



Suri's Wall

Lucy Estela & Matt Ottley

SYNOPSIS:

Eva squeezed Suri's hand. 'What's there? What can you see?' 'What can I see?' Suri looked out over the wall. 'Oh, it's beautiful, let me tell you all about it.' A moving tale of the power of the human spirit brought alive by Lucy Estela and award-winning illustrator Matt Ottley.

WRITING STYLE

- *Suri's Wall* has themes of coping with being different as well as broader themes such as people displaced by war and the power of the human spirit which will make it very attractive to schools and parents alike.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucy Estela's love of writing became apparent as early as age seven when she began writing and illustrating a multitude of storybooks and newspaper columns that were printed up at home and forced upon her family. Since then she has taken a fascinating path towards publishing her first book.

Her university degree focused on languages but rather than becoming a language teacher, Lucy was introduced to the world of computer games and has pursued a successful career in London and now in Australia as a developer of websites and games for the kids and youth entertainment market including such brands as Disney, Warner Bros Pictures, Chorion and Xbox.

Suri's Wall, illustrated by the talented Matt Ottley, is Lucy's debut book with Penguin. Lucy lives in Sydney with her husband and three children.

Matt Ottley is a multi-modal artist working across the fields of visual arts, music and literature. He is an award-winning picture book writer and illustrator, with 25 picture books published. He spent his childhood in Papua New Guinea, and has travelled widely throughout Australia and the world. As a teenager and during his early twenties he worked as a stockman on remote cattle stations in the Australian outback, before studying

fine arts and music. He lived for three years in Britain working as an equestrian painter, painting some of Britain's finest racehorses and polo ponies.

He is now one of Australia's most popular children's author/illustrators, and has been published in several different languages around the world. His book and musical work for young adults, *Requiem for a Beast* was awarded the Children's Book Council of Australia's Picture Book of the Year in 2008, and the Queensland Premier's Award for Young Adult Literature in the same year. His picture book, *What Faust Saw* was an international best seller. Matt has also worked as a professional flamenco and classical guitarist. He is currently working on two large-scale orchestral projects that will also have visual and literature components.

FROM THE EDITOR

The story for *Suri's Wall* came to Lucy in that moment before sleep, after watching a documentary on the tallest woman in the world. Having gone through school as the smallest girl in every year, Lucy understood the isolation that can come from being different to your peers and wondered what it had been like for the tallest woman growing up.

This was also a time when detention centres in Australia were featuring heavily in the news and the two ideas merged to form the basis of the story. Lucy wrote *Suri's Wall* as a short story and then left it for a year while focusing on her second baby, Ashton, before thinking to send it to Penguin. I was immediately captivated by it and felt it work beautifully as a picture book. Lucy adapted the story brilliantly and it then also captivated the talented Matt Ottley who agreed to illustrate it.

STUDY NOTES/ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHERS

Page 1

- Why might Suri like the wall? What does it offer her? (safety, familiarity, security, comfort etc)
- Why do we build walls? Are they designed to shut things in or out?
- What are the benefits of living behind a wall?
- What are the disadvantages of living behind a wall?
- Why do you think there is a 'silent and still' man standing next to the iron gate?
- What does this suggest about the sort of life Suri has?
- Consider the use of colour on the page. What mood is created with this colour?
- How does Suri stand out?
- Why do you think the roof is broken?
- What sort of life does Suri lead?
- What do you think her background might be?

Page 2

- Why is Suri different from the other children?
- Why are they afraid of her?
- What does Suri's body language tell you about how she is feeling?
- How are the other children seen to be feeling differently from her?
- Draw a Y chart describing what Suri can see, hear and feel.
- Do you think that the other children should be afraid of Suri just because she is tall?
- What other characteristics might cause children to exclude someone?
- Why are we often afraid of people who are different?

Page 3

- How does Suri feel?
- Why does her heart ache?
- Why does she sleep in a separate bed?
- Is there anything Suri can do to change her situation?
- How does the use of colour on this page help to emphasise Suri's mood?
- Where do you think the girls are? What sort of life do you think they have?
- Why would being excluded from the other girls be even harder in this situation?

Activity:

- Imagine that you are Suri and write a diary entry about how you feel.
- Imagine that you are one of the other girls. Write about your day, how you feel and how you feel about Suri.

