

Your Next Read

Teaching Notes



A Horse in a Tree

Written by Peter Cheong

Art by Peter Cheong



Teaching notes by Mel Kroeger

As a teacher librarian and passionate advocate for reading, I created the *Your Next Read* teaching notes to be both curriculum-connected and educator-useful. Each set of notes is grounded in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA V9) to ensure teachers can confidently link quality literature to learning outcomes across key learning areas. My aim is for these notes to do more than tick curriculum boxes. I want them to help educators create rich learning experiences and bookish conversations sparked by stories that act as windows, mirrors, and sliding doors and invite every child to see themselves and others in new ways.

The *Your Next Read* framework also intentionally incorporates the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP). Many Australian schools draw on both ACARA and PYP approaches, and I see great value in including both. The PYP focus on inquiry, conceptual understanding, and learner agency complements ACARA's emphasis on critical and creative thinking. Together, they provide a holistic way of engaging with stories, encouraging children not only to learn to read but also to choose to read with purpose, joy, and connection.

A stylized signature of Megan Daley in black ink.

Megan Daley

Curriculum Framework

- The Your Next Read teaching notes are designed to align with the Australian Curriculum (ACARA) and the IB Primary Years Programme (PYP) learning areas and outcomes. All literature and recreational reading also support both the PYP Approaches to Learning and ACARA General Capabilities and Cross-curriculum Priorities, encouraging students to think critically and creatively and to view learning as an active, dynamic process.
- The Your Next Read series aims to nurture the joy of reading, with educators playing a key role in the development of the knowledge and skills needed to access text.

These teaching notes aim to:

- Connect *A Horse in a Tree* to curriculum for meaningful classroom use and real-world connection.
- Prompt student inquiry, discussion, and creative response.
- Foster independent, confident, readers who read for purpose and pleasure.

By linking stories to meaningful learning experiences, these notes encourage students to inquire, reflect, and create, building a bridge between reading in school and choosing to read beyond it.

Synopsis

Sam did the biggest kick anyone has ever seen, and now his new football is gone. It's probably in the big gum tree in the park. But when Sam and his friend, Tony, go to look, they find a horse stuck in the tree! Sam climbs up to help. But Sam gets stuck too. So does Tony! Luckily, their neighbour Mr Katz is walking past. He can help! But Mr Katz cuts down the tree, and they all fall! But instead of getting squished, Sam, Tony and the horse soar above the park. The horse can fly! She drops Sam and Tony off on a nearby rooftop and shoots off into the sky. Sam still hasn't found his football.

From the Author/ Artist

I was drawing for fun and drew a kid riding on a flying horse. I instantly loved the concept and tried to base a story around it. The two kids in the book are heavily influenced by reading all of the 'Just' series by Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton growing up. I really loved the chaotic dynamic the protagonist, Andy, had with his best friend Danny. I hope I brought a similar energy with Sam and Tony, with my own voice added to the mix.

For this particular story the picture came first. I'm finding that, as I grow as a storyteller, picture-first story generation is something that I am viscerally drawn to, pardon the pun. I think, perhaps, since I am a visual learner, the pictures are more familiar to me. They ground me and provide a base that I can build upon, imagining the characters and their story. And it just kind of snowballs from there.



Themes

Compassion: Sam and Tony want to help the horse stuck in the tree.

Kindness: Sam tries to help the horse stuck in the tree.

Courage: despite being afraid of heights, Sam climbs up the tree and stays with the horse.

Problem-solving: Sam tries to pry the horse out of the tree.

Imagination and fantasy: a horse that can fly.

Humour: silly and strange moments making the story playful and engaging.

PYP Central Ideas

- Taking action, even when things are difficult, can make a positive difference.
- Challenges help us learn about ourselves and strengthen relationships.
- Everyone has different strengths, and success can look different for everyone.

Concepts

- **Courage (also a theme)**
- **Empathy**
- **Trust**
- **Community**
- **Perspective**

Getting to Know the Book (dialogic questions)

Pre-reading

Activate Prior Knowledge

- What do you know about horses?
- Have you ever seen a horse in a tree? Is it possible?
- Brainstorm ideas encouraging imagination of all the ways a horse could get stuck in a tree.

Prediction Questions

- Do you think this is an imaginative text or an information text?
- What clues tell you this?
- How do you think a horse could get in a tree?
- Why do you think the two characters on the front cover are with the horse in the tree?
- Read the blurb. Does the title make more sense now? Predict what the story might be about.

