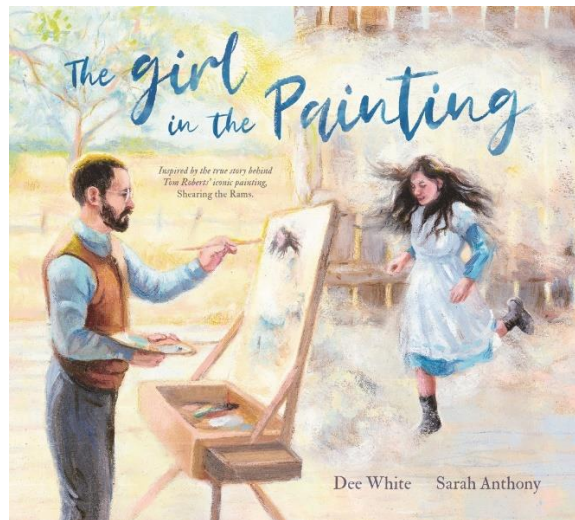


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TEACHING NOTES

The Girl in the Painting

Dee White/Sarah Anthony



Summary

The surprising truth behind one of Australia's most iconic paintings, Tom Roberts' *Shearing of the Rams*.

Susie lives on a sheep station and does all she can to help out alongside her sister and her rowdy brothers - collecting firewood, feeding the chickens and helping make the bread. But nobody - not the stockman nor the shearers nor the swaggies - ever notices Susie.

Until one day, a painter arrives at the sheep station - the famous Tom Roberts - and that all changes.

Based on the true story of Susie Bourne, and the painting of Tom Robert's iconic masterpiece, Shearing the Rams (1890).

Key Concepts: True Life Stories, Australian History, Australian Art History, 19th century Australia, Australian Identity, The Heidelberg School,

Curriculum Connections: English, Hass/History, Art, Personal and Social Development

Notes by Sue Warren
Teacher-librarian
<https://losangzopa.blog/>

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This is a book that can be used in multiple ways across year levels and the activities suggested carry across these. Teachers can select those that can be used or adapted to their own setting and needs.

BEFORE READING

- Looking at the cover, invite students' observations:
 - ✓ What first strikes the students? This could be the style of the illustration, the palette of colours used, or the clues about setting/period.
 - ✓ Would readers predict fiction or non-fiction? Can a book be both? Introduce or revise the term **narrative non-fiction**.
 - ✓ What inferences can students make about the setting of the narrative: time and place. Clues such as landscape, clothing, architecture all help to build a pre-reading concept.
- Do students know of any well-known Australian artists or paintings? How many have been to an art gallery?
 - ✓ Invite class discussion and make a note of responses for a class Learning Wall. Older students who are taking Art as a subject should be able to name significant artists and work, including The Heidelberg School.
- Can students name the medium/technique used by the illustrator? In what way does this match the students' predictions of content/setting/theme?
- Establish the class learning wall and organise a bulk loan of books that relate to Australian art specifically The Heidelberg School and artists. Record responses and ideas gathered and add to these during the unit of inquiry.

DURING READING

- What do students think now about whether the book is fiction or non-fiction? A quick class poll might be interesting. Ask students to justify their choice.
 - ✓ Can an information book also tell a story? Do students know of other examples?
 - ✓ What might the creators' purpose be in making this book?
 - ✓ Compare to a piece of non-fiction prose that describes Tom Roberts' painting of ***Shearing the Rams*** e.g. selected text from the Wikipedia entry. Older students might find an appropriate entry in an art history book. A simple Venn diagram will help younger students identify differences and similarities.

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- **Narrative non-fiction:** Narrative nonfiction is a genre of writing that uses literary style and technique to tell a factually accurate story.

- ✓ What elements of literary style here are more usually found in fiction books? Be language detectives and identify some of these e.g. literary or figurative language examples. Make a list of these for the learning wall e.g.

