

**Teachers' Notes (Primary)**  
**by Robyn Sheahan-Bright**

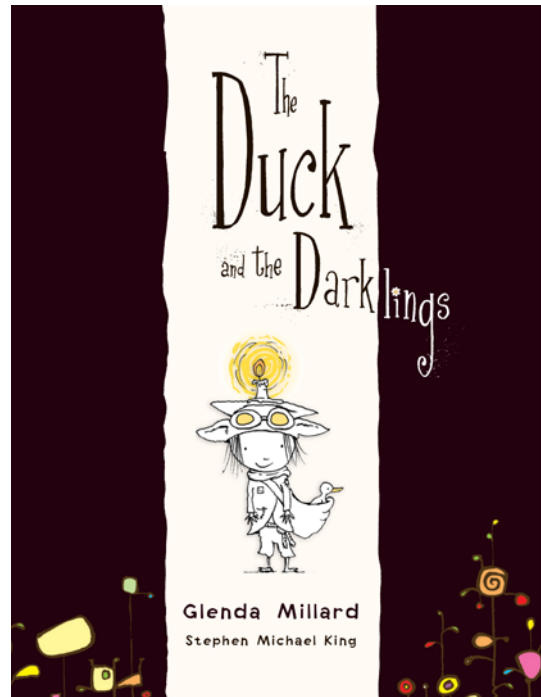
**The Duck and the Darklings**  
**by Glenda Millard**  
**Illustrated by Stephen Michael King**

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Recommended for ages 4–8 and older readers

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## INTRODUCTION

'One day I found a scrap of wonderfulness. Her wings were wounded but in her heart there was hope.'

Peterboy is a Darkling child – he lives in the world of Dark. His grandfather's love is the only thing which makes their lives in an underground burrow bearable. The other 'old ones' have forgotten to tell stories as a way of remembering the good times. But Grandpapa has always kept his stories close to his heart. When, one day, Peterboy sees the light in Grandpapa's eyes, he wishes that he could bring home something to keep that light alive. Instead he finds the wounded Idaduck.

This is a whimsical, magical joy of a story. It is inventively told in both words and pictures, and is deeply moving.

'The light put longing into Peterboy's heart.' And it will put longing, too, into the heart of every reader of this book.

## STORY SUMMARY

In this story, the Darklings live in a spoiled world. Only Grandpapa remembers when the world was full of light and hope. Peterboy glimpses the power of memory and goes out in search of something to recover that light for Grandpapa. Instead he finds a wounded duck, which potentially represents a drain on the family's already stretched resources, but instead what she does is bring more love and hope into their home. The final message in the text, though, is that ducks are naturally possessed by wanderlust and that Peterboy and Grandpapa are going to have to farewell Idaduck at some stage. And when they do, they must do it joyously, in celebration of what the duck has given them – hope.

## THEMES

There are several key ideas or themes which are suggested by the written and visual text in this work: **Enduring Hardship, Family Love, Friendship, Letting Go, Environmental Destruction and Regeneration, Hope, Generosity and Kindness, and Memories.** These themes could be considered in conjunction with the following school curriculum areas.

## CURRICULUM TOPICS

1. Study of history, society and environment
2. English language and literacy
3. Visual literacy
4. Creative arts
5. Learning technologies

The notes which follow are designed to be used largely in lower to upper primary classrooms, although some activities might be useful for secondary students. Teachers should be able to adapt them to suit the demands of their particular curriculum.

## **STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT**

### **ENDURING HARDSHIP**

'Dark was a sorry, spoiled place; a broken and battered place.'

- *Activity:* Being without any regular work or food or shelter is the fate of millions of people throughout the world. Read for example, about children in India who scavenge for food. How would you feel if you had to spend your days searching for food, or if you had to live in a burrow?

### **FAMILY LOVE**

'Home was a hole built with care, lit with love, where he and Grandpapa shared everything.'

