

## BELLA AND THE WANDERING HOUSE

Meg McKinlay

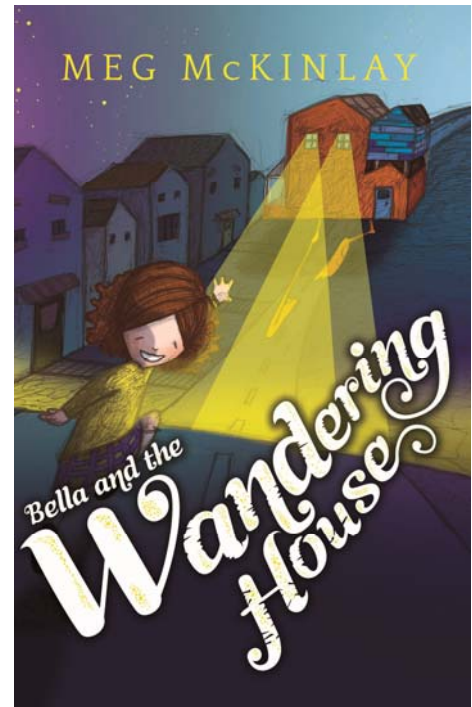
Illustrations by Nicholas Schafer

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Themes: family, imagination, sailing, adventure

Year level: Y2–6

Cross-curriculum priority: Sustainability



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Bella awakens one morning to find that the view outside her bedroom window has changed. The tree branch that normally stretches across the corner only reaches the edge of the frame. As she leaves for school, she notices that the front path is also crooked. Could she be imagining things? With the help of Grandad, she decides to solve the mystery of her wandering house. She stays awake all night long ... and gets a very big surprise!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meg McKinlay is a children's writer and poet whose work ranges from picture books through to middle-grade fiction. Her publications include the CBCA-shortlisted *No Bears* and *Duck for a Day*, among many others. Meg grew up in central Victoria, and spent her childhood roaming through the bush, striking it rich at least once a week on a vein of fool's gold. Raised in a TV-free household, she was a bookish kid, in love with words, excited by dictionaries and spelling bees. She lives near the ocean in Fremantle and spends her days writing, reading and rambling. Meg was the recipient of the SCBWI Crystal Kite Award (2013) and the Davitt Award (2012) and Children's Book Council of Australia Prize (2011, 2012).



### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Nicholas Schafer is originally from Tacoma, Washington, but now lives with his wife and son in Perth, Western Australia. Both places inspire his art. He works in a variety of mediums, including pencil, ink, acrylic and pastel and is motivated by a desire to express unique ideas, experiences and observations of the world. *Bella and the Wandering House* is his first project as book illustrator. For more on Nicholas and his work visit [www.nicholasschafer.com](http://www.nicholasschafer.com).



## STUDY NOTES

### LITERACY: COMPREHENDING TEXTS THROUGH LISTENING, READING AND VIEWING

#### Predicting

1. Examine the front cover as a class. What images has the illustrator used? What clues do they provide about the story? What hints do we get from the title?
2. Have students read the blurb aloud to a partner. Does it make them want to read the story? Why/why not?
3. Create a class prediction chart detailing what students think will happen in *Bella and the Wandering House*. Keep this chart to look over after reading the book – how many predictions were true/false?

#### During reading

*Bella and the Wandering House* can be used for several different sessions including:

- Modelled reading as a whole class
- Shared reading in student pairs
- Guided reading in small groups
- Independent reading

#### Comprehension strategies to practise Y2–6

- Sounding out words aloud (not only in your head)
- Phonics (blending and segmenting)
- Slowing reading rate for comprehension
- Self-monitoring for understanding
- Predicting words by recognising familiar letter patterns
- Re-reading to crosscheck graphophonic information
- Inferring

#### Comprehension questions

The following may be used as discussion points while reading, or adapted for written comprehension (have students write three-sentence answers).

