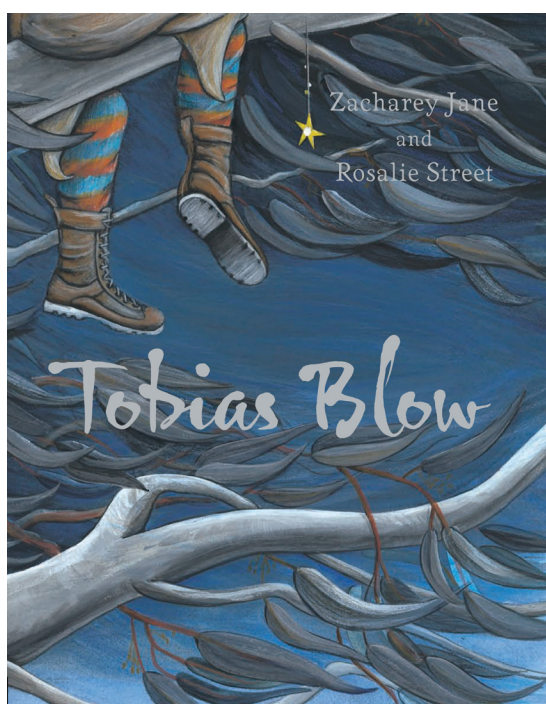


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TOBIAS BLOW

by Zacharey Jane and
Rosalie Street



Teachers' Notes

Written by a Practising Teacher Librarian
in context with the Australian Curriculum (English)

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SYNOPSIS

As a storm approaches, Tobias Blow is gathering his treasures that will be found by delighted children the following morning. Building momentum to reflect various stages of a storm, Tobias Blow represents the rejuvenation and new life that comes after a natural event such as a thunderstorm. In the author's words, 'Tobias is the silver lining in a storm cloud; the good thing that can come from something scary.'

Zacharey Jane's use of poetic devices and figurative language together with Rosalie Street's beautiful illustrations combine to make *Tobias Blow* a positive journey of discovery about the power and splendour of nature.

THEMES

Nature:

- Cycles in nature occur for a purpose: storms cleanse and refresh.
- The fear that some may experience as a storm builds is balanced with the wonder of what happens afterwards.
- From dark times, good can come.

Discovery and Treasures:

- Tobias Blow deposits many treasures during the storm. These treasures will provide a sense of discovery for children the following morning.
- Treasures come in different shapes and sizes. Those found in nature are amazing and valuable.

Poetic Devices:

- The text uses figurative language such as imagery and poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, alliteration and personification.
- Pace enhances storytelling. The pace of *Tobias Blow* represents the building storm and ensuing calm.
- Representation – Tobias represents the silver lining in a storm cloud; Tobias also represents the wind.

Colour:

- Colour is used to represent various stages of a storm and the vitality provided by a soaking rain.

WRITING STYLE

Tobias Blow is written in third person, present tense. Lyrical and building in pace to reflect the various stages of a storm, the poetic devices and figurative language combine to create a delightful reading experience.

Read aloud, the wonder of nature and the sense of newness that follows a storm are enhanced by beautiful illustrations that entice the reader to explore each page opening on their own journey of discovery.

STUDY NOTES

Before reading, discuss the dust jacket of the book:

- How does the title relate to the front cover illustration?
- Whose legs are dangling from the tree? What can we tell about this character from the front cover?
- What might the star reveal about the kind of story this is?

Discuss how illustrators use the end covers of a picture book to help tell some of the story. After reading, compare the front and the back end covers of *Tobias Blow*. How and why are they different? What is the reader being told through these end covers?

Read the story in its entirety before revisiting the poetic devices used in *Tobias Blow* such as:

- Alliteration:
 - Tinselled home in the treetops
 - Curtain of crashing clouds
 - Shrinking shore
 - Racing the ragged moon
 - Glorious gust
 - Stops and sniffs the softening air
 - Storm sinks into the sea
 - Smooth sand
 - Breeze and the birdsong to Tobias Blow asleep in his sunlit snug
- Onomatopoeia:
 - Swoops
 - Crashing
 - Rushing
 - Snarling
 - Tumbling
 - Flings
- Imagery:
 - Blown away on a snarling tangle of air
 - Down a funnel of rain he slides
 - Softening air
 - Tail of the storm
 - Clouds roll in

- Shape:
 - Up, up, up on a glorious gust
 - Racing the ragged moon across the sky
 - Swinging upon the tail of the storm
- Personification:
 - Clouds roll in
 - Quickly waking river
 - Sun sends bright fingers to point
 - Storm sinks
 - Clutching waves
 - Tail of the storm
 - Laughter floats
- Simile:
 - Flings himself like a skimming stone

How do these poetic techniques enhance the telling of this story? Why do authors use such devices in their writing?

