



When You're Older

Sofie Laguna
illustrated by Judy Watson

March 2022

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Format: Hardback

Recommended for: 4–8 year olds

Themes: Brothers, sibling love, imaginative play, new baby, natural world and independence

Applicable to learning areas: English language, literacy and literature, visual literacy

Summary

An exquisitely illustrated and deeply joyful celebration of the bond between brothers. Join them as they explore the far reaches of this wild and amazing world, side by side every step of the way. From two highly acclaimed and award-winning creators.

'This is a very special picture book for all ages. We are with the brothers all the way – on the last pages, holding our breath. A masterpiece.'

Ann James

'This beautiful book gives us the life we'd all love our children to have, out in the natural world, revelling in its beauty and truly being part of it. The exquisite illustrations are bursting with energy and colour, the language is rich yet simple and the brothers look after each other as brothers should. It really hits the spot, right in your heart.'

Alison Lester

A word from the author

'At the time of [my second son]'s birth... Peter Greste, an Australian journalist, was serving time in an Egyptian jail and I remember fearing for him. I knew Peter's brother was in Egypt when he received his sentence. [I also knew] that he was fighting to free him. And I was deeply moved by it. I thought about it a great deal. I thought a lot, too, about what it means to be a brother. It might mean facing prison, it might mean fighting injustice, it might mean giving away everything you have. I think this became one of the threads in *When You're Older* – just how far a sibling will go, for love. It doesn't matter how high the stakes – even life or death. I wanted to express this kind of fierce devotion in my story. I hoped it might be there for my sons. But *When You're Older* is a picture book about joy and play and imagination as much as it is about courage and sacrifice. Perhaps they are inseparable. Perhaps that is the nature of deep human bonds. That is what it is to care about one another. It is to stand in court to hear a verdict. It is to shout out in a stormy sea, "Take my hand!"'

Sofie Laguna

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Suggestions for classroom discussion and application

Considering the Cover

- Before opening the book, show the cover illustration to your students, running your fingers over the title as you read it out loud. Prompt responses from students by asking questions such as:
 - Who can you see on the cover?
 - How might the children be related?
 - What do you think the older child might be saying to the younger? [Hint: think about the book's title.]
 - Look closely at how the older child is dressed, the crown on his head and the toys on the ground around him. What do you think these things might tell you about him?
- Turn the book over to show the back cover and note the building blocks, the elephant, the teddy bear and sleeping dog.
- Read out loud the words from the story '*Baby brother, I can't wait until you're older. Just imagine the adventures that lie ahead...*' and ask students if they might be able to guess what sort of adventures this boy might imagine going on with his brother.

Examining the Endpapers

- Open the book to the front endpapers (the very first three pages of the book, consisting of a double-sized, folded sheet of paper, with one half pasted against the inside front cover) and explain that this section often sets a mood for the story ahead. Allow plenty of time to explore the image, pointing out the elements that suggest we are entering an imagined place full of adventure, excitement...and maybe even a little bit of danger.

Comprehension

- Read the story through once, allowing plenty of time for students to find the real and fantastic elements on each page. After finishing, ask the following questions:
 - Why does the older boy have to wait until his brother is older to play with him?
 - Does the older boy like having a new brother?
 - What in the story helped you guess his feelings about his brother?
 - Do you think the story is realistic, fantasy, or a bit of both?
 - What images or words in the book helped you to answer the question above?

Visual Literacy

Framing

- Point out that the page featuring the seal and lighthouse has two large connected circles, and ask students why. [Hint: there's a mention of binoculars here.] Ask older students how these circles change the viewer's perspective. [On earlier pages we see the boys in their world, but here we are seeing the world through their eyes.]



Perspective/Proportion/Angle

- Ask students to compare the three double-page images of the boys sailing on the ocean during the storm. Point out that the illustrator has used perspective to make them seem tiny in the first image, larger in the next, and larger again in the third. Encourage students to explore how the illustrator has used perspective by changing the distance between the boys and the viewer across the three images, as well as how she has changed the angle so that we are looking down on them in the first, while the next images are at eye level. Discuss what effect changing perspective has on the story here. [Hint: the danger of the sea is intensified when they are tiny, while closer shots help convey the intense effort they are making.]

Body Language/Gaze

- Have students compare the images of the older boy sitting with his sleeping brother at the beginning and end of the story. Point out that our face and body can tell a lot about what we are feeling, and encourage students to guess the older boy's emotions.

Colour

- Ask students to compare the images of the baby's room with those of the jungle, beach, ocean and Antarctic. Point to how the illustrator, Judy Watson, uses colour (or the lack of it) to distinguish between the real and fantasy worlds.
- Ask students to take a closer look at the dog's collar throughout the book. Is it blue? Or is it green? But wait, now it's yellow! Why do you think the illustrator changed the colour through the book?

Illustrator Challenge Activity

The publisher has decided that the book is too short and needs three more illustrated pages. Each student is appointed as the illustrator to produce the new pages. The pages can be slotted into the story wherever they like, but the dog needs to appear in each of the illustrations – and her collar will be purple.

How old are the boys on these new pages? What are they doing in each illustration?

- Students can then use their purple-collar illustration ideas to write a whole new story.
- Extension exercise: Students can practise and perform their new story in small groups. Again, include the dog as a character. Make her a coloured collar.
- Try the same exercise with a collar of a different colour.