Vocabulary and Language Talk

- A brumby is a wild horse. What other words do you know that are associated with horses? (gallop, neigh)
- Discuss the meaning of different words that describe a horse moving and have children demonstrate: gallop, trot, canter, walk. Discuss the differences between these moves.
- What types of foods do horses eat? How do you feed a horse safely so it doesn't bite your fingers?

Inference and Imagination

- If you saw a horse in a tree, what would you do?
- What would it be like to ride a horse? Or even a horse that could fly?
- What problems could happen if horses could fly?

Post-reading

Recall and Literal Understanding

- Who helped Sam and Tony get down from the tree?
- Where was the story set?
- What prompted Sam to climb the tree?
- What were Sam and Tony looking for when they discovered the horse?
- How did Sam and Tony get down from the tree?

Character Thinking

- What words could you use to describe the characters in the story – Sam, Tony and Mr Katz.
- Why do you think Sam wanted to help the horse?
- Do you think Sam realised he was afraid of heights before he started climbing the tree?
- Why do you think Sam was afraid to ask Mr Katz for help?
- Why do you think Mr Katz likes to help people?

Cause and Effect

- How do you think Sam felt when he realised how high the horse was in the tree?
- Why do you think Tony decided to climb the tree too?
- How did cutting down the tree help the situation?
- Why did Mr Katz cut up all his furniture?

Prediction and Extension Thinking

- How do you think the horse was able to fly? Did it have wings?
- How will Sam and Tony now get off the roof now?
- If there was another book in this series, what adventures do you think Sam and Tony could get up to?

Getting to Know the Book (dialogic questions)

Personal Response

- Which chapter was your favourite and why?
- What part of the story made you laugh the most?
- Was there any part that made you feel worried for Sam or the horse?

Partner Discussion Prompt

Turn and talk:

If you could be one character in the story, who would you like to be? Why?

Further Discussions

- Do you agree with the icons on the front cover of this book? Would you change them and why?
- Why do you think Peter Cheong wrote a book about a horse in a tree?
- Compare Peter Cheong's illustrations in this book to his other books. How do they compare? What types of mediums does he use? Do you think he has a particular style?
- This book is part of a series, Your Next Read. What is a series? Does Peter Cheong write or illustrate other books? Are any of his books part of a series?
- What might the series title Your Next Read mean? Do you know any other books in this series?
- What do the icons on the cover refer to?
- Which icon do you most connect to and why?

