of course but I found this (below) about Soles4Souls:*
  - *Donate your new or used children's shoes to an organization called "Soles4Souls." "Soles4Souls" was founded to help victims of the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, thousands of whom were left without shoes. This group partners with footwear retailers, churches, civic organizations and schools to provide shoes for children and adults all across the globe.*
- Find out more about Phil Cummings and his books at his website: <http://philcumplings.com>
- Find out more about Sara Acton at her website: <http://www.saraacton.org>