

Teacher's Notes for Jacaranda Magic

by Dannika Patterson & Megan Forward

AT A GLANCE

Story: More than a joyful picture book that celebrates the power of imagination, *Jacaranda Magic* is a dynamic tool to help educators explore the value of boredom and encourage unstructured outdoor play in children, aged 4-9 years.

Use in the curriculum: *Jacaranda Magic* can be used to address the Australian Curriculum's General Capabilities of Literacy, Numeracy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Cultural Diversity, Environmental Awareness, Visual Arts, English and Health and Physical Education. It can be most widely applied to key learning areas from Foundation Year through Year 4.

Themes:

- The power of imagination
- The value of boredom
- Outdoor play and links to health
- Movement and coordination
- Environmental Awareness and Urban Sustainability – the importance of preserving yards and green areas in the suburbs
- Change (emotional and physical awareness)
- Cultural Diversity

Literary devices:

- Rhyme
- Rhythm / Meter
- Alliteration
- Assonance
- Sentence structure
- Dialogue

Early Childhood and Primary School educators can use *Jacaranda Magic* as a tool to...

- Explore the value and importance of boredom to stimulate wild imagination, creativity, problem solving and experimentation
- Help encourage unstructured and imaginative outdoor play which assists in developing children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional skills
- Demonstrate the joy of movement, coordination, testing physical limits, and the possibilities that nature offers when playing with objects in their natural settings
- Encourage class and/or family members to talk of their experiences of childhood play surrounded by nature without the reliance on technology to entertain them
- Encourage environmental awareness in children as a key part of the new Australian Curriculum in Schools

- Encourage emotional awareness: recognising and naming emotions.

About the Author: Dannika Patterson is a freelance writer and children’s author with degrees in Child Psychology and Journalism. She loves writing rich stories for children that engage, delight and linger. Turning her talents from an international career creating content for businesses, *Jacaranda Magic* is her debut picture book. Dannika lives in the bayside suburb of Manly in Brisbane with her husband and two young children. When she isn’t busy writing stories for children, her favourite things to do include reading books and going on outdoor adventures with her family.



About the Illustrator: Megan Forward is an author, illustrator and artist with a Bachelor of Visual Arts and a Graduate Diploma in Teaching specialising in Visual Art and English. As a young girl she dreamed of one day creating picture books and is thrilled to be combining this dream with a love of the natural world and a desire to share this love with children. Megan’s two books *A Patch from Scratch* (published by Penguin Random House 2016) and *All I Want for Christmas is Rain* (written by Cori Brooke published by New Frontier 2016) were both shortlisted for the *Children’s Book Council Awards 2017* for the *Crichton Award* and *Younger Readers Award* respectively. *Jacaranda Magic* and *Emily Green’s Garden* are both due for publication in 2018. Megan works out of her studio in Manly, Brisbane, where she lives with her husband, two boys, her chooks, native Pacific Blue Eye fish, Striped Marsh frogs and whatever other creatures happen to be passing through.



IN MORE DETAIL

Story Inspiration – from the Author

My inspiration for *Jacaranda Magic* came from a mixture of memories from my own childhood and observations from the childhood that my young children are currently experiencing.

For the first 10 years of my life, I grew up in a long suburban street that had a cul-de-sac at both ends. From each end, bushland tracks led to pinecone forests filled with creeks to explore, mulberry trees to stain hands and fill tummies and the promise of endless outdoor adventures. My favourite place to be was up in the branches of the glorious jacaranda tree in my grandmother's unfenced garden. There were about 18 children who lived in my street, ranging in ages and ethnic backgrounds, who used to run 'wild' together up and down the street and in the bushland that surrounded it. There was always someone to play with and so many choices of things to do ... but so often we would while away hours telling each other there was 'nothing to do' or that we were 'bored'. We would spend hours discussing the things we could do (or why we couldn't), and more often than not the resolution of these lengthy debates on what to play was resolved by inspiration from nature ... and our wild imaginations, which are central themes in this story.

