Fox
by Margaret Wild, Illustrated by Ron Brooks

Magpie gets caught in a Bushfire and her wings are burned so she cannot fly. Dog, who is blind in one eye, rescues her and becomes her friend. Together they explore the world, Magpie becoming Dog’s missing eye, and Dog becoming Magpie’s wings. Then Fox arrives on the scene. Will he break up the friendship between Dog and Magpie? Or will trust and loyalty win the day?

Literacy

The activities have been written so that the whole class can participate, or the children can work independently or in a small group.

1. Before Reading the Book
Read a variety of fables to the children. Aesop’s Fables are probably the most famous.
Gottlieb (1975) credits the origin of the fable, in Western culture, to a Greek slave on the island of Samos, named Aesop, who lived in the sixth century B.C. Aesop was known for telling clever stories about animals. The tradition of Aesop was oral. The stories were eventually written down in Greek prose in the seventh century B.C., by Demetrius of Phalerum. In the sixteenth century Aesop’s fables included the fables of many others, so it became impossible to say which of the fables were Aesop’s and which were not. Fables are found worldwide.

Contemporary editions of fables
The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse and The Tortoise and the Hare, adapted and illustrated by Janet Stevens
Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings by Joel Chandler Harris
Fables (1980) by Arnold Lobel
The Singing Tortoise and Other Animal Folk Tales (1993) by John Yeoman
Aesop’s Fables illustrated by Rodney Mc Rae

What are fables?
Record the characteristics on the board, overhead or large display paper:

- They are fiction in the sense that they didn’t really happen;
- They are dramatic, meant to entertain;
- They are poetic, with a double meaning;

- They make abstract ideas about good and evil comprehensible to children;
- They are moral tales, usually with animal characters who have human characteristics;
- They are usually short with no more than two or three characters;
- The characters perform simple, straightforward actions that result in one, central conflict;
- They also contain human lessons expressed through the weaknesses of personified animals;
- The moral or lesson is often included as a proverb – ‘One good turn deserves another’.

Why do they have a moral or lesson? List the message of a selection of fables.

2. Introducing the Book

Show the cover by opening out the book so that the entire illustration of the fox can be seen.

What do you think the story is going to be about? Record responses under the heading predictions.

Foxes appear in many children’s stories. What are the characteristics of a fox? List them.

*Show the front endpapers.* Do they tell us anything about the story? Where do you think the story is set? How do you know? Why do you think the illustrator has used red and orange? Look at the back endpapers. How are they different? Why?

*Show the frontispiece.* Why is the dog carrying the bird in his mouth? Will the dog harm the bird? How do you know? What type of bird is it? What type of dog? Does it matter? Where do you think the dog and bird are going? What do you think the story will be about? Record responses under the predictions heading. What do you notice about the illustration?

What are the characteristics of a dog? A bird? List them.

*Show the double page spread of the title page.* Has the setting changed? Why have the colours changed from the endpapers? What do you notice about the illustration?

*Show the double page spread of the dedication page.* What is the fox doing? The dog and bird? Do they know that the fox is there? How do you know? What do you now think the story will be about? Record responses under the predictions heading.
What do you notice about the layout of this page? How is it different from most other picture books you know? Why has the illustrator arranged the page this way?

3. Getting into the Book
Read the first double page spread. What has happened to Magpie? How do you think Magpie feels? What will Dog do next? Why? Show the children the illustrations. What do you notice about the layout of this page? How is the writing different to most other picture books you know? Why has the illustrator written the text this way? Would the text have been better typed? Why or why not?

Read to the end of the double page spread beginning with 'But Dog says, "Welcome. We can offer you food and shelter."' How would you describe the character of Dog? Fox? Magpie? Add them to your list of characteristics. Is Magpie worried? How do you know? What do you think will happen next? Record responses under the predictions heading.

Turn to the next double page spread, but don’t read the text. Show the children the illustrations. What is happening on this page? Whose eyes can you see? How do Fox’s eyes make you feel? Why has the illustrator just drawn Fox’s eyes? What is the illustration on the opposite page about? How does it make you feel? Why has the illustrator drawn these pictures side by side? What do you think will happen next? Why? Record responses under the predictions heading.


