

Feather

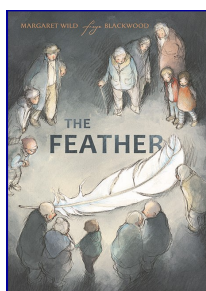
By Margaret Wild & Illustrated by Freya Blackwood

Publisher: Little Hare Books

ISBN 9781760124212 SCIS: 1844112

\$24.99

This is a story about hope, kindness and redemption set in a grey dystopian world. When a great feather drifts from the leaden sky, two children recognise its extraordinariness and take it to the village for its protection. The villagers, however, want to encase it, upon which the feather loses its radiance. The children take it home and care for it through the night. In the morning it is again radiant, and when they set it free it leaves behind the first signs of blue sky and colour. The ambiguous ending invites multiple interpretations about the effects of selflessness and kindness.



Teacher Notes have been based on those supplied by the publisher. A full version is available on our website.

Themes:

- Freedom
- Hope
- Potential
- Life and Death
- Expectation
- Suffering

Discussion Questions & Activities:

- How can the two wordless spreads towards the end of the book be read as two different endings? How would your interpretation of the ending change if the book ended on the first spread, where the only light comes from the window? How would it change if this spread wasn't included in the book at all?
- Consider the line *'That night, as always, there is no moon, no stars.'* What do you think the author means when she writes *'as always'*? How does this line reflect the memories of the villagers, when they remember what it was like to *'open the curtains to let in the light'*, and *'when the cloud shadows raced across the fields, and the sky was such a brilliant blue it hurt your eyes'*? What does it tell you that these are presented as memories rather than spoken about in present tense?
- Why do you think the children's clothes are colourful, while the villagers and the rest of the village are shaded in muted tones of grey? When do you see the colours of Maria and Nico's clothes take on some of these grey shades? What does this suggest about their position in the village?
- Margaret Wild doesn't write explicitly about hope, freedom or death, but these themes are clear in the text. How does the language she uses invite an exploration of these themes? How does each theme lead to a slightly different interpretation of the text? Which interpretation do you feel most strongly? Why do you think this is?
- What is the difference between the way the adults in the book see the feather and the way the children see it? How does this reflect the way they respond to the world and to each other? How is this supported both by the text and by the illustrations?
- Margaret Wild uses poetic language to show the movement of the feather. Think about the way that movement is shown by the words themselves and also by their placement on the page. Choose an object to write about and write a short piece using poetic prose and the placement of text on the page to show the way it moves.
- The feather symbolises many different things to different characters in the book. Make a list of the different ways each of the characters talks about the feather. How do they describe it? What does it remind them of? How does it make them feel? What does it mean to you? Look at the colour, shape and size of the feather. Choose one of the feather illustrations and describe it in your own words, trying to replicate the way that Margaret Wild has used other things, like washing on the line, to bring about an emotional response from the reader. In class, talk about how metaphors and similes can be used to make a reader feel a particular way.
- Think about the way that Freya Blackwood explores the themes of the text in her shading, her careful use of colour, and the sketchy line outlines of her characters. Discuss as a class how these elements can be used to evoke an emotional response in readers. Make a list of all the things the book made you feel. Using the story as inspiration, create your own illustration that uses colour, shading, light and line to show one of these emotions.