

TEACHER'S NOTES FOR GLASS TEARS

Published by Limelight Press, 2005.

JANE JOLLY has been a primary school teacher for twenty five years. She has always taught in country schools. Presently she lives and works about an hour away from Adelaide. She loves organic farming and spending time with her family.

Jane loves picture books and is drawn to the picture book section in bookshops. Inspiration for her own stories comes from real life. The inspiration for *Glass Tears* came from a lonely grave on the cliff tops at Stenhouse Bay that she first saw when she was on a camping trip around ten years ago.

A plaque near the grave tells how in 1940 a Vietnamese sailor on the *SS Notue* was hit in the head by a bag of coal. A doctor was sent for but the bosun, Dao Thanh, was already dead by the time he arrived. Other Buddhist crewmembers on the ship held funeral rites for Dao Thanh and he was buried overlooking the sea. When the ship left a few days later, the crew lined the deck as a mark of respect for their friend.

The simple gravestone bears Dao Thanh's name and age and on top sits a rectangular glass case with a bouquet of glass bead flowers inside. This bouquet was made and sent by his family. Sailors continued to visit the grave and pay their respects until 1975 when ships no longer stopped in the bay. Recently, members of the Vietnamese community have once again begun visiting and tending the grave.

When Jane first read the story and saw the grave, it made her shiver. She could imagine his family far away hearing of his death and making the bead bouquet for him. This was the starting point for her story.

At present Jane is working on a number of writing projects, including one set in Japan.

DI WU was born in China and he studied art in the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. After he completed his studies he became an illustrator and art editor for the People's Fine Arts Publishing House, one of the biggest publishers in China.

Since coming to Australia over twenty years ago, he has completed his Master of Arts (Visual Arts) at New South Wales University and worked as a freelance artist. He worked on his own paintings until his daughter was born ten years ago. Then he started illustrating children's books. He has illustrated six books, one of which, *Rebel*, written by Allan Baillie, was short listed in 1995 for the Children's Book Council of Australia's Picture Book of the Year and received an American Bookseller's Pick of the Lists award.

As well as living in Australia and China, Di has travelled widely in Tibet, Nepal and Europe.

SYNOPSIS

A telegram arrives for Tian and Dao's family. Their father has died in a country far away. The family lights incense in front of Father's photo. As they make a bouquet of beaded flowers, they talk about his burial and remember him. The bouquet is packed away and sent to the strange land where he died to be placed on his grave. Tian hangs a blue bead in the window as she tries to remember her father.

WRITING STYLE

Jane Jolly first learned about Dao Thanh at his grave near Stenhouse Bay. As she stood at the grave looking at the case of glass-bead flowers, she got goose bumps. She was immediately touched by the thought of his family in a far off land mourning his death. She could imagine them making the bouquet of glass bead flowers that she could see on his grave. She then began to imagine how they must have felt as they thought about him dying so far away, how his children might not have seen their sailor father often and how hard it might have been for them to remember him. A story was growing out of her first vision.

As Jane wrote *Glass Tears* she was very aware that many Asian cultures hold parents and elders in great respect. The ceremonies surrounding death are also especially solemn and important. She wanted this respect to come through in her story. The language she has used is deliberately formal. The parents in the family are called Mother and Father. No contracted word forms are used, so that statements like 'He is in the big land' sound measured and formal (p9).

Although the story is all about grief, this grief is expressed in a controlled way. The character's speech is introduced only with 'he said' or 'said Mother'; no one shouts, wails or screams. Instead Tian and Dao talk quietly with their mother about their father and what has happened to him. They patiently thread the beads for his bouquet as they talk (pp11-18). Step by step, Mother explains the funeral rites that the sailors carried out for Father (pp11-12, 16). This calm control also reflects their respect for the dead man.

The family's grief is instead expressed through the tears, real and glass, that they shed for him. Mother cries 'silent tears' when she receives the telegram about her husband and they do not stop for the rest of the story. Neither do Tian's. Their grief is captured and made solid by the beads that sparkle like tears that their fingers patiently thread into the bouquet. They wrap and send this gift made from their grief to his grave in a strange land.

The other important image in this story is the sea. Through vivid metaphors and similes, Jane Jolly shows us what the sea means to Tian, her mother and her father. Father is a sailor. He loves the sea and it is shown as something of great beauty in images such as the bouquet 'sparkled like the sun on the sea' (p19) and the bead that 'was a liquid blue. The blue of the sea that Father loved.' (p13). But the sea has also taken him away from his family. Tian does not know him well because he has been away for much of her life. For her, the smoke from the incense 'drifted out of sight like foam on the ocean, like Father from her life' (p6). Mother is also aware of the beauty of the sea (p9) but she fears that her son might follow in his father's footsteps and become a sailor (p17).

