



# BIRD TO BIRD

CLAIRE  
SAXBY

WAYNE  
HARRIS

# TEACHER NOTES



An imprint of Walker Books Australia



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By Claire Saxby

Illustrated by Wayne Harris

9781925381122 • March 2018

Black Dog Books, an imprint of Walker Books Australia

For readers 5+

A bird drops a seed to the floor of the forest. The seed grows into a sapling, then a tree. The tree is felled and taken to a busy city. *Bird to Bird* is the story of one bird, one seed, one tree.

Award-winning picture book creators Claire Saxby and Wayne Harris have crafted a gentle story of nature, history, recycling and art.



## Q&A with CLAIRE SAXBY



**What research went into your preparation for writing *Bird to Bird*?**

I read extensively about convicts and convict transportation, and also about early European settlement in Australia. Some of this was factual information gleaned from books and online, but much of the best information was included in family stories, newspaper archives, museum exhibitions. Sometimes, I was just in the right place at the right time to hear the right information just when I needed it.

***Bird to Bird* is grounded in Australian history. What drew you to explore this area of our history?**

As I continue to observe current Australian issues around migration and migrants, I wanted to understand more about those who have traveled here earlier, what their stories had been. There are myriad migration stories and many of those stories include travel across oceans, and include times of uncertainty. I have hopes that if we can truly understand our past, we can influence our present and our future.

**The message at the core of *Bird to Bird* is about recycling. Did you intend to write a story with a message of sustainability, or was that just where the story led you?**

I was fascinated by the facts at the kernel of this story: that convict bunking was removed from a ship and made into a weaving loom then a lean-to kitchen. The story grew from that. Sustainability is part of good survival, it felt like a natural fit here, but wasn't consciously added.

## Q&A with WAYNE HARRIS



**Can you tell us about your illustration style and colour palette in *Bird to Bird*?**

I'm very interested in colour and light and how they can transform the most everyday of scenes into moments that are memorable, moments that feel vibrant and alive. So I am very interested in the energy of each scene, which is why the illustrations are built up with many strokes of colour – you feel as if the landscape could shift at any time. The illustrations were created digitally but the evidence of the brushstrokes hopefully add a human warmth.

**Your illustrations depict many locations over a wide period of time. What kind of research did you do while illustrating this book?**

I did a lot of looking at historic images but I didn't want to so concentrate on the surface of period costume because sometimes it can "freeze" your work and make it feel less instant. So I suggest costume and architectural details in order to concentrate on the human experience of being in those situations in the story. I think it makes the progression through time more fluid.

**Do you have a favourite illustration from *Bird to Bird*?**

My favourite illustration is the ships arrival in Australia. After a journey that must have been perilous and horrific they arrive to a penal colony – but instead of arriving in hell they arrive to something that must have looked at moments like paradise. I am intrigued by the layers of feeling that must have gone through the minds of the convicts.

# QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

## Before Reading

Before reading *Bird to Bird*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? After reading, revisit your answer to this question. Were your predictions correct?

## Exploring the text

Discuss the title of the book. What do you think it means? Come up with an alternative title for the book.

Personification is when you give human qualities or abilities to an object or animal. Find examples of personification in the book and discuss why you think Claire Saxby used this device.

Examples for students to find include:

- “...the hungry city.”
- “...the tree trudges to the docks.”

The story of *Bird to Bird* comes full circle at the end; that is, the story begins and ends with a bird. Why do you think Claire Saxby chose to write the story like that? How might the story have been different if it didn't come full circle? Find other books that use a similar device.

Claire Saxby's writing style in *Bird to Bird* is lyrical and poetic. Choose a spread and examine the text to extract the core meaning. For example, “Deep in the forest where sundrops spill a bird sends seeds to the floor.” could become “In the forest a bird drops a seed.” Discuss how each version of the text makes you feel and which is more enjoyable to read. Take your stripped down version of the text and rewrite it in your own lyrical style.

## Exploring the illustrations

Examine the colour palette used throughout the book. What are the dominant colours? What mood or feelings do they create? How do Wayne Harris's colour choices convey meaning in each spread? Does the colour palette change throughout the book? Why do you think that is? Find a colour ad in a magazine or newspaper. Discuss how colour is used. Re-create the ad using a different colour scheme and discuss how the meaning of the ad changes with a different colour scheme.

Compare the illustrations in the beginning of the book to those in the end. What is similar and what is different? Consider the trees, animals, buildings, clothing and the colour of the sky and water. What do these differences and similarities signify?

Some spreads have full-bleed illustrations, while others are bordered with white space. How does this design help to draw your eye or highlight certain parts of the illustrations?

The illustrations not only interpret the text, but extend the story by giving the reader more information. Choose a spread and discuss what information is in the illustrations that is not in the text.

## Further activities

Is *Bird to Bird* an imaginative, informative or persuasive text? How can you tell?

Take turns describing/retelling the story as if you were explaining it to someone who hasn't read it yet. What do you think are the most important parts of the story? Why do you think that?

Track the journey of the tree from the time the bird drops the seed to the time the wood is carved into a toy bird. Plot each step on a timeline using estimated dates based on visual and textual clues in the book.





The story of *Bird to Bird* focuses on a particular piece of wood that is used and reused for a variety of different purposes throughout its lifetime. What does this story make you think about recycling in general? What are the benefits of recycling? What would change if a new piece of wood was used for each of the objects created throughout this story?

Create a list of other uses the wood could have.

Why were the bunks removed from the ship?

Why did the early European settlers choose to recycle timber when there were ample trees available? Consider different types of wood, no milling available, etc.

What else might have been recycled by the settlers? Why would recycling have been so important? Consider their access to fresh supplies from England via ships, available materials in Australia, the lack of existing European-style farms/homes in Australia, financial reasons and their need.

Identify examples of how the passage of time is shown in the words and illustrations. Suggest some other ways the author and illustrator could have shown time passing.

By having the bird that drops the seed in the forest connected to the wooden bird, this book is referencing the migration that some birds make across the world. Find some examples of migratory birds and what countries their flight path takes them through. Read *Circle* by Jeannie Baker (Walker Books, 2016) for information on one such bird.

As you read through the book, pause on each spread and think “what would it have been like?”. For instance, imagine what it would have been like to be a convict on a ship. How would you feel? Would you be happy or sad? Would it have been comfortable, enjoyable, etc.

Read other books written by Claire Saxby and illustrated by Wayne Harris. Compare these books with *Bird to Bird* and discuss similarities in theme and style.

## History

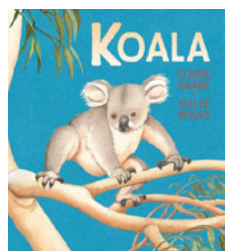
At one point the tree is made into a bed frame on a convict ship. What is a convict? Why were these convicts on a ship? Where were they going? Does this still happen today? Examine the illustration of the convicts. Based on their expression and body language discuss how you think they are feeling.

Later, the wood is used to create a frame for a weaving loom. What is a weaving loom? Do we still use these today, or is there a modern equivalent?

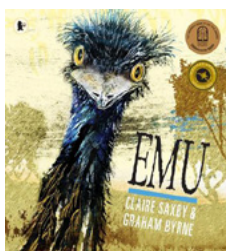
### Also by CLAIRE SAXBY



HB 9781922179913  
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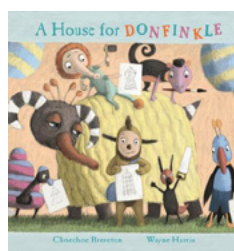
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