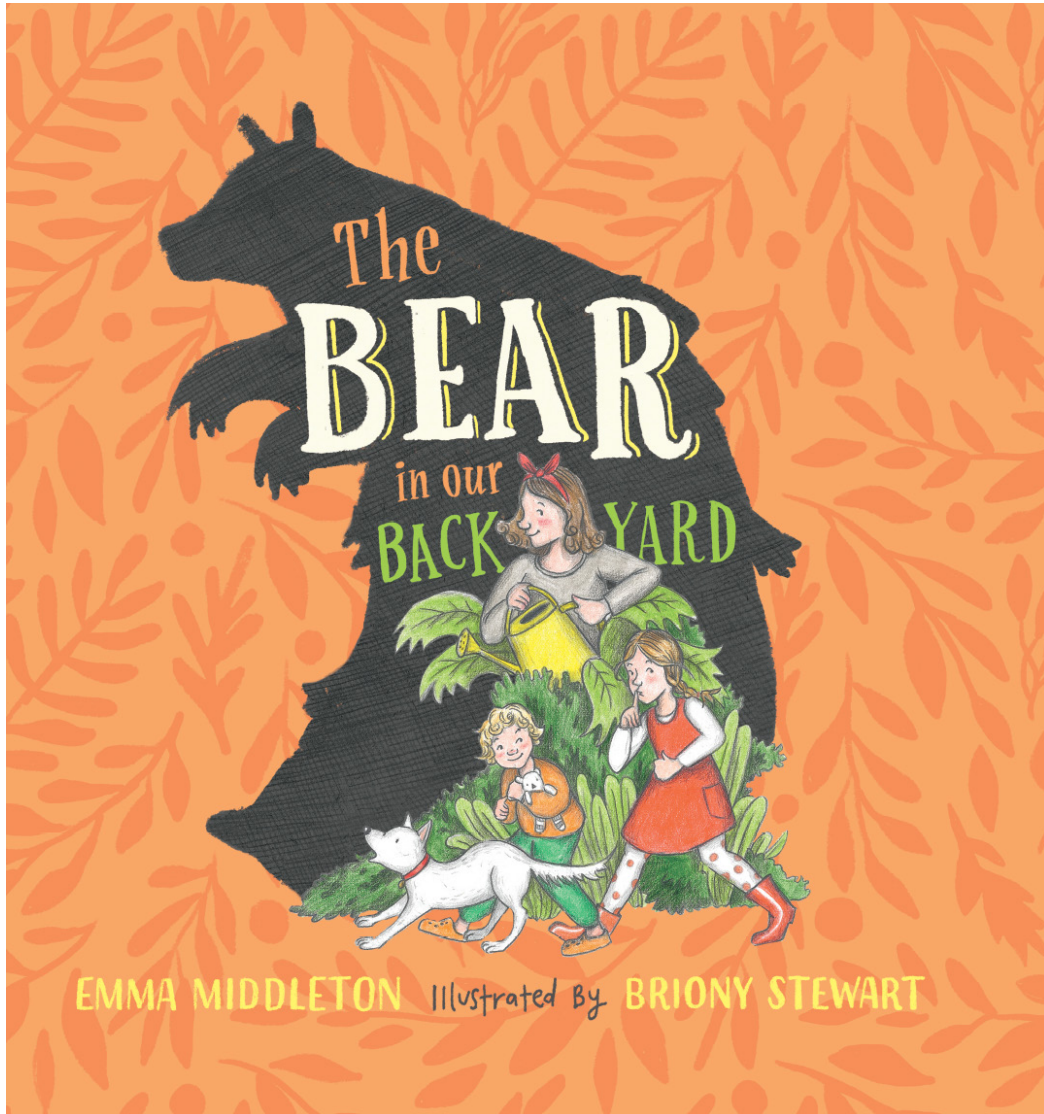


Teachers Notes

The Bear in our Backyard



Written by Emma Middleton
Illustrated by Briony Stewart

SUITABLE FOR
Age 2-8 – Prep to Grade 2

THEMES

- Playfulness
- Imagination
- Family connections
- Growing families
- Outside play
- Kindness and consideration



DESCRIPTION

Does she sleep? Shall we peek? Is it really Bear?

Shall we sneak outside and see if Bear is really there?

Tom and Tilly search for the bear who lives in their backyard.

Will she come out and play?

A rare tribute to the small and magical moments that mums create every day.

Perfect for families expecting a new baby bear.



