Not a Cloud in the Sky

Written and Illustrated by Emma Quay

Teacher’s Notes

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Introduction

This is a beautiful, lyrical story about friendship and imagination for every child and adult who loves to see shapes in the clouds.

Bird had been flying for such a long time. Sometimes everything looked the same all over – up, down, this way and that, on and on. Nothing different. Nothing at all ... But when Bird meets Cloud, Bird discovers that the sky is abundant and holds untold riches.

About the author/illustrator

Emma Quay is one of the most popular illustrators in Australia.

Emma wanted to be a children's book illustrator from a very early age. Emma Quay (pronounced 'kway') grew up in and has wanted to write and illustrate children's books for as long as she can remember. An Honours graduate specialising in illustration and printmaking, Emma's illustrative work is held in collections around the world, including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

After moving from England to Australia in 1993, she began her illustrating career and has since become one of Australia's most sought-after picture-book artists. Her many picture books include *Shrieking Violet*, which was shortlisted in the 2011 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, and *Rudie Nudie*, which was shortlisted in the 2012 CBCA Children's Book of the Year Awards and won the 2012 Australian Book of the Year Awards, Younger Children.

For more information please see:
www.emmaquay.com/
www.emmaquay.com/illustrating.html
Study notes on themes and curriculum topics

*Not a Cloud in the Sky* can be used for both Primary School and Secondary School Students in **Key Learning Areas** such as:

- English – language and literacy and visual literacy
- Visual Art and creative arts
- Studies of Society & Environment.

It could be used to explore Themes such as:

- Love
- Friendship

**Definition of a picture book**

A picture book is a story told in words and pictures. Each element makes an important contribution to the way the story is told and the way meaning is created.

‘A picture is not the same as an illustrated story: there the words alone could tell the story and the illustrations simply break up the words or decorate the text...In the best picture books, the illustrations are absolutely necessary. They carry parts of the story or narrative and in some cases the language is dropped and the pictures alone are all that is needed.’


For some fantastic picture book/illustrators websites and to find out more information about Emma Quay, please see:

Emma’s website:


Look! The art of Australian picture books today:


An example of how to illustrate emotion:

Creating a picture book:

www.guardian.co.uk/childrens-books-site/series/how-to-draw


**Pre reading activities**

1. *Not a Cloud in the Sky* is all about clouds and the sky. What do we know about clouds?

   Brainstorm all the things that we can think about clouds.

   What kinds of clouds are there?

   What are some of the characteristics of clouds?

   Please see:
   www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/arts-post/post/artist-berndnaut-smilde-creates-indoor-clouds/2012/03/13/gIQA7yAT9R_blog.html

   Look at this article and video about Dutch artist Berndnaut Smilde who creates clouds in empty gallery spaces in Amsterdam.


2. Why is the sky such a source of inspiration?

   Is there anything in the sky?

   Is the sky completely clear?

   If it isn’t clear - what is up there? Are we completely alone?

   **Discuss:** "You must not blame me if I do talk to the clouds." Henry Thoreau.

   Do you talk to the clouds? Why? What can you see in clouds?
Discuss: "That, if then I had waked after a long sleep, will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming, the clouds me thought would open and show riches ready to drop upon me; that, when I waked I cried to dream again." William Shakespeare

Why are clouds special?

Can we think of any poems, songs, books or movies in which clouds have appeared? What are some popular sayings about clouds such as every cloud has a silver lining?

Why have so many artists, writers and cartoonists created stories about clouds? What is it about clouds that make them appealing to readers and writers?

Look at these poems about clouds: Suitable for students Years 2 - 8

I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Low-Anchored Cloud by Henry David Thoreau

Low-anchored cloud,
Newfoundland air,
Fountain-head and source of rivers,
Dew-cloth, dream-drapery,
And napkin spread by fays;
Drifting meadow of the air,
Where bloom the daisied banks and violets,
And in whose fenny labyrinth
The bittern booms and heron wades;

_Spirit of lakes and seas and rivers,
_Bear only perfumes and the scent
_Of healing herbs to just men's fields!

As a class, create a word bank for describing clouds and using these poems about clouds as a guide, ask students to work in pairs to write an 8 line poem about clouds.

3. Friendship – the importance of friends and the impact of colour

_Not A Cloud in the Sky_ is a story about friendship and colour.

Why do we need friends?

What would life be like without friends?

What colours do you associate with friendship?

What colours do you associate with sadness or loneliness?

How can you use colour to illustrate feelings?

What is the effect of colour?

Please see:

_http://understandinggraphics.com/design/10-reasons-to-use-color/_


_http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nX0DHd5QNS8_ - PBS short video of the effect of colour.
Literacy activities

Look at the covers and endpapers of the book.

Discuss with the class picture books and what the students already know about them. Use the following to structure discussion and help students become familiar with the metalanguage of picture books.

**Cover:** What does the cover tell us? What is the story about? What predictions can we make about the story?

**Endpapers:** How do the endpapers take you into the story? What information is provided here? Do the endpapers set a mood for what is to follow?

