



GARY CREW

The
**LEAVING
LYREBIRD
FOREST**

ILLUSTRATED BY
JULIAN LAFFAN

TEACHERS RESOURCES

LEAVING THE LYREBIRD FOREST

WRITTEN BY GARY CREW WITH ORIGINAL WOODCUT

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INTRODUCTION

'Are you lonely here?' her mother asked.

'Never,' Alice said. 'Not while I am friends with the lyrebird.'

Alice Dorritt has spent her life living on the outskirts of a small town, in a house nestled in bushland. Alice's parents, Gwen and Ernie, are artists, and are quite happy in this idyllic setting. Every other morning, Alice has been visited since she was three years old by a lyrebird she has named 'Birdy'.

Her bond with this magnificent bird brings her together with their nearest neighbour, Mr Brown, a widower who loves the bush and its treasures as much as Alice does. He, too, is visited by the bird on alternate mornings but he calls the bird 'Fred'.

But change is coming: Alice is growing up, and planning a future which might mean leaving the bush to pursue further education. When she befriends Mr Brown they share their love of the lyrebird. But Alice realises that he is getting older. And as the nearby town has grown, their beloved lyrebird and bushland are threatened too. Alice discovers a fossil and Mr Brown invites scientists to investigate. This alerts Alice to the options available to her in her future and she becomes determined to study science and wildlife.

Then, one change does come unexpectedly, and Alice must face making adult decisions and accepting the losses which life inevitably entails.

This is a touchingly lyrical story about friendship, change and our place in nature, from legendary Australian author Gary Crew. It is stunningly illustrated with woodcuts by acclaimed artist Julian Laffan.



THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book that might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT (SOSE)

- **HUMAN PLACE IN NATURE & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**

DISCUSSION POINT: 'One day we will all have to let nature have its way,' he said. 'Like those trees that fell, none of us can live forever.' (p 89) Discuss this quote in relation to what takes place in this story.

DISCUSSION POINT: 'After we'd moved in, it didn't take us long to notice that wildlife which had once been plentiful stopped showing up.' 'What sort of wildlife?' 'Well, the growling grass frog for a start.' (p 118) Alice discovers from Mr Brown that their local area has changed a great deal since he and his wife built there in the 1920s. It is often the case that we don't realise what has been lost even in our own local environment. Discuss the role which human beings can play in monitoring and protecting their local area.

ACTIVITY: Lyrebirds are very special native birds and this book celebrates their uniqueness. Research the lyrebird as a species, and its special talent of mimicry.

- **PALAEONTOLOGY**

DISCUSSION POINT: Alice's discovery of the fossil (p 87) may represent an important finding about local fauna. Research fossils and what they can teach us about our ecology.

ACTIVITY: Research the 'archaeopteryx' (p 108) and what fossils have revealed about this winged prehistoric creature. [See **Bibliography.**]

ACTIVITY: Research the palaeontological work of Sir Richard Owen (mentioned p 109).

DISCUSSION POINT: Grace smiled. ““Found” is an interesting word,’ she said. ‘That’s like saying Captain Cook “found” the Australian continent when he didn’t, considering neither place – the creek bank nor Australia – was ever lost.’ (pp 104–5) Discuss this statement.

- **MATURATION AND LEAVING CHILDHOOD/CHANGE**

DISCUSSION POINT: Alice’s acceptance that she must leave her parents in order to educate herself is the first step in her maturity. What other signs of her maturity does she demonstrate in this story?

DISCUSSION POINT: ‘Mr Brown was far from young. He couldn’t live forever. He could die while she was away – if she went away – or at any time. As was the case for all living things. Naturally.’ (p 111) How difficult is it to accept the aging process and to see those we love become frail and die?

DISCUSSION POINT: Alice’s friendship with Mr Brown is a sharing of different perspectives on life. She brings youthful curiosity and excitement in the ‘now’; he brings knowledge, understanding and home-made pumpkin scones! He also shows Alice that life is full of sad losses but that one can continue regardless. What can we learn from friends who are older than we are?

- **WOMEN’S ROLES AND RIGHTS**

DISCUSSION POINT: ‘You know, Mr B,’ Alice began as she unpacked the lunch, ‘there are just so many interesting careers a girl can have these days.’ (p 126) Alice has strong role models in her mother and Miss Kerr; but when she meets Grace and Sheila she realises that her career options might be even broader than she’d imagined. This is a lesson which matters no matter what age we live in. Discuss with students the options available to them relating to their skills and interests.

DISCUSSION POINT: Choose a female character in this book and discuss her character traits. Would you say this character was a strong woman?

