

**Room on Our Rock**

Written by Kate and Jol Temple, illustrated by Terri Rose Baynton

- As a class discuss the cover illustration and title. What do you think might be happening in the story? What does it mean when it says *There are two sides to every story*?
- Read the story from front to back. As a class discuss the story that is told. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - What is happening to the parent and child seal?
  - How are the seals on the big rock reacting to them?
    - How do you think the two seals feel?
  - Why do you think the rock seals are saying there is no room?
  - What do you think the rock seals are thinking and feeling?
  - How much room can you see on the rock?
  - What do you think might happen to the two seals if they don't find a new rock?
  - Do people ever act like the seals on the rock? Why might they act like this?
  - If you were one of the two seals in the water, what would you say to the rock seals?
- Read the story from back to front. As a class discuss the story, and how it is different from the story as read conventionally. Include the discussion points as in the previous front-to-back reading.
- As a class discuss the two different stories in the book. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - How did reading the first story make you feel?
  - How did the second story make you feel?
  - When you look at the pictures of the rock seals during the first story, what do you think the expressions on their faces mean?
  - When reading the second story, do the expressions on the seals' faces look like they mean something different?
  - Which story do you think is the better one and why?
- Ask each student to choose one seal from the first story. Then have them write and illustrate an *I feel* or *I felt* statement from the point of view of that character sharing what they felt, and when they felt it. Then have them write and illustrate a second *I feel* or *I felt* statement from the point of view of the same character, on the same page in the second story.
- Have each student choose three colors of paint, and do an abstract finger painting that shows how reading the story front to back made them feel. Then ask them to do a second abstract finger painting that shows how they felt when reading the story from back to front.
  - As a class, discuss their color choices for both paintings. How do different colors make them feel when they see them?
  - Mount the painting pairs side by side, and ask each student to write a caption for each of theirs, sharing the different emotions that they represent.

- Ask the class, "If you could choose a group of rock seals to be part of, which group would you choose - the ones in the first story or in the second?" Then, "Why would you choose this? Which group do you think are happier?"
- As a written exercise, have each student retell the two stories from the point of view of the seagull. Ask them to be sure to have the seagull describe how they think the different seals are feeling as well as what they are doing. You may want to have each student share their story with the class.
- In pairs, have the students write the story of what happens next for all the seals. Have one person in each pair write the next chapter in the first story, and one person write the next chapter in the second story. Share the stories with the class, and discuss how they all made them feel.
- Discuss how it feels when you go somewhere where you don't know anyone. What things can you do and say to people who are new arrivals in your community to help them feel safe and included?
  - As a class brainstorm all the ways you can welcome visitors, refugees, and any other new arrivals to your school and community.
  - In small groups make posters showcasing some of the things you have brainstormed and display them in the hallway or around the school.
- Research seals. Some questions to answer about seals are:
  - Where do they live?
  - What do they eat?
  - What eats them?
  - How many types of seal are there, and what are the types?
- As a class, make a wave and water mural on large kraft paper taped together for the classroom wall. Retell the two stories found in *Room on our Rock* on the mural.
- Ask each student to write a haiku poem about the seals in the story.

#### Notes for the Teacher

**Synopsis:** *Room on Our Rock* is a powerful allegorical exploration of the emotions and fears that drive exclusion, persecution, and rejection of refugees. Read conventionally, it tells the tale of a group of seals who fear the approach of a strange pair of seals, one a child, whose rock is being overwhelmed by the sea. The group of rock dwellers refuse categorically to entertain the possibility of allowing the desperate and terrified pair to take refuge with them, stating that there is clearly no room. Seeking only safety the endangered pair go from hopeful to despairing over the course of the story. However, there is more to this book than a simple one-way reading can reveal, for if you start reading at the back of the book, and read all the pages in reverse order, it becomes an uplifting tale of acceptance, encouragement, and hope. In the mirror story, the seals on the rock welcome the struggling refugees, assuring them that there is plenty of room for them all, and encouraging them to leave the small beleaguered rock and to come share the much larger and

safer one. Read either way, *Room on Our Rock* is a heart-wrenching tale of fear and danger, and the seals exemplify the differing attitudes that can be found within human communities to the plight faced by many refugees these days.

**Key Themes:** Fear and courage, acceptance and rejection, exclusion and inclusion, refugees, danger and safety.

**Writing Style:** In *Room on Our Rock*, Kate and Jol Temple have employed a highly innovative writing style. Written throughout in verse, the story appears at first glance to be a typical example of the genre in terms of the language and form of the text, but is unique in that if one reads the story starting at the back page, it tells a completely different tale, while remaining both syntactically correct and adhering to a stable rhyme scheme.

**Illustration Style:** The visual narrative as seen in Terri Rose Baynton's illustrations parallels the textual narrative of both stories within this book, with the experiences and facial expressions on the different seals being appropriate to the situation described in the text, regardless of which way it is being read. Baynton uses a subdued palette of soft blue-gray watercolor tones to portray the marine environment, with an occasional touch of other brighter colors adding contrast. There is minimal white space, and Baynton makes good use of subtle gradations in tone, and of contrast with uncolored sections to highlight the watery subject matter, adding depth and interest to the artwork. The figures, rocks, and some of the more prominent wave actions are detailed with muted line work, maintaining clarity of form while seamlessly integrating the foreground features into the aquatic background.

Teacher Tips and Notes adapted from Teacher Notes by Rae Carlyl, with permission from Scholastic Australia Ltd.