

ZANA FRAILLON and PHIL LESNIE

# The CURIOSITIES

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TEACHERS RESOURCES

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## Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

'But slowly, Miro began to see things differently. He began to feel things differently, and do things differently too.' (p 5)

With the Curiosities, a whole world of wonders and possibilities awaits . . .

Miro wakes one morning to find the world isn't quite the way he thought it was. When the Curiosities choose Miro as the one they nest on, Miro is led to discover all the marvels waiting in the shadows where no-one else looks. Sometimes, though, the Curiosities can make Miro feel alone and invisible in the darkness. But perhaps Miro isn't as alone as he thinks . . .

This is a multi-layered text about difference, where author Zana Fraillon is inspired by neurodiversity. It is set in a specific cultural landscape by illustrator Phil Lesnie as a creative response to the text but is also universal in the many issues it explores.

Being able to see our environment differently is a big theme in the book, and so vital in getting people to really understand neurodiversity and disability.

*The Curiosities* is a beautiful celebration of disability, diversity and pride in who you are, from one of Australia's most loved and awarded writers for children, and one of its most celebrated illustrators.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

### HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

Several themes and topics are relevant to the following Curriculum Area:  
<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>>

Investigate the following sub-topics using skills developed in this Curriculum Area relating to **INQUIRY AND SKILLS** and **KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING**:

1. *Develop Methodology and Research Using Primary and Secondary Sources*
2. *Synthesise and Evaluate Evidence*
3. *Present Evidence*
4. *Develop Alternatives*

### DISABILITY AND DIFFERENCE

**DISCUSSION POINT:** 'I hope that *The Curiosities* can encourage all of us to embrace and celebrate diversity. People are disabled not by their impairment or their difference, but by the way they are treated by society. We are, all of us, differently abled in different ways. Be proud.' (Zana Fraillon, p 30) The sentiments in this statement lie at the heart of this book. Discuss with students.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** ‘Miro had never noticed all the oddments and snippets before, all those wonders and possibles waiting in the shadows where no-one else looked.’ (p 7) Discuss this quote with reference to aspects of students’ own lives and observations of the world and people around them.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** ‘Although dealing with neurodiversities and disabilities can be difficult, uncomfortable and painful, the pathways and connections formed inside the brain to deal with these differences can enable people to perceive the world in insightful, understanding and wondrously varied ways.’ (p 30) Discuss these fascinating ideas with students.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** A child with Tourette Syndrome inspired this text and students may wish to research this and other medical conditions. [Teachers should be aware that many students may have conditions that they prefer not to discuss.]

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Research and discuss the ‘Social Model of Disability’ (See **Bibliography** below). Zana Fraillon says: ‘This model encourages kids/people of all ages to look at their environments and consider them from the perspective of another.’ Students could look at their school or local playground, or their classroom, or the local shops, and make a list of all the things in those environments which may prevent someone with a disability from using the environment.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Playgrounds are an important area to consider in the context of disability. Encourage students to brainstorm situations or things in a playground which are disabling or create barriers for differently abled people (for example, tanbark in the playground and stairs to the slide would be a barrier for a child in a wheelchair). Students could also visit an all-abilities playground and note the differences.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Consider how accessible museums and art galleries are. What height are artworks usually hung at? What does this mean for people who are of short stature, or children, or someone in a wheelchair or using a mobility device?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Are trains and trams disabling in any way? Students might also be encouraged to draw maps of their local area – how would the maps vary if someone was using crutches or a wheelchair? What if the person had a visual impairment? What about someone using a walker? Would they go the same way to school or are there things that would prevent them from taking that route?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Students could also look at the school environment – are the classrooms set up to help children with sensory issues? Are there places people can go to if they are feeling overwhelmed? This discussion could also lead into a discussion of neurodiversities and ways in which the environment can affect all of our moods.

## **PHILIPPINE (FILIPINO) CULTURE AND BELIEFS**

**DISCUSSION POINT:** ‘Using [the Babaylan] to inspire me to paint Zana’s story, I find it impossible not to wonder what it would be like for Miro to grow up in a place where brain differences actually afford one political power, and where his tics, his Curiosities, are viewed as a communion with magic, essential in the life of a community.’ (Phil Lesnie, p 31) Research the Philippine cultural beliefs which Phil Lesnie refers to at the

end of the book and try to identify the spirit figures he depicts in this work.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Examine the pictures in this book. What do they tell you about the lifestyle, living conditions, work, leisure, and culture of the Philippine people?

