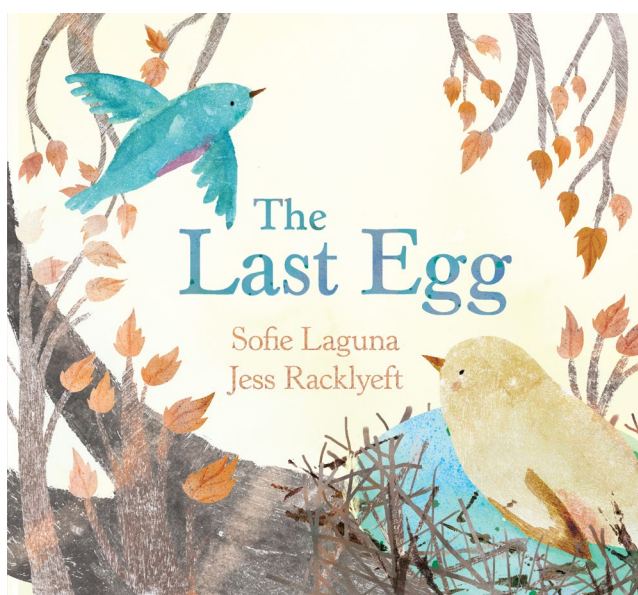


The Last Egg

By Sofie Laguna, illustrated by Jess Racklyeft



When Mother Bird and Father Bird discover a large blue egg in their nest, they treat it as their own. A beautiful story about love and kindness and loyalty in the face of adversity, from the award-winning creators of many much-loved picture books including *Iceberg* and *When You're Older*.

RECOMMENDED FOR

4–8 (Primary)

THEMES

Birds, parenting, trust, resilience, love, courage, commitment, honour, dragons

ISBN (AUS)

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SYNOPSIS

When Mother Bird and Father Bird discover a surprise fourth egg in their nest, they commit to parenting it, without question. That is goodness. That is sacrifice. The colours fade around them. Snow falls and the land freezes. They are at great risk of dying. Still, they do not leave. That is never a question for Mother Bird; even if Father Bird wavers, he too is loyal. Then the egg hatches and a dragon is born. Glowing bright and iridescent. A powerful other-worldly creature. Dangerous and glorious. Mother Bird barely has the energy to send it on its way. She does not regret her choice or her sacrifice. And the dragon has bonded with its carers.

The dragon is truly from another place. Able to create terror and beauty. Yet the birds do not judge. Only love. Even as their home burns. But the dragon returns, spreads its wings. It, too, loves in return. The dragon carries the birds away from the danger, warming this small, humble pair on its wings. This pair that has shown such strength, such commitment and courage. And it is good and right to carry them to safety.

A WORD FROM SOFIE LAGUNA

'I originally told the story of *The Last Egg* lying in the dark beside my six-year-old son, Milo, putting him to sleep when we were on a family holiday. We were staying at a coastal bush lodge and hadn't the usual pile of picture books to share. So began *The Last Egg*: I told my son of the parent birds, the strange egg arriving in their nest, the parents taking care of the egg, and the creature that hatches. As I encountered each problem – how would the birds survive the winter? What would the dragon do? What would happen to the tree? How could the dragon save the birds? – I heard my own voice in the darkness, solving them. Each beat moving to the next, just ahead of me, in the darkness. I had never experienced anything like this before. A story had emerged, balanced and whole. The next morning, I scribbled the words for *The Last Egg* into the back of my diary. Each time I worked on the story, in the months that followed, I would feel deeply for the birds, for their sacrifice, their devotion. I still do.'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Credit Rochelle Van Der Merwe

Sofie Laguna's many books for young people have been published in the US, the UK and in translation throughout Europe and Asia. She has been shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Awards, and twice been awarded Honour Book by the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). She is also a highly acclaimed author for adults. Sofie lives in Melbourne with her husband, Marc McBride, and their two sons.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



Jess Racklyeft creates a variety of illustrated things – picture books, paintings, prints, pins and cards – mainly in watercolours. She works from her studio at the beautiful Abbotsford Convent, and regularly has picnic lunches watching the neighbouring sheep and horses! Her art often combines collage – either on paper or digitally assembled – experimentation and lots of watercolour. Sometimes she writes the books as well. Jess worked in publishing sales for almost a decade before making the leap to full-time

illustration and writing, and since then has won several illustration accolades including CBCA Picture Book of the Year for *Iceberg* (written by Claire Saxby). Her work can now be found in bookshops and libraries across Australia, and her days are happily spent in a messy studio creating books or visiting schools.

IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Cover Study

Before opening *The Last Egg*, look at the title and cover design. Discuss what students think the story might be about and the clues in the picture that make them think that. Ask questions, such as:

- How do the pictures make you feel? Do you think this story will be happy, sad, exciting, or something else? Why?
- What do you think might happen in this story? Can you make a prediction just by looking at the cover?
- Why do you think the author and illustrator chose birds for the main characters? How might animals help us understand feelings or problems?
- Have you ever looked after something important, like an egg or a plant? How did it feel to take care of it?

Comprehension

Read the story through once and ask students the following questions to help them explore the story:

1. What did Mother Bird discover the morning after hearing the distant screeching?
2. Why did Mother Bird and Father Bird stay behind when their baby birds flew to warmer shores?
3. What do Mother Bird and Father Bird do that shows us they are devoted to the last egg?
4. What happened to Father Bird when the weather turned cold?
5. Who hatched out of the last egg?
6. How does the dragon show its love for Mother Bird and Father Bird?
7. How does the dragon's family show their love for the dragon and Mother Bird and Father Bird?
8. Do you think this story has a happy ending?

Visual Literacy – Colour

Explain to students that colours in picture books can help tell the story – just like the words do – and that illustrators choose colours to show how characters feel, what time of day it is, or what the weather is like. Talk about how warm colours like pink, yellow and green can make us feel cosy or excited, while cool colours like blue and grey can feel cold or calm. Open the book up again and invite students to look closely at how the colours change throughout the story and what they might be telling us about the story. Ask the following questions to explore further:

- How do the colours change from the beginning of the story to the middle? What do those colours tell us about the time of day or season?
- What colours are used to show the cold weather? How do these colours make you feel?
- How do the colours change when the dragon hatches? What might the warm colours mean in that part of the story?
- Can you find a part in the book where the pictures feel very dark or icy? Why do you think the illustrator chose those colours?
- At the end of the story, what colours do you see when the birds and the dragon fly away? Do these colours make you feel happy for Mother Bird and Father Bird?

Class Discussion

Explain to your students that stories are like treasure chests. Sometimes, they hold more than just the words and pictures we see. They can also hide special meanings – like lessons about love, bravery, or family – that we discover when we look closely. So, when we read a story, we're not just following what happens; we're also finding out what the story is really trying to tell us. *The Last Egg* is not just about birds and dragons – it's really about **families**.

Explain that Mother Bird and Father Bird are like mums, dads, grandparents, or carers in real life. They take care of their little ones, even when things are hard. They stay together, help each other, and never give up – just like families do when they love each other.

Explore this in more depth by looking more closely at how this beautiful story helps us understand the love and devotion families can share. Ask questions such as:

- How did Mother Bird and Father Bird show love to their eggs and each other?
- What hard choices did they make?
- Why did they stay behind even when the weather got very cold?
- What happens when parents need others to help?

In a whole class discussion ask, 'What does your family do to care for you or make you feel safe?' Let students share ideas about how people in their lives help or show devotion.

Extended Discussion Prompts

Encourage students to use their imaginations to answer the following questions.

- Who made the screeching sound that woke Mother Bird?
- Where did the egg come from?
- Why was it left in the nest?

Activity: Make a Caring Tree

1. Create a large tree trunk (drawn on butcher's paper or cardboard) and put it up on a classroom wall or window.
2. Give each student 2–3 paper leaves or feathers.
3. On each one, students will write or draw:
 - Something someone in their family does to show love or care (e.g., 'My mum reads with me,' or a drawing of a hug).
 - Something they do to help or show love to others (e.g., 'I help my brother tie his shoelaces').
4. Attach all the leaves to the class Caring Tree to create a beautiful symbol of family devotion and kindness.