

Our Baby
Margaret Wild / Karen Blair
TEACHERS' NOTES
By Janet McLean

Title *Our Baby*
Author Margaret Wild
Illustrator Karen Blair

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author Margaret Wild was born in South Africa and came to live in Australia in 1972. She worked as a journalist, and then for 16 years as a children's book editor, writing only in small snatches, or at night when she had the energy. She now writes full-time. Margaret is the author of many popular children's books, including *Fox* (illustrated by Ron Brooks), *The Pocket Dogs* (illustrated by Stephen Michael King), *Little Humpty* (illustrated by Ann James) and *Jinx*, a story for older readers. Margaret's books have received many awards over the years including the CBCA 2005 Honour Book, *Seven More Sleeps* (illustrated by Donna Rawlins and published by Working Title Press), the CBCA 2001 Picture Book of the Year, *Fox*, and the CBCA 2012 Honour Book, *Dream of the Thylacine* (illustrated by Ron Brooks). Her recent publication, *The Treasure Box*, illustrated by Freya Blackwood, was shortlisted for the 2014 CBCA Picture Book of the Year.

"As a grandparent (and a friend of other grandparents), my life is once again full of babies. It's such a pleasure to watch them growing, changing and developing in all sorts of different families. I'm very lucky that Karen Blair agreed to illustrate this story. Her pictures are just right - warm, funny and embracing".

Margaret Wild

Illustrator Karen Blair is an award-winning author and illustrator of children's picture books. She grew up in Perth, Western Australia. She made her first picture book when she was nine for a Year 5 project, and by the time she was in her 20s and living in the UK, she knew it was her dream to be a children's book illustrator. She lives in Fremantle with her husband, daughter and cat, where she works from her studio. She is the author and illustrator of *Baby Beats* and *Baby Animal Farm* and the illustrator of the 2013 CBCA Honour Book *With Nan*, written by Tania Cox, and the 2014 CBCA shortlisted title, *Granny Grommet and Me* by Dianne Wolfer. Her most recent publication is *Hello From Nowhere*, written by Raewyn Caisley.

"I was so thrilled to be asked to illustrate Margaret Wild's *Our Baby*. My first reaction was "yes!" let's celebrate diversity - of babies and of families - and all the fun and cheekiness of the everyday details of family life with a baby. Some of the families are inspired by real families, others are from my imagination. *Our Baby* was such a fun book to illustrate".

Karen Blair

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SYNOPSIS This warm and funny book told through the eyes of an older sister looks at the richness and diversity of family life today, and celebrates the many different babies who are so special to their families. Babies come in all shapes and sizes, and from all sorts of families. Every one of them is different, and every one of them is special.

WRITING This is a great book for parents, grandparents and carers to share with babies, toddlers and older children. Margaret Wild's text is warm and engaging. The story begins simply with the introduction of the characters:

*Some babies have a mum and a dad.
Some babies have a mum,
and a dad who lives elsewhere.
Some babies have two mums.
Or two dads.
Our baby has a mum and a dad and a big sister – me!*



After this, the words '*Some babies...*' become a catchphrase that leads from one episode to another in the babies' day, ending gently with sleep time. The episodes include: How babies look - ***Some babies*** have ... *milky mouths, little ears, snotty noses,...*; Where babies go...; How they move around...; How they play...; How they eat, and... How they sleep - ***Some babies*** sleep in ... *cots, prams, strollers, car seats, backpacks, or slings.*

Margaret Wild uses playful, rhythmic phrases and sentences that will evoke for adult readers memories of the delights, and frustrations of living with a baby, and add to the enjoyment of sharing the book with young children.

Some babies... squish bananas, spit out pumpkin, or try to feed themselves...
Our baby has a big bald head. 'Gorgeous!' says Grandpa...
Some babies crawl with their bottoms in the air, or do a wibbly- wobbly dance...
Some babies like... reading books, eating books, dropping things in the toilet.