4. How is the character Bella introduced in the opening chapters? How would you describe her personality? Use two adjectives.
5. How is the character Grandad introduced in the opening chapters? How would you describe his personality? Use two adjectives.
6. Bella's parents refer to her as 'a dreamer' (p. 10). What do you think they mean?
  - a. What are some of the advantages of being a dreamer? (e.g. imagination and inventiveness)
  - b. Are there any disadvantages?
7. *The next year he gave her a ship's anchor, crusted with salt and tiny shells, and another time it was a captain's hat with gold piping around the brim. Last year he presented her with a shiny brass compass and showed her how to find north.* (p. 17) Grandad is an inventor of sorts, busy recycling materials to create unique birthday presents for Bella.
  - a. Why might it be nice to give someone a homemade birthday present instead of one from a shop? Which would you prefer and why?
  - b. Have you ever used recycled objects to create something new? What did you build? Who was it for and how did they react?
  - c. List five creative uses for a variety of everyday objects found around your classroom (e.g. a cup can be something to drink from, a container to hold pencils, a musical instrument etc.).
  - d. Why is recycling important? How does it help protect the environment and contribute to sustainable living?
8. *What was happening was strange and a bit scary but it didn't feel like a nightmare. There was something mysterious and exciting about it, something that made her want to keep it for herself.* (p. 24) Would you have kept the wandering house a secret too? Or would you have felt afraid? Would you have told your parents straight away?
9. Why do you think the house lingered outside the travel agent? (p. 33) Do you think it was trying to reach a special place? Where might this be?

10. The house travels to a lake, a dam, a sports centre with a pool, and a park with a fountain.
  - a. What is the common factor that connects these locations?
  - b. Why do you think the house keeps journeying towards water?
11. *'The house will stay here,' Bella said. 'This is where it wants to live.'* (p. 83) Do you agree with Bella – will the house stay on the block beside the ocean? Or do you think it might try to sail out to sea, and never return to dry land? Share your predictions with a partner.
12. If your house went wandering at night, where do you think it would take you? Why?

## LITERACY: COMPOSING TEXTS THROUGH SPEAKING, WRITING AND CREATING

### Expanding vocabulary: clarifying unfamiliar terminology

Younger readers may be unfamiliar with some of the words in the story. Have students work in pairs to use the dictionary or an appropriate internet dictionary to define the following:

First Mention	Word	Meaning
title	wandering	
p. 11	whittling	
p. 13	salvaged	
p. 13	periscope	
p. 14	submarine	
p. 17	anchor	
p. 17	compass	
p. 19	Orion's Belt	
p. 47	dam	
p. 53	chlorine	
p. 54	kayak	
p. 54	waded	
p. 56	pitching	
p. 58	concrete	
p. 70	luminous	
p. 70	The Big Dipper	
p. 70	Sirius	
p. 78	tremendous	
p. 80	wisp	
p. 81	nestled	
p. 82	surface	
p. 89	telescope	

### Spelling: word observations (for older students)

13. As children encounter a variety of words throughout their reading of *Bella and the Wandering House*, have them complete a word observation sheet with the following prompts. This will later help them to memorise the correct spelling of new vocabulary to use in their own writing, such as: *beautiful, something, because, attention, window, dreaming, dangerous, darkness, direction, ocean, birthday, island* etc.
  - How many letters are in the word?
  - How many syllables?
  - Does the word contain any silent letters or double letters?
  - Is it plural or singular?
  - Does it contain any letter patterns?
  - How many vowels and consonants are there in the word?
  - Does it have a prefix or a suffix?
  - Does it have a base or root word?
14. Have students create a booklet, for future reference, containing the word observations they collect as they read *Bella and the Wandering House*.

## Recount and sequencing activities (for younger students)

15. Sequence pictures from *Bella and the Wandering House* in the correct order and write a sentence below each to describe what is happening.
16. Write a recount of the events in *Bella and the Wandering House*. Pay careful attention to simple punctuation (full stops and capital letters).

## Character profiles

17. Have students create character profiles based on a number of characteristics (my name, my age, I look like, I live, my family members, my hobbies, my talents/skills). They should do this for Bella, Grandad and the wandering house.
18. Using 'inference', invite students to add the following subheadings to their character profiles:
  - likes
  - dislikes
  - aspirations
  - fears
  - strengths
  - weaknesses

## Narrative writing

19. Discuss the purpose of narrative writing: why do we tell stories with narratives?
20. Invite students to plan and draft their own short story entitled '[Insert name] and the Wandering House'.

Step 1: Have students brainstorm using the following prompts:

- If your house went wandering each night after you fell asleep, where would it go? Why?
- Where would you like to wake up? On the beach? In the middle of the desert?
- Will your house listen to you as the captain? Or will it be naughty?
- How will your parents, siblings and pets react?

Step 2: Choosing ideas from their brainstorm, invite children to use a narrative planning sheet with the following subheadings:

- characters – their name, age, physical description, likes, dislikes
- settings
- conflict/problems that will arise in the plot
- climax
- resolution

Step 3: Have students write a draft of their story and swap with a partner once complete. Partners should correct any spelling/grammatical errors and offer advice on improving the plot and making the story more engaging for the reader.

Step 4: Have students incorporate the feedback from their partner. When the final version of their story is ready, have students illustrate their work.

