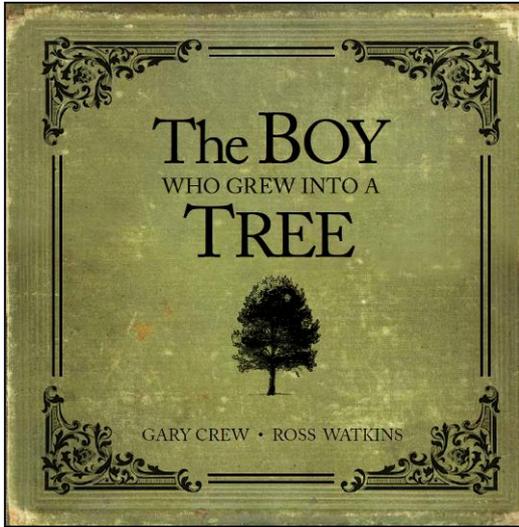


TEACHER NOTES:
THE BOY WHO GREW INTO A TREE
GARY CREW & ROSS WATKINS



And then, as if on cue, the baby shaped its mouth into a perfect circle, drew breath into its cheeks and, curling its tiny tongue upon its bottom lip, breathed the long, soft sound of wind in the trees.

This is a tale of storms and bushfires and wild bees. It is a tale of an old couple and a gift from the bush. A gift they must one day return...

BACKGROUND

Dr Gary Crew and Dr Ross Watkins live in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland town of Maleny, famous for its lush subtropical forest. They lecture in Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast and are concerned for the sustainability of the environment. *The Boy Who Grew into a Tree* is the creative outcome of these shared interests. The story was written by Gary some time ago and when Ross suggested he could illustrate the work, Gary jumped at that chance.

Gary's writing has been greatly influenced by the Australian Nobel Prize winning novelist Patrick White. In several of his novels—*The Tree of Man* (1955) and *Voss* (1957)—White uses the metaphor of the Australian landscape to represent character traits of his fictional personae. In *The Boy Who Grew into a Tree* Gary has used the rugged Australian bush to portray the characters of Arbour and his human parents, although the bush itself is Arbour's metaphorical parentage.

The digitally manipulated photographs and many of the illustrations were created by Ross, while others were chosen from public domain sixteenth century images of printing press technologies and nineteenth century naturalists' illustrations. Found objects—skeletal leaves, a melaleuca sprig—also feature in the book. The photographs were taken in the bush of the Sunshine Coast environs to best exemplify the setting of *The Boy Who Grew into a Tree*.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

1. Find excerpts from the print text to demonstrate the author's use of metaphor.
2. What value does the use of extended metaphor add to an appreciation of the text?
3. The author closes the novel with the words: 'But though he fell, he was not destroyed. He lives on in the pages of the book that you hold in your hand.' In what ways has Crew demonstrated that this may be the case metaphorically?
4. How has the author used natural life cycles to demonstrate that new life comes from old?
5. Just as the illustrator has used nineteenth century images throughout, the author has also employed nineteenth century language stylistics to establish the voice of the novel. What evidence is there of this somewhat dated (even archaic) voice and what does it add to the work as a whole?
6. How is the bush instrumental in Arbour's conception and birth?
7. What is the significance of the repetition of the word 'expect' on pages 16, 17 and 18?
8. What resonance does the word 'Naturally' create as the final word of the novel?

VISUAL LITERACY

1. Why has the illustrator chosen nineteenth century images in representing the ecosystems of the bush?
2. Comment on the characteristics of the content and design of the pages illustrated in a nineteenth century style.
3. How does the inclusion of illustrations enrich a reading of the book?
4. What influence does the inclusion of found objects—leaves and a melaleuca sprig—have on your perception of the book as an artefact?
5. One illustration features an arrangement of naturalist drawings of insects. What story does this arrangement tell?
6. In terms of narrative structure, why does an axe appear mid-way through the story? Why is this axe image juxtaposed by the chapter heading: 'Learning'?
7. What message is being communicated by the double-page spread of a leaf and chrysalis, and how does this relate to the book's themes?
8. Find illustration examples that are symbolic of life, death and rebirth, then discuss these examples in relation to an aspect of the environment.

DISCUSSION/ORAL PRESENTATION TOPICS

1. What message does the novel convey relating to the preservation of bushland?
2. Does Arbour actually die?
3. Do you think technology will eventually destroy the book as an artefact and what loss, if any, would that be to the world?

4. The creators of the book consider it to be a ‘graphic novel’, rather than a ‘picture book’. Research these terms and discuss your opinion of the differences.
5. Research printing press technologies of the past and present and discuss their impact on the way we access and read books.

CREATIVE RESPONSES

1. Take a photograph of something which represents conflict between an aspect of the natural environment and human technology/development. Combine this photograph with a passage of your own creative writing to explore the inherent themes.
2. Write a newspaper report on the death and discovery of the bodies of Arbour’s parents. Bear in mind that they were viewed with suspicion by the locals, noting the line: ‘To be mistrusted has always been the fate of those who are different’ (page 5).
3. This story has a certain fabulous or mythical quality. Write a fable based on some aspect of the natural Australian environment.
4. If you were reincarnated as a tree, what tree would you choose and why? Write a poem about yourself in the persona of that tree.
5. Write a review of *The Boy Who Grew into a Tree* and in your review discuss the book’s relation to one of the following contemporary issues:
 - a. climate change debate;
 - b. the impact of bushfire disasters in Australian history;
 - c. the evolution of electronic books and eReaders.

FROM THE AUTHOR

My earliest memories are of the overgrown shrubbery in the backyard of our Brisbane cottage in the 1950’s. My earliest family photographs bear these memories out: there’s toothless five-year-old Gary (with his gummy grin) sitting under a bush. Maybe this early relationship with the earth and plant life has had a long lasting effect on me; or maybe it’s more the fact that my mother has the greenest thumb of any human being I have ever known, including Don Burke of Backyard fame. And, to my great satisfaction, I have inherited this attribute. Always, since I was a student in primary school, I had to have a desk where I could look out and see a tree. Always. Even now, my study looks out over the untrammelled acres of forest that shade the Obi Obi Valley beyond my study window. And always it is to this verdant view that I turn when life gets me down. Kilmer’s somewhat sentimental poem *Trees* (1914) declares ‘I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree...’ and I have to agree. If that sounds twee, well, that’s who I am.

Gary Crew

FROM THE ILLUSTRATOR

My brother was the one who could draw. I was the writer. When I was eleven years of age our first illustrated book was turned down by a rather generous publisher who offered kind encouragement in the rejection letter. Twenty years later—now a self-taught dabbler in graphics—illustration was still my occasional playground outside the serious classroom of my writing. That was until Gary handed me a short story called *The Boy Who Grew into a Tree*, and the playground was brought indoors.

Amid the increasing digitisation of the reading experience, my aim in illustrating this mixed media graphic novel was to tell a story of ecology and humanity. A story about the collision between the environment and early printing press technology, both violent yet momentous in its creation of the artefact we know as the book. This is Arbour's story, and 'the book that you hold in your hand' is a celebration of him and the book as a meaningful object.

Ross Watkins