ILLUSTRATIONS Karen Blair's illustrations delightfully capture the essence of Margaret Wild's text. The cast of characters is established in the first five pages. Each family then features in each of the subsequent episodes. The illustrations provide a rich layer of meaning to the straightforward, matter-of-fact voice of the child narrator. They create a loose timeframe through a day, from one family's sleepy 'getting up' routine, to the big sister and her baby peacefully asleep side-by-side, with some joyful, messy and quiet experiences in between.

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As there is no specific setting the drawings focus on the characters,- the way they look, what they are doing, the way they interact with each other.

"It was a nice challenge to have no background and I had to think very carefully about where the characters and text would be placed."

Karen Blair

The structure of the layout adds to the predictability of the story, with a double page of vignettes featuring the other families followed by a double page spread focusing on the narrator and her family

"I loved the little details Margaret included that I could use to add to a baby's features when creating the characters, like "tufty hair" and "snotty noses" and the observations about how messy dinner time is, how their discoveries about the world can end up being a bit naughty".

Karen Blair



"At the heart of the book there is both action and warmth. So I tried to capture the action with loose pencil lines, using a variety of graphite pencils from HB for sketchy lines to 8B for strong, dark lines. I tried to capture the warmth of Margaret's text using a combination of watercolour for skin and hair, and gouache (which is like a thicker watercolour paint) for clothes to create a bright colour scheme with lots of patterns."

Karen Blair

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- *Our Baby* is a book for parents, grandparents and extended family to share with their babies, toddlers, preschool and older children. It is also a perfect book to be read in childcare centres, preschools, and kindergarten/prep classes.
- Let families know about *Our Baby*. Add it to your borrowing library.

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- Use and adapt some of the following suggestions / activities, and add more of your own when reading with the young children in your centre.
 - This is a great book to use with a baby, a toddler or child sitting on your knee, or snuggled up close beside you.
 - Read each phrase / sentence with feeling, and without hurrying – allowing time for the baby / toddler / child to listen to the words and look at the pictures
 - Don't be surprised if the child wants to move on to a new page (or to go back to an earlier page). It doesn't take long for a child (even a very young child) to choose a favourite page. Let them return to the place they want to explore as often as they wish.
 - Share your own reactions with the child/ren you are reading with. *"Oh no! Look! The baby with the dandelion hair is painting on the wall. What will Mama say?"*
 - Play word and sound games with the child/ren. Repeat the words that they pick up from you as you are reading. Children who are just beginning to talk will want to repeat words that appeal to them. Playfully repeat words with each other: *'tuf-ty – 'tuf-ty', 'dand-e-lion – 'dand-e-lion', 'snotty noses ooh!' - 'snotty noses ooh!' 'Gorr-ge-ous' – 'Gorr-ge-ous'*
 - Talk with the child/ren about what is happening in the book. Use statements, questions, always respond to what the child/ren are saying about the story and the pictures, repeat their words back to them. *"Do you think that baby likes pumpkin? Look at his/her (you can decide which) face. What do you think (she) is saying – "Yuk"?"*
 - Draw the child/ren's attention to the expressions on the children's faces. *"Is that baby happy?" That baby's reading a book. But what is that baby doing?"*
 - Read the book over and over. You can act out the story as you go along, using voice, actions and facial expressions
 - As the child/ren become familiar with the story they will begin reading along, anticipating the words. The child will begin to connect the words with a particular picture.
 - Make a photo gallery or album of the children and their families. Include photos of what happens inside your centre, preschool or school; as well as photos of the child/ren with family – who they are, where do they go, what games do they play, what and how do they eat, and sleep?
- Simply enjoy reading this delightful book with a baby, toddler or preschooler on you knee.
- You can find out more about Margaret Wild and Karen Blair and other books they have written and / or illustrated by going to the Internet. Google Margaret Wild and you will find many sites to visit. Visit Karen Blair's website here <http://www.karenblair.com.au>