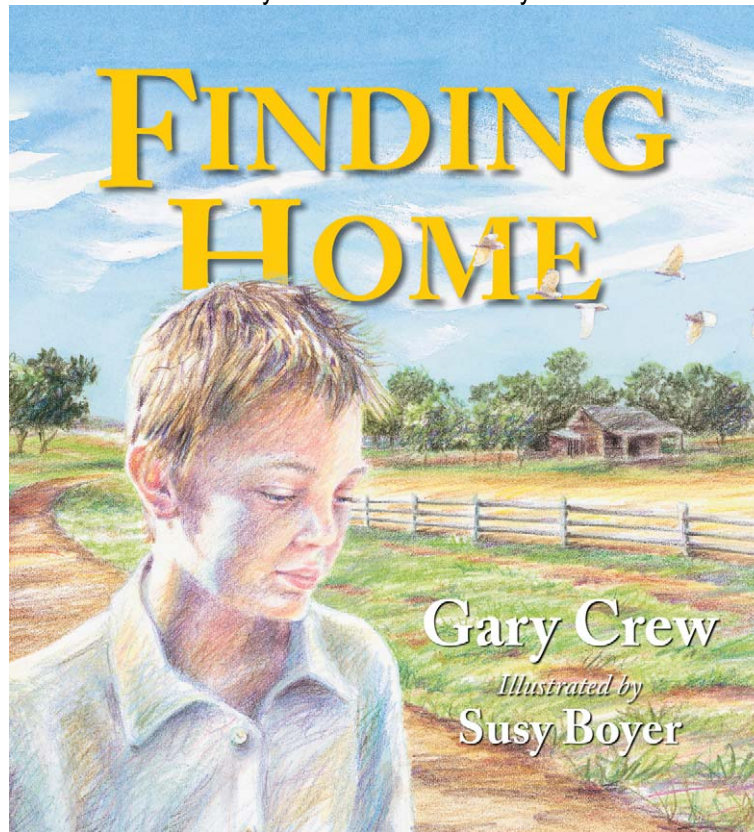


Finding Home
by
Gary Crew and Susan Boyer



Introduction

Finding Home is a wonderful book that will appeal to readers of all ages. Very young children will understand the story and be moved by the boy's plight. Older children will tune into the substantial subtext of the tale. It is not hard to imagine a Year 10 English class discussing the story in relation to Henry Lawson's short stories. Children and adults alike will find themselves returning again and again to Susy Boyer's evocative illustrations.

This book has all kinds of possibilities for the classroom. The historical setting will fit easily into the SOSE curriculum. Likewise, the environmental message may be a starting point for a unit or discussion on habitat loss or sustainability. For the science classroom, there is an opportunity for the students to extend the boy's bird watching and his observations about the gum tree. Susy Boyer's pictures will prove inspiring to young artists and her website provides some discussion of her use of materials. The English teacher can use this well-paced economically written tale to show how writers build stories around ideas. It may also inspire some creative writing in the classroom.

And this is as a tale which should be read aloud and enjoyed. All of the curriculum areas mentioned above deal with narratives. Whether it is the migratory patterns of cockatoos or the journey of 19th Century settlers in Australia, *Finding Home* provides an excellent model of our oldest tradition, storytelling.

Before Reading:

1. The Title

Finding Home is a curious title. People find their way back to home or find the path home but the idea of 'finding' home suggests something different.

- What does the word home mean?
- Is it an actual place or an idea?
- How would someone 'find' a home?
- What does the word 'homeland' mean?
- Think of other terms associated with home, ie home game, home town, etc
- What does the phrase, 'home is where the heart is' mean?
- What does the word 'habitat' mean? How is it related to the idea of home?

2. The Cover

What does the cover suggest about the story? What questions does it raise?

3. Vocabulary

Look up the following words and phrases

- Colony, Colonists
- White Settlement
- Gum Tree
- Scholar
- Wheat
- Clearing Land
- Nuisance
- Harvest
- Dusk
- Ha'penny

4. Read the story

Comprehension Questions

1. Describe the land before white settlement.
2. How old was the gum?
3. What happened to the boy and his family in London?
4. How does the boy feel about their new home?
5. What does his father say?
6. What do they grow on the farm?
7. What does his mother say to the boy about the future?
8. Why does his mother want the tree chopped down?
9. What has the boy noticed about the tree?
10. What does the boy compare the birds to?
11. How does the boy know that the birds are sulphur-crested cockatoos?

12. Where did the boy get the book?
13. How did he pay for the book?
14. Why wasn't the boy in the field with his parents?
15. What does his father say about the birds?
16. Why hasn't his father seen the birds?
17. What is his mother's reaction?
18. Why does the boy want the cockatoos to go away?
19. What observations does the boy make about the cockatoos?
20. Describe the felling of the tree.
21. How do the birds react to the fallen tree? Why?
22. What happens to some of the birds circling the place where the tree stood?
23. What does the boy do at the end of the story?

Inference Questions:

1. How is the boy different from his parents?
2. Why does he walk with a cane?
3. Why does the book about birds make his parents so angry?
4. Why do they cut down the tree?
5. Why does the boy identify with the cockatoos?
6. Why does the boy leave his parents?

