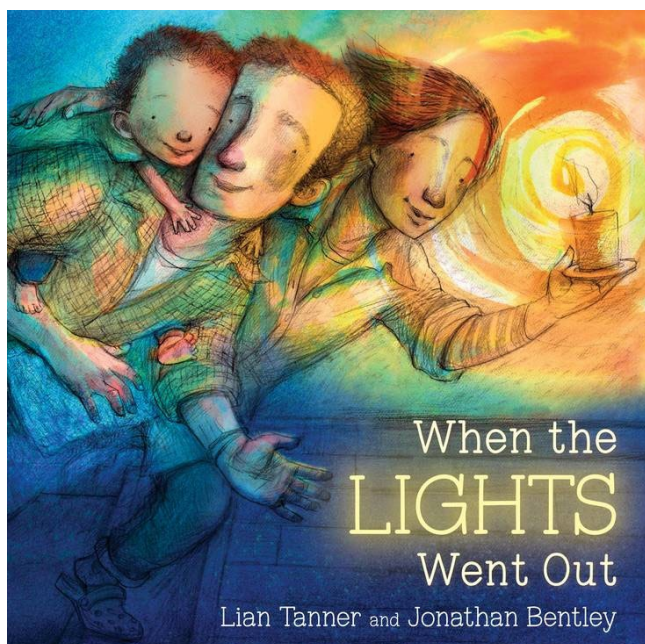


When the Lights Went Out

By Lian Tanner
Illustrated by Jonathan Bentley



A cosy picture book about finding warmth and connection in community from the award-winning creative team behind *Ella and the Ocean*.

RECOMMENDED FOR

4 – 6 (Lower Primary)

THEMES

Family, neighbourhood, multiculturalism, community, imagination, uncertainty, fear, adventure

ISBN (AUS)

9781761180019

SYNOPSIS

The night was frosty dark but we were snug and cosy in the kitchen. Then SNAP! The lights went out.

In the dark of night, a neighbourhood becomes a new country to explore, and an ordinary winter evening turns into a family adventure.

A reassuring story about finding comfort in community from the award-winning creators of *Ella and the Ocean*.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'I was really really scared of the dark when I was a kid. So the inspiration for this book came pretty much directly from my 4-year-old self, and I wrote it for that same little girl.

'But I also wrote it because of Covid, and some of the lovely things that came out of it. We're often told that humans are selfish (and there are definitely times when they are), but there were so many acts of kindness and community during the various lockdowns. People helped their neighbours, particularly the elderly and the isolated, and music seemed to be a big part of what happened, with opera singers on their balconies, guitarists in their garages, and orchestras and dance companies rehearsing via Zoom. So I wanted to bring all of that down to one street, with a community coming together on a cold dark night.'

Lian Tanner

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

'I first needed to create the neighbourhood or street, the setting. I spent some time drawing houses that felt both varied and interesting. A little quirky but believable. I also wanted to include a green area with trees, which gave plenty of hiding places for the foxes and owls.

'Then I sketched ideas of our family and the other main characters. Lian's only directive to me was to make sure the street was multiculturally diverse, and a few sets of roughs later we felt we had a believable community.'

'The other main challenge was picking the right tones of colour. As the book is set at night, I wanted to avoid black if possible. Black is a tricky tone, so I chose to play with blues and purples. Getting that mix of colour with the warm light of the candle and street light was a lot of fun.'

'I really enjoy drawing animals, so I added the family cat and also extra foxes and owls into most of the spreads, almost like a game of hide and seek.'

Jonathan Bentley

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lian Tanner has worked as a teacher, a tourist bus driver, a freelance journalist, a juggler, an editor and a professional actor. She has been dynamited while scuba diving and arrested while busking. She once spent a week in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, hunting for a Japanese soldier left over from the Second World War. It took her a while to realise that this was all preparation for becoming a writer. Nowadays Lian lives by the sea in southern Tasmania. She is the author of the internationally bestselling *The Keepers* series, the award-winning junior fiction *A Clue for Clara* and the picture book *Ella and the Ocean*, which won the 2020 NSW Premier's Literary Award and the 2022 Tasmanian Literary Award, Prize for Young Readers and Children.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

As a little boy, Jonathan Bentley liked football and drawing. When he was eight years old, he realised he wouldn't be good enough to play football for Leeds United – so he concentrated on drawing instead. He is now one of Australia's most treasured illustrators. Jonathan has worked with authors such as Margaret Wild and Andrew Daddo, as well as writing and illustrating many of his own titles. His award-winning picture books – including *Windows*, *A House of Her Own*, *Pink*, *The Second Sky*, *Where is Bear?* and *Cat and Dog* – have been published all over the world.



IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- **Before Reading:** Through a think-pair-share discussion, ask students to consider the following questions while looking at the front cover of *When the Lights Went Out*.
 - Do you think this story will be set in the day or night?
 - What things on the cover helped you guess the answer?
 - Who might the story be about?
 - What are some reasons why they might need to use a candle?
 - Do the people look scared of the dark?
 - How do you think they feel about being together in the dark?
- Open the book to the front endpapers (the double-size sheet folded, with one half pasted against the inside front cover) and look at the night sky, featuring the owl in the top left corner and the fox in the bottom right. Ask students how this image makes them feel. While recording answers on your whiteboard, ask students what it

is about the image – the colours, the swirls of the brush strokes, the light of the moon, the creatures featured – that made them feel that way.

- Read the story slowly, and after finishing, close the book. Encourage students to talk about why some people might fear being in the dark but how the dark brought good things to the family in the story. Encourage them to name the good things that happen after the lights went out. [They met their neighbours for the first time, they had fun dancing and singing together.] Now ask students to imagine the sorts of things the child might be able to do **in the future** because the lights went out when they did. [Have playdates with other children in the neighbourhood, greet the adults living nearby by their name, learn guitar from Mrs Martinez and dance with Mr Harada.]
- For school-aged students: Open the book again and turn to the first double-page spread. Discuss with the class the idea that an illustration can communicate information just as well as words. Re-read the text here and ask students to look closely at the image and see if they can list as many things as possible about the child's neighbourhood.
- If you found the class responded well to the previous activity, turn the page and ask them to find things in the next image that tell us a lot about life **inside** the child's house. [The child likes to draw, the family has a cat, dad likes to cook.]
- **Colour:** Introduce the idea to your students that colours can influence our emotions and point out, as an example, that yellows and reds make us feel warm and safe, while blues and greens create cold and scared feelings. Look at the images of the candle in the story and talk about how Jonathan Bentley, the book's illustrator, has depicted the candlelight as a bright swirling mass cutting through the dark of the staircase as the family ascends it to find candles.

- **Language:** Lian Tanner, the book's author, uses poetic language to emphasise key scenes in the story. Look at the page with the text, '*The night was bright with stars and smiles. Mrs Martinez played the guitar and sang brave songs and sad songs and songs that made us tap and sway.*' Ask students to find an example of rhyme, repetition and alliteration here.
- Ask students what two 'outside' creatures are shown throughout the story and why they think those two creatures were chosen.
- Turn to the final image in the story and ask students to write a sentence capturing what the child is thinking about while looking out of the window after the lights came back on.