

## Teachers' Notes

### Room on our Rock

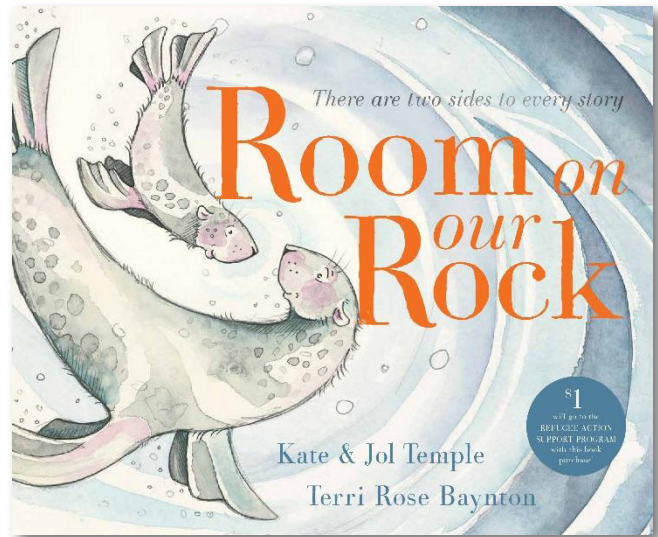
by Kate and Jol Temple

Illustrated by Terri Rose Baynton

Publication Date (Canada): February 2021

First published by Scholastic Australia in 2018

Notes by: Rae Carlyle



**Synopsis:** *Room on our Rock* is a powerful allegorical exploration of the emotions and fears that drive exclusion, persecution, and rejection of refugees. Read conventionally, it tells the tale of a group of seals who fear the approach of a strange pair of seals, one a child, whose rock is being overwhelmed by the sea. The group of rock-dwellers refuse unconditionally to entertain the possibility of allowing the desperate and terrified pair to take refuge with them, stating that there is clearly no room. Seeking only safety the endangered pair go from hopeful to despairing over the course of the story. However, there is more to this book than a simple one-way reading can reveal, for if you start reading at the back of the book, and read all the pages in reverse order, it becomes an uplifting tale of acceptance, encouragement, and hope. In the mirror-story, the seals on the rock welcome the struggling refugees, assuring them that there is plenty of room for them all, and encouraging them to leave the small beleaguered rock and to come share the much larger and safer one. Read either way, *Room on our Rock* is a heart-wrenching tale of fear and danger, and the seals exemplify the differing attitudes that can be found within human communities to the plight faced by many refugees these days.

### About the Author:

Kate and Jol Temple's picture book, *I GOT THIS HAT*, was the 2016 National Simultaneous Storytime Book and was read by over half a million kids on the same day at the same time. Their hilarious new junior fiction series *Captain Jimmy Cook Discovers Third Grade* has just been shortlisted by CBCA for Book of the Year.

### About the Illustrator:

Shortlisted for the *Australian Book Design Awards* in the Picture Book category, and for the *New Zealand Post Book Awards* in the Best Picture Book category, Terri Rose Baynton is a talented New Zealand Author, Illustrator, and Artist.

### Themes

Key Themes: Fear and courage, acceptance and rejection, exclusion and inclusion, refugees, danger and safety.

### Writing Style

In *Room on our Rock* Kate and Jol Temple have employed a highly innovative writing style. Written throughout in verse, the story appears at first glance to be a typical example of the genre in terms of the language and form of the text, but is unique in that if one reads the story starting at the back page, it tells a completely different tale, while remaining both syntactically correct and adhering to a stable rhyme scheme.

## Illustration Style

The visual narrative as seen in Terri Rose Baynton's illustrations parallels the textual narrative of both stories within this book, with the experiences and facial expressions on the different seals being appropriate to the situation described in the text, regardless of which way it is being read. Baynton uses a subdued palette of soft blue-grey watercolour tones to portray the marine environment, with an occasional touch of other brighter colours adding contrast. There is minimal white space, and Baynton makes good use of subtle gradations in tone, and of contrast with uncoloured sections to highlight the watery subject matter adding depth and interest to the artwork. The figures, rocks, and some of the more prominent wave actions are detailed with muted linework, maintaining clarity of form while seamlessly integrating the foreground features into the aquatic background.