To Consider:

1. What point does the story make about white settlement in Australia?
2. This story is set in the 19th century but the ideas are still relevant. Why?
3. What is the difference between the boy's perception of the landscape to that of his parents?

KLA based Activities

Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE)

1. The boy and his family are not convicts. They have made a decision to move to Australia to build a new life. Research this type of settler in Australian and answer the following questions:
 - Who were these people?
 - Why did they leave England?
 - How did they get to Australia?
 - How did they acquire farmland?
 - What crops did they farm?
 - What hardships did they face?
 - How did they regard Australia?
2. Research the life of an individual 19th settler to Australia and create a poster display. You may want to include the following:
 - A map of where they settled
 - A family tree

- A timeline of the settler's life
- A drawing of the farm
- A list of crops

3. Your neighbourhood.

Your neighbourhood has a history that goes back much further than white settlement. What can you find out about that history? Consider the following:

- What did your neighbourhood look like?
- What aboriginal group lived in the area?
- What kind of animals roamed through the area?
- When was it first settled?
- Is there anything that hasn't changed?

English

1. Write a review of the book. Be sure to include the following:

- Information about the writer and illustrator
- A brief outline of the story
- A description of the illustrations
- The target readership
- Your opinion, supported with evidence

2. Creative response

Choose one of the following:

- A letter from the boy to a friend in London describing what has happened to him in Australia
- A letter from the boy to his parents explaining why he left the farm
- A letter from the parents to the boy asking him to come home

Or

- A story about the family that explains why they came to Australia
- A story about the boy's adventures after he leaves the farm

3. The film of the book

In small groups, put together a proposal for a film version of *Finding Home*. Include the following:

- A brief outline of the story – you may want to start the story in England and finish with more information about the boy after he leaves the farm
- A storyboard to show how you will film the story
- Suggestions for casting. Who will play the various parts?

- Suggestions for a soundtrack. What songs could be featured?
- A poster advertising the film

Propose the film to your classmates in a presentation.

4. Read 'The Drover's Wife' by Henry Lawson. What do the stories have in common? What are the differences?

[to be added to the 'English' section]

5. Gary Crew

Gary Crew has written many books including novels for young people and illustrated books like *Finding Home*. In an interview a few years ago, he said that, 'History is not a narrative. History is an investigation of things.' His point is that writing history is not simply the recording of dates and facts. To write properly about the past is to investigate or explore the ideas that shaped the various periods in history. *Finding Home* is a made up story but it also examines the period in which it is set.

- What do we learn about the settler period in Australian history from *Finding Home*?
- Historical Fiction is a popular genre. What are the advantages of learning about a historical period from a storybook?

Activity

What period of history are you interested in?

Gary Crew has said that he enjoys researching a particular historical event and writing a story about it. Research a historical event or period and use the information to write a short story. You can add pictures as well, if you like.

Science

Activities

1. Trees

In small groups, choose a tree on your school grounds. You are going to research and make observations about this tree and present your findings to your classmates in a presentation. The presentation will be conducted at the sight of the tree.

Research:

- The type of tree. Is it native or introduced? What group of trees does it belong to? What characteristics are particular to this type of tree?
- How old is your tree?
- Is it a healthy tree? How do you know?

Observe:

- What birds use this tree? Do they nest in the tree?
- Do any other animals or insects use this tree?
- What other functions does the tree fulfil?
- Why is the tree important to the schoolyard/neighbourhood?

2. Birdwatching

Birdwatching is a popular activity all over the world. Birdwatchers are also called 'twitchers'. There are many guides to local birds available. For one week you are going to become a birdwatcher. Either at home or at a local park, observe the bird life. Make notes on size, colour, markings, and habits. Make a rough sketch of the bird. Use a field guide to determine which birds are most common. Research one type of bird you have observed and present your findings to your class. You may spot something rare!

3. Extinction and Natural Habitat

White settlement brought many changes to Australia. The destruction of natural habitats was disastrous for many native species. Research an animal or reptile that has become extinct in the last 150 years and write up a report describing the process of extinction.

Art

1. Research Susy Boyer, the illustrator of *Finding Home*. What other books has she illustrated? Check out her website – <http://susyboyer.com>
2. What materials were used to produce the illustrations in the book?
3. Look at the pictures without reading the text. Is the story that they tell the same? What is emphasised in the pictures? How does Boyer build the characters and the ideas of the story in the illustrations?
4. What colours does Boyer use? What is the effect of those colours?

Activity

On Susy Boyer's website, she says, 'The subject matter in my work is varied as I still like to draw and paint the many ideas and silly thoughts that course through my head.'

On a piece of paper, write down the first ten things that come into your head.

She also says, 'I work mainly with pastel, watercolour and coloured pencil in my illustration work.' Use one or more these to produce a picture based on one of the ten things on your list.

NOTES – Tony Thompson

Tony Thompson is a Melbourne based teacher and author. He has taught English to high school students in Japan, Brunei, Cambodia, and Carlton. He is currently

teaching at Victoria University in Footscray. His articles have appeared in *The Age* and *The Australian* and he has appeared on Radio National's Lingua Franca program. His first book, *Shakespeare: The Most Famous Man in London* was published by Black Dog Books in 2009.