- *Discussion Point:* This story is about a small family made up of a boy and a grandfather. There are all kinds of families in the world. How do you define a family? What makes a family work? What creates problems in families? What binds family members together?
- *Discussion Point:* What symbols of love did you notice in the illustrations in this book?

### **FRIENDSHIP**

'In return she cosied his toes and squeezed speckled surprises into his slippers.'

- *Discussion Point:* Idaduck becomes a friend to Peterboy and Grandpapa after they rescue her. What do you give to your friends as an expression of your feeling for them?

### **LETTING GO**

'Idaduck made stars shine in Grandpapa's eyes. But now she is mended and we must say goodbye.'

- *Discussion Point:* Letting Idaduck return to the world is very difficult for both Peterboy and Grandpapa. Have you ever had to say goodbye to someone you loved? How did you cope with that?

### **ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION AND REGENERATION**

'But time had soothed earth's hurts. She had dressed anew in flowers and forests.'

- *Discussion Point:* The world above ground had been spoiled but when they farewell Idaduck they discover that some of the past damage has been repaired. Is it possible to correct the damage done to our environment? How would you begin doing that as an individual / a community / a state / a nation?

## HOPE

'Idaduck spread her wings and the Darklings watched with hope in their hearts.'

- *Discussion Point:* The Darklings have little to live for except to scavenge for their everyday needs. What gives one hope? Make a list of the things which make you hopeful. Have you ever felt a sense of hopelessness? How did you deal with that?

## GENEROSITY AND KINDNESS

'There's little enough to eat without feeding someone else's child,' said Grandpapa gruffly.'

- *Discussion Point:* We are all challenged by the needs of others and sometimes we don't behave as generously as we might do. Have you ever felt guilty after you refused a donation in the street? How much should we be doing for our neighbours? Is our society one which encourages community kindness? Discuss this in relation to topics such as the treatment of refugees, or the existence of support for mental health issues, or services for homeless people.

## MEMORIES

'So Grandpapa turned the rusty latchkey of his magnificent remembery and set free a symphony of stories.'

- *Discussion Point:* There is a lovely word used in this book ('disremembering') which suggests that these people have willfully blotted out their memories and that human beings need to remember in order to survive. How important are memories in keeping human beings alive?
- *Activity:* 'Memories of things past, child, thoughts of things lost and longed for.' This is a beautiful expression of what memories represent. What do you think memories are? Describe them as you feel them, using words which are suggestive like these.
- *Activity:* Read other books about memories and the importance of older members of the family or of our community in our lives. eg Mem Fox and Julie Vivas's *Wilfrid Gordon Macdonald Partridge* (Omnibus, 1984); Eve Bunting's *The Memory String* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000); Neil Curtis's *The Memory Book* (Allen & Unwin, 2006); Lane Smith's *Grandpa Green* (Roaring Brook Press, 2011); *Isabel Allende: Recuerdos Para un Cuento/Memories For A Story* By Raquel Benatar, Ill. by Fernando Molina Transcribed by Patricia Petersen (Pinata Books, 2004); *Memorial* by Gary Crew and Shaun Tan (Lothian, 1999); *The Memory Tree* by Britta Teckentrup (Hachette, 2013).

[See also English **Language and Literacy** below.] [See also **Blackline Master 2.**]

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

**1) Rhythmical language is one of the joys of this text.** Eg. 'Over heaps and hummocks of lost and lonely things they clambered, gathering fiddlesticks for firewood, filling billies with trickle and seeking crumbs and crusts of comfort to take home.'

- *Discussion Point:* What effect does rhythm have in the enjoyment of reading?

2) Use of **inventive literary devices** such as **alliteration** in phrases such as ‘fiddlesticks for firewood’; ‘crumbs of comfort’; ‘crept into cracks and crevices, corners and crannies’ or ‘forbidden fondness’ is another very enticing aspect of this text.

- *Activity:* Make up some alliterative phrases to describe your home or suburb or city.
- *Discussion Point:* What other literary devices did you notice in this book?

