

Teaching Notes

The Fierce Little Woman and the Wicked Pirate

by Joy Cowley and illustrated by Sarah Davis



Synopsis

A woman lives in a small house on a long jetty – knitting socks, swimming, playing bagpipes and fishing. One day a wicked pirate tries to break into her house. She resists fiercely and stands up to the pirate. Eventually the pirate admits he is homeless, lonely and scared. Then she lets him in and gives him socks. They marry and have children and the family live happily on the jetty.

Author: Joy Cowley is one of New Zealand's most popular and prolific writers (including over 600 early readers!). She has won the Margaret Mahy Medal, NZ Post Children's Book Awards 2006 and 2008, and the Distinguished Companion of the NZ Order of Merit. She lives in Wellington, New Zealand.

Illustrator: Sarah Davis is an illustrator who has lived in both in New Zealand and Australia. Her first picture book won a Children's Book Council of Australia award and she's since collaborated on several picture books with well-known NZ and Australian authors, including Colin Thompson.

Themes: This story touches on themes of self-sufficiency, bullying, assertiveness and companionship. The little woman lives in a simple house and sells hand-made socks. She makes use of free entertainments but is she completely happy? The pirate tries to get his way with bullying tactics but the woman is strongly assertive. When he admits his problems, his honesty wins her over. She realizes the pirate makes her truly happy and they become a family.

Activities

1. How does the woman make money to support herself? How does she entertain herself? Do you think she is happy living like this? Discuss feelings about being alone or living alone.
2. What kind of person is the pirate when he first appears? Does he look as wicked as he says he is? What does the parrot suggest the pirate is really like? Research some real pirates. Were they always criminals?
3. Why does the pirate try to bully his way in? Discuss bullying. What is a bully? How do bullies make you feel? Who could you ask for help if you were being bullied?
4. How does the woman respond to the pirate's threats? Why isn't she scared of him? What happens to the pirate's attitude when he realizes she is so strong-minded? Why does she let him in after this? Some people are scared of the dark. Why is this? What does darkness mean to people?
5. Why does the woman smile 'for the first time in her life' when the pirate proposes marriage? Why isn't she called 'fierce' after that page?
6. When they have a family, how is life different for the woman? Does she still do the same things? How does the house itself change at the end? Create a diagram that shows the inside of the house at the end of the book.

7. The illustrator has created a story with the birds that mirrors the human story. Examine the parrot and the seagull throughout the story. Rewrite the story from their point of view.

8. Illustrations:

What colours are used most in the pictures? What colours are used least? Why do you think this is? Paint a sea picture without using green or blue.

Look at the use of light and dark in the pictures. Compare the scene of the scared pirate under the house with the family hanging out washing. Why are dark and light used? Paint a scary picture using dark colours.

There are several changes of viewpoint in the first three pages. How does this help to set the scene? Draw a picture from the point of view of a bird or a fish.

In some pictures there is a detailed background while in others there is only a single colour background. How does this focus attention on the characters? Examine how the illustrator has used the walls, floor, and sea level as frames for the action. Draw a cut-away view of your school.