

Teachers' Notes

Title: *The Incredible Freedom Machines*

Author: Kirli Saunders

Illustrator: Matt Ottley

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Notes by: Rae Carlyle

Synopsis: In a dusty town, in a place that is not at all unlike Australia, there is a small girl growing up who watches others using their Freedom Machines and feels a burning need for one of her own. Freedom Machines, however, take time, and effort, and determination to learn how to use, but in the end the rewards you can reap are magnificent. Hidden in the artwork are the clues that lead the reader to the inevitable conclusion that books are Freedom Machines that we all can use. In *The Incredible Freedom Machines* the reader gets to join one child on their journey from mundanity into wonder, and along the way realise that it is a journey that we, too, are on.

About the Author:

Kirli Saunders is a proud Yuin woman, poet, teacher, and author. *The Incredible Freedom Machines* is her first children's book.

About the Illustrator:

Matt Ottley is a multi-award-winning picture book creator and musician. This is Matt's second book with Scholastic Press. His first, *Teacup* (text by Rebecca Young) was the winner of the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature, 2016, and has most recently been named as the IBBY Australia Honour Book for Illustration, 2018.

Themes

Key Themes: Themes include: breaking boundaries, persistence, books and story, bravery, imagination, travel, wonder, exploration, freedom, hope.

Writing Style

Written throughout in the third person, *The Incredible Freedom Machines* is unusual in that the protagonist of the story is never named, but referred to exclusively as 'she', thus fostering and enhancing the concept that she could, indeed, be any of us on our journey of discovery and wonder. Appearing at first to be a fantasy adventure set in a fictional world, it becomes clear by the end of the story that it is instead an adventure of the imagination, where a child dwelling in our world of mundane reality learns to explore the joys of fiction. Saunders' prose is lyrical in nature, and the language used is evocative and resonant, echoing the wondrous nature of the events she is describing.

Illustration Style

Rendered exclusively in oils on canvas, Ottley's artwork utilises a broad palette of different tones throughout the book, reflecting the varied scenes and concepts that are contained within the text. From faded dusty plains to vibrant jewel-like oceans, Ottley has captured the sense of wonder that intrinsically drives Saunders' story. The visual narrative is rich in hidden detail, and each illustration faithfully depicts the scenes described in the text as well as embodying the magic inherent in the adventures being embarked on, and the restricted nature of the world where the protagonist lives.

Study Notes, Discussion Points, and Activities

- 1) Before reading the book, as a class look at the cover, and discuss your predictions for the story based on the title and artwork. Some things you might wish to include in your discussion are:
 - What do you think a Freedom Machine is?
 - What sorts of things might a Freedom Machine do?
 - What other things would you like a Freedom Machine to be able to do for you?
 - Where do you think you could find a Freedom Machine?
- 2) Look at the drawings inside the front cover of the book.
 - What do you think the drawings are of?
 - Can you decipher any of the writing?
 - What interesting details can you find in the drawings?
 - What sort of style would you call this type of drawing?
 - How would you describe these drawings?
- 3) Choose one section of the artwork inside the front cover, and write a paragraph describing it. Include in your description a brief outline of what you think the object's purpose might be.
- 4) After reading the story, revisit the artwork inside the front cover, and discuss what you see again. Have any of your opinions changed? If so, how and why?
- 5) Where did the freedom machine come from?
 - Why do you think it is shown as being unearthed?
 - How else might they possibly be found?
 - Invent a method of your own whereby Freedom Machines might be found or created. Draw a picture of a Freedom Machine emerging, and write a short paragraph describing the process.
- 6) Looking at the final page in the book, what would you say the Freedom Machines are? Discuss the difference between a figurative Freedom Machine, and a literal one. Which do you think would be better and why?
- 7) Reread the story looking very closely at all the pictures of Freedom Machines. What hints and clues can you find in the pictures that let the reader know the true nature of Freedom Machines?
- 8) Reread the section that describes how the little girl learns to use her freedom machine. As a class discuss this description. In your opinion is it a good description of how it feels to learn to read? Why or why not?
- 9) The little girl visits all sorts of wondrous places in her Freedom Machine. If you had one of your own, where would you like it to take you? Paint an imaginary place of wonder that you would like to visit in a Freedom Machine, and write a paragraph or short story describing it. Share your artwork and story with the class, and use them all to make a classroom wall display.
- 10) Which is your favourite place visited by the little girl? Why? In small groups discuss your favourite place visited in the story, and share your favourite details that you have found in the pictures.
- 11) The author says that the little girl is growing up in *a world sewn together by boundaries*. As a class discuss this phrase. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What is a boundary?
 - How can a world be sewn together?

- What do you think the author means by *a world sewn together by boundaries*?
- What might be some other ways that this phrase could be interpreted?
- What types of boundaries do you know of?
- What are the differences between physical, mental, and social boundaries?
- Are boundaries good or bad - or can they be both in different times and places?
- Think of some boundaries that help us, and some that harm us.
- Who creates boundaries?
- Are all boundaries created, or are some natural?
- Write a paragraph describing one boundary that you want to challenge, and why you want to challenge it.
- Write a paragraph describing a boundary that you approve of and think is valuable, and why you think it is important that it exists.

12) Draw a picture of how you imagine a *world sewn together by boundaries* would look.

13) The little girl in the story visits *abundant untouched places* in her Freedom Machine. As a class find a local place of natural beauty, and visit it. If you are lucky enough to live near a National Park it might be a famous landmark, but your place could also be as small as a local creek or pond, or even just a corner of the playground behind the school where wildflowers grow. While visiting your place make sketches of something that you can see which you consider beautiful. After returning to class use your sketches to help you compose and create a painting of your place. Look at the illustrations in the book to help give you inspiration for how such paintings might be done.

14) Rereading the story, make a list of interesting words and phrases that the author has used to describe the places and events in *The Incredible Freedom Machines*. Some of the words you might like to include on your list are: *abundant*; *unfurling*; *persevered*; and *toilsome*. As a class discuss your list of interesting words and phrases. What do these words mean? How can we work out the meaning of the ones we don't know? Choose your favourite interesting word from the story, and create an artwork featuring your word. You might want to write the word in big letters using an interesting font and decorate it with abstract colours and shapes, or you might want to draw scenes that you think represent what the word means. Write a caption for your artwork explaining what you have done and why.

15) Look closely at the pictures inside the back cover of the book. What do the pictures show? How might they work? Which do you like best and why?

16) Design your own Freedom Machine. Using the illustrations on the endpapers of the book for inspiration, draw a detailed design for an imaginary Freedom Machine of your own that you would like to create. Remember to label all the components of your design, and include a picture of the completed Machine. Write a brief description outlining what your machine is made of, how it is assembled, and the main functions of all the components.

17) Collect recyclables such as plastic bottles, cardboard tubes and boxes, and old pencils, and construct a Freedom Machine three dimensional artwork. Paint your finished construction in bright colours. Create a classroom sculpture display of all your Freedom Machine inspired sculptures.

18) The little girl in the story sits in a big comfy chair under a ceiling fan to read. Where do you like to sit and read? As a class discuss your favourite reading spots, where they are, and what features they have. Design what you would consider to be a perfect reading spot. Draw or paint a picture of your imaginary reading spot, and write a paragraph describing all the features it has.