Step 5: Display students' stories around the classroom so that children can read one another's work during silent reading. You may even like to have students design a front cover for their story and bind it using coloured cardboard to create a book. Books can then be made available in a class reading corner or library.

**Grammatical elements** to explore during short story writing:

- past tense
- descriptive language to create imagery – adjectives
- using a variety of exciting verbs to describe action
- connectives/conjunctions/joining words
- simple, compound and complex sentences (for more advanced writers)
- paragraph structure (for more advanced writers)

**Punctuation skills** to model, practise and assess:

- capital letters
- full stops
- question marks
- speech marks (for more advanced writers)

## Figurative language

*They were perched high on the edge of an enormous dam; below, steep walls curved down toward the water like the sides of a giant bowl. The land around them was hilly and carpeted with low scrubby bushes. Nearby, a dirt road snaked away toward the left. Beyond that were more roads, cars crawling along them like ants. They were all headed in the same direction – toward a place where trees gave way to houses and a cluster of grey buildings at their centre stood straight and tall, like rocket ships aiming at the sky. (p. 50)*

21. Figurative language compares one thing to something else, and conjures imagery for the reader. Find examples in the passage above of 'simile' – using 'like' or 'as' to compare one thing with another (e.g. *steep walls curved down toward the water like the sides of a giant bowl*).
22. Invite students to practise creating their own similes. Encourage them to incorporate these into their narrative.

## Synonyms vs. antonyms

23. Create a definition for the term 'synonym'. Explain that synonyms can be a useful resource when attempting to make your writing more varied and interesting, as opposed to constructing repetitive or dull sentences.
24. What are some synonyms for the following words used in *Bella and the Wandering House*?
  - a. *worried* (e.g. concerned)
  - b. *happy* (e.g. delighted)
  - c. *Bella said* (e.g. Bella asked)
25. Choose three words from a chapter of *Bella and the Wandering House* and create a list of synonyms for them.
26. Create a definition for the term 'antonym'.
27. What are some antonyms for the following words used in *Bella and the Wandering House*?
  - a. *worried* (e.g. carefree)
  - b. *happy* (e.g. distraught)
  - c. *Bella smiled* (e.g. Bella frowned)
28. Choose three words from a chapter of *Bella and the Wandering House* and create a list of antonyms for them.

## Vocabulary

29. Have children hunt for overused words in a partner's writing, e.g. *good, said, happy*
30. In pairs, have them brainstorm alternatives (synonyms) for these words and create a list of new options e.g. *good* → *excellent, great, superb*; *said* → *exclaimed, hollered, cried*.
31. Have students attempt to rewrite some of the sentences in their story using ONLY words from their new alternative list (instead of those they ordinarily overuse).
32. Invite them to compare their original sentences/paragraphs to the new ones.
33. Do children feel like their writing has become more engaging for the reader now that it incorporates a larger vocabulary? Why/why not?

## Connectives/conjunctions/joining words

34. Scan a chapter of *Bella and the Wandering House* and locate different 'connecting' words or 'cohesive ties' (e.g. *and, or, but, even, though, in case, because, now that, finally, while, when, after, if, when, unless*). Have students create a poster of these connectives to use in their independent writing. Display this resource in the classroom.
35. Give children the opportunity to practise using different connecting words in sentences. For example: *The house walked towards the beach because / but / yet (circle one) it wanted to see the ocean.*
  - a. Which is the most appropriate connecting word?
  - b. Are there some that do not make sense? Why?



## Pass it on

36. Separate students into groups of six. One student per group must write the first sentence of a story, setting the scene by naming two characters and the setting.
37. The student on their right then continues the story. They add one sentence by using a cohesive/connecting word to link to the prior sentence, e.g. *Suddenly ... She said ... Afterwards ... But before he could ...*
38. Repeat around the circle. When each child has contributed two sentences, the story ends. Have one volunteer from each group read their story in its entirety to the class.
  - a. Which story do students think was the most entertaining? Why?
  - b. To make this task more difficult, you may like to add the rule that no cohesive device can be reused! In this version, students must then be very careful to note the linking words that have come before them, to ensure they do not repeat them.

## Point of view

39. Retell the story of *Bella and the Wandering House*, but this time from the point of view of either Grandad or the house itself!

## Create your own blurb

40. Create an alternative blurb for *Bella and the Wandering House*. How will you encourage readers to feel excited about reading the book?

## Diary entry

41. Write an imaginative diary entry from Bella's point of view after she has discovered that her house has legs.
  - How might she feel?
  - What things might she be nervous about?
  - What things might she be excited about?
  - Why doesn't she tell her parents?

