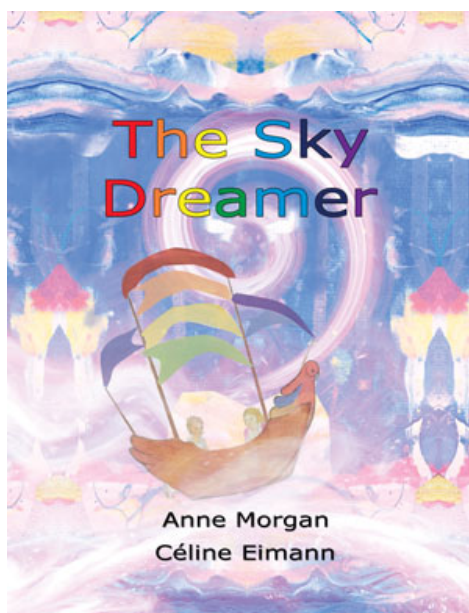


THE SKY DREAMER

Teachers' notes for the primary school classroom



The Sky Dreamer is the story a young boy's journey through grief after his sister dies of a childhood illness. It is a fantasy picture book about childhood bereavement, imagination, courage, resilience and hope.

Before commencing a set of classroom activities based around *The Sky Dreamer*, we recommend that you check whether any children in the class are grieving the loss of a friend, a relative, an acquaintance or a pet. If this is the case, please consult the [Notes on using The Sky Dreamer with Bereaved Children](#) at the end of these general notes.

READ THE SKY DREAMER ALOUD TO YOUR CLASS.

Some questions to ask:

- Have you ever had a dream, like Liam's, which seems more real than your life?
- Why do you think Liam's world turns grey after Cassie dies?
- Why doesn't Cassie help Liam steer *The Sky Dreamer*?
- What does Liam need to do to bring colour back into his life?
- Why do you think Cassie makes Liam a rainbow cloak for his birthday present?
- What do you think it would feel like to wear Liam's rainbow cloak?

If children in the class know someone who has died, or if they have had a pet that has died, ask,

- How did you feel when that happened?
- Did you do anything special to help remember that person or pet?

The Sky Dreamer is not just a story about a young boy whose sister dies. In this book we travel on a journey with Liam through the night sky. We see and feel his sadness, and how he learns to take control of his life, and to see beauty in the world again.

Tell the children that everybody hurts sometimes.

- Has there been a time when you have felt very sad?
- What cheered you up?
- What things do you like best about this world we live in?
- What would you do if one of your friends lost a person or pet that he or she really loved?
- Is it important to remember people who have died? Why?

Activities

Write about the things you love best about this world we live in.

Write about things that have cheered you up when you have been sad.

Write about a person or a pet who has died.

Write about a dream you have had.

Draw yourself wearing a rainbow cloak to brighten your life.

Astronomy

Liam sails the Sky Dreamer through our Solar System, and on through a huge galaxy called the Milky Way. Explain about planets in the Solar System, galaxies, comets and black holes.

- What is a black hole?
- What is a giant white star?
- What is a red dwarf planet?
- How can a comet have a tail as long as a year?

Children can research and present projects on the Milky Way and present them to the class.

Art and Craft

The illustrations in this book were made with a wide range of media, such as collage, painting and drawing. They were then finalised digitally, to reuse elements like backgrounds and create effect like lightning or stars. Below are a few questions you could ask the class to open discussion about this creative process.

- What do you think of the illustrations in *The Sky Dreamer*?
- How do you think they were made? Are they drawings, paintings, collages etc.?

To assist, write all the ideas on the board.

The illustrations in this book are partially made with the help of a computer. This technique is called “digital art”.

- Have you ever used the computer to make art, or to do something else creative?

The illustrator says there is never a mistake in an artwork and that we should “never ever” use an eraser, but should play with what we think is a mistake and make it part of the final piece.

- What do you think of this idea? Do you use the eraser a lot when you draw?
- Do you know what the term “mixed media” means? (Teacher to explain.)
- Do you ever use “mixed media” in your drawings?

