

**My dog** J. Heffernan. & A. McLean. Scholastic Australia, 2001

**Special visual features:**

Water colour illustrations that complement the text by providing information not found in the text; effective use of colour to portray mood and feelings; portrayal of seasons that match the mood changes in the story; use of colour to highlight main characters.

**Pre-unit assessment tasks to gauge students' current level of understanding**

- Show students the front cover. Ask them to predict what they think the story will be about.
- Ask students to suggest, from the front cover, where they think the story is set.
- Flick slowly through the pictures in the book. Ask students to observe the type of illustrations used and their tone. Ask students what they notice about the tone of the pictures as you progress through the book. *Sombre tones when the story is saddest; use of yellow to brighten the tone when the story is happier.* Ask students why they think the illustrator has used different tones.

**Outcomes**

*English Stage 3*

**RS3.5**

Reads (and views) independently an extensive range of texts with increasing content demands and responds to themes and issues.

**RS3.6**

Uses a comprehensive range of skills and strategies appropriate to the type of text being read.

**RS3.7**

Critically analyses techniques used by writers (and illustrators) to create certain effects ... to position the reader in certain ways and to construct different interpretations of experience.

**RS3.8**

Identifies the ... structure of a wider range of more complex texts and discusses how the ... features work to influence readers' and viewers' understanding of texts.

**Teaching and learning activities**

Almost every illustration in this book provides additional information that is not provided by the written text. Accessing the visual information is therefore very important.

An interesting exercise would be to read the book the first time without showing students the watercolour illustrations. Although students will have seen them briefly in the pre-unit assessment task, they will not recall them in sufficient detail to assist them in gaining meaning from them.

After the first reading, teachers ask students:

- to reassess their opinions from the pre-unit assessment tasks, in which they predicted what they thought the story was about.
- to discuss questions, such as: What kind of oven does Alija's father use to bake his bread? What season of the year is it, at the start of the story? What country is the story set in? What kinds of transport are used by the people travelling through Alija's village? Without the illustrations, most of these questions can only be answered using guesswork and prior knowledge.

On a second, and possibly subsequent, reading(s) of the book, showing the illustrations, teachers ask students:

- to observe the change of seasons throughout the book. *The story moves from autumn through to spring (last 2 double pages). This is the only real timeframe provided.*
- to note and discuss the extra information provided by the illustrations. *Style of housing and interior decorations; village square lifestyle; type of oven used; clothing worn; countryside; transport used; facial expressions of main characters revealing emotions; weather conditions.*
- to look closely at the tone in the pictures. *The illustrator uses grey tones, dull clothing, and eerie light effects in more sombre parts of the story. In these sombre parts of the story, the illustrator uses one bright colour, often red, to highlight the focus on a main character, e.g. Alija's mother being held back by soldiers on the truck on pp 19-20. In parts of the story where there is greater hope, the illustrator used a brighter yellow light.*
- to consider why the illustrator used red on p 9. *The bombing that is an inevitable part of war is never actually mentioned. The illustrator uses the colour red and the fearful expressions on Alija's and his father's faces to hint at the bombing.*
- to observe when the dog is first seen in the illustrations. *The dog appears on every page from p 3 onwards. This provides a much greater emphasis on the role of the dog in Alija's young life than the written text.*
- ask students why they think the dog is so important to Alija.

**Post-unit assessment tasks to determine students' progress towards stated syllabus outcomes**

- Ask students to record all the things they found out about the story through the pictures that they would not have found out by reading the text alone.
- Ask students how illustrators use colour or tone to convey moods and feelings.