Page 4

- Why does Suri measure her height on the wall each month?
- Do you think she wants to get taller?
- How tall must Suri be to be able to see over the wall?
- Why did tears well up in her eyes when Suri realised she was taller than the wall?
- What do you think Suri can see beyond the wall?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of change?
- In what way might Suri's sadness at growing up and being able to see over the wall be a metaphor for the fear we sometimes experience at the idea of growing up and leaving childhood behind?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of growing up?
- How do you think the other children will react when they realise Suri can see over the wall?
- Will this make her situation better or worse?

Page 5

- Why is Eva holding Suri's hand?
- How does this make Suri feel?
- How does Eva react to the fact that Suri can see over the wall?
- Why does she want to know what is over the wall?

- Would you want to know what is on the other side of the wall?
- How has Suri now become different in a good way?

Page 6

- How has colour been used on this page to change the mood?
- Do you think this is really what Suri saw over the wall?
- Why do you think she gave the children that description?
- What happens to Suri's level of acceptance when she starts describing the other side of the wall?
- What does this suggest about the power of stories and dreams?

Page 7

- Draw a Y chart describing what you can see, hear and smell on this page.
- Why is it a good sign if this is the king's ship?
- How would the children feel on hearing this description?

Page 8

- How would Suri feel when Eva and Maria take her hands?
- How has Suri's situation changed?
- Why are the children no longer afraid of her?
- Why do they now see her height as an advantage rather than as something to fear?
- What does this suggest we should try to do when we meet people who are different or of whom we may be afraid? Why might it help to find out their strengths or abilities?

Activity

- Write Suri's diary entry describing how she feels after this dinner.

Pages 9-11

- Why do more and more children come to listen to Suri's stories?
- Imagine you are Suri. Describe these scenes to the other children. What can you see, hear, feel, taste and smell?
- What sort of world has Suri created for the children?
- How would she make them feel?

Activity

- Draw or describe another scene that Suri might see over the top of the wall.

Page 12

- Why does Eva ask to snuggle with Suri?
- Why does this make Suri's heart sing?
- What feeling does Suri give Eva?

Page 13

- Why does the man at the gate warn Suri that the children will find out? What will they find out?
- Why do you think he is cross with Suri?

- Why does Suri reply, '*Yes, perhaps. But not today.*'?
- What do you think the bangs were that the children heard?
- What do you think might have happened?
- What do you think Suri can see over the wall?
- What do you think she will tell the children?

Page 14

- Consider the reality of what Suri really sees.
- Why would she not want to describe this scene to the children?
- How would this description make them feel?

Page 15

- Consider the contrast in the use of colour on this page.
- Do you think Suri tells the children the truth?
- Why does she create a fantasy world for them?

For discussion

- How does Suri rise above her sadness?
- What does it say about her that she makes the other children feel better even when they were so mean to her?
- Where do you think Suri and the children live?
- What do you think has happened to their land?
- How might stories like the ones Suri tells help the children to deal with their situation?
- Do you think Suri does the right thing or the wrong thing in making up stories about what she can see rather than telling the children the truth?
- Is this really lying?
- The guard is worried that the children will find out the truth. How will they feel about Suri's stories if they do?
- How do stories or dreams help us get through the dark times?
- What do they provide that reality sometime can't?
- Adults often tell children stories rather than exposing them to the harsh truth of a situation. Do you think this is a good thing to do

Further Reading

- Read Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem, *Telling Lies to the Young Is Wrong*. Do you agree with him or do you think Suri does the right thing in making up stories?

TELLING LIES TO THE YOUNG IS WRONG

Telling lies to the young is wrong.
 Proving to them that lies are true is wrong.
 Telling them that God's in his heaven

and all's well with the world is wrong.
The young know what you mean. The young are people.
Tell them the difficulties can't be counted
and let them see not only what will be
but see with clarity these present times
Say obstacles exist they must encounter,
sorrow happens, hardship happens.
The hell with it. Who never knew
the price of happiness will not be happy.
Forgive no error you recognize,
it will repeat itself, increase,
and afterwards our pupils
will not forgive in us what we forgave.

—Yevgeny Yevtushenko.