

WHERE DO THE STARS GO?

KATIE STEWART

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YEAR LEVEL: K–3

ABOUT THE BOOK

Possum wakes one day and wants to know where the stars go in the morning. His friends, such as Bungarra, Rakali, Numbat and Galah, all have ideas and he spends a wonderful day discovering ‘stars’ in his environment. So wonderful, in fact, that even when his mother helps him discover the true answer, he still plans to look for more stars the next day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Stewart is an author and illustrator. Born in the north of England, she came to Australia at the age of nine. She started her working life as an archaeologist and ethnohistorian, went on to teaching and then to being a mother. She later worked in a school library, but her lifelong dream was to be what she is now. She is married to a farmer, has three children and lives north of Northam, where her love of animals means she has a lot of pets and takes lots of nature photos. In her spare time, she tries to play the harp or wanders the countryside with a metal detector amusing the neighbours and occasionally finding an interesting piece of history.

THEMES

- Perception
- Curiosity
- Australian flora and fauna
- Astronomy
- Visual art

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

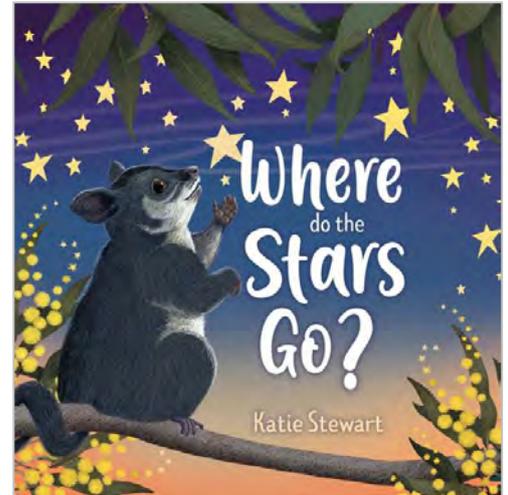
K–3 English

K–3 Earth and Space Sciences; Biological Sciences

K–3 Visual Art

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author’s website: magicowldesign.com
- Author’s Facebook: facebook.com/KatieStewartAuthorIllustrator
- Author’s Instagram: instagram.com/katiestewartillustrator/
- Author’s Twitter: twitter.com/Skate60



CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. Possum has a question: where do the stars go in the daytime? Turn to a partner and share some ideas. Create a list of possible answers as a class.
2. What is a star? Have you ever looked closely at one through a telescope? Are there different kinds of stars? What colours are they and what are the stars' names? What do you call a pattern of stars in the sky? What constellations can you find in the night sky?
3. How many friends does Possum meet throughout the story? Why do you think each animal has a different answer about where the stars go during the daytime?
4. Are the 'stars' the other animals describe *really* stars? What are they? Why do you think the other animals think they are stars?
5. How many different 'stars' can you find around your school? Hint: what qualities might make an object star-like in addition to its shape? What adjectives would you use to describe a star (e.g. bright, sparkly)?
6. All the animals have different opinions about where the stars go in the daytime. Can you think of a time when you had a different opinion to your friend? Why is it important to respect different opinions?
7. Possum discovers that stars *stay in the sky and appear in the dark*. Why aren't they visible during the day?
8. After learning the truth, Possum still wants to look for more 'stars' the next day. Why do you think this is? What did you enjoy most about looking for stars around your school?
9. Which animals in the story have Indigenous names? What language are they from?
10. Can you think of a similar question to Possum's that you'd like to ask (e.g. where does the sun go at night)? Encourage children to post questions into a class Curiosity Box as they occur to them. Select a question at random every Monday for children to research throughout the week. Students can then present their findings as a poster or PowerPoint and be encouraged to bring along props, photographs, models, etc.

Creative writing

1. Create finger puppets of each animal to read along and retell the story.
2. Look closely at the verbs used to describe the movement of the various 'stars' throughout the book: e.g. *danced, jiggled, swaying, swinging*. How have the letters been arranged creatively on the page? What do you like about this effect? Invite students to do the actions as they read along.
3. Choose your favourite animal from the story and create an informative poster, pamphlet or PowerPoint with the following information: name, physical characteristics, habitat, diet, life cycle, interesting facts, special adaptations, labelled diagram, conservation status.
4. Can you change the following statements into questions by moving the verb to the beginning of the sentence and adding a question mark at the end? The answer to each is italicised below.
 - a. Statement: Stars play in the water during the day.
Question: Do stars play in the water during the day?
 - b. Statement: The stars hide in gumnuts during the day.
Question: Do the stars hide in gumnuts during the day?

Visual art

1. Visual literacy: What style has the illustrator used to draw the animals (e.g. realistic, cartoon, abstract)? What medium/s has she used (e.g. acrylic, watercolour, pencils, ink)? What do you like best about this illustrator's style?
2. Design your own illustration of an Australian animal (not already included) in the style of Katie Stewart and then add a sentence about where this animal thinks stars go during the daytime.
3. Create a sculpture of your favourite animal from the story using plasticine, clay or recycled materials.
4. Take a bushwalk in your local area and make sketches of some of your favourite flora and fauna. Can you find any 'stars'?
5. Cut out some stars and use them to make something else (e.g. a person, an echidna).
6. Can you find any easy ways to draw stars? What other shapes could you arrange to make a star?

INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

What is your book about?

Where Do the Stars Go? is the story of a young possum who can't sleep. He looks out of his den at the daylight and wonders where the stars have gone. His friends all make suggestions as to where they think the stars hide during the day and he goes for a walk through the bush to check out their ideas. That evening, his mother sits with him as it goes dark so that he can see where they come from. So then he knows, but he's enjoyed looking for 'stars' on the ground so much, that he wants to do it again tomorrow.

Essentially it's a book about observing what's around you and seeing how it all interconnects, rather than staying locked in your own little world (especially the one on a screen). In a way it's autobiographical because I've always enjoyed observing what's going on around me. As a child, I learned a poem – 'Leisure' by W.H. Davies – that's stayed with me. It begins, 'What is this life, if full of care, / We have no time to stand and stare?' I think it's really important to stand and stare. One of my hobbies is bird photography and I often post photos that I've taken on Facebook. Neighbours can't believe the number of different birds I've seen, but you just have to stand still and watch to see them. Most of the time they're hiding, so you won't notice them. There's so much to gain from just taking the time to look, and it's a great thing for kids to learn. The more they see, the more they'll realise the connections between things. If one child has this book read to them and then wants to go out looking for 'stars', I'll have done my job.

This is your second picture book featuring Australian animals. Why is that?

With the first book, I naturally fell into using animal characters. I love animals and I've always loved books with animal characters. With the second book, I wanted to write a story with a similar pattern to the first, to complement it in a way. Children's picture books are a great opportunity for children to learn more about the animals around them. For Australian children, that means Australian animals. This book especially has animals that a lot of children won't have encountered before. I think my rural background, too, makes me loath to use animals like rabbits and foxes because I know what a pest they are in Australia. That doesn't mean I never will. I have to admit I'm a terrible farmer's wife, and I do love rabbits, but for now I prefer to use Aussie animal characters.

The mother possum never actually tells her baby possum the answer to the question, where do the stars go? Why is that?

There's a quote that often appears on social media, attributed to Alexandra K. Trenfor: 'The best teachers are those who show you where to look, but don't tell you what to look for.'

That has always resonated with me. Children who work things out for themselves learn so much better than those who are fed information. When they've thought it out for themselves, they own the answer and are more likely to remember it. It's like children tying their shoelaces. If you show them and then let them try, they will learn. If you do it for them, they won't.

I'm probably a little biased on this because it's always been my preferred learning style, especially with art. I never liked teachers who did long demonstrations of what to do. I much preferred the ones who said, 'This is the result, this is a quick explanation of how it's done, now you go and work it out for yourself.' I made lots of mistakes working it out, but sometimes the mistakes led me to other ideas and the whole experience was empowering. It spurs creativity and that's how you make progress.

You've said you don't like picture books that explain everything to the child. What do you mean by that?

I mean that stories shouldn't tell the children what to think. It's a way of talking down to them and it's not necessary. Kids need to develop their critical thinking skills and if a book tells them the reason for everything, they won't need to think. Making inferences from information given is a huge part of learning to read and comprehend.

Tell us about the process of creating your beautiful artworks.

All my illustrations are done on the computer. I work on a Wacom Cintiq tablet and I've developed a 'pencil' that I like to use which has the effect of a pastel pencil. I do a rough sketch and then, on separate layers for different parts of the page, I 'paint' flat colours on each shape. So, for example, I painted Possum blue. Then I

start building up the fur using the pastel pencil. The first layer is just scribble in a dark colour to cover the flat colour. At that stage, I usually do the eyes. I find that once I've done the eyes, it's easier to make the animal look alive. I build layer on layer of fur, colouring in the right direction for fur, gradually getting lighter in places to give a 3D effect. It's like sculpting in two dimensions.

By the time I've finished a two-page spread, I can have 50 layers all up, depending on how many different elements are on a page.

You started learning the harp at 50 and you came to book writing a little later in life. What would you like children to know about lifelong learning?

I'd love them to know that no matter where you are in your life, no decision you make about your future is set in stone. So all the stress that's put on you to 'choose a career' when you're leaving school is unnecessary. You can stop and choose to do something else whenever you like, you just need to be willing to learn something new and put in the effort. You can take up new hobbies, too. Life's a wonderful journey, but it's not a straight line. It's like a tree, and you can choose which branches you want to go along whenever you like. The important thing is to be doing something that you want to do, not what you think others think you should do. Sometimes it might take a while to get to that point, but it's something to aim for. You're never too old to try something new.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with teachers or students who might be reading these notes?

In a nutshell, be creative! You can know everything there is to know if you study hard enough, but if you don't use that knowledge to create new connections, then there's no progress. Sadly, schools these days are geared towards imparting knowledge, so find every opportunity you can to use your imagination. Imagination is the greatest gift there is.

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