



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower primary
(Year 1–3)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, HSIE, Creative Arts
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Visual literacy

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- To discuss new vocabulary and writing techniques, respond to texts and share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts.
- To learn more about ourselves and how we react to challenging situations and growing independence.
- To analyse and appreciate the creative partnership between author and illustrator, and learn more about artist techniques.

THEMES

- Anxiety
- Bravery
- Resilience
- Support networks
- Creativity/imagination

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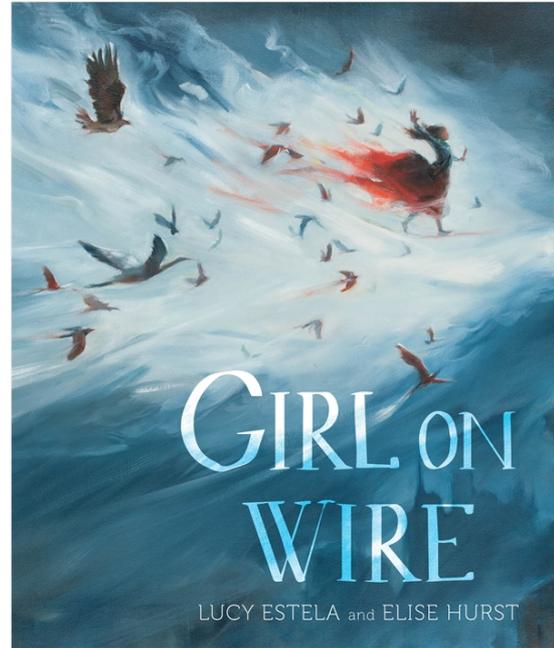
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Girl On Wire

Lucy Estela and Elise Hurst

PLOT SUMMARY

Girl on Wire is a simple yet brilliantly uplifting allegory of a young girl struggling to build her self-esteem and overcome the anxiety that many children feel as they grow – she walks the tightrope, afraid she will fall, but with the support of those she loves, her toes grip the wire and she walks forward, on her own, with a new confidence.

A poignantly beautiful story from the CBCA Shortlisted author of Suri's Wall, Lucy Estela, and Prime Minister's Literary Award shortlisted illustrator of Adelaide's Secret World, Elise Hurst.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucy Estela's love of writing became apparent as early as age seven when she began writing and illustrating a multitude of storybooks and newspaper columns that were printed up at home and forced upon her family. Since then she has taken a fascinating path towards publishing her first book.

Her university degree focused on languages but rather than becoming a language teacher, Lucy was introduced to the world of computer games and has pursued a successful career in London and now in Australia as a developer of websites and games for the kids and youth entertainment market including such brands as Disney, Warner Bros Pictures, Chorion and Xbox.

Suri's Wall, illustrated by the talented Matt Ottley, was Lucy's debut book with Penguin. This is her second. Lucy lives in Sydney with her husband and three children.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Elise Hurst is an illustrator, author and fine artist. She has illustrated over 50 books and is known worldwide for her surreal vintage images in paintings, cards and her own books. Her most recent picture book before this one, *Adelaide's Secret World*, was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards in 2016. She lives in Melbourne with her husband, Peter, and their twin boys.

THEMES

- **Anxiety:** Using the story of the girl facing the perilous journey across the wire, students can identify personally significant events that they've faced and compare with those of their peers. How are they similar and different to each other. How did they react?
- **Bravery and resilience:** Using the characters and events in the book, children are introduced to these important concepts.
- **Friendship/Significant relationships:** The story has important messages about the help that we can seek from those who have guiding roles in our lives and how, even though we must often ultimately take on challenges ourselves, we have many people there to give us support, if we're willing to ask for help and accept it.