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY**

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following:

ACTIVITY: In this book Gary Crew employs deliberately inventive language. Alice loves to surprise her teacher Miss Kerr with inventive words such as ‘mud-walloping galoshes’ (p 79). Have fun with the words in this book. [See **Worksheet 2.**]

ACTIVITY: Read poems about the lyrebird. [See **Bibliography.**] Encourage students to write a poem about the lyrebird in haiku, or tetractys or acrostic or free verse form. [See **Worksheet 4.**]

ACTIVITY: Characters include: Alice Dorritt and her parents, Gwen and Ernie; Cyril Brown, a reclusive neighbour (his deceased wife, Marcella, and lost son, Ronald are mentioned); Alice's teacher, Miss Kerr (her fiancé, bankteller Colin Solomon, is mentioned); Harry Shields, Postmaster; Grace Nicholas, scientist; Sheila Kavanagh, science photographer; Dr Ingram, Palaeontologist. Write a short character study of any of these characters based on what you have read in the text.

ACTIVITY: Test your students' **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text.

- **VISUAL LITERACY**

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story, as explored below:

ACTIVITY: The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. What does this cover suggest?

ACTIVITY: The **medium or style** employed in illustrations which appear in each chapter is **woodcut printmaking**. Conduct a simple printing exercise using polystyrene or foam with students. Invite them to create an image inspired by this text.

See: 'Printmaking' *Artful Parent* <<https://artfulparent.com/category/kids-arts-and-crafts-activities/printmaking/>>

'Print! Print! Print-making!' *Art and Technology Design for Kids!*
<<https://art-educ4kids.weebly.com/printmaking.html>>

ACTIVITY: Create a collage image of the lyrebird [See **Worksheet 1.**]

ACTIVITY: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography.**] [See also **Worksheet 3.**]

- **CREATIVE ARTS**

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

1. **Create a list of lyrebird facts** to share with your classmates. Collate your lists and have a student illustrate each fact; create a book of lyrebird facts as a class project.
2. The lyrebird has been used as an **emblem and logo** on many objects and by many organisations including on the ten cent coin and as the logo of the Australian Film Commission (See: 'Lyrebird' *Wikipedia* <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lyrebird>>.) Design a poster for an imagined *Lyrebird Dance Company* in as creative a way as possible.
3. Create a **diorama** in a box, using a papier-mâché model of a lyrebird in a forest.
4. **Create a poster** to advertise this book.
5. **Create a book trailer** to promote this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

- **Learning Technologies**

ACTIVITY: Research the topics above online.

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Gary Crew. Compare this to his other books.
- Research the work of Julian Laffan as an artist. This is his first book.
- Students might research this book in comparison to other books such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

CONCLUSION

This is a gentle and evocative text about finding one's place in the world, which often involves leaving beloved people and places behind. The uniqueness of the lyrebird inspires Alice's love of nature, and she becomes determined to accept change, and to develop her knowledge and skills in order to protect nature's treasures. Written in Gary Crew's poetic prose and illustrated with Julian Laffan's exquisite woodcuts this is a timeless book to treasure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gary Crew writes short stories, novels and picture books. Gary is Professor of Creative Writing at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. He is particularly interested in researching the creative links between fiction and nonfiction in his novels and the creative interface between print text and visual text in his picture books. During his publishing career of over 30 years Gary has won the Children's Book Council of Australia's Book of the Year four times, twice for novels and twice for his picture books; the New South Wales Premier's Award, the Victorian Premier's Award, the American Children's Book of Distinction, the Aurealis Best Children's Short Fiction, the Wilderness Society's Award for Environmental Writing, and the Royal Geographic Society Whitley Award. Gary lives on the waterfront of subtropical Bribie Island. When he is not writing or lecturing, he loves to walk by the sea or read.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Julian Laffan is an artist, educator and curator. Julian graduated from the School of Art at the Australian National University in Canberra. He is currently a picture book judge for the Children's Book Council of Australia. He specialises in contemporary woodcuts and drawings, using these mediums to create sculptural objects and works on paper that explore themes of history and identity. Julian has produced a series of exhibitions that developed mentorship partnerships between emerging and established artists from across Australia. He is a member of The Culture Kitchen, a Canberra-based

cross-cultural collaborative print group. He has worked on inter-cultural print based projects in East Timor, Indonesia and on the Thai-Burma border. His works are in the collection of the Australian Print Council, Canberra Museum and Gallery, and significant private collections.

Julian is a primary school teacher, living with his wife and their son in Braidwood, New South Wales. Julian is passionate about children becoming literate through great books, integrating with the importance of the arts.

For more about Julian visit julian-laffan.squarespace.com



WORKSHEETS

WORKSHEET 1. COLLAGE THIS IMAGE OF A LYREBIRD

Use appropriate materials to make a collage of this image. Enlarge to A3 to give you more space to work on.



'File: PSM V46 D799 The lyre bird menura superba.jpg' *Wikipedia Commons*
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PSM_V46_D799_The_lyre_bird_menura_superba.jpg>

WORKSHEET 2. WORDS & THEIR MEANINGS

Write a sentence using the words below which are used in this story.

