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BEAR & CHOOK TEACHERS' GUIDE

Bear & Chook

Lisa Shanahan and Emma Quay

Synopsis

'Bear and Chook' are unexpected friends. Bear likes adventure, but Chook would much rather have the quiet life. They are talking about what they'd like to be when they grow up, and every time Bear acts out a profession he'd like to be involved in, disaster is just around the corner—and Chook almost gets hurt in the process. For example, when Bear's pretending to be an explorer, a snake pops out of a hole, almost biting Chook.

'It just missed you, Chook!' Bear exclaims each time this happens, full of concern.

In the end, when Chook is almost seriously hurt, Bear is quite shaken up. He decides that when he grows up, he would much rather be just like Chook... But this doesn't really stop him from dreaming!

Style

'Bear and Chook' is told in third person narrative and mixes humour with warmth and sentimentality. It has a very neat, chronological structure, covering a whole day from morning to night. There's repetition in the structure as well (e.g. 'It just missed you, Chook!'), giving the story a safe and familiar rhythm for young children. Sound effects are put into words in big, black type, and the story therefore lends itself beautifully to being read aloud. Emma Quay's illustrations add a lovely gentleness and they also tell a complementary story.

Motivation

Lisa Shanahan writes, 'How did 'Bear and Chook' come about? It began as a daydream. One day, I was sitting on my bed, thinking how lovely it would be to write about a Bear, when a Chook suddenly invaded my daydream. From that moment, I began to wonder what it would be like if a 'Bear and Chook' were best friends. It struck me as a very funny and unlikely friendship, but as I thought about it, I realised that many friendships are unlikely and even bizarre!

'I continued on with my daydream, imagining 'Bear and Chook' as friends and before long a few lines of dialogue began to ring around my head:

'What do you want to be when you grow up?' asked Bear.

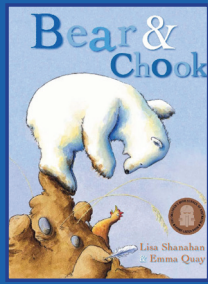
'An old Chook,' said Chook.

'Oh,' said Bear, wrinkling his nose.

In those few lines I had my story. I could suddenly see a Bear who loved adventure and quests, thrusting his best friend Chook into all sorts of mischief. And even though Chook liked peace and quiet, he would willingly follow Bear into all of his messes because that was what true friendship is all about.

'What I like about the characters of 'Bear and Chook' is that despite all of their differences, they are big-hearted, generous and forgiving of each other. I don't think they necessarily find it easy to be like that—and in that respect we face the very same challenges.

'I feel very privileged to have had Emma Quay illustrate the story. I think she has created characters that are unusually vivid with tenderness and strength.'



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Emma Quay writes, 'Bear and Chook' remind me of my little sister and I when we were younger and loved adventure. My poor sister often ended up soaking wet, caked in clay or covered with mud... and it was usually my fault.

'It's funny, I used to be as adventurous and daring as Bear, but now I'm far more Chook!'

Editor Comments

Mark Macleod writes, 'George and Lenny, Laurel and Hardy, Oscar and Felix, Lucy and Ethel, Laverne and Shirley: if you think about the great doubles, they offer us endless possibilities for dramatic conflict. When it's not the two of them against the world, it's the one against the other.'

'So the moment I read Lisa Shanahan's story I fell in love with it. With Lisa's background as an actor, the dramatic read-aloud qualities were all there. But how could any illustrator manage the extreme size differences between the two characters, for a start?

'We tried a teddy bear and a real chook. But there were too many teddy bear books already and the fluffy, broody hen just didn't look right. (Was Chook supposed to be a boy or a girl, anyway?)

'Emma Quay found exactly the right solution. Bear's naivety and optimism seemed to work best with a white polar bear (although in the wild they are nothing like their placid, cute storyworld image!) and by making him young we could minimise the size differences between the two friends. Chook then became a pullet, leaner and meaner to go with the snippy voice of realism, as opposed to Bear's eternal romanticism, and Emma foregrounded Chook in several scenes so that the reader is brought into some kind of empathy.

'Apart from the wonderful experience of solving dramatic problems with this outstanding writer and illustrator, the chance to publish a book with 'Chook' in the title appealed to me. I'd done one before for another publishing company, so it wasn't my first. But I love old Australian words and I resent the fact that the British publisher felt the need to change the character's name to Chicken, which doesn't work rhythmically or tonally for me. Interesting that the Korean publisher has felt able to retain the name Chook'...

Educational Applicability

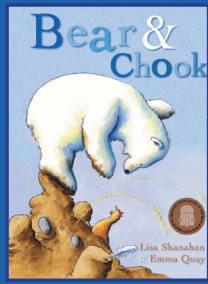
Before reading the text

- Show students the cover and ask them what they think the story will be about.
- Are there any potential problems that they can foresee? (e.g. Bear falling off the hill, the size of Bear compared to Chook, etc)

Getting into the text

- Students discuss what they'd like to be when they grow up and why.
- Brainstorm different jobs people have.
- Get members of the community to come in and talk about the jobs they do.

- Discuss friendship.
- What are the qualities needed to be a 'friend'?
- Look at different types of friendships that people have (e.g. a brother-sister friendship, a grandparent or an older person friendship, best friends, pets, etc)
- What are some of the things you do with friends?
- Ask students to find other books that have 'friendship' as their main theme.



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After reading the text

- Examine the structure of the story – Beginning, middle (with lots of complications), end. Create a story map, making use of the chronological sequence of the story.
- What tools have been used to create humour, drama, tension (e.g. sound effects written in bold, repetition)
- Create more written sound effects to describe the kind of predicaments Bear and Chook find themselves in? Comic strips may be a source of inspiration.

Writing

- Write a story about an 'unusual' friendship. Students can experiment with using tools like sound effects, repetition, humour scenes in their writing.

Drama

- In groups get students to act out scenes from the book; put all the scenes together to create a play for assembly.

Going beyond the Text

- As a class, write your own version of 'Bear and Chook', using the same structure but with different animals and professions (e.g. Lion & Mouse). Use the professions that students themselves have expressed an interest in. When done, get students to illustrate the story as a class and create a Big Book.