



Teachers' Notes

The Gift

Written by Penny Matthews

Illustrated by Martin Mckenna

Teachers' Notes by Madeline Holmes

OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Picture Book
Title	The Gift
Author	Penny Matthews
illustrator	Martin McKenna
Extent	32 pp
Age	4+
ISBN	978 1 86291 698 2 (hb)

Contents

About the Story..... 2

About the Author..... 2

About the Illustrator..... 2

Study Notes for Teachers..... 2

Teachers' Notes may be reproduced for use in school activities. They may not be redistributed for commercial sale or posted to other networks.

About the Story

It's Christmas time and a very plain bear is sitting high on a shelf in a toy shop. Next to him sits the smiling, velvety soft crocodile. Both are waiting for someone special to choose them. As they watch the other toys being taken from the shelf, the two friends fear they won't be in a new home by Christmas. In the spirit of the season, Brown Bear gives his friend a very special gift, one that may help the crocodile's wish come true.

This is a lovely tale for children about friendship and the gift of giving.

About the Author

Penny Matthews grew up on a farm near Eden Valley, South Australia, and is the author of the award-winning *A Year on Our Farm* and many other picture books and beginner reader and fiction titles for children. She is now a full-time writer after many years working as an editor of children's books as well.

For more about Penny, see her website (www.pennymatthews.com.au).

About the Illustrator

Martin McKenna is a freelance illustrator based in the UK. Starting out with work for fantasy & horror RPG fanzines in the 1980s, he has also illustrated game-related material including covers and internal illustrations for 22 of the *Fighting Fantasy* series from Puffin Books/Wizard Books. Martin's own books include *Digital Fantasy Painting Workshop*. He also does concept and production art for games, and for film and TV, most recently *Gulliver's Travels* for 20th Century Fox.

This is Martin's first picture book.

Study Notes for Teachers

1. *The Gift* is a great starting point for visual literacy learning and teaching children to think about how and what they read. It is important to reread picture books, as children will learn new things with each reading.

- On the first reading just show the children the illustrations instead of reading aloud to them. Have them come up with their own ideas for what the characters in the story are doing. You can prompt their learning with questions such as, why are toys sitting on a shelf? Where might they be? Why do the bear and crocodile stay on the shelf? Why does Brown Bear give the crocodile its bow?
- For children unfamiliar with the way we read books, emphasise that we read the words from left to right.
- On one of the later readings, don't show the children the illustrations. Instead when you read each page, ask them to mime the actions they hear.
- See how children responded to the plot. Why doesn't anyone want the bear or crocodile? How are the bear and the crocodile different?
- Ask children why does Brown Bear compliment the crocodile on his smile?
- When you read the story, ask children to think about the pictorial elements. Prompt their discussion with questions like, what do we learn from this picture? How do we know the bear and the crocodile are friends? How do we know Brown Bear is sad? What clues in the illustration tell us that it is Christmas?

2. Use the setting of Christmas in *The Gift* as a starting point for activities and discussion.

- Begin by asking children what they know about Christmas. Go around the class and find out what Christmas means to each child.
- As you read through the book, ask children to identify words related to Christmas.
- Create a Christmas vocabulary list using the words you've found and other words children may know that are associated with Christmas time.
- Find out if children have special family Christmas traditions they observe and have them share their experiences.

- If you have access to cooking facilities, hold a cooking day to make Christmas treats. There are lots of kid-friendly recipes at <http://www.kidspot.com.au/Christmas-Christmas-recipes-Christmas-kids-cooking+1321+116+article.htm>
- Put up a class Christmas tree to decorate. You can use tree branches or even make your own out of cardboard. For creative inspiration, have a look at these ideas from an artist's blog: http://shannonberrey.com/blog/Shannon_Berrey_Design_Blog/post/Christmas_tree_options/
- Using the story's illustrations as inspiration, have children make Christmas decorations for the class tree and to take home. Here are some helpful websites for ideas and instructions: <http://www.kidspot.com.au/Christmas-Christmas-crafts-Christmas-shapes+1390+117+article.htm>
<http://spoonful.com/christmas/christmas-decorations#carousel-id=content-carousel&carousel-item=2>
<http://www.parents.com/holiday/christmas/crafts/handmade-gifts/>

3. Use *The Gift* to explore the idea of selfless acts and caring for one another.

- Ask the children what they thought the story was about. What do they think of Brown Bear's gift? Why does the bear do it?
- Ask children to describe what it feels like to do something nice for someone else.
- How would children describe the bear and the crocodile's relationship?
- Find out what gift they would give to a friend. Ask them what they think the best kinds of gifts are.
- Ask children to consider what makes someone special. Have them turn to their neighbour and describe something that makes them special.
- Have children make their own Christmas picture books that they can give away as gifts.
- For older children, organise for them to be involved in a volunteer activity to enjoy the experience of helping.

4. Use *The Gift* as inspiration for creative activities:
 - Teach the class Christmas carols.
 - Put together a Christmas play for children to act.
 - Hold a Christmas concert, and have children put together the program. They can sing carols or perform a Christmas play. Have children contribute to set design and make their own costumes from craft materials.

5. *The Gift* can be used for language activities and learning.
 - Using the bear's description of himself, introduce children to adjectives and explain that they are describing words.
 - Ask children to think of words that describe their features: I have ... eyes, I have ... hair, etc.
 - The bear is sad, the crocodile is anxious and the lady is worried. What other words can children think of to describe emotions?
 - Look at the colours used in the story. The crocodile is green, the bear is brown and his ribbon is red. What other colours can children identify in the illustrations?