Creating Characters

- Challenge students to invent their own story-book character.
 - The character could be an animal, a person or something else. What would they be like when they are a baby, then a little older and so on, until they are very old indeed?
 - Do they look different when they are very old? Or do they look much the same, and behave differently?
 - Have students imagine a conversation with their character at a few different ages, and write down their chats. (e.g. what would a three-day-old black rabbit have to say, and what would the same rabbit say when they are old and grey?)
 - Can students think of a real animal that changes a lot as they grow older? What is the animal, and how do they change? Or what about an imaginary creature – what is it called, and how does it change?

Untold Stories

Ask students to look carefully at the pages of *When You're Older* – can they notice how many small creatures are hidden within them?

- Invite students to choose two creatures from two different pages. For example, a lizard in the tree where the boys are hiding in a cave hung with vines, and the Arctic hare on the dog-sledding page then write a story about what happens when they meet. Ask students:
 - Where did they meet? (Did the lizard go to the Arctic? He would have to wear protective clothing to keep warm.)
 - Did they like each other?
 - What did they do?
- Ask students to choose one creature and write about what they thought of the two brothers. For example, do they think the dragon likes the brothers? Or does she find them annoying? What about those cheeky crabs? What are they up to?
- Ask students why they think there are no creatures on the stormy sea pages. Have them try drawing their own version of these pages with some extra creatures. Could there be sharks? A sea monster? How might this change the feeling of the story?

Point of View

- Ask students to tell the story from the point of view of the dog, thinking about the following:
 - Does the dog notice the same things as the boys?
 - If not, what is she focusing on?
 - When is the dog most interested in what the boys are doing?
- Have students choose a character and draw or write about its home and its family. For example, do they think the butterfly will have butterfly babies who look just like her? Will she live in a tiny house with a tiny teapot and a tiny TV? Or will she sip on nectar and have caterpillar babies?



Literary Techniques

Word selection

- Point out to your class that the choice of words we use in a story has a very big impact on how much information the reader receives and whether that information is exciting.

Use a simple example to illustrate this, such as asking which word in the following two sentences is the more informative and exciting:

The rocket fell to Earth.

The rocket plummeted to Earth.

- Point out that the author, Sofie Laguna, has chosen her words very, very carefully to make sure they have maximum impact on each page. Turn to the spread featuring the whale 'spurting fountains' and ask students to think about her choice of words here and their effect. Ask them to choose another element on the spread, such as the tiger, bird, butterfly, fish...and to choose informative and interesting words to describe what the creature is doing in the image.

Figurative Imagery

- Point out the line '*The waves will sing us to sleep*' and ask students why they think Sofie Laguna chose those words when waves can't 'sing'. Encourage them to recognise that the words *sing* and *sleep* here create a feeling of peace, quiet and gentleness.

Exercise: What feelings do the words *icy*, *churning* and *crashing* have on the phrase '*...into the icy, churning water, waves crashing around us...*' in the story?

Repetition

- Explain that repetition is sometimes used by authors to highlight something important in a story. Point out that the word '*we'll*' is repeated throughout the story and ask why Sofie Laguna might have done that. Encourage discussion by asking how the story would change if you replaced the word '*we'll*' with the word '*I'll*'. Guide them to the idea that the author is emphasising that the older brother doesn't imagine himself as the baby's leader; rather that they will be equal partners in the years to come.

[NB: Point out that the dog is repeated in every spread yet is never mentioned in the story. Ask why they think the illustrator might have wanted to include the dog, and if its presence on the page makes the story richer.]

Dialogue

This story has no dialogue. But perhaps the whole story is being told by the older brother to his baby brother. That's a kind of monologue. What if the story was told differently...?

- Have students re-write the scenes purely in dialogue, with the boys talking to each other on their adventures. Can this show their different personalities, via the way they talk to each other? eg:
 - Which one of them do students think is the funniest or the most daring?
 - Which one comes up with the ideas more often?
 - Does one of them ever suggest that they turn back?
 - Do they have arguments?
 - Do they share the cooking and packing the luggage?
 - Is one of them better at fishing?
 - Are they both good rowers, or do they sometimes go around in circles?

About the author

Sofie Laguna's many books for young people have been published in the US, the UK and in translation throughout Europe and Asia. She has been shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Awards, and twice been awarded Honour Book by the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). She is also a highly acclaimed author for adults. Sofie lives in Melbourne with her husband, illustrator Marc McBride, and their two young sons.



About the illustrator

Judy Watson works with a combination of digital and traditional methods to make art that explores colour, light and our connection with nature. She has won a Prime Minister's Literary Award, been selected for the International Youth Library's White Ravens catalogue, and been shortlisted for the CBCA Eve Pownall Award. Judy is married with two teenage children, a three-legged dog, several chickens and a changing array of foster cats. She lives and works in Frankston South.

A word from the illustrator

'I've tried to stock [each page] with lots of things for fingers to point out. I tapped into my own joy of reading as a young child and remembered the things I liked to notice in the picture books I loved. So, there are tiny animals both real and imagined here and there, all with a hint of a personality or backstory. And there are clues and traces of goings on, such as footprints in the snow.'

'But the book starts and finishes in the very real world of a home with a little boy and his baby brother who sleeps a lot. In these pages, I really wanted lots of white space. And I wanted the "white" space to be white, rather than a colour. This became a kind of visual storytelling device to hint to the readers that "here is the real world".'

'It's easy to see that our leading character has a much richer world in his head than the one in which he is sitting, waiting for his baby brother to wake up. But I hope this book will fill young readers with wonder at the delights of our natural world, and a desire to get outside and explore it.'

Judy Watson