**ACTIVITY:** Read other books about Philippine culture. In 2022, the Philippines will celebrate its quincentennial as a nation. Research this topic further.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Read folktales and fables from the Philippines with your students and discuss some of the key figures portrayed in them.

## TOLERANCE AND EMPATHY

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Values such as tolerance and empathy are essential in any person's maturation. We are all different and learning to appreciate that difference or diversity is a key aspect of developing as a person.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** 'But sometimes, the Curiosities were so loud and strange that people couldn't help but stare.' (p 10) What is the appropriate response to someone who is 'differently abled' to those around them?

## ENGLISH (LITERATURE, LITERACY & LANGUAGE)

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

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

**ACTIVITY:** The language used in this text is evocative and suggestive, for example:

- 'At first, Miro didn't even notice them, perched on his shoulders and nuzzled in his hair. At first, Miro thought the tingle he felt was just the warmth of the sun or the murmuring of the wind.' (p 3)
- 'They showed him how to whisper up waves and weave clouds to make stories for the wind.' (p 6)
- 'flapping and hissing and screeching and hurtling.' (p 16)
- 'One evening, as the sun tiptoed across the very tops of the trees,' (p 14).

Discuss the literary devices employed in these examples and in other parts of the text.

**ACTIVITY:** Write another story about Miro and his adventures with the Curiosities.

**ACTIVITY:** Test your students' comprehension by asking them questions about the written and visual text. [See also **Worksheet 2.**] [See also **Author's and Illustrator's Notes** at the end of the book.]

## VISUAL LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>>

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

**ACTIVITY:** The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. This one features the boy in a boat surrounded by the looming figures of the Curiosities. What feelings does this cover evoke? (The title page features an evocative image similar to the cover.)

**ACTIVITY:** The front and back **endpapers** feature two different images. Invite students to speak about the two images and what these images suggest to them.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** How does the **layout of the storyboard** and the **format and design** of the book influence your reading of it?

**ACTIVITY:** Creating characters involves studying **facial expressions and body language**. Study faces in this book and discuss what they reveal about the characters.

**ACTIVITY:** Phil Lesnie explains:

'Although technology has often played a part in the planning process of my earlier illustrations, I've always favoured watercolour for the final pages. I knew the art for *The Curiosities* called for levels of contrast and intricacy that I didn't know how to accomplish with watercolour, but I was still learning to paint digitally. It was the inspiring digital work of Rovina Cai and Bruce Whatley, as well as David Hockney's breathtaking iPad paintings, that pushed my curiosity about the medium over the line. Like Hockney, I worked on an iPad, using Procreate, which is an incredibly accessible and versatile tool, plus the cost in materials was a \$15 app and an apple pencil!

'The Curiosities themselves had many different visual iterations over the course of illustrating the book. It was challenging to adapt creatures from Filipino mythology to a text that wasn't written specifically for them, and to then adapt them again so that they were less harrowing. I worried constantly that I was betraying Zana's text, while worrying also that I was betraying the original folk tales.

'But the nature of painting digitally really helped to shape their final forms. I set arbitrary limitations, using a single brush unseen elsewhere to portray their other-worldly glow, and drew their shapes with as few brushstrokes as possible. I wanted them wherever possible to have simply dripped out of the pen into a dollop of milky light.

'Meanwhile, my cat has been enjoying its unfettered access to my neglected painting table, from which it is usually banished. Perhaps for his sake, I'll continue to work in this fascinating new digital medium for a while longer.'

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The **colours** used in this book are dark in tone with the Curiosities depicted as white ghost-like figures. How does the contrasting colour palette influence

your reading of this text?

