



BOOK ISLAND

Teaching Notes

Fox & Goldfish

by Nils Pieters

translated by Greet Pauwelijn

Synopsis

Goldfish is nearing the end of his life so his friend Fox arranges some wonderful life experiences and adventures for him before he goes. Together they enjoy simple pleasures, such as splashing in puddles, hair-raising thrills motorbike riding, and extreme adventures like space travel.

This is a warm story about friendship, the pleasures of life and the wonders of the world. The story is told in vibrant illustrations, introduced and ended with just a few words.

The Author

Nils Pieters is a Belgian artist and writer who studied illustration with Carll Cneut at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, Flanders. His unique and humorous drawings take us on a colourful and atmospheric trip around the world and his style shows a great admiration for romantic art.

Nils likes to travel, but because he's not too fond of flying, he prefers to bring his own globetrotting adventures to life using his pencils and ink at home.

Fox & Goldfish is his fourth picture book.

Themes

This story about friendship takes the reader on a tour of the pleasures of life, from joy and exhilaration to peaceful contemplation.

Fox, wild and free, is an unlikely friend for Goldfish, a tiny animal who lives his life in the bubble of a glass bowl. Yet Fox has real empathy for his friend and helps him to experience life before his inevitable death. Their adventures together are not limited by Goldfish's reliance on his bowl and they are not marred by their awareness of all life comes to an end.

The vibrant illustrations evoke the vivid sensations of a life of discovery and adventure.



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Activities

Sharing the book

Students in years 1, 2 and 3 will enjoy this exciting story.

Read the book with a small group or with the class. On the first reading, read the short text and display the illustrations on each page without comment or interruptions. Suggest to the students that they look carefully at the illustrations throughout the first reading, saving their comments until they have seen the story through to the end.

At the end of this reading, facilitate a brief discussion about the story. Ask:

How do we know that Fox and Goldfish are good friends?

Which of their adventures was your favourite?

What do you think this story is about?

Do you think Goldfish had a happy life? Why?

Reread the story, drawing the students' attention to details in the illustrations.

Being good friends

Discuss why Fox and Goldfish might be unlikely friends. Construct a Venn diagram on the whiteboard or on a large sheet of paper and have the children brainstorm the areas in which a fox and a goldfish are alike and unlike. Consider their lifestyles, sizes, habitats, and behaviours.

Draw out the understanding that while we are all different from each other, we can still be friends.

Have the students think, pair, and then share a difference between themselves and a friend. (They may comment on different genders, different ages, living in different places or liking different things.)

Discuss the ways Fox cares for his friend (for example, making a trolley for him, carrying him in his bike basket). How does he make sure that Goldfish is able to take part in their adventures?

Ask:

Do we sometimes have to take care of a friend? Can you think of a time when a friend had to take care of you?

Discuss how Goldfish has to live in water and how this could be seen as a disadvantage or a limitation.

Ask: *Do Fox or Goldfish see this as a limitation?*



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What limitations might you have? (Encourage a range of honest responses to this question – from being too tall or not able to run very fast, to belonging in a poor family, having only one parent or being dyslexic. Focusing only on superficial disadvantages as examples will limit children’s responses.)

At the end of the discussion, ask: *What do you think this story is telling us?*

Comparing adventures

Have the students sort Fox and Goldfish’s adventures into two lists – one headed “Everyday adventures” and one headed “Amazing adventures”.

Everyday adventures	Amazing adventures
Walking in the countryside	Climbing a very high mountain
Singing in the rain	Watching Earth from Mars

When the students have completed this activity, discuss how some adventures could fit into either list. Look at the pages where Goldfish and Fox swim in the sea.

Ask: *Is swimming in the sea an everyday adventure or an amazing adventure?*

How has the illustrator made this adventure seem very exciting? (The colours in his illustration, which make the sea look dark and dangerous in the distance, the characters’ towel and clothes resting on a craggy rock in the middle of the ocean, Goldfish’s bowl balancing precariously on the edge of the rock, and so on)

Have the students in pairs choose another illustration and discuss how the illustrator has added excitement and adventure to the image.

Discuss with the students the adventures they have had or plan to have in their lives. Draw out the idea that adventures do not have to be active, noisy events. Refer to the illustrations of Fox and Goldfish strolling through the bush or sitting quietly watching Earth.

Make a class list of adventures that the students have had or plan to have in their lives on the white board or on a large sheet of paper. Prompt the students to add a tick beside any of the adventures that they have experienced.

Adventure	How many people have tried this?
Toasting marshmallows outside	✓✓
Sleeping over at a friend’s place	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓
Seeing a volcano	✓✓✓



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Making a class mural

Pair the students and have each pair brainstorm an adventure they would like to have together. When they have decided, distribute large A3 sheets of paper and have them illustrate their adventure, trying out some of the art ideas and techniques that Nils Pieters uses in *Fox & Goldfish*.

Before they start, brainstorm and list Pieters' techniques to remind them of the style they are working on in their illustrations.

This list could include:

- Vibrant colours (pastels and dye could work well)
- Sunlight and dark
- Nature scenes
- Hints of danger
- Zany natural shapes
- Expressive faces.

When the illustrations are completed, they can be displayed alongside each other as a mural on a wall in the classroom or corridor.

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