

THE OTHER BEARS

MICHAEL THOMPSON

THEMES: ACCEPTANCE, TOLERANCE,
MULTICULTURALISM

YEAR LEVELS: KINDERGARTEN TO EARLY PRIMARY

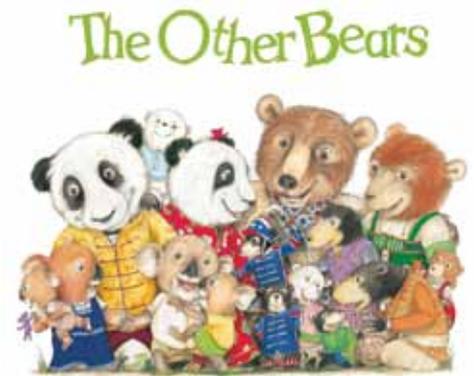
CROSS CURRICULUM: ASIA AND AUSTRALIA'S
ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA

RECOMMENDED BY:

'A fun tale about tolerance and acceptance.' *Nurture Magazine*

'Thompson has created a timely tale of love and acceptance, without undue moralising.' *Child Magazines*

'The message here suggests that it is perhaps through the young that the fear of differences can be overcome. What do you think? Highly recommended.' *Reading Time*



written & illustrated by Michael Thompson

ABOUT THE BOOK

Mother and Father Koala are suspicious of the OTHER bears. They don't like the pandas and they don't trust the polars. The black bears are noisy and the brown bears have big teeth. But all their grumpiness melts away, watching the littlest bears at play.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael has drawn pictures for as long as he can remember. His Grade 2 teacher showed him how to make a picture book and he has been thinking about them (and collecting them) on and off ever since. His parents still have his first book, *How the Rabbit got its Long Ears*, hidden away somewhere (where it should stay!).

FROM THE AUTHOR

Michael says: 'I wrote *The Other Bears* for young children with the aim of celebrating the diversity amongst different cultural groups in Australia whilst highlighting the things we all have in common. In a multicultural country we are blessed with food, clothing, music and stories from around the world and have an opportunity to learn from other cultural groups. Immigration has played a large role in defining Australia's history and *The Other Bears* celebrates this heritage while challenging our ongoing response to new families that come to live in our country.'



STUDY NOTES

Koalas

Koalas are often called koala bears, but they are not true bears.

- What are koalas?
- Why are they often called bears?
- As a class, make a list of everything you know about koalas.
- Research koalas on the internet or in the library. Where do they live? What do they eat?
- How big are they?
- Compare your research with the list you made earlier. How accurate was your list?

Marsupials

- Make a list of marsupials.
- What makes marsupials different from other mammals?
- Form groups of two or three and choose a marsupial to research. Present your findings to the class as a poster or talk.
- Rewrite the story using a marsupial and another group of mammals, eg. a quokka and different rodents. Does this change the story? How/why?

Bears

In the story there are five true bears depicted.

- What are they? Look at the front endpaper. Find each of the bears and their proper names.
- How many true bears are there in the world? Look at the back endpaper.
- Why do you think Michael Thompson chose to include the other true bears here? Why do you think he didn't include them in the story? Write and illustrate new pages for the book to include one of the missing bears in the story.

Form groups of two or three and choose a bear to research.

- What do they look like? How big are they? Where do they live? What do they eat? Are they endangered?
- Present your findings to the class as a poster or talk.

Bears are a popular choice for children's picture books. Look through the library and see how many picture books you can find with bears — there are hundreds!

- What is your favourite bear story?
- Why do you think there are so many stories about bears? Do you think illustrators choose bears because they can be humanized without being human?
- Why do you think Michael Thompson chose bears for his story, not people?
- Do the bears in this story behave like bears or people?

Throughout the book the little bears carry and exchange teddies.

- Can you follow the exchange of teddies from beginning to end? Can you find the extra teddy in the last double page spread?
- Teddy bears are very popular. When and where did teddy bears first appear? Why are they called 'teddy bears'?
- Bring your favourite teddy to school and hold a teddy bears' picnic. Use the teddies to re-enact the story.

Migration

The 'other bears' arrive, but where do they come from? See if you can guess where each bear family might be from.

- What gives you clues? Check your answers against the habitats for each bear listed in the endpapers.
- On a world map locate the bears' habitats.

Australia's population is made up of people from many different countries.

- Find out where the students in your class were born.
- What percentage of the class was born in Australia?
- What other countries do students and/or their parents come from? How much do you know about those countries — eg. geographical location, languages spoken, food and culture?
- Why do you think people move from one country to another? Make a list of all the reasons you can think of.

Most countries have immigration laws that control the movement of people into their country.

- Why do you think this is so?
- Do you think people should be able to live wherever they want to? Why/why not?.

Prejudice and ignorance

- Why do Mother and Father Koala react to the other bears so negatively at first?
- What makes them change their minds?
- Why do you think the little koalas are more accepting of the other bears?

People are often afraid of what they don't know.

- When you meet someone new, how do you feel?
- If the new person looks different to you and speaks differently, too, does that change the way you feel towards them?
- Do you think adults and children react the same way to new people?
- Have you ever met someone who assumed things about you before they got to know you? How did that make you feel?

What makes people people?

- Make a list of all the things people have in common, eg, physiology, emotions, etc.
- Make a list of all the things that can be different, e.g. beliefs, ideas, language, skin colour, etc.
- Choose a partner. Make a list together of the things you have in common, and the things that are different.
- Discuss as a class whether the things people share are more or less important than the things they don't.

Point of view

The story is told from the point of view of the koalas.

- How might it be different if it was told from the point of view of the 'other bears'?

Choose one of the other bears and re-write the story from their point of view.

- What might their impressions be? What would they find different or strange about Australia? How would they feel about the koalas?
- Write a postcard home from your bear.

Language use

Michael Thompson has chosen lots of different verbs to describe the way the koalas talk: e.g. grumbled, griped, grinned.

- Why do you think he has done this?
- Read a couple of pages changing the different talking verbs to 'said'. How does this change the way the book works?
- Try substituting the talking verbs in the story with others, giving the parents positive verbs and the children negative verbs. How does this change the story?

Illustrations

- What medium do you think Michael Thompson used to create the pictures? Check your answer against the Illustration medium note on the imprint page (at the end of the book).
- How much of the story is told in the illustrations? Would the story work just as well with different illustrations?
- Choose a spread from the book and re-illustrate it yourself using a different medium..

Write to Michael Thompson and tell him what you liked/didn't like about his book. Tell him how it made you feel or what it made you think about. Send your letter to Michael Thompson c/o Fremantle Press, PO Box 158, North Fremantle WA 6159 or admin@fremantlepress.com.au.



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