

## TEACHER NOTES

### *Seagull*

Written and illustrated by Danny Snell

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Title:** *Seagull*

**Author / Illustrator:** Danny Snell grew up in Adelaide, and trained at the Central School of Art and the University of South Australia and graduated with a Bachelor of Design (Illustration) in 1992. His first major picture book *Whose Tail Is That ?*, written by Christine Nicholls, was shortlisted the 2000 Victorian Children's Book Council's Crichton Award for first time children's book illustrators. His second book, the best selling *Bilby Moon* written by Margaret Spurling, was nominated as a Notable Book for 2001 and shortlisted for the 2001 Kids Own Australian Literature Award (KOALA). Since then he has illustrated *The Long Way Home* by Emily Rodda, *Scary Bear* by Tania Cox, *Seadragon Sea*, also by Margaret Spurling, *Crocodile River* by Diana Lawrenson and *You are My Special Baby* by Carol Chataway. His most recent book *Jeremy*, written by Chris Faille, was the winner of the 2014 CBCA Eve Pownall Award for Information Books. In between books Danny works as a freelance illustrator for newspapers, magazines and design studios around the country. He lives in Adelaide with his partner Louise and his two daughters, Leilani and Daisy.

**SYNOPSIS** Seagull loves to fly. It makes her heart sing. But one day on the beach she gets caught up in a tangle of fishing line. Seagull can't fly. She asks Mullet, Pelican and Crab to help her, but they can only loosen the line a little. Then, a boy wraps his warm hands around Seagull. He too loosens the line just a little – but enough to set her free.

#### WRITING / ILLUSTRATIONS

*Seagull* is written and illustrated by Danny Snell. He has created a simple, heart-warming story about the rescue of a seagull caught up in a tangle of beach litter. *Seagull* also provides a powerful, positive message about the conservation of our environment and the preservation of our wildlife. The idea for the story of Seagull first came about a few years ago when Danny and his family were holidaying with friends on Hindmarsh Island, near The Coorong in South Australia. He says, "*We were walking along the beach one day and noticed a seagull that had some fishing line tangled around its leg. We tried to help the bird, but every time we approached it flew away, and eventually out of reach in the shallows. By this stage the children with us were getting a little upset, so to ease their concerns we suggested that the seagull may have some friends that would help. I imagined*

## TEACHER NOTES

### *Seagull*

Written and illustrated by Danny Snell

*the seagull sitting there in the shallows with a small fish nibbling away at the fishing line. And the story grew from there”.*

One difficulty Danny had when writing the story was working out how Seagull would eventually get free from the tangle. The solution he came up with is in the refrain: “...he/she could only loosen it a little...” He says, “Just as a knotted rope or string often takes a few people a number of attempts to untangle it, it takes Seagull’s friends a few attempts and the boy’s final effort to untangle the fishing line. It’s their combined efforts that set her free”.

The story begins gently, lyrically. The illustrations show Seagull hovering and floating in mid-air, and lifting *up, up, up into the sky, high above the sand dunes and the long white sandy beach*. Then, suddenly Seagull is faced with a problem – she’s caught in a tangle of fishing line. From this point a predictable pattern unfolds. First, Seagull *pecks and tugs at the fishing line. But she could only loosen it a little*. As she slowly moves along the beach she meets Mullet, Pelican, and Crab. “*Can you help me*”? she asks each of them. They all have a go but they ‘*could only loosen it a little*’.

Throughout the story a lone boy appears in the background. This boy plays an important role in the story. He is shown as an observer in the background in some of the early pages. He does not enter the written story until the final pages where we see him first in an intimate pose with Seagull in a vast landscape, and then in a dramatic close-up, gently holding Seagull in his hand. In the end it is this boy who rescues Seagull, by loosening the line just enough to set her free.