Choose a different natural event such as a bushfire or a flood:

- Research how bushfires and floods are a part of nature's cycle.
- Although destructive, what benefits do these events bring? Discuss this idea in light of the theme in *Tobias Blow* that from dark times, good can come.
- Create a class anthology of original poetry about a bushfire, thunderstorm or flood.
- Recite your poem to the class.

Read poems about storms or natural landscapes, examining the poetic techniques employed. *A Sunburnt Country* by Dorothea Mackellar would also be a good example.

Visit the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards website www.dorothea.com.au where there are excellent resources for teachers to help with the teaching of poetic devices.

Read Rosalie Street's comments on page 8 of these notes that describe the process she underwent to create the illustrations in *Tobias Blow*:

- Carefully examine her illustrations in *Tobias Blow* in light of these comments.
- Use digital cameras to take photos of objects and scenes that suit your poem. Use Microsoft Paint, Photoshop or a program such as Picassa (available as a free download from Google) to enhance or manipulate the images. Alternatively, use the picture toolbar in Microsoft Word. Create an illustration or collage to reflect your poem.
- Draw an illustration for your poem. Scan and use Microsoft Word or other programs to create your artwork in a way similar to that of Rosalie Street.

- Using Photo Story 3 (downloadable for free at www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.mspx), create a presentation using images to suit the mood, pace and theme of your poem.

Tobias Blow represents the wind.

- Create a character to represent a different element such as earth, water or fire.
- Name this character.
- Draw this character.
- Write a story using this character. Centre on the positive role this element plays in nature's cycle. This could be a narrative piece or in a picture book format.

Tobias Blow has a sack full of treasures.

- Discuss what these treasures are. Why are they considered to be treasures?
- Use the end covers at the back of the book to help classify these treasures into groups. Give explanations for your groupings.
- Ask students to bring in something of nature they treasure. Share the story of this treasure with the class.
- With younger students, collect a bag of treasures. In small groups, have children put their hand into the bag, select a treasure and guess what it is before removing it from the bag. Use the sense of touch to feel for texture. Describe this object using explicit vocabulary. Can the others in your group guess what it is from your description?
- Remembering is the first stage of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Play a game of memory using either the treasures in *Tobias Blow* or those brought into class. Place objects on a tray. Cover with a cloth. Show the students these objects for thirty seconds before covering again. Have students list as many objects as they can. Vary this by removing an object and asking which object is missing.

Read *The Island* by John Heffernan. Compare this with *Tobias Blow*. Both books emphasise the beauty of natural treasures.

Create a collage to reflect your understanding of/feelings towards Tobias Blow. Include items from nature.

Compare the first and last page openings in which Tobias is in his tree. Discuss the similarities and differences in terms of colour, character and plot.

Examine the page opening below in which there are no words.

- Pages that have no words require the reader to slow down and ‘read the pictures’ carefully.
 - What is happening?
 - Why is this page opening wordless?
 - What does the yellow throughout *Tobias Blow* represent?



The page opening below shows Tobias Blow in a stance that dancers use at the end of their dance. Why is he using this stance? Reflect on the stage of the storm at this point in the story.



The start of the book uses greys and blacks. Once the storm has passed, there is an explosion of colour. As the sun rises, a sense of calm and newness sweeps over the land and the reader. Discuss the use of colour in *Tobias Blow* to reflect and enhance meaning.

Tobias Blow builds in plot and pace to reflect various stages of a storm.