Decrepit (p 10)

Translucent (p 22)

Lunettes (p 43)

Claustrophobia (p 44)

Dollop (p 84)

Intaglio (p 86)

Astonishment (p 100)

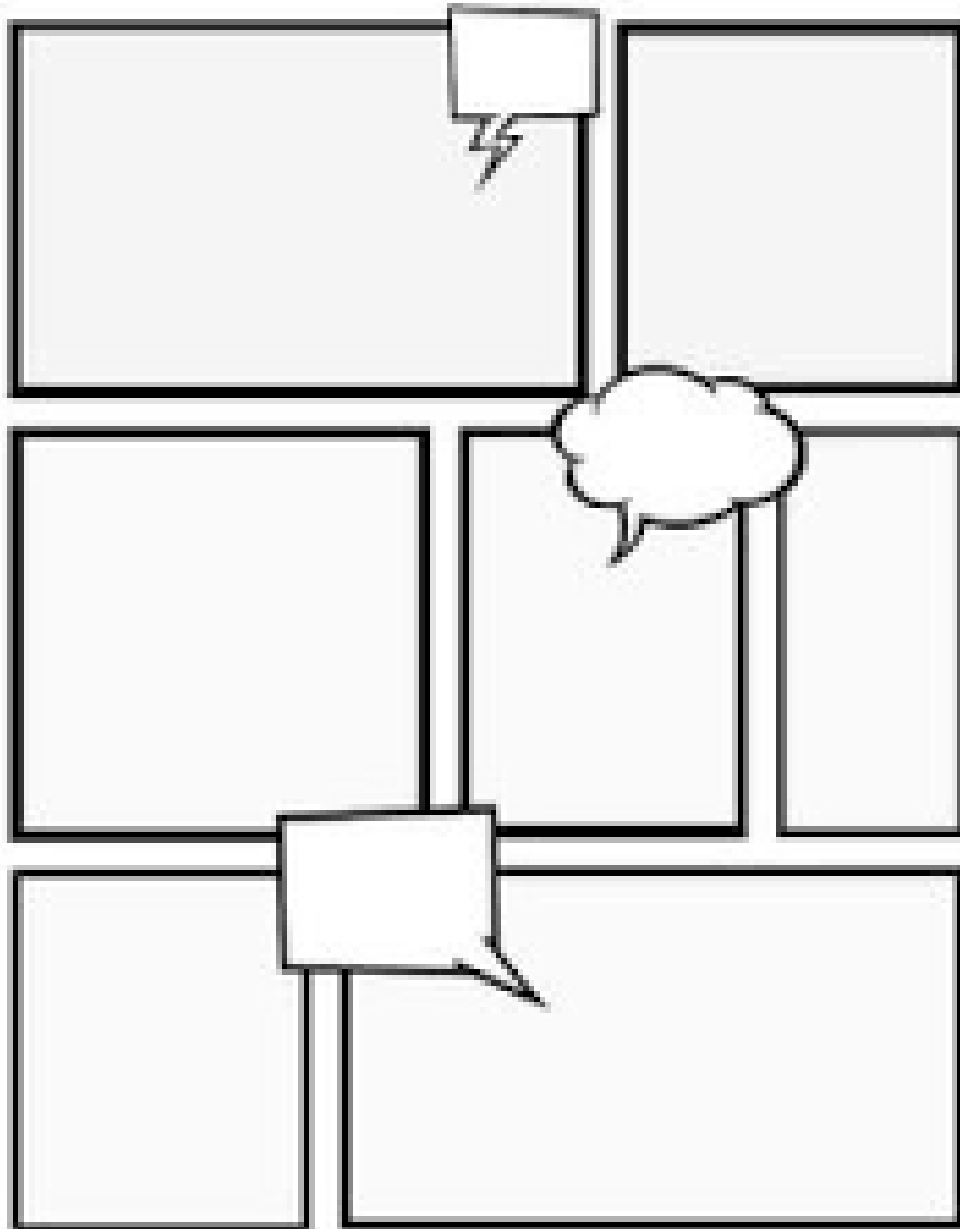
Archaeopteryx (p 108)

Palaeontology (p 110)

Repository (p 119)

WORKSHEET 3. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Comic Book Template viewed at: <<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/>>

WORKSHEET 4. LYREBIRD POETRY

A. Write an acrostic poem:

L	
Y	
R	
E	
B	
I	
R	
D	

B. Write a haiku poem:

5 syllables	
7 syllables	
5 syllables	

C. Write a tetractys poem:

1 syllable	
2 syllables	
3 syllables	
4 syllables	
10 syllables	

D. Write a free verse poem beginning:

'Look, a lyrebird...

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011, she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the Queensland Writer's Centre's Johnno Award.