3) **Wordplay and ‘making up words’** can be a powerfully poetic and effective way to tell a story, too. Eg. ‘Merrily winged the birdlets through the periwinkle sky and daisily, daisily bloomed the fields where children played in peace.’

- *Discussion Point:* Create a description of a scene using words such as ‘daisily’. Read other texts which employ wordplay. Eg. Chris McKimmie’s picture books are full of such inventive language. Or read *Puffy* by Anne-Maree Rolley and Jirí Tibor Novák (Random House, 1993).

4) The **Conclusion** of a story is important in cementing its themes. Here the duck flies away, despite the fact that Grandpapa and Peterboy have looked after her.

- *Discussion Point:* What does this ending suggest to you as a theme? How else might the story have ended? Write your own ending. [See also **Visual Literacy** below.]

5) Discuss the **concept of synonyms**.

- *Activity:* Find examples in this text eg. Spoiled, broken, battered, ruined. Choose an unusual word from this text and then find a synonym for it.

6) The text of this story is quite **sophisticated in its use of language and the concepts conveyed**.

- *Activity:* **Comprehension activities** might include asking students to guess the meanings of words based on their context in the sentence. [See also **BLM 2**, below.]

## VISUAL LITERACY

Every aspect of a book’s visual text and design works to tell the story and to enhance the meaning of the written text.

1) The **medium** used is a mixture of line drawing and atmospheric silhouettes.

- *Activity:* Try to create your own picture using a silhouette.

2) **Detail** in the pictures helps to create an imaginary ‘world’. Eg. the ‘candle hats’ are just one of the whimsical things drawn in these pictures.

- *Discussion point:* what other unusual or interesting details did you notice in these images?

3) Every part of the book's **design**, from cover, to endpaper, to title page, to back cover is important to making meaning in a picture book.

- *Discussion Point:* Discuss the cover and what meaning it conveys. Then design your own cover for the book.
- *Discussion point:* the endpapers are spare and suggestive, depicting ducks flying overhead and a hand reaching up to them in a wave or salute.
- *Discussion Point:* What does this image suggest to you? Design your own endpapers for this book.

4) The colour palette changes after Idaduck arrives with more brightly coloured pages and areas of white.

- *Discussion point:* what does the colour change denote? [see also **BLM 1 & 3.**]

## CREATIVE ARTS

This text might encourage students to explore it through other forms of creative arts.

### SONGWRITING

- *Activity:* **Write a song** to farewell Idaduck inspired by some of the lovely phrases which Peterboy says in farewelling her.

### MUSIC

- *Activity:* **Compose some music** to go with the lyrics.

### DRAMA

- *Activity:* **Act out a scene** from the book eg. The farewell party for Idaduck.

## LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

- Research the work of Glenda Millard and Stephen Michael King.
- Research any of the topics suggested in the themes above.

## CONCLUSION

What a joyously heartfelt book this is! Readers will be touched and delighted by the relationship between Peterboy and his Grandpapa, and brought to tears by the care they give to Idaduck. The poignant pain of Idaduck's departure completes what is a celebration of love, life and laughter, but also of pain, longing and loss.

It is a book which symbolises the triumph of the human spirit over adversity, and the power of hope, imagination and love in our lives.

## ABOUT THE CREATORS

### GLENDAMILLARD

Glenda has written picture books, short stories and novels for children and young adults. She says that she 'has loved reading and being read to from an early age.' As a child, her more robust pursuits included billy-cart racing, tree-climbing and attempting to fly. She used to dream that she could fly and on windy days she could be found at the football oval with her arms outstretched, poised to be whisked away, or sometimes balanced precariously on the roof of her Nana's shed. Neither of these techniques worked. Even an impressive bandage around her wrist, a day home from school and a ride in the council grader was poor compensation for the spectacular failure of her launch attempt from the high-up swing at school. Glenda left school at 15 and didn't discover the joy of writing until nearly thirty years later.