- As a class, share feelings and experiences of storms. Be sure to discuss what happens when a storm is over.
- Brainstorm words associated with a thunderstorm. Discuss and use a combination of effective verbs, nouns and adjectives as well as phrases and clauses. Focus on explicit vocabulary that helps a writer to paint a picture with words. Using these ideas, write a descriptive piece about a thunderstorm.
- A storm builds slowly, escalates to a crescendo or climax and then falls away as it passes. Compare this with the structure of a story. Create an illustrated story graph to show the parallel between the stages of a storm and the storyline in *Tobias Blow*.

Listen to a piece of music about a storm, such as Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, Movements 4 & 5

- As you listen, consider your experience of reading *Tobias Blow*.
- Can you suggest other pieces of music that may be appropriate representations of a storm?
- Compose your own piece of music about a storm using a program such as Sibelius.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION written by Zacharey Jane

My main theme underpinning *Tobias Blow* is that of the revelation that can come after the 'darkest hour'. As a philosophical concept for children it is too big if made to measure up to the huge natural disasters the world has experienced recently, but at a local, domestic level it is understandable to a child. Tobias's treasure works as a metaphor for the myriad gifts that come to people after disaster, whether they be material goods donated by sympathetic strangers, a new friendship forged during hardship, or the more ephemeral discovery of personal resilience.

The writing process was very creative. Tobias had literally flown into my head one night during a storm, as I nursed my baby daughter. The next day, I held a strong image of Tobias in my head and then wrote down a description of what he was doing, coloured by how he felt, and how I felt watching him. I tried to hold the storm in my head like another character in opposition to Tobias. It was important that each word felt right, emotionally, which is something that is quite personal, or idiosyncratic, to each writer.

I then recited the words back, like a poem, or a piece of drama. The sound of the words is also important, that the juxtaposition of hard consonants and soft vowels, or long vowels and short consonants, are balanced. I used alliteration a lot because I find alliteration frivolous but dramatic, all at the same time, like circus performers on the trapeze. It also gives the prose a poetic feel, without the confining rhythm of rhyme. And Tobias is like a lion tamer, performing joyful acrobatics on the back of the dangerous beast that is the storm.

I loved *Under Milk Wood* as a child. My parents read it to us regularly (with accents!), and I think I can hear the influence of Dylan Thomas in *Tobias Blow*. The prose is quite lyrical and I hope it has caught the wildness of the storm, as well as the beauty of the force of nature.

I hope the children and parents who read *Tobias Blow* love him as much as I do. And that next time one of Tobias's readers looks out of the bedroom window into the eye of a storm, they imagine possibilities as well as destruction.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zacharey Jane has been a production manager, advertising executive, travel consultant, hansom cab driver, painter, singer, waitress, airbrush artist, crèche attendant, horse rider, prop maker, scenic artist, nanny, go-go dancer, swimming pool attendant, set dresser, props master, producer, window cleaner, carpenter and housemaid. She is now a mother and lives by the sea. Her adult novel *The Lifeboat* was also published by UQP (2008). She likes to read books and sleep.

ILLUSTRATION PROCESS written by Rosalie Street

I didn't have a big studio space when I was working on *Tobias Blow*, so instead of producing lots of working sketches and pinning them up all over the walls, I was restricted to my laptop and drawing board. A lot of my reference material came from the rural beach location where I live in Mount Martha. I took photos and sketched, then scanned or downloaded the images onto my laptop. Otherwise I searched for reference material on the internet.

Using a Wacom tablet with an electronic pen I drew and coloured the rough illustrations in Photoshop and saved them into a storyboard. This process was easier and more time efficient than producing lots of rough artworks on paper (not to mention more environmentally friendly) so I will continue to work this way in the future. The roughs were printed to scale, then, using carbon paper, I traced the images onto beautiful water-colour paper which I had stretched onto boards. The final illustrations were drawn and painted by hand using acrylic paint and coloured pencils. Five of the illustrations were printed to scale as proofs so we could check them for colour correctness and quality.

The designer does the typesetting: she chooses the font style and works out the text placement into the illustrations. It was great to meet her and watch some of this process.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Rosalie Street has been oil painting and freelance illustrating since 1998.

She has worked for advertising companies and illustrated editorial images for magazines such as *Sydney Child*. Her background training was in fashion design at RMIT and theatre design at NIDA. Rosalie currently works from her home studio on the Mornington Peninsula, where she resides with her husband, young children and a dog named Marlo. This is her second children's picture book.

www.rosaliestreet.com