The environment I grew up in played a vital part in my early development. In the increasingly structured, over-scheduled and technology-driven world children are growing up in today, a trend is emerging from research in early childhood education in Australia indicating that young children are struggling to develop key creative, imaginative and gross motor skills due to diminishing access to unstructured play outdoors.

I wrote *Jacaranda Magic* not only for children to enjoy as an uplifting picture book in itself, but also to encourage children in the critical 4-9 year old age group to get outside and discover all the possibilities that nature offers when playing with objects in their natural settings, using the limitless power of their imaginations. I hope this story inspires today's children to get outdoors and exercise their wonderful imaginations, to feel boundless and free in their play, wherever they are growing up and whoever their playmates are. They – as well as their families and wider communities – will reap the physical, emotional, cognitive and social benefits of more time spent in unstructured outdoor play.

The greatest compliment I could imagine receiving for this work would be a photograph of children reading (or being read) this book outdoors, enjoying my two favourite things – nature and literature – simultaneously – even up, under or beside a jacaranda tree! If you treat the children in your care to an outdoor reading adventure, please feel free to share a photo (after gaining appropriate permissions) with the hash tag #jacarandamagic or share with me directly – dannikapatterson@gmail.com. I love hearing how children respond to my stories and welcome feedback on anything further I can do support their love of reading, the outdoors and wildly imaginative play.

Dannika Patterson – Author

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From the Illustrator

It was a lovely treat and a privilege to illustrate Dannika’s delightful *Jacaranda Magic*, as connecting children to nature and raising their environmental awareness is a passion of mine. I too have many childhood memories of being out in the yard and up in trees in our neighbourhood in Brisbane. And later, the association between university exams and the Jacaranda trees in bloom was a shared experience for myself and fellow students. I had lots of fun walking the neighbourhood with my boys, who were happy to test their own climbing skills as research for the illustrations in *Jacaranda Magic*. The rough texture of the bark, the beautiful winding branches and of course, the sublime colours of the petals were a pleasure to experiment with in paint. And sourcing children to climb and pose and play to depict them in the story was lots of fun. I look forward to engaging child audiences to read and respond to *Jacaranda Magic*, and create some interesting *Jacaranda* inspired art along the way.

Megan Forward – illustrator

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Linking to the Australian Curriculum

Most discussion points below incorporate ACELY1646 (F), ACELY1656 (1), ACELY1666 (2), ACELY1676 (3) when addressed as a group. Others support specific skill development that can be applied to learning areas including; critical and creative thinking, interpreting, analysing, evaluating, creating literature, examining literature, responding to literature, communicating, language for interaction, drama, visual arts and word knowledge.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Before Reading

1. Look at the front cover of *Jacaranda Magic* and ask: What do you think this story might be about? What sort of story do you expect? What clues to the title and illustrations give you?
2. What are the children doing? What makes you think that?
3. Do you think the fairies and mermaids are real or imaginary? What makes you think that?
4. Do you know what a ‘jacaranda’ is?
5. What do you think might be ‘magic’ in this story?

6. Do a 'walk through' the book, turning the pages and taking a look at the pictures without reading the words. What clues do the illustrations give you about the story?

After Reading

1. Is this story imaginative (pretend) or informative (real)? How do you know?
Which parts are real and which are imagined?
 - Are jacaranda trees real?
 - Do jacaranda trees have purple flowers?
 - Can children climb trees?
 - Do jacaranda trees turn into rockets?

Discuss some examples of what the book might tell us if it were more informative rather than imaginative. Hint: what are some facts you know about trees?

2. Look at the first illustration and the last illustration in the book.
Do you think the children feel the same at the beginning of the story and the end?
Discuss what happened to change the way they feel.

3. Look at some of the other illustrations in the book, where Will, Charlotte, Priya, Lizzie and Finn are using their imaginations.

Discuss what the character/s may be feeling as they engage in various scenes of imaginative play, encouraging children to name these emotions.

4. Each child in the story was able to imagine the jacaranda tree and flowers being or becoming different things.

Could their friends see what they were imagining?

Is imagination the same for everyone or different?