**Title Page:** Look at the font used and the illustration—How are you positioned as a reader? How is your reading of the book directed?

**Page Opening:** Any information that can be gleaned by examining the two facing pages in a picture book.

**Size:** How does the size affect your response to the book? Does the size encourage sharing or the private viewing of the book?
**Format:** A picture book will be in a square, vertical or horizontal format. The format affects the shape that the artist fills with pictures. How does the shape affect what the artist can show?

**Colour:** Designers and illustrator’s make very clear choices about why they use particular colours in picture books. What is the predominant colour used on the cover? What effect does the choice of this colour have on the reader? How would it be different if the colour was black for example?

**Purpose:** What is the purpose of the text? Who is it for? Is it to entertain? Is it to inform?

**Predict:** Ask the class what they think the book will be about as a result of examining all of those features of the text.

**Discussion Point:** Why has the artist chosen the images on the front and back endpapers? What do they refer to in the story?

**Activity:** Read through the book as a class and design your own cover for this book.

**Response to Literature –**

**Look at some of the pictures of Bird - what are some of the things that you notice about Bird?**

Is Bird always alone?
What does Bird look like? What features and colours are emphasised?

**Activity:** Draw a picture of Bird and write a description.
List some of the things Cloud draws and then read the book aloud to the class.

Read out *Not a Cloud in the Sky*. Ask students to add on the board anything else Cloud makes and then discuss the list. Ask the students to draw a picture of five things that Cloud has drawn. Label each of the things. Ask students to leave room at the bottom of the picture for them to write down what and why they love clouds and what pictures they have seen in clouds.

**Reading response: Ask students to draw a picture of Bird and write down three things about her, what she looks like or what she likes doing.**

This activity asks students to recall a character from the story and then use writing to link personal knowledge to the character. It demonstrates a good knowledge of concepts about print directionality and a beginning understanding of how to use sound–letter knowledge to write unfamiliar word

**Response to a letter - Read out a letter from Bird explaining what clouds are and ask the students to write a response.**

Dear Class,

*My name is Bird and I am in the book, Not a Cloud in the Sky. I fly a lot and one day I met the most wonderful cloud, Cloud and she drew the most wonderful pictures in the sky for me. Cloud drew a picture of a butterfly and a bunch of bananas riding a motorbike! I would love to know what kinds of pictures you can see in the clouds.*

*Can you please write something about what you like to do and draw a picture for me?*

*If you send it to me, I will show my friends in the tree that I live in.*

*Thankyou ever so much,*

*Bird.*

This activity allows students to make meaning from the text they have heard; allows them to identify connections between a text and personal experience; enables students to use letters of the alphabet to represent sounds in words and allows students to write common sight words, for example ‘my’, ‘like’, ‘play’.

These activities have been adapted from work samples for Foundation Year English National Curriculum: Please see: [www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/worksamples/AC_Worksample_English_F.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/worksamples/AC_Worksample_English_F.pdf)
Factual description - Write an information report on clouds

Teach the class about the features of clouds and develop a word chart and picture dictionary of different characteristics of clouds. Show the class pictures of different types of clouds and ask them to identify the differences.

Please see this video that you could play in class:

Look at these website:

  - www.youtube.com/watch?v=ur0k7UDrrvg
  - www.weatherwizkids.com/weather-clouds.htm

Some suggestions for the word chart:

- Clouds, high, low, middle, Alto, cirrus, stratus, wispy, ice, thin, puffy, ripple, groups, rain, thunderstorm

After learning about different types of clouds, ask students to write a factual description of clouds.

This activity allows students to produce a series of accurate simple sentences to present information, use familiar and learned vocabulary, to apply learned knowledge about a topic.

Write a persuasive text

Ask students to write a persuasive text as to why clouds in the sky are better than a sky with no clouds.

Retell the story

In their reading group, ask students read Not a Cloud in the Sky together. Ask each student to then retell the story in writing and then ask each student to read his or her written text to the whole class.

These activities have been adapted from work samples for Year One and Year Three English National Curriculum: Please see: www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/worksamples/AC_Worksample_English_1.pdf

Reading response: Questions and answers (Year 5 activity)

Students in pairs, read Not A Cloud in the Sky, and then they generate a small number of open style questions for their classmates based on the text. The students then present the questions and the answer to the whole class. Then have a class discussion about the quality of the questions and answers.

Response to Literature (Years 7 and 8)

Ask students to answer the following questions.
Why do you like or not like this picture book? Explain your reasons.

If you were to invite Cloud or Bird to dinner – who would you invite and why?

Think about Cloud and Bird. Who do they remind you of and why?

List some of the colours that describe the mood of the book. Explain your choices.

Using any medium you like – design a creative response to the text.
Look at inference and themes in the story – Year 3

Students listen to a reading of *Not a Cloud in the Sky*. Together examine as a class, what the story is about, what is the story saying about friendship and using your imagination? Using the sheet provided ask students to describe the main idea, retell the literal meanings of the text through a written and visual response and then make inferences about the feelings of one of the characters.