Read to 'And when at dawn Fox whispers to her for the third time, she whispers back. "I am ready."' Why has Magpie changed her mind? How do you think Dog will feel when he discovers Magpie and Fox have gone? How would you now describe the character of Dog? Fox? Magpie? Add them to your list of characteristics. What do you think will happen next? Record responses under the predictions heading.

Read to the double page spread beginning ‘He stops, scarcely panting.’ Why does Fox leave Magpie? Who screams? How do you know? Is the behaviour of Fox surprising? Why or why not? Add any other characteristics to your list. What do you think will happen next? Record responses under the predictions heading.

Read to the end. Why does Magpie decide to go back to Dog? Did the book end the way you predicted? What is the book Fox about?

How does the illustrator’s use of colour help to tell the story?

Music

Tone Colour / Dynamics / Duration (Tempo) / Pitch
Read through the story, then categorise the sounds that could be used to represent the movements and personalities of each of the three main characters in relation to:

- High and low
- Loud and soft
- Fast and slow
- Regular and irregular

Choose instruments to represent each animal and, as the story is narrated, play the instruments at the appropriate time when each character is mentioned.

Structure / Tone Colour
Create a story map of the text and use this as a graphic score.

Use instruments to represent the different characters and events and tell the story without any words, just using the instruments.
Drama

Hot Seating
Brainstorm words to describe each of the three main characters. Explore the way each character might move and talk.

Interview three children, chosen to be Dog, Magpie and Fox, and have them tell the story from their perspective. Have them give reasons for each of their actions.

Let each child choose one of the characters and write the story from their point of view.

Mime
Use the story map from the above music activity as a visual cue to assist the children in miming the action in the story.

Use contrasting dynamics, levels, timing, etc to show the personalities and movements of each of the characters.

Improvisation:
Words and sounds may be added to create an improvised dramatic version of the story.

Readers Theatre
Alternatively, turn the text into a Readers Theatre presentation.

Expand this by adding mime and instruments as well as narration to tell the story.

Visual Arts

Collage
Examine the mixed media illustrations in the book. Discuss how they have been created, eg. paint on board with details scratched in with sticks or thin black ink lines. Look at how the artist has showed the differences between the bush, day time, night time, paddocks and the desert.

Have children choose one of these scenes and, using similar techniques, create their own version.

Encourage them to use appropriate colours, lines, textures, etc to depict their particular scene.
**Extension:**
Use cardboard and other found objects to scratch through thick paint to create their picture. Add bush materials to create a collage to complement this artwork.

Write a sentence about either the techniques used to create the finished artwork, or about the content of the artwork.

Display these together on the classroom wall.

**Perspective**
Explore different pictures of Australian landscapes including those shown in the story.

Discuss how they would look from a bird’s perspective, and from a dog or fox’s perspective. What would be different, what would be the same?

Have each child select one Australian landscape to draw or paint.

Have them create it first from the ‘human’ perspective, then from a flying bird’s perspective and thirdly, from a dog or fox’s perspective.

Write a couple of sentences telling the viewer about the differences and similarities in the three pictures.

Share these with the rest of the class and display them around the room.

**Literacy**

4. **Coming Back to the Book**
Read the book again without stopping. Go through the characteristics of a fable. Is Fox a fable? Whole class or group discussion. Is there a moral or lesson in Fox? If yes, what is it? Write it as a proverb, for example, ‘Trust is earned not given’.
The teacher and the children jointly construct a simple fable (which can be typed directly on to the computer if working with a small group). The language needs to be chosen so that everyone in the class will be able to eventually read it.

**Visual Arts**

**Illustrating Text**
The finished text is word processed in a large font size or written in large print and divided into sections. The students illustrate a section of the narrative, which is displayed around the room. Alternatively, the children write and illustrate their own fable.

Create another list of characteristics, from information books, about dingoes, foxes and magpies. Compare the factual list with the list of characteristics about Dog, Fox and Magpie. Are they different? Similar? Why?

What does *anthropomorphic* mean? Is Fox anthropomorphic? Write the story of Fox, but create human characters for Dog, Fox and Magpie. Is the story as interesting?

**Literacy**

5. **Going Beyond the Book**
Investigate other books written by Margaret Wild or books illustrated by Ron Brooks.

Read other books about fictional foxes and compare them to Fox. For example, *Hattie and the Fox* by Mem Fox, *Fantastic Mr Fox* by Roald Dahl, and *Foxspell* by Gillian Rubinstein.