

LAMONT TEACHING NOTES

TITLE:	Pea Pod Lullaby
AUTHOR:	Glenda Millard
ILLUSTRATOR:	Stephen Michael King
PUBLISHER:	Allen & Unwin
PRICE:	A\$24.99
ISBN:	9781760290085
PUBLICATION DATE:	September 2017
AUDIENCE:	4-8

SYNOPSIS

I am the small green pea, you are the tender pod, hold me

Words sing over the pictures in this evocative story: a beautiful lullaby about what we can be for each other.

A mother and baby, a boy and a dog run for their lives. A little boat carries them across the sea. A polar bear, too, has come adrift. When will they find land? Where will they find friends? Who will welcome them in?

Pea Pod Lullaby is an inspiring and timely story of courage, endurance, and hope... for a world in which we can reach out and embrace one another.

IN THE AUTHOR'S OWN WORDS

Pea Pod Lullaby began as a poem simply titled 'Poem For Leonard' and was a response to some Leonard Cohen lyrics which had been sent to me by a friend (the amazingly gifted illustrator, Stephen Michael King!). The poem was, I felt at the time, largely about trust. It was first published, along with an illustration created by Stephen, , in *The Hush Treasure Book* – a collection of poems and stories produced by The Hush Foundation, established by Dr Catherine Crock of the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

Then in November 2016 Stephen was awarded a residency at the Manning Art Gallery in Taree, NSW, during which time he planned to sketch his illustrations for 'Poem', as it was then still titled. When I heard about this, I was keen to see Stephen's work in progress, but not simply from curiosity. 'Poem' was not a narrative, so I knew that Stephen's illustrations

would provide a larger than usual part of the storytelling than is the case with most picture books.

By the time I arrived, Stephen had already been working at the gallery for several days. We began to talk to one another (in a very conversational way) about aspects of our individual contributions to the book and to discuss options for change, and very speedily alterations and adjustments were made. Each small shift in design, illustration or wording created the need or opportunity for further refinements.

Of course some if not all these changes might have been made at a far later stage in the process, but Stephen and I both felt that this truly collaborative, organic and immediate way of working gave our joint works fluency, cohesion, a truly distinctive voice and a unique perspective. It was a poem about intangibles, about opposites; things like frailty and strength, power and weakness, hope and despair, trust and doubt. What Stephen did was tell the story through his imagery. As an example, Stephen's inclusion of the polar bear in the illustrations added an unexpected layer to the sparsely worded narrative. Refuge, safety, journey, the offer and acceptance of aid, and the environment are all elements of the story and all elements which pertain to both humans and other animals.

The way this book was created is almost an example of opposites in that the most usual way a picture book is created is where the artist reacts to the writer's words. In a sense, Stephen did react to my words; however, in this book, the narrative is provided by Stephen's imagery and the words extend and add layers to what we see and know. During the process I felt the lines of our individual roles became less defined. In my personal opinion, this book is probably the closest I'll ever come to experiencing what it's like to being both writer and illustrator.

Stephen's silent story is so profound that when we finished our collaboration at Manning Gallery, there were fewer words in my manuscript than when I began. And all, including that, is as it should be.

See the review of Stephen and Glenda workshopping the book at the Manning Regional Art Gallery in this article, including videos, from the Manning River Times.

<http://www.manningrivertimes.com.au/story/4283836/space-creates-thought-video/?cs=1467>

AUTHOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Glenda Millard is a highly respected author who writes for children of all ages. Her novel *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark* was the Winner of the 2009 Queensland Premier's Award for young adults, Honour Book in the 2010 CBCA awards for older readers, shortlisted for the 2010 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, and included on the Honour List for the 2012 International Board of Books for Young People. In 2017, *The Stars at Oktober Bend* has been shortlisted for the CILIP Carnegie Medal and longlisted for the prestigious UKLA Book Awards. Books from her popular Kingdom of Silk series have also received individual awards. *The Novice* was selected by the International Youth Library as a White Raven 2006 book. Glenda has also written many picture books, including *The Duck and the Darklings*, illustrated by Stephen Michael King.

