

Teacher Notes – The Lonely Jacaranda

Written and illustrated by Russell Irving
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Jaca, a lonely Jacaranda tree, lives far from home, dropping her flowers and leaves like teardrops. Some of the birds and trees ignore or laugh at her, others come together to help.

This touching fable explores themes of diversity, loneliness, and alienation, and the simple acts of friendship that can help.

The colour illustrations bring to life the wonder of the spectacular Jacaranda blossom and the birds and trees of the sub-tropical coastal region of Australia.

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Book Overview

Jaca is a visitor in a new place, far from home. Some might say a 'weed' that doesn't belong. But even a weed from a far-off place once belonged somewhere else first. There is a bit of Jaca in all of us - yearning for acceptance, understanding, belonging and connection. As the story unfolds – and after some initial resistance - the 'locals' band together to help Jaca feel like she belongs, and help her celebrate and share her unique gifts.

Russell highlights how embracing differences and celebrating diversity can help create stronger communities and nurture feelings of belonging, pride and connection – to each other and to nature. Jaca and her friends - those like her and those different to her - show how transformative the power of empathy and understanding can be and demonstrate that by working together in cooperative rather than competitive relationships, our world (both natural and human) can be made richer in so many ways.

Themes

- Diversity & difference
- Loneliness
- Friendship

Audience and Writing Style

The Lonely Jacaranda has been written as a fable with the trees, plants and birds as the main characters displaying human emotions and traits. Its simplicity and innocence is seamlessly reflected in the sparse, poetic text and simply yet powerful imagery.

This story can be enjoyed by a wide range of ages, including adults, as it explores universally recognised, commonly experienced themes.

Classroom Activities & Discussion Points

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

Look at the front cover of the book. Read the title together. What do you think the story will be about?

Read the blurb at the back of the book. What do you feel about it? What kind of things are you know expecting to see inside the book? What questions do you have?

Read the story aloud as a group, pausing to take in the delicate and beautiful artwork and observe all the detail and difference you can find on each page.

KEY STUDY TOPICS/THEMES

Loneliness, difference and friendship

Questions

1. Has there been a time when you've felt lonely? What did it feel like?
2. Has there been a time when you felt different from others? What did it feel like?
3. Did someone else help you? If yes, in what way? If no, what did you do to help feel better?
4. How do you think you could help someone who was lonely or excluded from a group because they were different?

Activity

1. Memory drawing: Do a drawing about your own experience of feeling lonely or different. Include something that helped you feel better. Think about what colours would you use to match how you feel.
3. Look at the many ways that people are different. Celebrate all of the differences that make you and your classmates special.

Literacy, language and storytelling

Questions

1. How many characters are in this story? Do you think creatures other than people can be characters in a story? Can you think of other stories that have non-human characters?

Activity

1. New Words: Can you find three words in the book that are new to you? Try to work out what they mean from the context (the way they are used and what surrounds them).

Creativity and our imagination

Questions

1. Discuss how the artwork in the book compliments the themes of the book? Soft, fluid lines and gestures are used to create the images, lending a feeling of emotion to each one. Try matching the textual elements to their visual counterparts.
2. What do you notice about the colours in some pages of the story compared to colours later in the story? How does it make you feel?
3. What messages do you think the author is conveying through this book?
4. Which is your favourite illustration. Why? Share this with a small group.

Activities

Collage Forest: Have the class make a paper forest together using simple collage.

1. First, go outside and explore different plants – unusual plants, exotic plants, imaginary plants, interesting trees. Gather a collection of leaves or flowers and notice all the many ways they are different.
2. Then individually or in groups ask them to think of a mood or feeling from the book and create any kind of plant in a way that captures that feeling. They can gather naturally found objects, coloured paper, tissue paper and any other collage items pasted on with glue. Gather the individual plants together and create a forest of different trees and moods. Talk about the differences and moods of each plant, what they're feeling, and how they could help each other.
3. Using the 'Friends of Lonely Jacaranda' poster, study the images and facts about each of the birds and play the quiz game. Ask students to guess the answers based on the look of each bird (eg which bird eats seeds? Which insects?).

About the author and illustrator

Russell Irving is a children's and young adult book author with a passion for inspiring people to care for and connect with themselves through nature. He has lived most of his life in Melbourne, a vibrant, creative city but far too cold and wintry. He now lives on the warm, sunny north coast of New South Wales.

Apart from writing, he has worked for many years as an environmental educator and manager, including with Indigenous Ranger groups across Australia. This experience has reinforced his passion for educating people about the many benefits of caring for and building meaningful connections with nature. Visit his website at www.russell-irving.net

Book Ordering & Publication Details

- No. Pages – 24
- Trim Size - 8" (W) x 8" (H) (203x203)
- Formats & ISBN

PAPERBACK - 9780645238228
HARDCOVER – 9780645238235
PAPERBACK (MANDARIN) – 9780645238242

- Book Subject Codes
 - Children's / Teenage personal & social topics: prejudice & intolerance
 - Children's / Teenage personal and social topics: Emotions, moods and feelings
 - Children's / Teenage personal & social issues: Bullying, peer pressure
- Price (RRP) –Paperback USD\$9.99 / AUD\$14.99, Hardcover USD\$14.99 / AUD\$21.99.
- Book Sales & Reviews
 - Direct from author – www.russell-irving.net/shop-1
 - Amazon - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/0645238228>
 - Goodreads - <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/60593246-the-lonely-jacaranda>
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Appendix 1 – Some Suggested Links to Australian Curriculum

<p>Cross Curriculum Priorities Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia</p>
<p>General Capabilities Personal and Social Capability, Intercultural Understanding, Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking</p>
<p>Health and Physical Education – year level description (Strand: Personal, social and community health) Personal and social capability encompasses students’ personal/emotional and social/relational dispositions, intelligences, sensibilities and learning. It develops effective life skills for students, including understanding and handling themselves, their relationships, learning and work.</p>
<p>English Literature – year level description Students engage with a variety of texts for enjoyment. They listen to, read and view spoken, written and multimodal texts in which the primary purpose is to entertain, as well as some texts designed to inform. These include traditional oral texts, picture books, various types of stories, rhyming verse, poetry, non-fiction, film, multimodal texts and dramatic performances. They participate in shared reading, viewing and storytelling using a range of literary texts, and recognise the entertaining nature of literature</p>

Year Level	Communicating, interacting for health & wellbeing – Interacting with others sub-strand	English - Literature
F	Practise personal and social skills to interact positively with others (ACPPS004)	Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students’ own experiences (ACELA 1575) Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a text (ACELA 1578) Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts (ACELT1783)
1-2	Describe ways to include others to make them feel they belong (ACPPS019)	Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students’ own experiences (ACELT1582) Discuss features of plot, character and setting in different types of literature and explore some features of characters in different texts (ACELT1584) Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication (ACELT1586)
3-4	Describe how respect, empathy and valuing diversity can positively	Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on

Year Level	Communicating, interacting for health & wellbeing – Interacting with others sub-strand	English - Literature
	influence relationships (ACPPS037)	the authors' reasons (ACELT1594) Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (ACELT1596) Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension (ACELT1605)
5-6	Practise skills to establish and manage relationships (ACPPS055)	Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)

Links to curriculum

[https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Health and Physical Education - Sequence of content.pdf](https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Health%20and%20Physical%20Education%20-%20Sequence%20of%20content.pdf)

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Search/?q=ACELA1432>