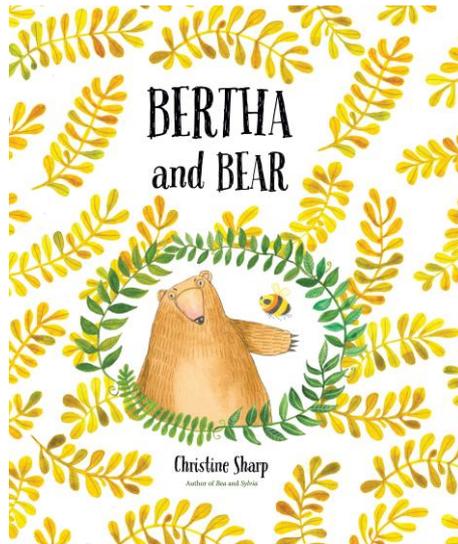


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BERTHA AND BEAR

Christine Sharp



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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SYNOPSIS

When an approaching storm damages their beehive, Bertha is given the responsibility of finding a new, safe home for her swarm. Keen on adventure, she finds the courage to persevere through thunder and lightning, meeting Bear along the way, who helps with her quest.

Bertha and Bear is a lyrical text that explores friendship, bravery and the importance of home.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Courage
- Bees
- Poetic Devices e.g. alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, imagery

WRITING STYLE

Bertha and Bear is written in third person, present tense and is appropriate for younger readers. It successfully combines poetic language with a simple narrative structure that explores the themes of friendship and courage. It is beautiful as a read-aloud text.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *Bertha and Bear*, look carefully at the front cover. What predictions can you make about the story? Discuss the use of colour, patterns and body language in the illustrations.
- The author has used poetic devices such as alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition, imagery and rhyme to help tell Bertha's story. Discuss these devices and the author's choice to include them in the text. Some examples include:
 - A wind whips up (alliteration; personification)
 - The worried bees are buzzing (onomatopoeia)
 - She must be brave. She must face fears. She must be home for tea. (repetition)
 - They hear distant thunder growling (personification)
 - Fly like the wind (simile)
 - The spring sun shines (alliteration)
 - The churned-up, choppy sea (alliteration)
 - Clouds curl and scud across the sky (alliteration; imagery)
 - The wind is howling (personification)
 - Washing flapping in the flurry (alliteration; imagery)
 - Past a farmhouse, past a lake, past birds looping in the air (repetition)

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- The fringe of the forest (alliteration; imagery)
- Rain bullets down and bathes the ground (imagery; alliteration)
- White lightning cracks the sky (imagery)
- The coal-black clouds are tumbling (imagery; personification)
- There's a grumble and a rumble in the brown bear's burly belly (rhyme; alliteration)
- Dreaming of a sticky supper with a cuppa (rhyme)
- Bertha craves adventure. How does her quest to find a new home for the hive fulfil this need?
- How does Bertha stand out from the other worker bees? How does she show her individuality? Which illustrations help to depict Bertha's character strengths? How does her body language set her apart from the other bees?



- Retell the story of *Bertha and Bear* in your own words. Alternatively, write the story from either Bertha's or Bear's point of view.
- In small groups, re-enact the story of *Bertha and Bear*.
- Create a classroom display of *Bertha and Bear* based on one of the page openings. Ask students to write a comment about the story to include on the display.
- Discuss your first impressions of Bear. Examine the page opening in which he first appears. What is he doing? What does this tell us about his nature?
- Why do Bertha and Bear become friends? How important are friends? Write a reflection about the role your friends play in your life.
- How does Bertha show courage and resilience? What qualities does she have that you too would like to have?
- Which is your favourite page opening? Why is this your favourite? Share with a friend. Draw your own version of this page.
- Discuss the different shapes used in the illustrations, such as the curved, blue lines depicting the wind, and the hexagonal shapes of the honeycomb. How do these illustrations help tell the story?

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- Using only the illustrations as your guide, write your own story.
- Graph the plot of *Bertha and Bear* on a story graph.
- How do the bees and Bear help one another? What can we learn from them about the importance of cooperation?
- What role does nature play in *Bertha and Bear*?
- Experiment with poetic devices such as rhyme, repetition, alliteration and onomatopoeia in your own writing.
- Watch YouTube clips featuring typical behaviour of bees to help stimulate ideas (see links below) for writing. Brainstorm verbs, adverbs and adjectives to help with your writing.
- Using the illustration below as stimulus, continue the story of *Bertha and Bear*.



- Write a poem about the storm using the page opening below to help generate ideas.



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- Use the topic of bees to teach basic research and note-taking skills. Use both print and digital texts to gather information. Create an information report on bees, focussing on their habits such as building hives, making honey and the role of the Queen Bee.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT6lQx26eHk>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA05LOfPbIY>
- Bear likes knitting. Try some knitting of your own. See the links below for instructions on basic French knitting.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpfZQ1Ro8vU>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liJFvUCai2k>
- Check Pinterest for bee-related art and craft ideas.
 - <https://au.pinterest.com/pin/161637074102983616/>

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The idea of the story was originally sparked by the current worldwide concern for bees. Bees are necessary to a healthy planet, as they pollinate the plant life that keeps the entire ecosystem alive. But bees are under threat from a range of factors, including pesticides and loss of habitat. We all need bees to survive.

I decided to create a book for children that, while it didn't directly talk about the plight of bees, might kindle curiosity about and affection for one of planet Earth's much-loved creatures – the bee.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Sharp is a writer, illustrator, editor, book designer and photographer, who has worked in the creative industries for 25 years across the literary, visual and performing arts. Christine holds a Master of Arts (Research) in Writing for Youth & Children, QUT, as well as tertiary qualifications in creative writing, drama, voice and dance. Christine is passionate about creating beautiful, inspirational and joyful books for children and adults. She works from her home on Tamborine Mountain, surrounded by birds and in the company of her dog, Billie Bear.