



Teachers' Notes

Potato Music

Written by Christina Booth

Illustrated by Pete Groves

OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Picture Book
Title	Potato Music
Author	Christina Booth
Illustrator	Pete Groves
Extent	32 pp
Age	4+
Australian RRP	\$26.99
Binding	Hardback
ISBN	978 1 86291 788 0

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About the Story

The family life of Mama, Papa and their little girl revolves around music. Mama plays her piano every night after dinner, and music fills the family's hearts and lives. As the war encroaches from outside, the music must compete with the sound of marching in the streets and the sound of planes in the sky. As times grow hard, there is less dinner and more music. Mama and Papa become sadder and more worried until finally their little girl wakes up to find that the piano itself has gone, gone during the night and replaced by a bag of potatoes. Undaunted, Mama and Papa still dream of their music, which, once in their hearts, can never be taken away, just as their love for each other can never be taken away.

About the Author

Tasmanian author/illustrator Christina Booth has been drawing and writing for as long as she can remember. Christina grew up on Tasmania's east coast surrounded by state reserves, sand dunes and beaches. This fostered a deep appreciation of the unique textures and colours, native flora and fauna that can only be found in this part of the world. As an artist, Christina tells stories visually and as an author combines her illustrations with words to fill the senses, inspired by her surroundings. Christina is passionate about art being accessible to all. As an author/illustrator she believes that a most wonderful way to learn about the world is through quality picture books and inspiring stories that make us think and challenge us to take the next step forward. Through her love of books and art, Christina enjoys sharing her enthusiasm with kids and adults alike. *Potato Music* is Christina's 13th children's book, her third as author.

Author Inspiration

'The story of *Potato Music* came about from an old piano stool we had in our house. When I was a child I asked my mother why we had a piano stool if we didn't have a piano. All she could tell me was that the piano was swapped for a bag of potatoes in the Second World War. I had an opportunity to talk to my grandfather (Opa) about this when I decided to write the story. He had won some money and had purchased his new bride her beloved piano and stool as a gift. In 1944 in Amsterdam, Holland they had a little girl and a baby on the way. Most of the country starved during what was known as the Hunger Winter in 1943 and '44,

my family included. To save his family he sold the piano and bought much needed clothing for their winter baby and two sacks of potatoes from the black market. He had to carry them through the German soldiers to get them home. The black marketer who offered to help him carry the load ran off with and stole one of the sacks but he could not make a fuss because of the soldiers. He said it was the scariest moment of his life, he thought he would be shot.

They survived. The baby that was born was my mother. We still have the beautiful stool.'



About the Illustrations

The illustrator, Pete Groves, was born in Melbourne, where he completed a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design at Swinburne Institute of Technology. His work is represented in private collections in Australia, the USA, Japan and London, including a recent purchase for the BHP Billiton London Collection. He continues to exhibit in numerous successful solo and group exhibitions each year. Pete used acrylic paint on canvas paper for the illustrations in *Potato Music*. His technique involves building layers of paint to allow the texture on the layers to build up and present an intriguing, luminous effect. This fine-art technique is unusual in picture book art, but suits this timeless story very well. The figures, although rendered very simply, are nevertheless expressive of emotion, the poses of the characters and their 'body language' eloquent in conveying the story, which relies on a symbolic representation of the setting rather than a realistic one. For this particularly spare but meaningful text, the style is just right. This is Pete's first picture book.

Study Notes for Teachers

1. *Potato Music* is an ideal book for introducing concepts of war and the effects of a war on ordinary people as well as those involved directly.
 - *Potato Music* can be used to show how valuable it is to stay focused on the positive at times of hardship, and to understand the value of what is truly important. For older students it could inspire a discussion on the effects of war on those who are not directly involved but who live with the deprivations caused by war.
 - Students could find out from grandparents or from research, for example, what shortages and rationing meant to Australians during times of war. Find a list of rationed food from times of hardship and work out how you would use it to feed your family: What recipes would you use? What would you miss the most? What could you do to make sure your family didn't starve?
 - Survey family members and find out how they were affected by war (Second World War, Korean War, Vietnam War and how many family members were directly involved)
2. *Potato Music* can be used as a starting point for creative writing:
 - Imagine that your life has been changed suddenly by war. Write your own story of what is special in your life that helps you to keep your hopes and dreams alive.
 - Write a poem about how your feelings change during war, as someone watching it on the news and through the eyes of someone experiencing it first hand. What different emotions can you use to describe each point of view? How do these emotions differ and how are they similar? Can you create an artwork to show all these emotions in one picture?
3. If you liked *Potato Music*, write and tell Christina Booth/Pete Groves why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write

and ask about it! Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can send your letter to the following address:

Christina Booth/Pete Groves c/- Omnibus Books, 335 Unley Rd, Malvern SA 5061

For information about Christina's other books, visit her website:

www.christinabooth.com/