



The Second Sky

TEACHERS NOTES

Written by Patrick Guest and illustrated
by Jonathan Bentley

Published by Little Hare in October 2017

SYNOPSIS

Great things happen when you reach for the sky.

The first thing Gilbert sees when he hatches from his egg is the sky. It is love at first sight and from that moment on Gilbert longs to fly like other birds. But penguins don't fly, they waddle, and so begins Gilbert's quest to find his place in the world.

THEMES

The Second Sky is about having dreams and striving to attain them. It is also about discovering one's limitations – and discovering one's unique talents for overcoming them. Penguin chick Gilbert longs to soar and glide in the sky like an albatross. Only after accidentally tumbling into the ocean does he discover he is better suited to dive and soar and glide underwater.





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WRITING STYLE

Author Patrick Guest uses straight narrative prose in *The Second Sky*, with poetic elements added for dramatic and emotional intensity. His main poetic form is the repetition of individual words. For example, the phrase 'up, up, up' on the second spread of the narrative, when Gilbert is full of hope, is repeated several pages later, when he struggles to climb a mountain. In the first instance, the words 'up' are used to impress upon the reader the initial emotional intensity of Gilbert's longing to fly. In the second instance, the same three words reflect Gilbert's dogged pursuit of his dream: he clings to the concept of 'upwards' as necessary to flight, but now the concept is loaded with effort, struggle and the force of gravity. Patrick also repeats sentence styles, such as the use of three truncated sentences in a row, also for enhanced emotional effect. On the first spread, Gilbert's longing to fly is given dramatic emphasis by describing the sky itself in three staccato statements: 'The moon glowed. The stars sparkled. The birds wheeled.'

Yet another repetitive device is in the structure of the overall narrative, with the second half of the story mirroring the first half. The repeated use of 'up' is replaced with the repeated use of 'down'; the concepts of rising, soaring and striving upwards become images of falling, tumbling and sinking; and the moon and stars of the sky become the 'moon' and 'stars' of the underwater world.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

One of an illustrator's tasks is to enrich the emotional impact of a text. The illustrator can manipulate the reader's emotional response to a story with a range of techniques, including point of view, perspective, and contrasts of light and dark, size and placement. A skillful illustrator can give a reader a physical sense of what the character in the story is experiencing; this helps the reader identify with the character and his or her emotional journey. Jonathan Bentley is particularly known for his line drawings, but in *The Second Sky* he has opted for shape rather than outline, predominantly using blurred watercolour washes, but adding occasional contrasts of strong, rough scrapes of paint. Gilbert, in particular, is depicted with blurred applications of colour, suggesting his fluffiness and softness and accentuating his appeal. The mountains that challenge and thwart him, on the other hand, are hard-edged and roughly textured, emphasising the stark contrast between the delicate penguin chick and his harsh environment, as well as portraying the extremes of his emotional challenges. Jonathan also positions Gilbert on different parts of the page, and in different sizes relative to other visual elements, to help give the reader a powerful sense of Gilbert's smallness compared with the grandness of his dreams.



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AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Patrick Guest was raised in the Melbourne beachside suburb of Seaford. Even as a child, Patrick was writing stories, starring in his own Powerful Patrick series: a major hit with his mum, dad and rabbit, Snowball.

A desire to be Michael J Fox took Patrick down the corporate path. After gaining a commerce degree at Melbourne University, followed by a three-year stint with a big mining company, Patrick realised that he was possibly the world's worst accountant. A dramatic change saw Patrick go back to study physiotherapy, and in 2000 he landed his dream job at the Sydney Olympics.

It wasn't until his first child, Noah, was born, followed by Reuben and Grace, that Patrick started writing professionally. Since then he's had two picture books published – *That's What Wings are For* and *The Ricker Racker Club* – with several more in the pipeline.



ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Jonathan Bentley is one of Australia's most treasured illustrators, and is fast becoming an international favourite. He has worked with some of Australia's best authors, including Margaret Wild and Andrew Daddo, and has recently branched out into writing his own stories.

Jonathan's first solo book, *Where is Bear?*, was a runaway success and sold into 16 territories in its first year. Several of his other picture books have earned prestigious CBCA recognition, including *A House of Her Own*, *And Red Galoshes* and *Pink*.





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STUDY NOTES

1. How does the typesetting and design of the book reflect the emotional elements of the text? For example, compare the typesetting of 'up, up, up', and of 'down, down, down' where they occur throughout the book. How do the different styles of text enhance the meaning of the words? To what extent does this kind of typesetting enhance or detract from the meaning and appeal of the book? To what extent might the book's emotional significance be changed with conventional typesetting? Is unconventional typesetting necessary to help understand or enhance the book's meaning?
2. Find as many instances of various kinds of textual repetition as you can (look for words, sentences, themes or narrative structure). What is the narrative effect of these repetitions, or patterns? Read the following article about patterns in lyrical poetry. How do the ideas in the article make you think differently about the effect of literary devices on our meaning and comprehension of literature?
http://rorotoko.com/interview/20120404_boyd_brian_on_why_lyrics_last/
3. Jonathan Bentley is a talented illustrator who is able to adapt his style to suit the story. How does his style in *The Second Sky* compare to his illustrations for *Where Is Bear?* or *Blue Sky, Yellow Kite*?
4. Formal aesthetic principles are those elements that underlie the overt subject or content of an artwork. Contrast, for example, can add many shades of meaning, as well as manipulate the emotional tone of a narrative. Choose a spread from *The Second Sky* and identify the types of contrast employed in the picture (for example, size, light and dark, placement). How do these uses of contrast add to the meaning and emotional impact of the image?
5. Choose two consecutive spreads and note how Jonathan has used contrast to accentuate different elements for dramatic effect. Think in terms of light and dark, high and low, far and near, as well as contrasts of size and placement. How might you articulate the sequence of meaning from one spread to the next?



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ACTIVITIES

1. *The Second Sky* tells the inspiring story of penguin chick Gilbert as he attempts to find his place in the world. Discuss Gilbert's emotional journey in the story and plot his feelings from beginning to end on a large piece of butcher's paper or the blackboard. How do you think Gilbert feels when Uncle Crabstick tells him to 'Give it up'? What are his emotions when the albatross effortlessly glides away? What words would you use to describe his state-of-mind at the end, as he does a 'perfect dive'?
2. Author Patrick Guest uses the repetition of individual words in *The Second Sky* for dramatic and emotional intensity. Ask your students to write and illustrate a scene – such as jumping over a puddle, or running for the bus – and have them experiment with word repetition and the placement of text on the page. How does this technique enhance storytelling?
3. Gilbert longs to soar and glide in the sky like an albatross, but it is only after he tumbles into the ocean that he discovers he is better suited to diving, soaring and gliding underwater. Encourage your class to explore the idea of "the second sky" and what Gilbert's journey says about overcoming adversity and finding one's own path in life.
4. Illustrator Jonathan Bentley has used contrast to accentuate different elements for dramatic effect, including in the endpapers. What do you think is the significance of the different endpapers at the start of the story and at the end?