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Stephen Michael King has illustrated more than fifty books that have been drawn in, chewed and thoroughly enjoyed throughout the world. He's been nominated for, and sometimes won, a whole bunch of awards. Several of his titles have been shortlisted by the CBCA, and they frequently appear in children's choice awards.. Books he has both written and illustrated include *Milli*, *Jack and the Dancing Cat*, *Mutt Dog*, *You* and *Leaf*.

Stephen and Glenda are frequent creative collaborators—together they have created *Applesauce and the Christmas Miracle*, *The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk* and other books in the Kingdom of Silk series, and the CBCA-shortlisted *The Duck and the Darklings*.

EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY

Themes include:

- Refugees
- Journey
- Global warming
- Uncertainty
- Love
- Family
- Safety

Suggestions for discussion and classroom activities:

- Before reading *Pea Pod Lullaby*, ask students to consider the title and cover design. What sort of story do students expect this to be? Might it be a poem or a story, a fairy tale or something fairly true to life? How might the different characters on the cover interact in the story? Encourage students to come up with specific things about the cover that influenced their answers (the image, the style of illustration, the title or font used, etc).
- Why do you think the poem in the book is called a 'lullaby'? What do you think of when you hear the word 'lullaby'? How does this reflect on how you read and interpret *Pea Pod Lullaby*?

Close reading:

- *Pea Pod Lullaby* opens with the words 'I am the lullaby/you are the melody/sing me'. Why are these words positioned before even the title of the story when you open the book? How do they introduce the themes of the story and the pace of Glenda Millard's poetry?
- Consider Stephen Michael King's use of colour and light in the first illustration of mother, child, baby and dog. What atmosphere do these techniques convey? What does it suggest about where the family are in this picture and how they are feeling?
- What is the family fleeing from? How do the splashes of red in the illustration convey a sense of danger and urgency?
- How does the yellow of the lantern stand out among the darker, duller tones of the illustrations? What might it symbolise?
- Glenda's poem is written in the first person ('I am') and sings to a 'you'. Who might this 'you' be? Think about the different 'I's and 'you's that the poem could incorporate. For example, 'I' could be the storyteller, 'you' could be the reader; 'I' could be the baby, 'you' could be the mother. In small groups, draw a table listing all the 'I' personas and their corresponding 'you's. What do all the 'I's have in common? What about the 'you's? (HINT: the 'you' always helps and supports the 'I'). How does this convey the themes of safety and togetherness in the story? Extend your group discussions into a class-wide discussion, using the final three pages of *Pea Pod Lullaby* as your foundation.
- Turn to the spread which introduces the polar bear. How have the words on the page been positioned up until this spread? Look at the number of words on the page, and the pace at which you read them aloud and turn the pages. What happens when you reach the polar bear's first three spreads? How does the pacing change with the number of words on the pages and the way they interact with the illustrations?

- What is the impact of having the polar bear floating on a refrigerator? Refrigerators are usually where food and drink are kept, but this refrigerator is empty and offers the bear and the family no sustenance.
- How does the pace of the poem change again once the polar bear is settled on the boat, then again once the polar bear leaves the boat and the family approaches the end of their journey? Why do you think this is?
- How do the tumbling leaves on the third-last spread signal that the boat is approaching land?
- Look at the endpapers of *Pea Pod Lullaby*. Which illustrations from the book do these endpapers correspond to? Why might those illustrations in particular be significant?

Class discussions:

- Discuss climate change, particularly the role that our household emissions (such as those from appliances like refrigerators) have on climate change. How are animals such as polar bears affected by rising sea levels and other effects of climate change?
- What do you know about refugees? What are refugees? What makes a person a refugee? Are the family in the story refugees? What makes you think so? What challenges might refugees face when fleeing their homelands in search of safety? Why are the words ‘welcome me’ at the end of *Pea Pod Lullaby* so important to the family in the boat?
- Polar bears are dangerous predators, and Stephen Michael King conveys this in the bear’s sharp claws and teeth. The dog is particularly unhappy to see the polar bear coming onto the boat. Why do you think the family stops to rescue the bear anyway? What do the family and the bear have in common? How does the bear become part of the family as the journey continues? What do you think this suggests about finding common ground and helping each other during times of adversity?
- Go through the book as a class, making note of the different families and communities that appear in the story, both human and non-human. What does *Pea Pod Lullaby*, particularly the final three pages of the book, say about family and community?