

The Little dinosaur
Catriona Hoy / Andrew Plant

TEACHERS' NOTES
By Janet McLean

Title: The Little Dinosaur
Author: Catriona Hoy
Illustrator: Andrew Plant

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author: **Catriona Hoy** was born in Scotland and migrated to Australia with her family when she was 7 years old. She began her career as a lab technician, but later switched to teaching. She combines writing for children with a job as a part-time secondary teacher. Her books include *The Music Tree*, *My Grandad Marched on Anzac Day*, *Daddies and Mummies Are Amazing*. She and Andrew Plant have collaborated before on the Working Title Press picture book *Puggle* which was a 2011 CBCA Notable Book in the Eve Pownall section and shortlisted for the 2011 for the Wilderness Society's Environment Award for Children's Literature.

Illustrator: **Andrew Plant** trained as a zoologist at Melbourne University, and works as an author, scientific artist, and a children's book illustrator specialising in natural history. He has illustrated more than 130 books in Australia, the USA, the UK, New Zealand and South Korea, and has written and illustrated a number of his own, including *Could a Tyrannosaurus Play Table Tennis?* and *Finding Dinosaurs*. He has also directed, choreographed and designed 60 children's theatre productions, and created murals for schools and museums. His other Working Title Press picture books include *Puggle*, also by Catriona Hoy, and *Warambi* by Aleesah Darlison.

SYNOPSIS **The Little Dinosaur** recreates a truthful and poignant story of a little dinosaur that lived millions of years ago in the land called Gondwana, where it was cold even in summer, and during winter, dark all day and night. The little dinosaur lived in a herd. This protected her from large meat-eating dinosaurs that also roamed Gondwana. One day the little dinosaur fell and hurt her leg. From then on she struggled to keep up with the rest of the herd. Then, at the end of summer she collapsed by the river, and she was left behind. She soon died. Over the years the little dinosaurs' bones were covered with mud

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and silt. The silt turned to stone, the bones dissolved, and minerals filled the spaces where the bones had been. The little dinosaur became a fossil. Millions of years later, in 1989, palaeontologists on the Otway coast of Victoria discovered the lower leg bone of the little dinosaur. The second part of the story describes the slow, painstaking work of scientists, artists and sculptors as they prepare the bone and piece together the clues that tell the tale of the little dinosaur who lived all those years ago.

WRITING STYLE Catriona Hoy has created a text that blends a warm and moving narrative with an accurate description of the work undertaken to recover Australian dinosaur fossils. The book begins with an imagined story of the little dinosaur's life cycle. This story was written after Catriona spoke with Lesley Kool from the Monash Science Centre at Monash University. Lesley showed Catriona a particular leg bone that had been broken and then healed. Lesley explained to Catriona that the examination of this bone suggests that the dinosaur had been part of a herd because it survived long enough for the bone to heal. With this and other accurate scientific information Catriona has woven a sequence of events into a fictional story of the little dinosaur's life – the description of her physical features, the food she eats, her need to be protected by living in a herd, the accident that changed her ability to survive the harsh conditions, and her death. The narrative is told simply. Catriona uses words and phrases that give emotional depth to the story – *It was not safe to be alone; Sometimes she limped and couldn't run as fast as...; Sometimes things with big snapping jaws lurked in the shallows;...and soon she died.* By presenting the second part of the book as a factual description of the current day discovery and recovery of dinosaur bones, Catriona has made a link between the Cretaceous period and the present, millions of years later. The second part of the story simply and factually describes how the world changed over time, until *One day, not so long ago, with a tap and a rap, a palaeontologist snapped one of those rocks apart.* She then clearly describes how the discovery of one bone led to the reconstruction and display of the little dinosaur and her habitat.

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ILLUSTRATIONS Andrew Plant used acrylic paints for the illustrations in this book. He says that illustrating *The Little Dinosaur* was ‘a fabulous opportunity to combine science and art.’ He enjoyed creating the character and following her through a story. He found the most difficult decision to make when he was doing the illustrations for the book was what colours to choose. He looked at the colours of small animals today – ‘... *ground-living birds and reptiles, but not mammals... most mammals are pretty dull*’! He chose camouflage colours and patterns, which he thinks work pretty well. Andrew says that the design for the pages came quite easily, ‘...*following Catriona’s lovely text.*’ He has used double page spreads that bleed off the edge of the page for many of the illustrations. This has allowed him to use colours and vistas that recreate Gondwana at the time in which the story is set. He varies these illustrations so that sometimes the animals seem small and vulnerable in the landscape. In other illustrations he has portrays the animals in close-up. Andrew uses varying shades of colours to portray the year-round coldness, and the darkness of the Gondwana winter. Many of the illustrations show the dramatic changes that occurred to the land over millions of years. – the volcanoes spewing lava and ash, new plants, stretching their leaves to the sun, the ocean flowing to meet the river valley. Andrew has interspersed the double page spreads with soft edged circles containing images that focus on particular parts of the story. He uses this technique in the second part of the book to show the details of the work of the palaeontologists, artists and sculptors.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- When introducing the story refer to the brief description of the story on the imprint page, This provides information about the inspiration for the story, and of the work done by a team from the Monash Science Centre, Monash University. Fossil preparator, Lesley Kool, and a team of artists and sculptors shared their ideas about what the little dinosaur may have looked like.
- When you read the story, allow time for the children to respond. Ask questions to help them absorb the meaning of the events, the emotions evoked by the words and pictures, the shift in time, and the crossover from fiction to fact.
- When you start reading the second, factual part of the story talk about how the author moves the story from the first part of the story, millions of years ago when the little

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dinosaur was alive, to the second part of the story that takes place in the present. What is the link between the past and the present?

- Make further investigations into various aspects of the story:
 - Find out more about Gondwana
 - Investigate The Cretaceous period
- Visit the Dinosaur Dreaming website to find out more about the discovery of dinosaur bones in Victoria. <http://dinosaurdreaming.monash.edu/inverloc/jaw/>
- There is a koolasuchus in *The Little Dinosaur*.
Visit www.abc.net.au/dinosaurs/fact_files/forest/koolasuchus.htm to find out more about the koolasuchus.
 - Who was it named after? What kind of animal was it? What did it look like? What did it eat? How big was it? Where was it found?
 - Can you find Andrew Plant's picture of the koolasuchus in *The Little Dinosaur*
 - Get the children to draw or make models of their own versions of a dinosaur or another ancient creature. Name the characters that they make after the children e.g Johnosaurus,
- Using words and pictures, create a visual time line from the Cretaceous through to the present day, showing when the changes that are described in the story took place.
- With the children make a diorama-in-a-box. Create your own characters and settings, based on the *The Little Dinosaur*, and assemble them in a box.
- Organise a visit to a museum, or encourage families to visit with their children.
- For information, timelines, and activities visit the Melbourne Museum website: *600 Million Years – Victoria Evolving*
:<http://museumvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/discoverycentre/600-million-years/>
- Other useful websites:
 - Link your investigations to the National Curriculum.
<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Science/Rationale>
<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/FoundationYear> (also refer to Year 1 and Year 2)
 - www.otwaydinosaurs.com/

Visit Catriona Hoy and Andrew Plant at their websites:

Catriona: <http://www.catrionahoy.com.au/>; Andrew: <http://www.andrewplant.com/>