**Main idea:** What do you think is the special message this book is trying to tell us?

**Literal meaning:** What happens in the story?

**Inferential meaning:** How do you think Bird feels about Cloud?

Do you think Bird will see Cloud again? Why?

Draw a picture of Bird and Cloud.
Not a Cloud in the Sky - Inferring Reading Strategy

My Prediction

Brief recount of the text

What type of connection did you make with the text? Text to self, text to world, text to text

What have you learned about clouds?

Who is the intended audience for this book? Children/teenagers/adults/other

Why do you think the author wrote this book? To entertain/tell a message/how do you know?

What is the underlying message of this book?

Do you think the story would have been different if Bird had been an elephant rather than a bird? Yes/No/ Please explain
These activities have been adapted from work samples for Year Three English National Curriculum:
Introduction to Visual Literacy

Part One - Exploring metalanguage (QTF)

It is important that students understand the metalanguage of visual design as this provides them with a language for interpreting and deconstructing images, and for conveying information. They will need this skill throughout high school.

Provide students with definitions of the following terms in the context of visual design:

**Purpose** – Consider the composer’s purpose: to entertain, satirise, inform, to make comment, provoke thought or emotion; or persuade. May be one or more of these.

**Audience** – the group of people a composer intends to influence.

**Context** – The range of personal, social, historical, cultural and workplace conditions in which a text in responded to and composed (BoS NSW 2003). Relates to when the text was composed; type of publication and evidence to support this.

**Salience** – Most noticeable point or important feature. The protruding or conspicuous element of the text.

**Vectors** – lead the reader from one element to another

**Reading path** – Taken from the most salient images to the less salient images.

**Framing** - The frame determines the amount of information given to the viewer as well as sometimes signalling a social relationship with a viewer.

**Colour** - Colour is used both to create convincing images and suggest particular mood or feelings. Variation in tone and saturation can be used for a variety of purposes.

**Angles** - The use of angles in images allows different relationships to be conveyed between people and between people and objects.

**Size** - Illustrations may vary in size to establish and enhance the relationship between the viewer, the image maker and the page.

**Demand and offer** - The eyes of the character in the image determine either a demand or offer. When the eyes are looking directly at the viewer, they are called a demand. An offer is looking away from the camera.
Adapted from NAPLAN 2011 teaching strategies Visual literacy: Analysing and interpreting visual images, Stage 4:


Please see for more information:


The images are not in black and white but four colours, using a particular palette of colours. List the colours used in the book. Why has the illustrator used them and not black and white images for example? How do the choices of colour add meaning to the text? How does the ‘look’ of the book add to the themes of the text?

Discussion Point: How have the pictures been created? What method of drawing has the illustrator used? How do the choices that the artist has made, enhance the look of the book and influence the meaning of the text?

Part Two: Look at how some visual techniques shape meaning

Model how to do a visual language analysis of a picture. Explain the composition of the picture, the salient feature, the reading path, how framing and angles shape meaning, the use of colour and symbols.
How does changing the colour of the sky change the meaning of the text? What is the relationship between the images and the text? Ask the students to make a creative response to these images.
Look at the first and last pages, same text, different images – how has the meaning of the words changed over the course of the book. What can a tree symbolise? What did the author do over the course of the text to change the meaning of the words? Examine how to images work together. Watch this short video about illustrator Anne Spudvilas and the processes and choices she makes when illustrating picture books. Please see: [www.slv.vic.gov.au/node/3147](http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/node/3147)
Part Three: Apply knowledge and examine the visual techniques used on the cover Not a Cloud in the Sky

As a class, annotate the front cover of Not a Cloud in the Sky, ensuring that students can identify:

- The purpose of the book.
- The target audience for the book.
- The salient feature of the cover.
- The reading path of the cover and if any vectors are evident.
- How framing and angles are used to convey meaning.
- The use of colour and the purpose of it.
- The symbols.
More questions you can ask:

What is the first thing you look at on the cover of the book? This is called the “salient object” (the object that stands out most). Why is your eye drawn to this object? Compare your response with other classmates. Are their salient objects the same as yours?

Are there any other figures that are prominent in the picture? Why are they there? How do they contribute to the meaning of the story? What does that tell you about the story?

What are the main colours used on the cover of the book? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen these colours?

Listen to the story being read aloud without looking at the illustrations. Then, read the story while viewing the illustrations. Do the illustrations change your understanding of the story in any way? How?

How does Emma Quay convey emotions in her images?

Adapted from:  

Working in pairs, choose a double page spread from the book and comment on the features of the written text and the illustrations and present findings to class.

In pairs, create your own two page illustrated text on a white hare using text and colour and framing in particular to try and persuade the reader.
Bibliography

About the author of the notes
Mandy Newman BA (Sociology), MA (Creative Writing), BTeach is an author and a teacher of English. Originally from Melbourne, she has called Sydney home for twenty years. Mandy has worked as an Education Officer, a web producer at the Australian Financial Review and is the author of How to Say I Do (Allen and Unwin, 2009) and other titles. She has appeared on Sunrise among other television programs and written features for Sunday Life magazine. She is now an education consultant working with major Australian publishers, a teacher and writer.