

TEACHER'S NOTES FOR *LIMPOPO LULLABY*

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1. About the author.

JANE JOLLY has been a primary school teacher for twenty five years. Although she grew up in the city, she has always taught in country schools. Presently she lives and works on South Australia's West Coast. She loves organic farming, looking after her chickens and her organic orchard, and spending time with her family.

Jane's love of picture books has continued way past her own childhood. When she goes into book shops she is still drawn to the picture book section.

Inspiration for Jane's writing often comes from real life. Her friends know she loves to write. They save up stories that they hear to tell her. When she first heard the story of a woman who gave birth to a baby in a tree with floodwaters swirling below, she was 'gobsmacked'.

Once Jane hears a story she embellishes it in her mind. This process of forming the story may take months. During this time she researches the story as well. In the case of Sophia and Rosita's story, she spent time looking at newspaper articles on the internet and then reading about Mozambique.

When Jane feels that she has the story sorted out in her mind, she 'goes for it', sitting down at the computer to brainstorm words that evoke her story, then putting them into order to create the story. She always looks for poetic words, concentrating on alternative words, metaphors and similies. She feels that this sort of language helps kids get a more vivid picture of what is happening. (One of her favourite parts of teaching is sharing poetry with kids – and they love it as well!)

Jane loves the illustrations that Dee created for *Limpopo Lullaby* – the vibrant colours, the vast African landscapes, details such as the little goat that Josette's children take with them and the 'beautiful, plump baby' at the end.

DEE HUXLEY has been a freelance illustrator since 1976. She has illustrated such notable picture books as *Light the Lamps* (1997), *Rain Dance* (2000, Shortlisted for the Children's Book Council Picture book of the Year), *Mr Nick's Knitting* (1989, Shortlisted for the Children's Book Council Picture book of the Year) and *Unplugged*.

Graduating in design and craft at the National Art School, East Sydney, Dee went on to teach visual arts in secondary schools in London and Australia. Later she was a graphic designer in television production. She continues to teach design and illustration part time.

Dee found Jane's text inspiring. It offered her many exciting challenges as an illustrator.

2. Synopsis

Leroy dances as the rain begins to fall. His sister and his pregnant mother join in his celebration of the coming of rain. But the rain keeps on falling and soon the Limpopo River rises and breaks its banks. Leroy, Aimee and Josette go with the other villagers to higher ground. They climb into the giant milkwood tree near the village as the river continues to rise. For three days they cling to the branches of the tree and on the fourth day Josette gives birth to her baby. Along with the rest of the villagers, they are rescued by helicopter and taken to a safe, dry place. Finally the rain stops.

3. Writing Style

Limpopo Lullaby is based on a true event that took place in March 2000. Mozambique was ravaged by flood and more than 180,000 people were displaced, some perching in trees for up to nine days to escape the water. Sophia Pedro had been there for three full days when she went into labour in the tree. She was discovered by a team of rescuers moments before her baby was born. An airforce medic was lowered to the tree and helped her give birth. Minutes later, the mother and baby were hoisted into the helicopter. They were taken to a refugee camp on high ground. The baby was named Rosita.

Jane Jolly has based her inspiring story of bravery and endurance upon this true story. In Jane's story, the mother has two other young children to share her ordeal. The characters Leroy and Aimee help the reader feel as if they are seeing the flood through children's eyes. They help children looking at the book ask themselves what would it be like if I were in this situation? In real life, a medic helped the mother give birth, but in this story it was the children who bravely assist their mother.

The story is almost entirely narrated. The only dialogue is between unnamed people as they climb into the milkwood tree (p14). This gives the story the feeling that it is being told orally, as perhaps it would be by someone telling a story in a village.

The text is rich with phrases that use alliteration: '*Limpopo Lullaby*' (cover), 'like a hungry hippopotamus', 'tickle his tongue and trickle down his throat' (p5), 'Ants stung, snakes slithered' (p18), 'people were plucked' (p25). This device gives the narration a lilting, poetic feel that perhaps reinforces the notion that the story is being told by a storyteller.

Jane has used metaphors and similes throughout the story that she feels will help children see what is happening from unusual perspectives, ones that will really bring it alive for them. For instance, on page 25, the children are not just lifted into the helicopter but pulled away from the swirling river 'like fish on a line'. These similes never seem out of place as they are appropriate to the world of the villagers: 'Again and again, people were plucked from the tree, like berries from a bush'. They contribute to the sense that the reader is a part of this world.

The Limpopo River is brought to life, like a terrifying, out of control beast, with the use of metaphor. First it is like a 'swollen chocolate sea' (p9) that 'seethed and sucked' at the tree (p14). And when the villagers are rescued, the river is like a disappointed creature that 'scowled and sulked and then rushed out to the welcoming sea' (p25). The milkwood tree is brought to life in a similar way using personification. It 'stood sentinel' like a 'friendly giant' offering the villagers protection (p14).

Such poetic devices make *Limpopo Lullaby* an inspiring, powerful story of survival and the renewal of life.

4. Illustrations

Dee Huxley found *Limpopo Lullaby* a challenging book to work on. Firstly she felt that she did not know much about Mozambique. She had not drawn African people very often. She had to familiarise herself with the features of the people, from small babies to children and adults. The landscape and the colours it contained was also very new and different for her. These challenges and the inspiration of the story are what drew her to it.