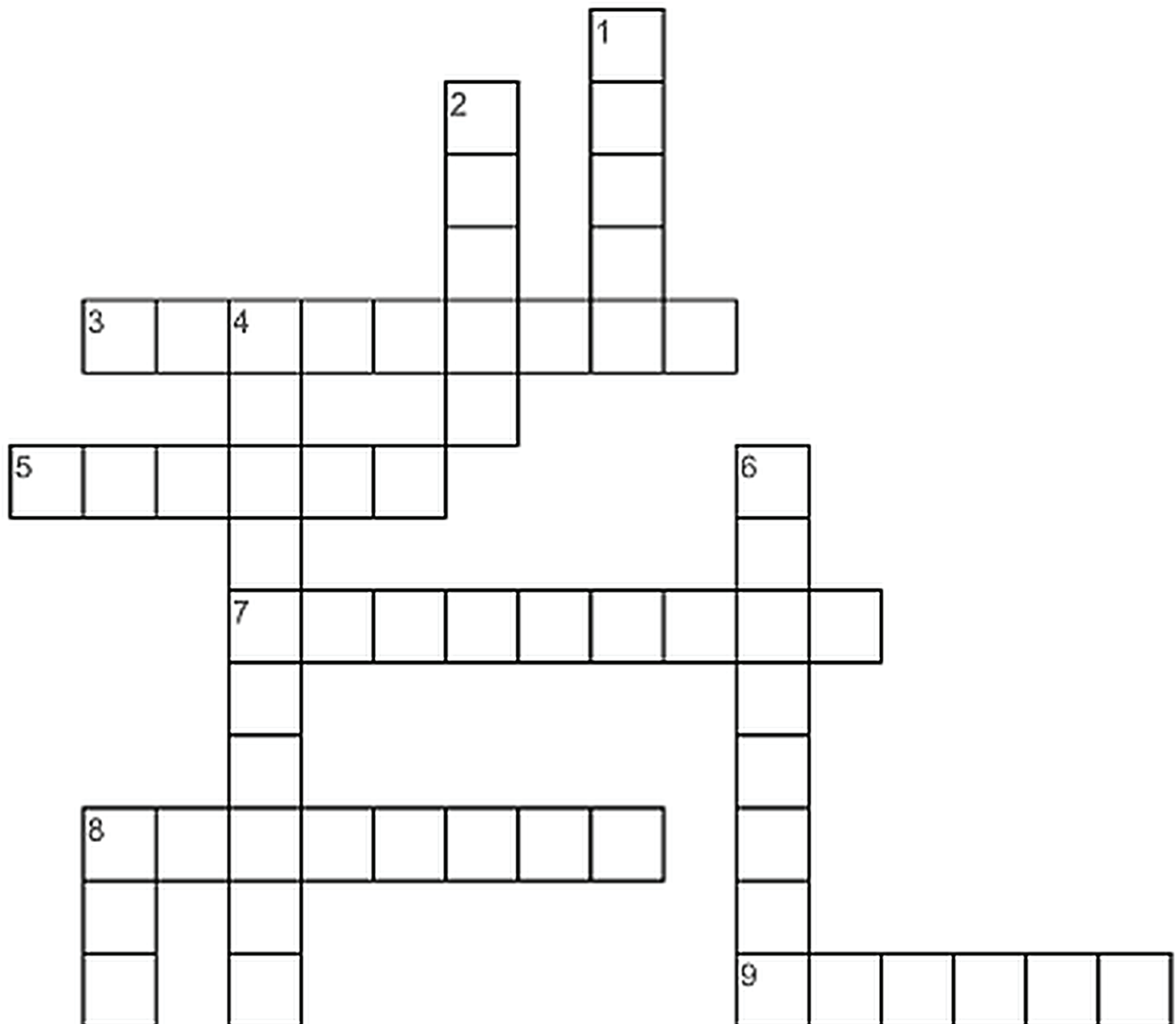
Vocabulary Words

Pulling out rich vocabulary from *A Horse in a Tree* gives students the opportunity to notice, discuss, and use new words in meaningful contexts. The following words from *A Horse in a Tree* can be used for word walls, oral language discussions, writing prompts, or vocabulary notebooks, helping children deepen comprehension and transfer new vocabulary into their own speaking and writing..

- brumby p.20
- shimmy p.25
- splotches p.31
- pry p.35
- budge p.35
- whinnies p.60
- perch p.44
- eccentric p.53
- lumberjack p.5
- prancing p.90

Complete the Vocabulary Words Crossword

Learning Activity Prompts



Across

3. Marks or shapes on the skin which don't have a regular shape
4. Free-roaming or wild horse in Australia
5. Quirky or peculiar behaviour
6. To move with high, spring-like steps
7. To move up and down and from side to side

Down

1. To try to move something
2. A resting place like a branch or a high seat
3. A person who cuts down trees into logs
4. High-pitched, gentle neighs made by horses used to greet or show curiosity
5. To snoop into someone's private business

A Horse in a Tree

Curriculum Connections

ACARA Australian Curriculum Version 9

Learning Areas:

English – language. Literature and literacy
Health and Physical Education

General Capabilities:

- Literacy
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding
- Numeracy
- Digital Literacy

Cross-Curriculum Priorities:

- **Sustainability** – caring for beaches, marine creatures, and ocean habitats

Content Descriptors:

English – Language, Literature and Literacy:

AC9EFLY06, AC9E1LE01, AC9E2LE01, AC9E1LE02, AC9E1LY07, AC9E2LY02, AC9E3LE02, AC9E3LE02

Health and Physical Education: AC9HP2P05

Design and Technologies: AC9TDE2P04, AC9TDE2P02, AC9TDE2K02, AC9TDE2P03

Visual Arts: AC9AVA2D0, AC9AVA2C01

International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB PYP)

Transdisciplinary Theme:

Who We Are – character, courage, personal values, overcoming fears, self-awareness, trust, identity

How the World Works – problem-solving, cause and effect, STEM, design, systems thinking, forces, contraptions

How We Organise Ourselves – community

helpers, asking for help, circles of trust, teamwork, roles and responsibilities

Key Concepts:

- **Form** – What is it like? Exploring the features of an imaginative/fantasy text and how illustrations and words work together to tell a story.
- **Causation** – Why is it the way it is? Understanding what motivates characters to act – why Sam climbs the tree etc.
- **Connection** – Exploring how relationships, trust, and community connect us to others and help us solve problems.

Approaches to Learning (ATL) Skills:

Learner Profile Attributes:

- **Caring** – Sam shows care for the horse despite the difficulty and danger of helping it.
- **Risk-taker** – Sam overcomes his fear of heights to help the horse, modelling courageous action in the face of uncertainty.
- **Thinker** – Characters problem-solve throughout the story.
- **Open-minded** – The fantasy elements of the story invite students to suspend disbelief, embrace imagination, and consider perspectives beyond their own experience.