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Study each of the images closely. Phil Lesnie uses a variety of **artistic techniques** such as silhouettes (p 32), close-ups or zooming into a face painted in realistic style for impact (p 20), use of light and reflection in many of the scenes. Identify and discuss any artistic techniques employed in this visual text.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** Critical literacy can be applied in reading any visual text. For example, on p 9 we see a village home with the Curiosities crawling over its roof. On p 32 we see the same house with Miro in darkness standing on its roof. What do these two similar but different images suggest? The Curiosities are based on animist figures of Philippine culture. What two animals do the Curiosities look like on p 4? Encourage students to study each image carefully for meaning.

**DISCUSSION POINT:** The reader's perspective in observing strong left to right movement across a double page spread is also important in a picture book, encouraging the reader to follow the action sequentially in a filmic way. Discuss how Phil Lesnie uses each page in a variety of different formats to engage the reader in the filmic progression of this narrative.

**ACTIVITY:** Invite students to draw, paint, or collage another scene to accompany the story they wrote in the second English (Literature, Literacy & Language) activity above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1**. below.]

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

## **CREATIVE ARTS**

There are several creative activities inspired by this text:

**1. Make a Filipino Parol Lantern** [See 'Make Your Own Beautiful Filipino Parol Lantern' *Little Passports* <<https://www.littlepassports.com/blog/craft-diy/make-beautiful-filipino-parol-lantern/>>

**2. Make a Curiosities Wall Hanging** using nine paper plates. Decorate each one with colourful images you have drawn or collaged in response to this picture book. Then string them together in threes, from a long piece of bamboo, with fishing line.

**3. Create a Model** of one of the village houses which appear in this book using a cardboard box, straw and other materials. Create a cardboard cut-out figure of Miro to stand in front of the model.

**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.

**ACTIVITY:** Research the author and illustrator online. [See **Bibliography**.]

## MATHEMATICS

**ACTIVITY:** Have fun counting things in this text.

## FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Zana Fraillon. Compare this book to her other books.
- Research the work of Phil Lesnie. Compare this book to his other books.
- Students might add to their understanding of this book by reading the other picture books listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

## CONCLUSION

This is an intriguing picture book about difference and diversity. Fraillon's text about a neurodiverse child has been explored through Phil Lesnie's artistic rendering of Philippine religious and cultural beliefs. It is a fascinating work about respecting the differences between each other and appreciating that every person has something special to offer.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES AND ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

[See end of book.]



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Zana Fraillon** was born in Melbourne, but spent her early childhood in San Francisco. Her 2016 novel, *The Bone Sparrow*, won the ABIA Book of the Year for Older Children, the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the Amnesty CILIP Honour. It was also shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the Queensland Literary Awards, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Gold Inky and the CILIP Carnegie Medal. It was included on the prestigious IBBY Honour List in 2018. Her book *The Lost Soul Atlas* (2020) won the 2020 Aurealis Award for Best Children's Fiction and was shortlisted for the 2021 Children's Book Council Award for Book of the Year: Older Readers.

She spent a year in China teaching English and now lives in Melbourne with her three children, husband and two dogs. When Zana isn't reading or writing, she likes to explore the museums and hidden passageways scattered across Melbourne. They provide the same excitement as that moment before opening a new book – preparing to step into the unknown where a whole world of possibilities awaits. See her website for further information: <<https://www.zanafrailon.com/about-me>>

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Phil Lesnie** is a Sydney-based illustrator of children's books. He is also a children's bookseller. It is entirely possible that he hasn't read a title written for adults since he became one. He works primarily in watercolour, because in a watercolour painting even mistakes look lovely. He is the illustrator of *Feathers*, which was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards in 2018. His first three books were CBCA Notable books in 2015, 2016 and 2018. But his first cat, Cassidy, is notable all of the time.