The illustrations in *The Sky Dreamer* have been made using “mixed media”. Here is a list of the different media the illustrator used (you can use the images in the following pages to guide you):

- Collage with different sorts of paper. Can you see where?
- Painting. Can you see where?
- Colouring with crayons. Can you see where?
- Drawing. Can you see where?
- Collage. Can you see where?
- Computer software. Can you see where?

collage

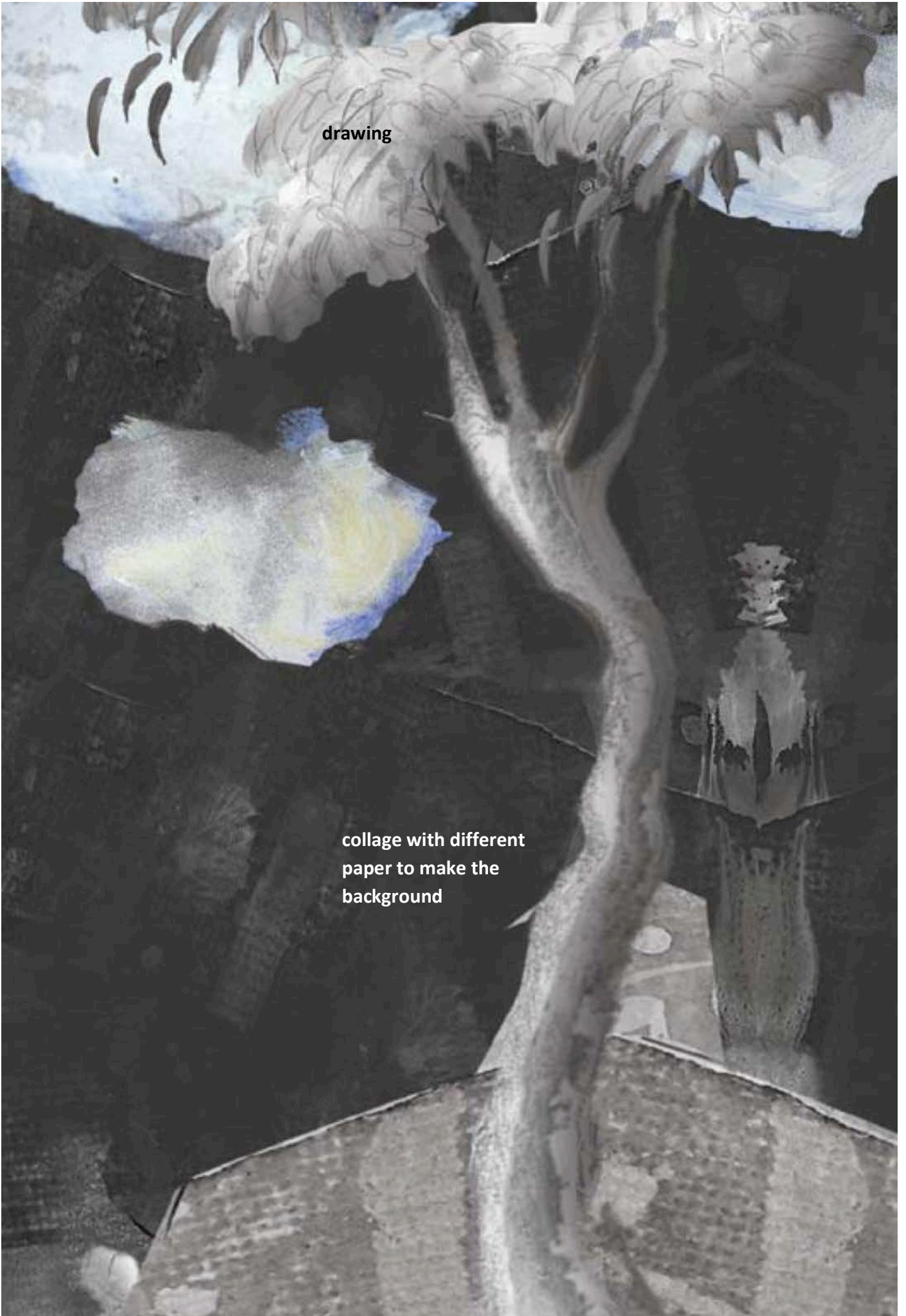
digital

crayons

painting

drawing





drawing

**collage with different
paper to make the
background**

- How do you think a flying boat would look? The illustrator has chosen to draw the boat one way, but maybe you would have drawn a different sort of flying boat.
- Ask the children to think of different ways that a boat could fly, and to draw their own version of 'The Sky Dreamer'.
- Provide modelling clay or plasticine for the children and ask them to make a model of the *Sky Dreamer*. They can also make clay or plasticine people or pets, and put them in the boat.