Margaret Hamilton helped Dee to conduct extensive research into many aspects of Mozambique and its people. Dee needed to look at many photos of people to understand what they look like. She also had to find out things like what a milkwood tree looks like – how big they are in relation to huts and people, what their leaves and bark look like close up and what it looks like from a distance. Details such as what type of huts might be in the village and the design on the fabric that the people wear were important. The endpapers are based on African cloth (although Dee and Margaret were unable to find textiles that were definitely from Mozambique).

Limpopo Lullaby has been illustrated using pastels. The illustrator chose them because they provided her with a vivid, wide pallet. One of the challenges for her was that the location of the story means that there are many browns used in the landscape and people. She had to vary the browns as much as possible and use other colours and whites as highlights to stop the pictures becoming too sombre. Note, for instance, the inclusion of yellow, blue, orange and white in the predominantly brown river on pages 8-9 and 10-11. The brilliant colours in African\ textiles helped to provide bright contrasts as well

The illustrations are full of movement as well as colour. The river swirls (pp9, 14-15), as does the sky (pp4-5), the raindrops slice downwards and send up spurts of dust (pp4-5). (Note that the raindrops always move from left to right, leading the reader forward through the story until Josette and her children's struggle begins on pages 12-13, when they go in the other direction, against the natural flow of the book.) The whole landscape is alive with the chaos caused by the rain.

The facial expressions of the characters and other people tell the story of their joy (pp4,7), then their concern (p10), their fear (pp16-17), their suffering (pp18-19) and finally their contentment (pp26-27). The fear caused by the floods is even shown on the faces of the bullocks (pp18-19). Readers are left in no doubt of how terrifying the floods were.

Small visual details included by Dee add to the story. The children have a little goat that is not mentioned in the text. It lives through the entire ordeal with them, even being lifted into the helicopter (p24). Other details are included that help us understand the difficulties of the situation, such as the cloud of annoying mosquitos that buzz around Josette and the children while she is in labour (pp20-21).

The illustrations have been carefully crafted to lead the reader through the story, drawing the eyes through action from left to right. For instance, on pages 22 and 23, our eye is first caught by Leroy, who points to the right to his mother and her new baby being lifted into the helicopter. The plump little baby on the last page comes as a satisfying full stop, lying in the crook of her mother's arm.

5. Characters

Josette is a villager who lives by the Limpopo River in Mozambique with her children. She is based on a real person, Sofia Pedro, who gave birth to her baby in a tree during a flood.

Leroy is Josette's young son. He dances with joy when the rains come and helps his mother while she is in labour.

Aimee is Josette's daughter, Leroy's sister.

The baby is not seen for most of the book, but its birth is central to the story. On the last page it is a very satisfying end to all the concern and chaos.

6. Discussion Points

1. Natural disasters like floods are terrible events, but wonderful things happen during them as well, like the birth of a baby. New life is always a miracle, but seems even more so in such difficult circumstances. The story could be an excellent starting point for kids to talk of their feelings about disasters that they see and hear about all the time in the media. What makes kids feel scared when they hear about things on the news? How does this story make them feel? Worried? Happy? Do stories of survival against the odds inspire them?
2. Dee Huxley spent a lot of time researching the landscape and people of Mozambique. What bits of the illustrations tell you that it is set in Africa? What is different about it to where you live?
3. For older children, it could be interesting to look up information about the Mozambique floods of early March 2000. Information is available in newspaper files and on the internet from newspapers such as *The Guardian*. Teacher note that you might want to check that you think the material is suitable for the age group you teach before you direct students to it. The students might also like to find out how the people of Mozambique have rebuilt their lives after the devastating floods.
4. The characters in *Limpopo Lullaby* have very clear facial expressions. Pick some illustrations and talk about what the characters might be feeling. Which words in the accompanying text tell us about feelings?
5. It might be fun for children to try to paint expressive faces using bright, bold crayons, chalk or pastels. They could try this in pairs, taking turns pulling faces and drawing each other.
6. Children could also find out more about Mozambique in general – its recent history, how the people live, what is special about their culture and what the countryside and wildlife are like.
7. Jane Jolly has used lots of similes and metaphors in her story. Pick some out to discuss. Think about why they are effective. Children could take them out of the story and see how the story seems different. Students could make up some more similes and metaphors for themselves.
8. *Limpopo Lullaby* takes place over three days so the story has to make jumps that means bits are left out. Perhaps the children could try to imagine what might have happened in some of these gaps and write or make pictures about them. For instance, how did the children rescue the goat that is on the edge of the flooding river on page 8? What was the helicopter ride like and what did the flooded land below look like? What happened when the family was taken to a safe place – did they get food? Were people kind to them? Did a doctor check that they were okay?

9. The little goat is not mentioned in the story but appears on every page. Children might like to find it on every page and even make up a story from its point of view. (Don't forget to give it a name!)
10. The story is based on something that really happened. Lots of authors and artists base their work on real-life events. Why do you think that the author changed things a bit in *Limpopo Lullaby*? Try looking in the newspaper or in non-fiction books to find an inspiring story on which to base a fictional story or a picture.
11. Leroy or Aimee have to be very brave. People in Australia have been in similar situations. Imagine that you are caught in a flood in Australia and have to climb onto the roof. What happens? Who rescues you? How would you feel?