Danny used acrylic paints and collage on board for the illustrations in the book. With this book he wanted to recapture some of the textural feel that he achieved with one of his earlier books, ‘*Bilby Moon*’. He says, “In both books the landscape is quite simple and sparse so the texture helps to add depth and visual interest. MDF board is a very forgiving surface to work on and allowed me to trowel the paint on with a palette knife as well as scrape it back, creating layers of texture”. Danny wanted the rubbish in each image to stand out and look out of place, so he decided to collage these onto the illustrations. Some of the rubbish that he used came from photos that he took while researching the book. Other pieces were cut out of old books. Once the painting was complete he pasted the cut-out images onto the illustration.

## TEACHER NOTES

### *Seagull*

Written and illustrated by Danny Snell

The story contains an obvious environmental message, and as Danny says, highlights that everything we do and make has an impact on our environment and the creatures that surround us. While researching the book Danny went for a number of walks along the beaches around The Coorong as well as suburban beaches. He says,

*“The amount of rubbish that I saw (once I started looking) was incredible. We produce so much waste and much of that ends up in our oceans and on our beaches. Fish, birds and sea mammals often mistake this rubbish for food and try to eat it. Or they get tangled up in ropes and fishing lines”.*

### DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Using this story with children can be approached from different perspectives.
- *Seagull* is a simple story about a bird that gets into trouble and needs to be rescued.
  - Where is the story set?
  - Who is the main character? What happens to her?
  - Who are the other characters? What did they do to help? Are they successful?  
Talk about the descriptive language Danny uses in the rescue scenes.
  - What is the problem that has to be resolved?
  - How is Seagull rescued? Who rescues her?
- Danny uses the refrain “...he/she could only loosen it a little...” throughout the book. There are other repeated phrases and sentences in the story. Read the story in a way that invites the children to read the refrains aloud with you
- Danny Snell uses lyrical and descriptive language to describe, events and movement. Look for these throughout the story – *hover, floating, prodded, effortlessly, determined*,  
- Talk about the meaning of these words; act them out
- Point out how the pictures add important details and give clues as to how the story will unfold.
  - The changing light and colour in the drawings shows the passage of time from morning to evening
  - Talk about what how the way they are drawn adds to what we learn about them and how we feel about what is happening – e.g. Seagull standing still, delicately holding her red, tethered leg off the ground; Seagull floating through the air

## TEACHER NOTES

### *Seagull*

Written and illustrated by Danny Snell

against a bright blue background; the boy sitting alone on the boat, watching

- In the final pages we see the boy and Seagull in two illustrations - an intimate pose in a vast landscape, and then in a dramatic close-up, with the boy gently holding Seagull in his hand. What do you feel when you look at these pages?
- Look at the backgrounds carefully. How many different colours and tones can you see in each textured background
- Try painting your own landscapes with acrylic paints, using Danny's palette knife technique. Arrange the pictures in sequence from morning to sunset
- Draw attention to how Danny has added the rubbish to each page. The rubbish in the illustrations is done with collage.
- Ask the children to identify the pieces of litter on the beach. Talk about how they got there.
- Organise a 'rubbish chase'. Use these and photos of rubbish / litter from magazines to stick onto your landscapes
- Display some of your landscapes with no rubbish and some with rubbish. Use these to talk about how we should be caring for the land and our wildlife.
- *Seagull* provides a powerful, positive message about caring for our land and wildlife. wildlife.
  - What happens to Seagull when she lands on the beach?
  - What would happen to Seagull if she could not be untangled from the line?
  - Could what happened to Seagull happen to Mullet / Pelican / Crab?
  - Why is there so much rubbish on the beach?
  - Whose responsibility is it to make sure that the beach is clear of litter and safe for wildlife and people?
- Find other picture books and information books about conservation.
- *Seagull* touches on themes of community and co-operation.
  - Talk about how Mullet, Pelican and Crab are willing to help Seagull, and how, when everyone co-operated Seagull was rescued.
- Visit the Australian Conservation Foundation website <http://www.acfonline.org.au>
- Find out more about Danny Snell's writing and illustrating, and see more of his books [dannysnell.com](http://dannysnell.com); [dannysnell.tumblr.com/](http://dannysnell.tumblr.com/); [facebook.com/danny.snell.illustration](https://www.facebook.com/danny.snell.illustration)