

THE STONE LION

TEACHERS NOTES

WRITTEN BY MARGARET WILD
ILLUSTRATED BY RITVA VOUTILA

PUBLISHED BY LITTLE HARE

SYNOPSIS

The stone lion statue that stood outside the library looked so real that small children were scared by the very sight of him. There was however, a girl called Sara who would cuddle the lion and cry at his feet. One day the lion asked the wise old gargoyle why Sara was crying. The gargoyle explained to the lion that Sara and her baby brother were homeless.

Ben, who worked at the library would also lean up against the lion and read. As the lion did not understand emotions and feelings, he was very confused about why Ben would be laughing or sighing whilst reading a book.

The one thing the Stone Lion did understand was the desire to be alive. He wished he could get off of his pedestal and run through the park. He wished he was alive and imagined all the things he could do if he was.

On one cold, snowy night, Sara and her baby brother were resting on the lion when the lion felt a spark of pity for them out in the cold by themselves. He wanted to take them into the library where it was warm and safe. He wanted to do it so much that, with a jolt, he felt his heart start to beat. With a look at the park, he grabbed the baby and took him inside the library, before going back for Sara.

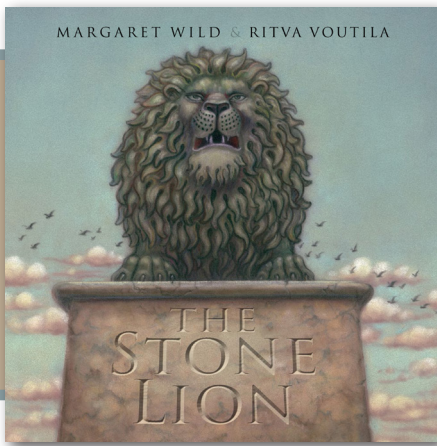
Not long after, the lion felt his heavy paws turning back into stone. As he lay outside the library, once again returned to stone, he realised what it was to feel emotion for someone else. From that day on children were no longer scared of him and would always flock to the Stone Lion.

THEMES

This is a story about desire, selfishness, compassion and transformation. It tells the story of an indifferent and heartless stone lion whose imposing countenance and grim expression frightens children. His only thoughts are for himself and what he wants, but when he realises that someone else might suffer a fate similar to his own, he briefly comes to life in order to save the life of two destitute children. It is the story of the revolutionary power of even a single act of kindness.

WRITING STYLE

The Stone Lion is a fantasy where stone statues can think, dream, feel, speak and even move. Margaret Wild has adopted the traditional, unhurried prose of fable-like stories, and uses Gothic elements such as statues, gargoyles, homeless waifs, ancient cavernous buildings, cruel winter weather and the dramatic action taking place at night. It has a circular plot: the story begins and ends with the lion on its pedestal, and the opening and closing dialogue are conversations between the lion and the gargoyle above the



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portico. But even though the beginning and end are the same, they are also different. Because this is a story about transformation, the lion at the end of the story is different from the lion at the beginning.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

To match Margaret Wild's traditional writing style, Ritva Voutila has adopted a traditional style for the illustrations. She has set the story in the 1930s, during the Depression Era. Her inspiration for the buildings is the style of architecture called "Art Deco", and she has loosely modeled the setting on New York, USA, as well as adding her own fantasy elements. Her medium was oil pastels on grey velour paper, as this made the art look soft, dreamy, fantastical and otherworldly, adding to the sense of a Gothic fable.

MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

This book will be widely reviewed and available where all good books are sold.

STUDY NOTES

- Why do you think Margaret Wild has chosen a stone statue for her main character in this story?
- All stories are about emotional journeys. They lead a character from one emotional situation to another, such as from sadness at the start to happiness at the end. What is Sara's emotional journey? What is the lion's emotional journey? Which of these two emotional journeys is more interesting to you? What is the reason for your choice?
- Some characters have no emotional journey (that is, their mood is more or less the same at the end as it is at the beginning). The gargoyle might be considered one of these characters. What other characters seem to have no emotional journey? What do you think is their role in the story?
- Oscar Wilde wrote some stories that were similar to Margaret Wild's *The Stone Lion*. The best-known of these are *The Happy Prince*, *The Selfish Giant* and *The Nightingale*. Chose one of these stories and consider the ways in which it is similar to *The Stone Lion*.
- The illustrator has shown the story moving through a number of seasons. What are the seasons she portrays? How does the weather in each picture make you feel about that moment in the story? How does this help to make the story more dramatic?