See also:

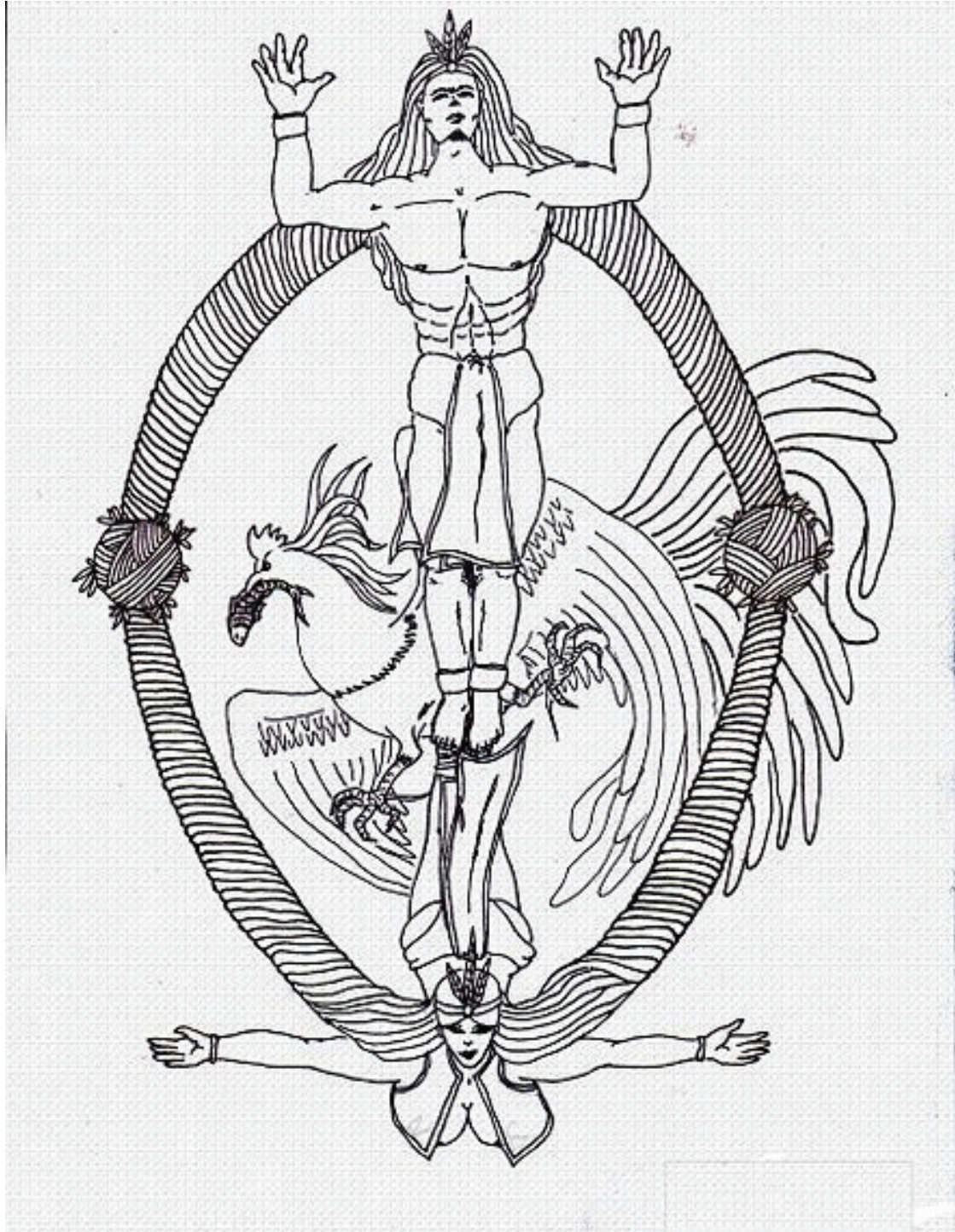
'Meet Phil Lesnie' *Reading Time* 10 March 2015  
<<http://readingtime.com.au/meet-phil-lesnie/>>

'Meet the Illustrator: Phil Lesnie' *Kids' Book Review*  
<<http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2016/04/meet-illustrator-phil-lesnie.html>>

# WORKSHEETS

## WORKSHEET 1. COLOUR THIS IMAGE

The image below relates to Philippine cultural beliefs. Enlarge it on a photocopier and then colour it in.