## Study Notes, Discussion Points, and Activities

- 1) As a class discuss the cover illustration and title. What do you think might be happening in the story? What does it mean when it says *There are two sides to every story*?
- 2) Read the story from front to back. As a class discuss the story that is told. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - What is happening to the parent and child seal?
  - How are the seals on the big rock reacting to them?
  - How do you think the two seals feel?
  - Why do you think the rock-seals are saying there is no room?
  - What do you think the rock-seals are thinking and feeling?
  - How much room can you see on the rock?
  - What do you think might happen to the two seals if they don't find a new rock?
  - Do people ever act like the seals on the rock? Why might they act like this?
  - If you were one of the two seals in the water, what would you say to the rock-seals?
- 3) Read the story from back to front. As a class discuss the story, and how it is different from the story as read conventionally. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - What is happening to the parent and child seal?
  - How are the seals on the big rock reacting to them?
  - How do you think the two seals feel??
  - What do you think the rock-seals are thinking and feeling?
  - How do you think the two seals feel when the rock-seals tell them there is plenty of room on their rock for them as well?
  - How much room can you see on the rock?
  - What do you think might be different for the rock-seals that they can act welcoming and friendly in this back-to-front story?
  - If you were one of the two seals in the water, what would you say to the rock-seals?
- 4) As a class discuss the two different stories in the book. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - How did reading the first story make you feel?
  - How did the second story make you feel?
  - When you look at the pictures of the rock seals during the first story, what do you think the expressions on their faces mean?
  - When reading the second story, do the expressions on the seals faces look like they mean something different?
  - Which story do you think is the better one, and why?

- 5) Individually, choose one seal from the first story. Write and illustrate an *I feel* or *I felt* statement from the point of view of that character sharing what they felt, and when they felt it. Write and illustrate a second *I feel* or *I felt* statement from the point of view of the same character, on the same page in the second story. For example you might want to say *I felt scared when our rock was swamped by the big wave.* for your first statement and *I was happy that we had a new home when our old rock was swamped by the big wave* for your second statement.
- 6) Choose three colours of paint, and do an abstract fingerpainting that you feel shows how reading the story front to back made you feel. Do a second abstract fingerpainting that shows how you felt when reading the story from back to front. Think about your colour choices for both paintings. How do different colours make you feel when you see them? Mount your two paintings side by side, and write a caption for each of them sharing the different emotions that they represent.
- 7) If you could choose a group of rock seals to be part of, which group would you choose—the ones in the first story or in the second? Why would you choose this? Which group do you think are happier?
- 8) Retell the two stories from the point of view of the seagull. Be sure to have the seagull describe how they think the different seals are feeling as well as what they are doing.
- 9) What do you think happened next? In pairs, write the story of what happens next for all the seals. Have one person in each pair write the next chapter in the first story, and one person write the next chapter in the second story. Share your stories with the class, and discuss how they all made you feel.
- 10) How does it feel when you go somewhere where you don't know anyone? What things can you do and say to people who are new arrivals in your community to help them feel safe and included? As a class brainstorm all the ways you can welcome visitors, refugees, and any other new arrivals to your school and community. In small groups make posters showcasing some of the things you have brainstormed and display them in the hallway or around the school.
- 11) Find some books about refugee experiences in the school library, and read them as a class. Discuss the similarities and differences between the stories of the people that you find, and the stories of the seals in *Room on our Rock*.
- 12) Use pastels to create a picture of an oceanscape. Look at the illustrations in the book before starting your picture. Think about what colours the artist has used, and how the artist shows water and movement. Try to include some of these things in your own artwork.
- 13) Visit a seal colony or a local wildlife park or zoo to look at the seals. If you are unable to do so, find live footage of seals online.
- 14) Research seals. Some questions to answer about seals are:
  - Where do they live?
  - What do they eat?
  - What eats them?
  - How many types of seal are there, and what are the types?
- 15) As a class make a wave and water mural on A3 paper taped together for your classroom wall. On your mural retell the two stories found in *Room on our Rock*.
- 16) Write a haiku poem about the seals in the story.