## Book review

42. Write a critical review of *Bella and the Wandering House* for your school newspaper.
  - a. In your opinion, what were the strengths and the weaknesses of the book?
  - b. To whom will you recommend it and why?

## Debate

43. In teams of three, have students debate for/against the validity of the following claim: 'A homemade gift is better than buying someone a present from a shop.'
44. Warm up: pass the topic around the circle – each student has to think of an argument *for*. Pass it the opposite way – each student has to think of an argument *against*.

## Nautical communication

45. Bella's grandad loves sailing. Long before Twitter, texting and Facebook, people used Morse code and semaphore to communicate.
  - a. Write a message to a friend using the Morse code alphabet.  
([www.scoutscan.com/cubs/morsecode.html](http://www.scoutscan.com/cubs/morsecode.html))
  - b. Make semaphore flags from cardboard or fabric. 'Flag chat' in pairs.  
([inter.scoutnet.org/semaphore/semaphore.html](http://inter.scoutnet.org/semaphore/semaphore.html))

## Report writing

46. Have students use the *KWL Report Writing Guide* below to research and write a factual report on one of these two topics:
  - a. Sailing in Australia – history of the sport, equipment needed, boat types, famous sailing competitions, famous sailors etc.
  - b. Recycling in Australia – location of recycling centre/s near your school, materials that can be recycled, a diagram of the recycling process etc.

*K: What I already **know***

*W: What I **want** to know*

*L: What I have **learned***

## Step 1: Planning

- What do I already know about [sailing / recycling]?
- What more do I want to find out?
- Can I create four focus questions to guide my research?
- What are the key words for each of these focus questions?
- How will I record the information I find?

## Step 2: Locating

- Where can I find the information I need?
- What kinds of sources will be best?
- How will I record the references to make a bibliography later?

## Step 3: Selecting

- How useful is the information I have found?
- Do I need to use all of it?
- What information can be discarded?

## Step 4: Organising

- What subheadings will I use to structure my report?
- What diagram/s should I include?

## Step 6: Presenting and assessing

- What did I learn from this task?
- Did I fulfil the aim of the task?
- How well did I present my work? Did I edit carefully for spelling and grammatical errors?

## The writing sequence

This can be adapted for any of the writing activities previously listed.

- *Modelled writing* (teacher only) – the teacher ‘thinks aloud’ as he/she writes on the whiteboard while the class watch.
- *Shared writing* – the teacher has the pen and continues to ‘think aloud’, but also asks for children’s input and ideas. Children are invited to come and help write/make corrections on the whiteboard.
- *Guided writing* – children can plan their writing in pairs by brainstorming and/or using a planning template.
- *Independent writing* – children write their own piece and engage in editing and redrafting.
- *Presentation to audience* – children share their work with one another in small groups.

## CROSS-CURRICULAR LINKS

### Visual arts

47. In groups of four, have students examine the illustrations in detail.

- a. What style has the illustrator used to draw the characters – realistic, cartoon, abstract, fantasy?
- b. What medium has he used – collage, black and white, watercolour etc.? What effect does this create?
- c. What do the illustrations add to the story? Do you think it would be as effective without them? Why/why not?

48. What would you do differently if you were the illustrator? Create your own illustration of your favourite scene from *Bella and the Wandering House*.

49. Research the design of various sailing boats and create your own.

50. Create a class definition for the term 'eco-art'.
- Research eco-artists in Australia such as Sean E. Avery. What kinds of materials do they use?
  - How does eco-art contribute to sustainable living?
  - Create your own eco-art sculpture using recycled materials.
51. 'A girl needs the ocean,' he said. If the beach was too far away for her to see it from her window, then a painting was the next best thing. (p. 17) Create a watercolour painting of a beach scene like the one Bella's grandad gives her.
52. Plastered to the glass were brightly coloured posters with photos of tropical beaches and enormous cruise ships. Fabulous Fiji! they read. Sail Away to Paradise! (p. 33)
- Create a class definition for the term 'tourism'.
  - Make a poster that will encourage tourists to visit the town/city where you live. What attractions might people like to visit in your local area?
  - What is eco-tourism?
  - Why is it important to take care of natural wonders that are popular with tourists?
  - What are some of the dangers associated with tourism? How can they be managed?

## Science

### Astronomy

53. 'The stars are important,' he said. 'A girl should know where they are.' (p. 20) Research the following constellations that Bella mentions. Where are they located in the night sky? How did they get their names?
- Orion's Belt
  - The Big Dipper
  - Sirius
54. How can sailors use the night sky for navigation?
55. What other famous constellations are found in the Southern Hemisphere?