Some children's books dealing with grief and/or childhood illness

Molly's Memory Jar, Norma Spaulding, New Frontier Press

Jenny Angel, Margaret Wild, ill. Anne Spudvilas, Penguin Books Australia

Badger's Parting Gifts, Picture Lions, Susan Varley

Old Pig, Jenny Wagner and Ron Brooks, Penguin Books

The Sound of the Sea, Jacqueline Harvey, ill. Wayne Crossett, Lothian Books

The Sad Book, Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake

Pearl Verses the World, Sally Murphy, Walker Books

Toppling, Sally Murphy, Walker Books

Non fiction

Mending Lucille, J. R. Poulter and Sarah Davis, Lothian Books

Children and Grief weblinks

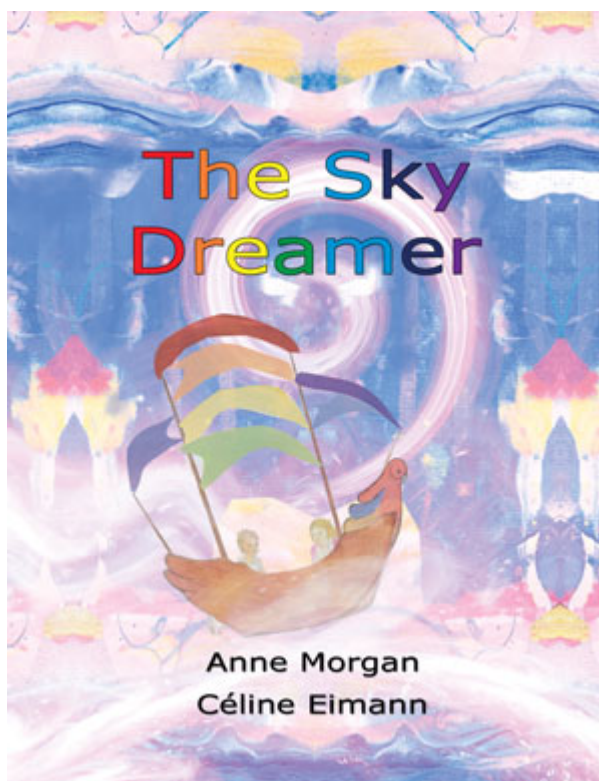
<http://education.qld.gov.au/library/resource/currtopics/grief-bk.html>

http://dying.lovetoknow.com/Children's_Books_Dealing_With_Death_and_Grieving

<http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailListBooks.asp?idBookLists=109>

<http://www.vsk.org.au/media/files/Our-Services/Resources/BooksonGriefandLoss.pdf>

NOTES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ON USING *THE SKY DREAMER* WITH GRIEVING CHILDREN



The death of a child is a particularly tragic event because we do not expect children or young people to die. Children in your class might believe that only old people die, so the death of a child may be a dreadful shock to them, and this might be their first experience of death.

If you have a grieving child or children in your class, it is important for you to understand that grief involves a variety of moods, and that different children will react to grief in different ways – some may react through tears, others through anger and aggression, others may withdraw into themselves. Some children might want to talk all the time about the person who has died, in order to keep that person ‘alive’. Most likely, grieving children will have all of these reactions at various times.

As a teacher of a bereaved child or children, you should be very sensitive to the emotional states of these children. Remember that healing after grief is a lifelong process, and you should not expect a child’s grief to magically vanish after a few months.

If a child or children in your class becomes bereaved, we recommend you visit the website of Compassionate Friends Victoria and read or download the *How can I help when a child dies?*

<http://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/Downloads/How%20Can%20I%20Help%20When%20a%20Child%20Dies.pdf>

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement also has information on their website on strategies for supporting grieving children.

http://www.grief.org.au/grief_and_bereavement_support/understanding_grief/supporting_children

Before commencing any classroom activities based around *The Sky Dreamer*, let the bereaved child first read this book. Discuss how they would feel if you read the book aloud to the class.

Ask the bereaved child if they would like the class to:

- Plant a tree in honour of the person who has died.
- Create a special place in the classroom which contains photographs and special objects to remind them of the person who has died.
- Suggest some other way of remembering the person who has died.
- If they would like to send Anne Morgan, the author of *The Sky Dreamer*, a message about their grief (<http://www.annemorgan.com.au/contact/>).

At the teacher's discretion, the teacher may introduce some or all of the activities suggested in *The Sky Dreamer classroom notes*.

Note: If a bereaved child is reluctant to have *The Sky Dreamer* read aloud in class, and to be involved in any activities based on this book, please respect his/her wishes.