

# TEACHERS' NOTES

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## THE RED FEATHER

Written by Ben Kitchin

Illustrated by Owen Swan

### SYNOPSIS

Claude and his friends find a beautiful red feather at the beach one day. One by one, they trade for the feather until they discover they have the most fun sharing its beauty together.

### AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Ben has written the story very simply.

The inspiration for the story came from reading about the value of red feathers in polynesian cultures via Captain Cook's journals. Ben wanted to create a simple story in which art and meaning was juxtapositioned with more practical considerations such as food and

shelter. He was hoping to show the importance of sharing all these things.

### AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Ben Kitchin grew up in rural South Australia where he spent a lot of time playing on the trampoline, riding motorbikes and making model aeroplanes. Ben now lives in Adelaide where he is a primary school teacher and father of five. These days he enjoys playing with his children, reading books and watching anything at Adelaide Oval. He is still shocked and amazed at how cool everything looks underwater when wearing goggles.

### ILLUSTRATOR STYLE OR MEDIUM

Colour pencils and watercolour were used to make the illustrations. Owen loved the names of the characters and felt it was important to give all four distinctive personalities in their appearance and body language and expressions. A big challenge was to create a colourful nostalgic palette which entirely excludes red – so that the red of the feather becomes the strongest colour emphasis on every page.

Owen's intention was for a simple, somewhat anachronistic vibe because the story and style



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of writing reminded him of the Ladybird Early Readers from the 1950's and 60's - many of the visual references are from that era. Without trying to exactly mimic the look of those earlier books he wanted to keep the same sort of timeless/nostalgic feeling in the pictures.

### ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Owen Swan lives in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney and has illustrated numerous picture books. He likes to going to the cinema and playing the banjo, though rarely at the same time.

### EDUCATIONAL APPLICABILITY

*The Red Feather* may be a good story to utilise when teaching children about sharing.

### DISCUSSION TOPICS

Before and during reading the book

1. Looking at the cover, what do you think this story might be about?
2. Who might the main characters be?
3. Where do you think the setting will be?

*Inferring Question*

4. Why are the children looking at the red feather?
5. Looking at the inside cover, what type of bird is on this page?
6. Where do you see these birds?
7. Where do you think the book will be set now?

After reading the book

1. Who were the characters in this story?
2. What was the problem in the story?
3. Why do you think they all wanted the red feather?
4. How was the problem resolved?
5. Verb brainstorm. What were some verbs that told us what the children liked doing with the feather.
6. What were some of the feelings the children experienced?
7. Why do you think sharing is a good idea?



### ACTIVITIES

#### Games

**Birdie, Birdie Who's Got the Red Feather (based on Doggy, Doggy Who's Got Your Bone?)**



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Using a red feather or another prop as a feather say:

*Birdie, birdie where's the red feather?*

*It's blown somewhere in the windy weather,*

*Wake up birdie,*

*Wake up now!*

### Pass the Red Feather

Children pass a red feather to the person next to them saying how they would share the red feather with that person.

### Writing Activities

- Describe the red feather; texture, shape, colour, action.
- Describe the creature that the red feather came from. What does it look like? How does it move? What does it sound like?
- Sequencing/retell. Write a sentence for each picture and then put them in their correct sequence.
- Write a letter to the creature saying you've found its feather. Describe what it's been used for.
- Write a persuasive text on the topic "Why it's Important to Share".

### Art Activities

#### Ink Blown Feathers

Materials:

- lead pencil
- A4 or A3 paper depending on how big you want them
- red ink or watered down acrylic paint
- teaspoon
- straw
- black paper for mounting (optional)

Steps:

1. Using the lead pencil, lightly draw an outline of a feather in the middle of the paper.
2. Spoon some of the paint onto the paper at the base of the feather.
3. Using the straw carefully blow the paint in different directions (trying to keep within the outline of the feather as much as possible).
4. Repeat steps two and three until the feather is completely covered.
5. Leave the feather to dry and then mount it on the black paper.



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## Easy Red Feather Quills

### Materials:

- red pencil or lead pencil
- craft red feather
- PVA glue



### Steps:

1. Lay a feather flat on the table.
2. Apply some glue along the middle of the feather.
3. Carefully place the chosen pencil on the glue, leaving enough room at the end for someone to be able to hold the pencil.
4. Leave overnight to dry completely.
5. Start writing with the new red feather quill... you might even like to share it with your friends!

### During Reading/Drama

Each child has a red feather so they can copy the actions in the book. After reading students work in pairs to come up with their own three actions. Share/perform to class.

### Further research

- There are lots of different types of birds. See if students can find what birds have red feathers. What other feather colours/birds are out there? Why so many colours?

### MARKETING AND SELLING POINTS

- The story and illustrations are very simple and engaging.
- The story teaches the values of sharing and friendship without being didactic.
- Children often take a while to learn how to share. The Red Feather could be used repeatedly or as need in the classroom arises.



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