- **Creativity/Imagination:** Using the illustration in the book, children can identify features in the book that are significant to them and link that to their own experience. They can talk about the use of different colours, shapes, textures and other things of interest in the art and also talk about the artist, how she illustrated the book, and why in that way.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Look at the front cover of the book. Have the class read the title together. Can you see what the title *Girl on Wire* is referring to? What do you think the story will be about?
2. Read the blurb on the back cover of the book. What kind of things are you now expecting to see inside the book? What questions do you have? How does it make you feel?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

English

Girl on Wire is an allegory – an extended metaphor in which the elements of the story can be interpreted to represent something else, something beyond the literal story.

From the Illustrator

When I read Lucy's manuscript I stepped into a world that I could not only imagine, but also feel. Her words made me hear the distant rumble of thunder and sense the chill wind. I tasted the stinging rain on my face and then felt the warm surprise of the sun breaking through. It is important that I can imagine all of this because when I work on the book I must build a world that will make the reader see and feel and believe the written story. Even when it is a book about a child doing an impossible thing. *Especially* then.

In the real world children do not usually head to the rooftops to find red cables stretching out. But, like a dream, which may not always make sense, it must still *feel* true.

Authors and illustrators love to work with metaphor. You will have noticed books in which animals talk and people move through strange landscapes. And you will hopefully have felt something for those characters and had moments when you have thought - this is about me!



It's a deliberate tool we use - taking a true idea, emotion or scenario but giving it a different space to inhabit.

The reader becomes more than a passive observer then, becoming part of the story because they are having to explain it to themselves and fill in the gaps with their own ideas. It becomes a neutral territory for all imaginations to explore.

Questions about the story

1. What is a metaphor?
2. Is the girl really on a wire?
3. What device could have been used as a metaphor instead of a wire?
4. Why do you think the cold breeze bites her cheeks at the start, but kisses her cheeks at the end?
5. Who are the 'curious eyes' that watch from the window. What are they thinking?
6. Apart from the girl and the wire, what elements appear on most pages of the book? (Birds or feathers) What is their significance to the story? What do they represent?
7. Why must the girl walk the wire by herself?
8. Who are the people gathering on the street below. What do the feathers represent?
9. Even though the girl is crouched and the storm is ferocious, the wire feels 'inviting'. Why do you think that is?
10. What does the storm represent? What has happened with the girl when the storm breaks?
11. How many characters are in this story? Do you think things other than people can be characters in a story? How? Can you think of other stories that have non-human or non-living characters?

Activities

1. Words of feeling: Write down a word or phrase from the book that describes how the girl is feeling. Explain why you chose this and how it makes you feel.
2. Writing a metaphor
Write an example of a metaphor. Then change it so that it becomes a simile, e.g. *Metaphor*: The sun was a molten ball of light, melting into the ocean as it rose. *Simile*: The sun was like a

molten ball as it rose above the horizon, its reflection seeming to melt across the ocean.

3. Writing an extended metaphor (allegory): Write, draw or tell a short story about a child having to do something that, for whatever reason, they don't want to do.
Use a different metaphor to the girl on a wire, e.g. sailing a boat through a storm, or paddling down a river into rapids; climbing to the summit of a mountain.
Include some elements in the story or illustrations to make us understand this isn't meant to be like real life.

Human Society and Its Environment

From the author: on inspiration and anxiety

Often I don't know why certain images pop into my head or what their story might be, but with *Girl on Wire* I knew from the very start who she was and what she was afraid of.

From about the age of 5 until about 25 I suffered from the most crippling anxiety. My Grandma would say that I made 'mountains out of mole hills', and even though I knew that, I couldn't stop myself from doing it. My mind frantically looked at every situation and the many possible outcomes. Then I'd run through each one and work out how I'd cope if it happened. It left me feeling sad and very tired.

As an adult, when I started to see the same feelings in children around me, it brought my Girl to life. I saw her, just as she is in the first illustration, perched on the edge of a building, desperately trying to start her way across a very high wire, while the roar of a mighty storm raced its way across the sky towards her.