The Bear in our Backyard is the second book about the joy of family time from author–illustrator team Emma Middleton and Briony Stewart, following on from *The Lion in our Living Room*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emma Middleton is a writer, illustrator and dance teacher. After a fifteen-year career as a professional dancer, during which time she performed for the Vienna Ballet, Emma became a dance teacher at her own ballet school. Emma's passion is to create stories that will enhance a child's sense of wonder, delight and unlimited possibility. She lives near Noosa, in Queensland.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Briony Stewart is an award-winning writer and illustrator from Western Australia. She has a double degree in Fine Art and Creative Writing and is passionate about all forms of art for kids and the young at heart. When she's not writing or drawing, Briony can be found programming events, projects and art activities for festivals or doing something weird like building dragons and organising her local egg-rolling championships.



AUTHOR INSPIRATION BY EMMA MIDDLETON

In writing *The Bear in our Backyard*, I wanted to acknowledge the magical moments that mothers create in their children's lives. I knew the talented illustrator, Briony Stewart, was expecting her second child and it was clear to me that we needed to mirror this little miracle in the book.

I believe creativity and imaginative play is the domain of every child, and can turn an ordinary day into an extraordinary adventure. I remember many hours spent with my children creating fairy potions for an enchanted visitor, or making a fort to protect against imaginary enemies.

I have strong memories of my daughter calling me 'Mummy Bear' when she was younger. The bear is a wonderful image for mothers as she is warm and cuddly, yet also strong and protective. It was a privilege to pause and reflect upon these treasured moments created by mums around the world, each and every day.

THEMES

Playfulness

The Bear in our Backyard focuses on the joy of playfulness. Tom and Tilly sneak around the backyard, waiting for the 'bear' to wake up and join them in their games. The book cultivates a sense of fun and wonder in the children's domestic setting.

Imagination

Tom and Tilly use their imagination to see their mum as a bear and to use narrative to enhance and develop their creative play. This makes their games more exciting and lets the reader know how they see their mum. It also allows the reader to use their imagination to be able to see the bear on the page as the 'mummy bear' she really is.

Family connections

The Bear in our Backyard celebrates the bond between a mum and her children. It shows the happiness to be found in making the most of small moments of togetherness, and how mums really can make the ordinary quite magical. It also displays the bond between siblings, and how much fun time playing with a brother or sister can be.

Growing families

The 'surprise twist' of this story is that the mum is pregnant. It is hidden by the clever use of illustrations through most of the story. It is a sweet and gentle introduction to the way families change and the ways they stay the same. The story conveys a sense of comfort and continuity around the arrival of a new baby, which can help lead to a greater sense of joy and acceptance.

Outside play

Tom, Tilly and Mum spend most of the day playing actively outside. It is a great way to encourage readers to enjoy the pleasures of being outdoors and get some time away from screens.

Kindness and consideration

The book models collaboration, generosity and sharing. Tom and Tilly have to be careful not to wake up mum – all mums need nap every now and then! It's a lighthearted way to introduce topics of respecting the space and needs of everyone in a family.



ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

- Before you start reading, have a look at the cover of this book and read the blurb on the back. Discuss as a class what you think this story might be about. Also take a moment to discuss what it is about a book that makes you want to read it. Is it the cover? The description? Are you interested in this book based on these details?
- After reading the book, discuss as a class if the book has lived up to expectations. Draw your own version of the cover and write your own blurb, now that you have read the book.
- In this book, we meet a family made up of Mum, Tom, Tilly and dog Bess. Who makes up your family? Draw a picture of your family members – and don't forget any pets!
- Why would you compare a mum with a bear? What things do they have in common? Do you think this is a nice comparison, or a mean one? What animals would you compare your family members to? Why? Draw a picture of your family as animals.
- Flick back through the book. What hints are there that Mum is the bear?
- Can you find all the hidden bears in the illustrations? Why do you think they are there?
- Look at the rhyming text, and discuss how the rhyme works in this format. Can you pick out which words rhyme? Write your own rhyme about a family member, and draw some pictures to go with it.
- Why is it a surprise at the end that Mum is having a baby? Go back through the illustrations and look closer at the clever ways the illustrator has hidden Mum's tummy. Why? What else might be hidden in the story?
- Tom and Tilly know their mum will have plenty of love and hugs to share, even with a new baby. What other concerns might you have about welcoming a new baby into the family? Has anyone in the class been in this situation? How did it make you feel? Write a list of things someone would need to know about the arrival of a new baby sibling.
- Tom and Tilly are very good at using their imaginations. Do you have any games you play that use your imagination? Act these out to the class, and explain why you think they are so much fun.
- Draw a picture of your backyard, or favourite outdoor space. What do you like about it?
- What special things do you like to do with your family?
- Read *The Bear in our Backyard* as a companion to *The Lion in our Living Room*. What is similar about these books? What is different? Discuss as a class what it means for books to be in a series. Have you read any other books in a series?
- When are times that you need to be quiet, and why? Throw an imaginary tea party with your classmates and share your tips and tricks on how to be quiet.