

TEACHER NOTES

Let's Go to Sleep

Margaret Wild / Michelle Dawson

Title: *Let's Go to Sleep*
Author: Margaret Wild
Illustrator: Michelle Dawson

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author:

Margaret Wild was born in South Africa and came to live in Australia in 1972. She worked as a journalist, and then for 16 years as a children's book editor, writing only in small snatches, or at night when she had the energy. She now writes fulltime. She has written more than seventy books for children, ranging from picture books to verse novels, including *Fox* (illustrated by Ron Brooks), *The Pocket Dogs* (illustrated by Stephen Michael King), *Babs The Baby And Fog The Dog* (illustrated by Donna Rawlins), *Little Humpty* (illustrated by Ann James) and *Jinx*, a story for older readers. Her books are published around the world and she has won many awards, including CBCA 2005 Honour Book, *Seven More Sleeps* (illustrated by Donna Rawlins and published by Working Title Press); the CBCA 2001 Picture Book of the Year, *Fox*, and her latest book the *Dream of the Thylacine* (illustrated by Ron Brooks) that was recently announced as a CBCA 2012 Honour Book for the Picture Book of the Year. Margaret Wild says about *Let's Go to Sleep*:

The idea for Let's Go to Sleep started with an image of an iceberg dazzling in the dark. This book is a bit of a departure for me in that there is no actual storyline, but I feel the repeated phrase "let's go to sleep" gives it a structure that hold its together and creates a calm, gentle mood. Michelle Dawson's pictures of the various animals are warm and endearing and gorgeously sleepy – just right for bedtime!

Illustrator:

Michelle Dawson was born in New Zealand, and moved to Australia in 1985. She has been working as a professional artist since 1996 and has studied both in Australia and the UK. In 2009 she illustrated her first picture book *How Weird Is That?* a fantastic tale (written by Gyan) that features a collection of amazing hybrid beasts woven around the theme of Australian native animals. Both an art book and a children's book, it was subsequently shortlisted for the 2009 Crichton Award for New Illustrator of the Year. *Let's Go To Sleep* is her second picture book and is the perfect vehicle for her work that invariably focuses on animals. Michelle lives and works in a converted church near the coast in rural Australia. Michelle writes about illustrating *Let's Go to Sleep*. She writes about illustrating *Let's Go to Sleep*,

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I have strived with each drawing to evoke the scenes and settings suggested by Margaret's exquisitely distilled sentences and with the depiction of the animals to express a sense of tender nurturing, love and safety that the children can take with them as they drift towards sleep.

SYNOPSIS All over the world, in different lands, habitats and climates baby animals are settling down with a parent to sleep, and dream.

WRITING STYLE Margaret Wild has created a soft, lilting, text that is perfect for this calming bedtime story. It is a 'slow' story. Each line must be read softly and slowly. '*Where sand dunes flow like golden waves*', '*Where burrows curve like welcoming arms*', and '*let's go to sleep little penguin*', *let's go to sleep, little wallaby*'. In a simple way her use of words such as *cradle, snuggle, nestle, nuzzle* creates a strong sense of loving connection between a parent and a baby. The use of the literary technique of alliteration helps the reader to tell the story in a dreamy voice. (*Where shadows lap at sheltering rocks*, and *Where silvery skies lie down in the seas*). Margaret Wild has said that this book is a departure for her because there is no actual storyline. However by using the same words with a slight shift in meaning ('*little animals are going to sleep*' on the first page becomes '*little animals are fast asleep*' on the last page), she creates a clear beginning (It's time for bed), and a satisfying end (Everyone's asleep). Apart from the first and last pages, the text has a definite structure, with two lines of repeating, predictable verse. The first line begins with the word '*Where*', placing each animal in it's own place - the setting. The second line on each page also has a repetitive pattern, and introduces each of the characters. The predictable, lyrical text is perfect for reading aloud and for encouraging children to join in.

ILLUSTRATIONS Michelle Dawson used watercolour, ink and soft drawing pencils on cotton paper for the illustrations in *Let's Go to Sleep*. She says that this story felt like the perfect project for her because so much of her work as an artist focuses on drawing or painting animals. She writes,

'Because of my love of animals it was important to me that although the book was intended for a very young audience, that the portrayal of the animals be true to their actual colours, forms and behaviours'.

The illustrations of the animals are true-to-life representations while, at the same time, featuring human attributes that children will identify with (facial expressions and body language that show warm and loving bonds between parents and children). The story takes place over a short period of time – between bedding down and going to sleep. On each double page spread Michelle Dawson shows the shift in time through a layout that is as predictable as Margaret Wild's text. She uses a small, soft-edged, broad-view vignette on

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one page, as day ends. The illustration on each facing page is a full-page, close-up night-time scene, focusing on a parent watching over a sleeping baby. All of the illustrations in the book evoke a sense of peace and quiet reflection through the interaction between the parents and the babies, and through the use of a palette of muted watercolour washes – pink, yellow, orange, blue, and the hint of the silvery reflection of the moon in the night-time scenes. Michelle Dawson says about the drawing process,

“The process of bringing each drawing up with watercolour washes and the soft drawing pencils was a delight. There is a point in the process when the creatures start to have form and their individual characters emerge, in the act of drawing and painting it was almost like a constant act of willing them to turn up on the page.”

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- This is a wonderful book to read with one or two children at bedtime or sleep / rest time. It is a book that invites adults and children to snuggle up together and savour the peace and quiet of the book
- It is a book that can be read with babies, toddlers, preschool and school-aged children.
- For younger children take time to linger over each page. Read the words with the children, and draw their attention to the story that the pictures are telling e.g. “Look at the Pandas. Mama and Dada are playing a game with baby, before bedtime. Hear the wind: ‘woooosh’.
See, the sun is going down. Dada gives baby a good night kiss”.
- As you read through the book point out some of the details that the children can look for. E.g. On the ‘sleep’ page do all of the babies have their eyes closed? What about the parent?
- Find the moon on every ‘sleeping’ page. Can you find it where the dolphins sleep? Is the moon the same size on each page.
- Cradle, nestle, nuzzle and snuggle with the children as you share the story.
- Give the children lots of opportunities to talk about the animals
- Talk with older children about where each animal lives – different habitats, different climates - they live in deserts, on icebergs, in jungles, on and in rivers, in burrows and trees.
- Talk about how at the end of the day they all settle down to sleep – just like the children hearing the story – ‘Just like you’.
- Older children might like to find out more about the animals in the story. On a world map point out where each animal is from, what they eat, etc.
- Michelle Dawson says that working out the very small drawings of the animals interacting with the "W" at the start of each sentence was tricky, as it was essential that they look comfortable. She says,

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- “A squirrel balancing on a letter is one thing, a dolphin, panda or camel somewhat trickier!”
- This is a lovely book to use to introduce young children to the pleasures of reading and writing. Look at each of the animals on the ‘W’. What are they doing? E.g. point out the interplay between drawing and text - the otter is wrapped around the ‘W’, and the ‘river is wrapped around the land. Others are lolling, sitting, hanging, etc.
- Even very young children will soon learn the last word in the book. ‘Shhhh!’
- Look at the picture of Michelle Dawson’s work space. Name the things that she uses to do her work. Talk about how she has a rough drawing to refer to when she is doing the final artwork.



- You can find out more about Margaret Wild at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Wild
- You can find out more about Michelle Dawson at <http://msdawson.com>. Children might like to see some of the strange animals she is drawing at present. Look out for her book *How weird is that?* which “weaves its way around the Tasmanian Tiger via an array of fantastical creatures drawn in the style of early natural history drawings”.