I knew she was scared – scared to start, to try, to fail – because I always hated failing and making mistakes. I worried that people would think less of me if I let them see that I was fallible. I thought they would be the eyes that watch from the windows, waiting for me to fail, waiting for me to fall from the wire.

But it turned out, what I truly failed at was seeing all the people standing under me, next to me, walking a wire just like me. All those who were ready to catch me and help me back onto the wire so that I could continue, stronger and surer of myself.

When the wolves are at their most fierce, it's hard to stay calm and remember all the people who love and support you – willing you to succeed with all their might.



With my *Girl on Wire*, I was hoping to remind others of this, so they don't stumble along, feeling utterly alone. Your family and your friends, your teachers, your coaches are all there ready to encourage you as you walk the wire and feel the incredible joy that comes when you don't let your fears stop you from enjoying life and all it has to offer.

Conversations About Anxiety

1. Think about a time you have felt anxious about something that you needed to do.
2. Did your anxiety stop you from trying it?
3. Once you started, did you ever feel like giving up?
4. Why *did* you give up, or why *didn't* you give up?
5. How did you feel as you were doing it, and how did you feel once it was over?
6. What types of things helped you to get through the event?

Creative Arts

From the Illustrator

Illustration is a supreme act of creation, building a world that will make the reader see and feel and believe the written story, even when it is a book about a child doing an impossible thing.

So my first task was to situate this book visually in a fantasy setting. There are Victorian rooftops and Tudor gables, Roman archways and mediaeval towers, Chinese temples and Japanese torii, high-rises competing with wind turbines and ancient power stations that attach to waterwheels. It is a place untethered to time or location but filled with the familiar. It also tells us, from the first glance, that we are somewhere different and special, and the story will be too, so don't worry about it! Fantasy and reality operate differently. In the real world, I would have been terrified that she would fall. In a dream world I am waiting to see if she can fly.

This setting changes continually through the book. Sometimes the city and the wire seem to disappear entirely. Sometimes the character is large and sometimes she is miniscule, sometimes the clouds are normal and sometimes they are in the form of wolves or giant birds. I use all of these things to show what she is feeling and experiencing. When she feels overwhelmed - she is tiny, when she is frightened she is indistinct and her edges are blowing away, when she feels hopeless it is hard to see far along the wire, when she is confident she is bigger and commands the space differently.

There are other metaphors I introduced too. Feathers are a symbol of hope and belief. The crowd below send their positive emotions to her and feathers rise up to swirl around her in the sky. Her mother sends birds to accompany her, and when the girl finds her courage, all of these things are there beside her - not completing the task for her but letting her know that she is not alone. When the storm breaks and she has moved through her time of tribulation, she is ready for the next stage.

Like finding new worlds in the clouds and kindred spirits among them, her act of bravery has opened her eyes to new possibilities in life. I do not show her reaching the end because, really, she is just beginning.

The illustrations were completed as a series of large oil paintings on canvas. I have a background in traditional art and I was interested to look at painters like Turner to see how they focused on atmosphere and experience, rather than location. It helped me realise that the city was simply a stage, and atmosphere would be an important storyteller.

This atmosphere was conveyed through colour and stroke, allowing the paint to sweep across details and break edges, to hide things in shadow or behind a blaze of light. For a model, I was lucky enough to have Lucy's daughter pose and be photographed acting out my early sketches and the different emotional moments of the book. This gave me a real base for the character and helped me to convey the very real emotions that were playing out.

Although the book is set in a fantasy world - the emotional journey is true, and while everything else changed around her, she would be our anchor and our champion.

Questions

1. Run your hand over the cover and look closely at the texture. Why do you think the cover was created in this way? What does it remind you of? (A canvas?)
2. Within the book, find some examples of how the illustrator uses colour to create different moods.
3. What techniques does the illustrator use to give you a sense of the wind? And the rain?