Glenda was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award 2004 as well as receiving the Honour Book Award for the CBCA awards that same year for her book *The Naming of Tishkin Silk*. Her picture book *Kaito's Cloth* was shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Award 2005, and *Layla, Queen of Hearts* was shortlisted for the Younger Readers CBCA Award in 2007, and winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award in 2007. Her most recent novel *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark*, for lower secondary readers, was winner of the Queensland Premier's Literary Award for YA Fiction in 2009 and has been included in the prestigious international IBBY Honour Book List in 2011. Her picture book *Isabella's Garden*, illustrated by Rebecca Cool, was a CBCA Honour Book Award and was shortlisted the Queensland Premier's Literary Award 2010. *All the Colours of Paradise* was also shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Award 2010. *Mbobbo Tree*, illustrated by Annie White, is another of her latest picture books. Glenda has written picture books for very young readers as well as novels for lower secondary readers. Her books are beautifully written, and are an inventive mixture of whimsy and reality which will entrance both children and the adults who read her books with them. Visit her website: <http://glendamillard.com/>

Read this Inside-a-Dog interview with Glenda Millard by Andrew McDonald:

<http://www.insideadog.com.au/blog/blog-post-interviewing-glenda-millard-author-small-free-kiss-dark>

### STEPHEN MICHAEL KING

**Stephen Michael King** says that he can remember drawing all of his life. Growing up in suburban Sydney in an environment where his imagination and creativity were nurtured, he wrote stories, dreamed of illustrating a book and of one day working with Walt Disney Studios. When he was nine, Stephen went partially deaf but his hearing loss was unnoticed for a number of years. During this time he began to immerse himself in art where he could communicate without words. Due to his deafness he found school a traumatic experience which failed to prepare him for the future. However, he was eventually employed as a children's library assistant and this job made use of his

natural affinity with children and helped pave the way to future opportunities. In 1990 he was employed by the Walt Disney Studios in Surry Hills and he subsequently worked as a book designer and illustrator for Scholastic Australia.

Watercolours, black ink, oil painting and sculpture are Stephen's favourite media, and he has now produced a number of successful books. His first picture book, *The Man Who Loved Boxes*, won the Family Therapy Association Award and was shortlisted for the Crichton Award in 1996. It has since been published around the world and translated into a number of languages. In 1997 Stephen collaborated with Robin Morrow over *Beetle Soup - Australian Stories and Poems for Children*, which was shortlisted for the 1997 CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers. *Patricia* was released in 1998 and in 1999 both *The Little Blue Parcel* and *Henry and Amy* were shortlisted by the CBC for the Picture Book of the Year Award.

Some of Stephen's most recent books are *The Pocket Dogs* and *Pocket Dogs Go on Holiday* (with Margaret Wild); *Emily Loves to Bounce*; *Millie, Jack and the Dancing Cat*; *Mutt Dog!*; *You!*; and *Never Ever Before*. *Applesauce and the Christmas Miracle* (text by Glenda Millard) and *Leaf* were both shortlisted for the 2009 CBCA Early Childhood Book of the Year Award. He has an excellent website where you can find out all about his work. <http://stephenmichaelking.com/bio.html>

#### **ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT**

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and publishes regularly on children's literature, Australian fiction, and publishing history. She was inaugural director of and is a Life Member of the Queensland Writers Centre, and was co-founder of Jam Roll Press. Her publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia (1946-2005)* (2006) co-edited with Craig Munro and *Hot Iron Corrugated Sky: 100 Years of Queensland Writing* (2002) co-edited with Stuart Glover. In 2012 she was recipient of the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2011 of the Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland.



## BLM 1 DRAWING ACTIVITY

See how much you can remember of Peterboy's outfit.

Here is an outline of what Peterboy looks like. Enlarge the drawing on a photocopier.

Draw his costume on for him and then colour it in.


Can you create a scene behind the image, suggestive of the country of Darkling? Use collage and a range of media to create an effect.





### BLM 3 IMAGES IN TEXT

Images of each of these things appear in the book, some more than once. Try and find them. Write the name beneath them on this sheet as well.

		
1.	2.	3.
		
4.	5.	6.
		
7.	8.	9.