Learning Activity Prompts

1. Warming Up

AC9E3LE02

Discuss connections between personal experiences and literary texts and share personal preferences.

- Discuss (as a whole group or think/pair/share or write a simple response)
- Have you ever lost something? Did you get it back? How did you get it back?
- How do you think Sam and Tony will get their football back now? Could they use a strategy that you have used to help them?

2. Peculiar Things Writing Response

What have you found in a tree that was peculiar? Or if you haven't found anything in a tree, what is something most peculiar you could find in a tree?

Use these writing prompts:

When I looked up in the tree, I saw the most peculiar thing! It was a ...

I thought of all the ways it may have got there (did aliens drop it or was it washed up in a flood?):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

To get it down I had to ...

But when that didn't work, I finally got it down by ...

3. Imagination Illustration

Look at Peter Cheong's illustrations in this book (you can watch Peter draw a flying horse here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yv3LMYhRtQ>). Peter likes to keep his drawings simple. Look at the lines he uses, being slightly sharp and imperfect. You can also look at Peter's other books he has illustrated too for inspiration. Draw the most peculiar object you found in the tree, using the illustrating style of Peter Cheong

4. My Circle of Trust

In the story, Sam and Tony get help from Mr Katz. At first Sam is afraid to ask Mr Katz for help. Discuss what made Sam think that Mr Katz might not be someone he could trust? (see pp.52-56)? What characteristics do you look out for in someone you can trust?

Who would you ask for help if you needed it?

A circle of trust is the people who are the safe, supportive people are in your life – like a team that always has your back. Who is in your circle of trust?

5. Text Type Detectives

Is this book an imaginative or an informative text? What clues tell you this? Can you list three clues to support this fact?

6. Magical Flying Creatures

Think of a favourite creature that cannot fly. Design a way for it to fly.

- Draw a diagram of your creature
- Label the materials you would need to make it fly
- List all the things that your creature can do now that it can fly



Learning Activity Prompts

7. Contraption STEM Challenge

Invent different contraptions to safely get a horse out of a tree using:

- Recycled materials
- LEGO
- LEGO Technic (with motors)
- Loose parts

Design it on paper first, labelling all the materials required.

Make it!

Test your contraption using a small plant with a toy horse in it.

Appraise your contraption.

- What would you change next time?
- What worked well?
- Were your materials you used appropriate?
- Why did you use the materials that you did?
- Did you consider sustainability when selecting your materials?

YOUR
NEXT
READ

Educator Bookmark - Front

Note to educators: this bookmark is designed to be used as a quick prompt card for you or an adult helper. Consider it a summary of much of the content of these teaching notes to have beside you while reading.

This educator bookmark could also be sent home with a copy of *A Horse in a Tree* as a homework task and as a guide to parents/caregivers as to how to extend the book reading experience.



Before Reading

- Preview the title and cover. Ask: How would a horse get in a tree?
- Activate prior knowledge about horses and trees
- Encourage predictions: Why do you think the horse is in the tree?
- Introduce focus vocabulary: brumby, whinnies, budge, prancing
- Encourage visualising the setting: How do you think the horse might feel and what would it sound like if it is stuck?
- Set the reading purpose: Find out how the horse can get stuck and unstuck out of a tree

Educator Bookmark - Back

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After Reading

- Tell someone the story in order
- What was the big problem?
- How was the problem solved?
- What was your favourite part?
- Say one new word you learnt
- How do you think Sam and Tony will get down from the roof?
- Will Sam and Tony find their football after all?

Creative Challenge

- What will Sam and Tony do next?

YOUR
NEXT
READ

Student Bookmark

Note to educators: this bookmark is designed to be photocopied (2 to an A4 page) and placed inside the front cover of *A Horse in a Tree* and is for independent use by a student or reading group.

If you have class sets or multiple copies of *A Horse in a Tree*, a laminated bookmark could be added to each copy for use in small group sessions. Laminated bookmarks can be sent home with a copy of *A Horse in a Tree* as a homework task.



Keep this card alongside you as you read

A Horse in a Tree

Before You Start

- Look at the title and cover
- Think: What might happen in this story?
- What do you already know about horses?
- Say the tricky words: shimmy, eccentric, whinnies
- Make one prediction

After Reading

- Tell someone the story in order
- What was the big problem?
- How was it solved?
- What was your favourite part?
- Say one new word you learnt
- What do you think will happen next?

Creative Challenge

- Draw a favourite creature that doesn't ordinarily fly but could! How will it fly? Will it have a motor, wings or something else?