### Buoyancy

56. Create a class definition for the term 'buoyancy'.
- How does this scientific principle guide the design of boats and ships?
  - Conduct a test of everyday classroom objects to see which are buoyant and which are not. Predict the outcome for each before placing it in an ice-cream container filled with water and giving it 10 seconds to float or sink.
  - Design a boat out of materials you think will be buoyant. Hold a class competition to see whose boat can float for the longest time period.

### Sustainability

57. In the story, Grandad recycles a variety of materials by using them to create unique birthday presents for Bella.
- Create a class definition for the term 'recycling'.
  - Create a list of common items in your classroom and your home that can be recycled.
  - What are some of the environmental benefits of recycling?
58. Research other ways in which students can contribute to sustainable living. For 'change the way you live' links visit [www.wwf.org.au/get\\_involved/change\\_the\\_way\\_you\\_live](http://www.wwf.org.au/get_involved/change_the_way_you_live). Create a poster or pamphlet advertising this information to your school community. Suggested topics:
- Sustainable shopping
  - Transport – car and air travel and offsetting
  - Saving water
  - Reducing energy consumption
  - Green building design
  - Ethical and responsible investment

### Coastal environments

59. The wandering house finally settles on a block right on the beachfront. What kinds of animals live in marine and coastal environments? Research and write a report on a species of your choice under the following subheadings: habitat, diet, physical characteristics, life cycle, conservation status. (Useful link: [australianmuseum.net.au/Wild-Kids-Animals-of-coastal-habitats](http://australianmuseum.net.au/Wild-Kids-Animals-of-coastal-habitats))



## Mathematics

60. *Usually, there was a number on the side telling you which map to turn to next. But this time there was nothing but a thick black line and the words 'Limit of Maps'.* (p. 62) Practise reading a street directory like the one Bella uses.
61. Draw a scale map of your school and divide it into quadrants.
- Label the horizontal axes with letters (A, B, C etc.).
  - Label the vertical axes with numbers (1, 2, 3 etc.).
  - Create a set of ten questions for a partner (e.g. 'Where is the canteen located?' Answer: G4).
62. In pairs, allow students to play the game *Battleships* to practise map-reading skills.
63. Directionality with compass points:
- Place labels for the four compass points (North, South, East and West) in the appropriate four corners of your classroom.
  - Separate students into pairs. Child 1 must choose a start and end point for child 2. Child 1 must then direct child 2 using instructions such as 'two steps East' or 'five steps South' etc. (Note: children are not allowed to go over furniture and must be directed around it.)
  - To make the game harder, use eight compass points (i.e. incorporate North-East, North-West, South-East, South-West).
  - In pairs, have children create an A3-sized map of their school. Invite them to place a coloured counter each on the map. Have them give their partner directions from one place to another using compass points e.g. 'five steps West to get to the oval' (move the counter correspondingly).
  - Challenge: go outside and practise compass points in the playground!

## History

64. Excursion: visit the maritime museum in your state or territory.
65. Invite students to research and compile a report on the role of ships in the early European exploration of Australia.

## Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

66. Create a book trailer using iMovie/Windows Movie Maker. Have students create a storyboard and advertisement for *Bella and the Wandering House*.
- Source copyright-free images at: [www.imagebase.net](http://www.imagebase.net)
  - Source creative commons licensed music at: [creativecommons.org/legalmusicforvideos](http://creativecommons.org/legalmusicforvideos)
67. Research the history of 'stop motion animation'.
- What are some famous films that have been created using this technique? (e.g. *Wallace and Gromit*)
  - By using a digital camera and uploading images in sequence onto Microsoft PowerPoint, have students create their own stop motion animation clip of a miniature house rising up onto a pair of legs and wandering around the classroom. Students may utilise a variety of materials to build their model house, such as pop sticks, playdough, Lego etc. The clip should be approximately two minutes in length.

## Design and Technologies

68. *Last week he had been working on a periscope. It was a long tube with funny bends in it and mirrors inside. He said it helped you see around corners.* (p. 13) Build your own periscope:  
[www.planet-science.com/categories/under-11s/our-world/2012/06/make-a-periscope.aspx](http://www.planet-science.com/categories/under-11s/our-world/2012/06/make-a-periscope.aspx)
69. Make a telescope like the one Grandad gives Bella for her birthday:  
[www.optics4kids.org/home/content/classroom-activities/medium/make-a-telescope](http://www.optics4kids.org/home/content/classroom-activities/medium/make-a-telescope)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Visit the author's website: [www.megmckinlay.com/index.htm](http://www.megmckinlay.com/index.htm)

Visit the author's blog: <http://megmckinlay.com/blog/>



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