Discuss the acceptance of other people's ideas and points of view.

5. Which of the imaginary scenes/games in the book would you most like to join in and play? Would you release genies from their bottles, fly a rocket to space, captain a ship, climb a dragon's neck to have tea in a marshmallow cave ... or something else?

Discuss what makes an imaginary game fun and if there are any rules or limitations to imagination.

6. The children in the book are outside, having fun in nature.

Where is your favourite place to spend time outside? Doing what? With who?

Discuss some of the things you can do/see/experience spending time outside in nature that you can't do indoors?

7. What did you like about the story? What didn't you like about it?

Discuss how you would you describe this book to a friend (who hasn't read it yet).

8. How do you think rhyme contributes to the mood of this story? Do you enjoy listening to / reading stories written in rhyme?

Discuss why.

ACTIVITIES

1. Literacy:

- In the book, how do we know when one of the children is speaking?
- The author describes the five friends in the story 'feeling bored on a hot sticky day'. Tell/write a story about how you feel today, including something about your environment. E.g. 'One student feeling excited on a windy winter day.'
- Rhyme awareness: ask students to point out the rhyming words on each page. Where are they placed? Are they at the beginning, middle or end of the sentences?
- Ask students to think of their favourite natural object (a tree, the ocean, the stars, etc). Then ask students to brainstorm words that rhyme with the object they have thought of. Discuss: might this kind of brainstorming activity be something that the author did to help her come up with the rhyming words that appear throughout this book?
- Rhythm awareness: using a pencil, a ruler or your hands, choose a page in the book and tap to count the beats in each line. Are there the same number of beats in each line or different?
- Vocabulary knowledge: ask students to name/list synonyms for specific words used in the story: RESTLESS, BORED, FREE, FAVOURITE, EXPLORE.

2. Visual literacy:

- Students cut random shapes out of purple, green and brown-coloured paper to represent the various parts of a jacaranda tree. Ask them then to assemble the shapes into a picture to tell a story about what they imagine the tree could become, using interconnecting drawing if necessary.
- Look at the first and last illustration spreads in the book. Both illustrations show five children and a jacaranda tree but they are not the same. Discuss/make a list of the differences you see when comparing these two illustrations.
- Look at the children on the front cover of the book. Describe how they are similar to each other. Describe how they are different to each other. Which character do you think you might have something in common with?
Ask students to draw a picture of themselves joining in this scene.

3. Numeracy:

- How many children are under the tree on page 2/3?
- How many flowers are on the jacaranda tree? How could you count them? Are there too many to count? Count up in denominations: ten, one hundred, one thousand, etc. How far can you go?

4. Drama:

- Pick a scene in the book to recreate in the classroom or in an appropriate outdoor

environment. Ask students to arrange physical objects in the classroom or gathered from the natural outdoor environment as props to create the scene. Ask children to act out the scene. What would they say? What would they do? What problems may they need to solve?

5. Environment:

- Ask students to take a walk outdoors and to collect one natural object that interests them (fallen leaves, stones, flowers, etc). Ask them to use their imaginations to tell a story about what the object they collected could turn into or become.

- A treasure hunt for texture: in groups or individually, ask students to explore an accessible natural environment and collect (or make a list of) all the different textures found in nature (e.g. rough bark, soft petals, hard rocks, smooth leaves, spikey grass, gritty sand, slimy seaweed).

- Research/science: Do jacaranda trees have green leaves and purple flowers (as shown in the book) throughout the year? Are jacarandas an evergreen or deciduous tree? What time of year do jacaranda trees bloom? Can this be influenced by the climate ... temperature, rainfall, etc?

- What makes a good climbing tree? A tall skinny trunk? Pretty flowers? Low wide branches? Ask students to identify good/not good and safe/unsafe trees to climb during a walk outside or by showing pictures or various types of trees with varying attributes (e.g. palms, eucalypt, frangipani, figs, jacarandas).

Ask students if they have a favourite climbing tree? Do they like to climb trees? What else are trees good for? How do we respect them when we are playing in, under or near them?