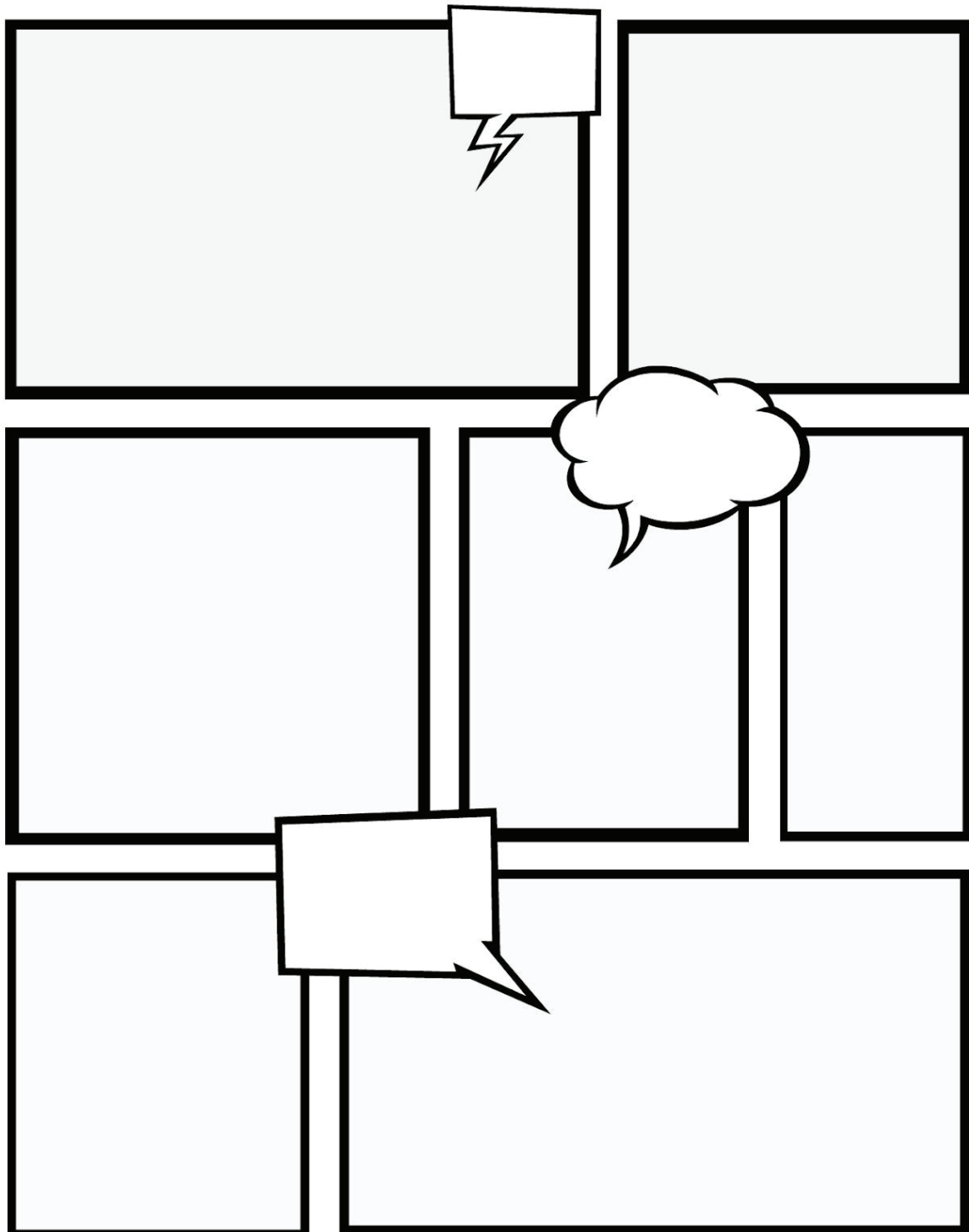
## **WORKSHEET 2. WORDS AND MEANINGS**

Invite students to write the meaning of each of these words (which appear in this book) and then write a sentence containing the word.

<b>WORD</b>	<b>MEANING</b>	<b>SENTENCE</b>
nesting		
blended		
nuzzled		
tingle		
murmuring		
chirp		
oddments		
snippets		
wonders		
possibles		
confusion		
brilliant		
furious		
yowling		
pleaded		
tamed		
hurtling		
fragile		
invisible		
cartwheeled		

## WORKSHEET 3. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a comic or graphic novel 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/>>

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<<https://goodstart.edu.ph/filipino-story-books/>>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM** 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 QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021, she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.