The beautiful imagery of *Glass Tears* adds a depth and richness to his gentle story about loss and grief in a far away land.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Di Wu was attracted to *Glass Tears* because the story is touching, sad and at the same time gentle. He found the language 'like a poem'. To him it showed a connection between Australia and another culture, and he felt that this connection would help Australians relate to people of this other culture. For him the tears of Tian's family's grief can be understood by all of us.

Although Di is a Buddhist, he was unsure whether Vietnamese traditional practices would be the same that he was familiar with in China. He spoke with some Vietnamese friends and found that their traditions were similar. For instance, in both countries people wear white clothes for a period of mourning. He also looked at photographs to become familiar

with the details of Vietnamese life. When he was near completing his illustrations he showed them to a Vietnamese family. They were able to point out some mistakes and make suggestions. Di incorporated these changes into his final illustrations. His illustrations show us the ceremony that Tian's mother describes.

In the initial stages of creating his illustrations, Di used his young daughter as a model. The character's faces are full of grief, but they are the faces of gentle calm (see pp14, 15). Only when the family stands before the shrine to say their last farewell does their anguish show in the strain on their faces (p17) and in the tight clasp of Tian's hands.

Dao Thanh died in 1940 but so that children could relate to the story Di was asked to make the illustrations carry hints of modernity. Hence the everyday clothes look quite modern (pp4, 14, 17, 20) and so too does Tian's toy kangaroo (p8). Yet there are many traditional touches that depict Vietnamese culture including the streetscape (pp3, 19-20) and the family shrine (pp 1-2).

To separate Tian's real world in Vietnam to that on the other side of the world which she can only imagine, Di has filled the real world with rich colour but has used more sombre, subdued colours for the land far away. Vietnam is the red of the shrine cloth, the gold of the incense holders and the bright orange of Tian's toy kangaroo. The land on the other side of the world is brown and grey. Brown and grey kangaroos lie on the ground and the men standing by Father's coffin are dressed in dark coats in the watery light. Between the two worlds floats the twirling soft blue and white of the incense smoke and the foam of the sea. All of the colours are soft and the use of pastels means that the texture is often soft and smudged, giving the illustrations a gentleness that matches the sensitivity of Jane Jolly's story.

CLASS DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

1. Tian and her family make a bouquet of glass bead flowers for her father's grave. Why do you think it is important for them to be able to send the flowers to him? In what ways are glass beads like tears?
2. Why does Tian hang a bead in the window near the shrine? What does it remind her of? Why?
3. The sea is important in this story. Talk about how the sea means different things to Father, Mother, Tian and Dao.
4. How does the author use similies and metaphors to make feelings and messages more powerful? Find one in the text. Try writing it as a plain statement. Is it more or less powerful? How does imagery bring stories to life?
5. Tian's father dies in a country far away from her own. Do you think it might be even harder for her when he dies because she finds it hard to imagine where he is and because she can't visit his grave?
6. Talk about the ceremonies in the story. What special things do the people do to remember and show their respect for the man who has died? What special objects or clothes can you see in the pictures that tell us more about the ceremonies? In what ways are the ceremonies like funerals in Australia? In what ways are they different? Why is it important for people to remember their loved ones with special ceremonies when they die?

7. Glass beads make beautiful decorations. Have the children thread beads on wire and loop the wire together to make flowers. The class can put their beads together to make a bouquet. Alternatively, tie glass beads on strands of wool or cotton and hang them in the window where they can catch the light.
8. Using soft chalk or pastels, try to capture the light shining through a glass bead or on a glass. How does Di Wu suggest light? Make sure you have a white piece of chalk or pastel to try and use as a highlighter as he does.
9. What are the differences in the way that the illustrator shows Tian's world and that far away in Australia? How do we know that the characters are imagining Australia?
10. Why do you think that the author does not make the characters wail with grief and the illustrator shows their faces as calm, though touched by tears?
11. *Glass Tears* is based on a true story that touched the author. Are there any true stories that have ever touched you deeply? Why? Do you think that they are sometimes more powerful because you know that they really happened?
12. Why do you think the picture of Tian looking out of the window was chosen for the cover of *Glass Tears*? Does it tell you much about the story? Do you think that if you were to see it in a row of books in the library you would want to pick it up? Why?
13. Look at the first two pages of the story and the last two pages. Are they similar? They are like an introduction and a conclusion to the story. Do they work like a frame that holds the rest of the story in place?