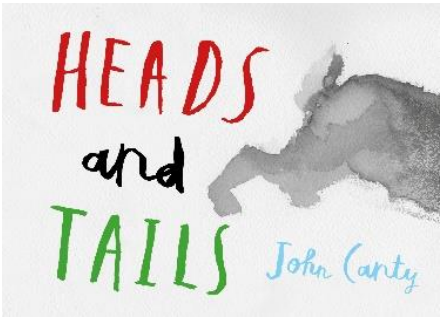
Teacher notes for *Heads and Tails*



SYNOPSIS

Heads and Tails by John Canty is an extraordinary children's picture book. Leveraging the natural and universal fascination that children have with animals, the book utilises hints and recognition to build a sense of anticipation on each page that is resolved on the following page when the identity of the animal is discovered.

Heads and Tails employs simple but stunning water colours and line art that increase in detail as the animal is revealed.

Young readers are engaged in the process of deduction by drawing on visual prompts and descriptive clues - such as where the animal may live, what the animal may look like and sounds the animal makes.

The result is that each page presents an engaging yet accessible mini-mystery for the child to solve. Accordingly, the young reader's inevitable participation in the process of discovery ensures the book's enjoyment.

THEMES

- Problem solving and deduction
- Visual clues versus descriptive clues
- Imagination and creativity

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

John Canty

John Canty loves design, books, art, drawings, paintings, watercolours, printmaking, the country, cows, the wild sea, architecture, beautiful writing, whippets, music, violins, croissants, pizzas, French movies, Italian food, Scandinavian design, fast computers, slow food, coffee and beautiful Melbourne.

STUDY NOTES

- Book review and comprehension
  - After reading *Heads and Tails*, ask the children to list all the animals in the book. Can they remember them in order?
  - Select an animal. Ask the children to discuss which clues helped them identify the animal.

- Which animals were harder to guess, and which were the easiest? Why?
- The author tries to trick the children on a couple of spreads. Get the children to do something similar.
- List some additional clues the children could add to the description of each animal.
- Use pins on a world map to identify where each animal lives.

- Invite children to draw an animal that is not in the book. Ask get them to list three descriptive clues to describe it (where does it live? What sound does it make? What makes it different from other animals?)

- Discuss the difference between visual clues and descriptive clues.
  - Which one do the children find most helpful in guessing the animal?
  - This may vary from animal to animal. Use examples in the book to prompt this.
  - Which animals would be easier to identify if you saw their heads BEFORE their tails?

- Discuss animals with distinctive heads (e.g elephants) versus animals with distinctive tails (e.g. crocodiles)

  - Group animals to create discussion and encourage analysis of different and common features. Create the categories on a whiteboard and ask the children to help place an animal in each category. Categories could be:
  - Big/medium/small animals
  - Furry/scaly/rough skin/prickly
  - Walking/flying/swimming/slithering
  - Bird/mammal/reptile/fish.
  - Habitat (oceans; jungle; farm; sky)
  - Dangerous vs not dangerous – this will rate discussion.

- Making your own *Heads and Tails* creation
  - Ask each child to draw a picture of a different animal (this exercise is more fun if their waists are a common width).
  - Cut the picture in half, separating the front half of the animal from the back half.
  - Now swap halves with other children to create imaginary hybrid animal with the head of one animal and the tail of another.
  - Think of hybrid names for these funny animals.

- Using the book as a vehicle for self-analysis
  - Invite children to draw a self portrait
  - Ask them to write three sentences to describe themselves.
  - Create a class book about the characteristics of the students in the class.
  - Place a half a photo of the student and get the children to guess who it is using three clues:
    1. I am (gender)
    2. I have… (hair)
    3. I like…