

Title: My Friend Fred
Author: Frances Watts, illustrated by A. Yi
Publisher: Allen & Unwin
Price: \$19.99
ISBN: 9781760290948
Publication Date: May 2019
Audience: 3-5
Reader: Carolyn Walsh, Allen & Unwin

Synopsis:

A delightful picture book about a friendship between an exuberant but loveable dachshund and his more retiring, tidy housemate.

Style:

Repetition of the words, ‘My friend Fred...’ helps pre-schoolers anticipate what will come next in the story, and it provides a rhythm that is useful to early reader word recognition. Best of all, repetition builds a sense of expectation that, in this story, is delightfully upended both in text and visuals on the book’s last double-page-spread.

A Yi’s illustrations are motion-filled and guaranteed to bring smiles to the faces of dog-lovers and non-dog lovers alike. The story’s delightful denouement - that the narrator is in fact a cat who has been discretely shown in earlier spreads – encourages young children to return to the book to find if they have missed other details.

Author Motivation:

‘Although *My Friend Fred* is about a very dashing dachshund, I am in fact a cat person! But I make an exception for dachshunds. (Although I’ve had cats since the age of nine, my first companion was a dachshund who very graciously shared his bone and his chew toys.) While most dogs are eager to please, dachshunds have strong wills and minds of their own. But they are so personable, how can one resist them? Even the aloof cat narrator of *My Friend Fred* can’t resist Fred’s charm.’ **Frances Watts**

‘This is a preschool story, so I had to have this in mind when illustrating. The story is sweet and gentle. Most of the colours are pastel toned to reflect this, with the exception of Fred and the cat; Fred is light brown and the cat is brown black. This is so that those two characters

stand out in the pages. This is a story about those two and I wanted to remind the readers of that visually. You will also see that there are children's toys lying around the house, reminding the reader that there is a child somewhere too.' **A. Yi**

Authors' Background:

Frances Watts is an award-winning author of more than 25 books for children. Her first picture book, *Kisses for Daddy*, illustrated by David Legge, was a Children's Book Council of Australia Honour Book and has been published in 20 languages. Her next book with David Legge, *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books*, was a CBCA Book of the Year and *Goodnight, Mice!*, illustrated by Judy Watson, won the Prime Minister's Literary Award. Frances lives in Sydney, Australia.

Illustrator's Background:

A.Yi is an illustrator and animation artist based in Sydney. She has illustrated various children's books including the best-selling Alice Miranda series. She likes doodling and wishes all books were illustrated.

Suggestions for classroom discussion and application:

- Before opening *My Friend Fred* look at the title and cover design. Discuss what students think the story might be about and the clues in the picture that make them think that. Ask questions such as:
 - Do you think this is going to be a funny or sad story?
 - What sort of a dog do you think Fred is?
 - Do you think he might be a bit naughty and silly sometimes? What in his picture makes you think that?
 - What other animals can you see on the cover? [Hint: look very closely.]
- Read the story out loud once without showing the pictures and ask students if they think the story is funny. Now read it out loud with the pictures and after finishing ask them if it is funnier the second time? Talk about why the images make the story funnier. Ask students to nominate their favourite images of Fred in the story. Turn to the page where the narrator is revealed and ask them to explain why it is funny that the story was told by a cat.

- Repeat the story, turning the pages slowly, to allow enough time for students to find the narrator on most pages. [Hint: sometimes they will need to look very closely.]
- The book's endpapers show Fred and his friend doing all the things they like best. We know that Fred loves to be active but, based on the back endpaper images, what sort of things do students think the cat likes to do?
- Ask students to come up with a name for the narrator and create a new story about the cat entitled, *My Friend ...*, told from Fred's point-of-view.
- Discussion: ask students how it might be if their best friend ate exactly the same food, did exactly the same things and thought exactly the same thoughts as them. Ask them if they think this might be exciting or a bit boring after a while. Encourage them to explore why they feel this way and end the discussion with a talk about things they like about their friends that are different to themselves.