Activity

1. With paints and a brush, try different strokes to create: a bird; a cloud, rain, a feather (look at examples from *Girl on Wire*)



READING *GIRL ON WIRE*

Lucy Estela has written a story based on metaphor, not meant to be taken literally. The challenge for Elise Hurst, the illustrator, was to create something that conveyed the emotions, illustrated the author's descriptions, but included elements of the fantastical so the reader can see it's not meant to be real life.

As Elise began to bring the story to life through her expressive illustrations, the author in several places decided to take out or change text because the illustration now conveyed that particular idea without having to restate it in words.

It is important to pause and ask students to carefully read the text and examine the illustrations on each page for further information and clues to the story and its meaning.

Page 1 (half-title page – dark city skyline & birds)

What does this illustration tell us about the setting of the story? What kind of city do you think it is?

Page 2 and 3 (Imprint and title pages)

Read the dedications from the author and illustrator. What clues do they give you about the story?

Where do you think the feather came from? How does it make you feel?

Page 4 and 5

Where is the girl standing? How do you think she feels? Look again at the city – where do you think you might find a city like this?

Page 6 and 7

Can you find the girl here? Where is she standing and what is she about to do? Have the people noticed her?

Page 8 and 9

Before reading the words, what has changed since we last saw the girl on the ledge? How can we tell?

Now read the text. What do you think of when you hear the word 'prowl'?

Why must she begin?

Page 10 and 11

On page 10, how do you feel when you see her step her foot out? How do you think the girl is feeling?

On page 11, how are all the elements of the illustrations helping to make you feel afraid for the girl?

Page 12 and 13

Think of a time when you have been out on a very windy day. How did that make you feel? Now imagine trying to balance on a beam in that wind.

Page 14 and 15

Why do you think the illustrator chose to change our perspective on this spread? What is the effect? Now read the text to see how the illustration has helped the text here.

Can you find the curious eyes? When you are trying to do something difficult, how does it feel when you're being watched by others?

Have a close look at the street. What unusual thing can you find there? Would you find that in a regular city street? Why do you think the artist has put it there?

What elements in the illustration tell us that it's raining?

Page 16 and 17

What has happened to the girl here?

Look closely at the clouds. Can you see how they tie in with the descriptions of the wind here and back on p9? (i.e. there are wolves in the clouds)

Is it sometimes hard to ask for help? What usually happens when you do ask for help?

Page 18 and 19

Who do you think this person is?

What do you think is the meaning of the light she is holding?

Page 20 and 21

Now you can see the woman more clearly, who do you think she is? Why?

What do you think the birds are doing? What do you think is the true meaning of the birds?

Why do you think the girl must walk the wire herself?

Page 22 & 23

How do you think these words make the girl feel?

What is the effect of this illustration being such a close-up of the girl's face?



Page 24 & 25

Who are the other people in this illustration? What is the significance of the feathers here?

Why do you think the wire now feels 'inviting under her feet'?

Page 26 and 27

What elements in the text create the image of the wolves again here?

What has the artist included on this spread to help you feel the girls' determination?

Page 28 and 29

Wow! What is the immediate effect of this very different colouring on you as the reader? Before you even read the text, what is it telling you about how the girl is feeling,?

What is the significance of the storm breaking, the wind calming and the sun shining through?

Page 30 & 31

Compare the text on this page with the text on page 4. How has the author used language to convey a very different emotion relating the breeze on her cheeks? How is that supported by the illustrations on both pages?

What other elements can you now see in the distance? What do you think they mean?

Page 32

Why do you think the girl is still moving 'forward' on the last page, rather than getting to the end of the wire?

What other important elements can you see that has reappeared in this illustration?



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Girl on Wire	Lucy Estela & Elise Hurst	9780143787167	1-3	\$24.99		
Suri's Wall (paperback)	Lucy Estela & Matt Ottley	9780670077755	K-2	\$14.99		
Florette	Anna Walker	9780670079414	Pre-1	\$24.99		
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