Example	Literary language type
The shearer bent like a tree	
Like a scarecrow come to life	
Swish of Tom's sweeping paintbrushes	

- Introduce [The Heidelberg School](#).
 - ✓ Listen to this [ABC Art History](#) [29 mins] discussion as a class.
 - ✓ Follow this with [History of Australian Art: Part 2: the Heidelberg School and Australian Impressionism](#) [YouTube 22:01 mins]
 - ✓ Encourage students to take notes as they listen – [Sketchnotes](#) could be a useful tool for this. Record findings/responses on the learning wall. Add any subject specific vocabulary e.g. impressionists, *en plein air* with meanings.
 - ✓ What was it?
 - ✓ Who was involved?
 - ✓ Why did these artists create a different approach to art?
 - ✓ Continue to add to the list of subject specific vocabulary for the learning wall e.g. nationalism, naturalistic, easel, palette etc.
- Who was Tom Roberts? Mini-research Individual activity: create a one-pager biography of the artist [templates available online]. Older students could use a [mock social media profile](#). Include aspects such as birth/death, personal life, artist life, famous works, influences on his work.
- Brainstorm students' knowledge of shearing:
 - ✓ What is it?
 - ✓ Who has seen shearing being done?
 - ✓ Why would Roberts consider this to be an ideal subject for his painting? Refer specifically to the ideals of the Heidelberg School and nationalism/Australian identity.
- Look up the geographical setting (Google earth is useful):
 - ✓ *a shearing shed at what is now called Killeneen, an outstation of Brocklesby sheep station, near Corowa in New South Wales*

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- ✓ .Record any observations made and compare to descriptions in text and in the book.
- ✓ Write a short description of a shearing shed using [the 5 senses technique](#).
- One spread has two Aboriginal men overlooking the boys' antics. What was the situation for First Nations people at this time (1890)? What role would these two men likely have on the property?
 - ✓ Undertake some research and collect information on conditions: Rural settings, urban/city/town settings, restrictions, children, schooling, employment, Stolen Generations etc.

WRITING

- Creative writing: narrative non-fiction. Have students select a painting to examine. This could be one of Tom Roberts' paintings or one of the other Heidelberg School painters e.g. Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin or Charles Conder. Have students write a narrative weaving some factual information into this.
- Use a 9-square/9-grid analysis on a painting by one of the Heidelberg artists (could be individually chosen or all students using the same image). Have students annotate the image with their observations on the different aspects e.g. thematic or visual elements, colours, light/shadow, brushstrokes, [illusion of] movement.
- Choose one of these Heidelberg School artists (or own choice) to research. Share findings with peers.
 - ✓ Frederick McCubbin
 - ✓ Arthur Streeton
 - ✓ Charles Conder
 - ✓ Ethel Carrick Fox
 - ✓ Ina Gregory
 - ✓ Walter Withers
 - ✓ Jane Price
 - ✓ Tudor St. George Tucker
 - ✓ David Davies

AFTER READING

- **Character Analysis:** Use contextual clues and inferences to create a character analysis of Susie. A template would be useful. This could be a simple STEAL framework or a 'body' template (many available online).

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- **Invite an expert:** Primary classes without a resident art teacher could invite one from the nearest secondary school or campus, or a local art society could be useful as an alternative source.
 - ✓ Present a tutorial on the techniques of Tom Roberts/the Heidelberg School.

***If an expert is not possible, there are numerous online possibilities [some listed below]*

- **Experience:** Arrange an excursion to a shearing shed, or living museum to experience life in Australian 19th century. [[Jondaryan Woolshed](#) in Queensland is one such historic venue]. Alternatively, it might be possible to arrange for a traveling or hobby shearer to visit for a demonstration OR
- Organise an immersion experience day at school: period costumes, foods, activities. This could involve community as well.
- **Pavement Summaries:** Use pavement chalk to create 'one-pager' style summaries of the book. OR choose one scene to recreate. Individual or paired activity works well for this.

Art

- Take the class out for *en plain air* drawing or painting. More than once is preferable so they can compile their own portfolio.
 - ✓ Have students critique each other's work focusing on constructive feedback, and using specific criteria. Some will need a template for this to ensure the guidelines are observed.
 - ✓ Students can select what they consider their best sketch and best painting for a class gallery.
 - ✓ Invite other classes and/or parents for a gallery walk.
- An excursion to an art gallery with either Heidelberg School or Impressionist paintings would be ideal but not possible for many. There are many online galleries and collections to explore as an alternative e.g., [The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#). NB: Melbourne schools would be able to go to the NGV to see [Shearing the Rams](#) in person.
- Conduct a series of in-class watercolour art lessons to develop students' skills.
- Give each student a mini-canvas and easel [bulk buys readily available] to create an artwork using their new skills. One idea could be to set up a model 'pastoral' scene for them to recreate on their canvas. Arrange a 'mini' gallery with the results. Hold an art show and invite guests. Older/art students will be able to extend this easily.
- Illustration project for older students - from illustrator Sarah Anthony
Design one page of the book using the authors text for that page.

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- ✓ Consider the meaning of the title or page text. What stands out as the main visual elements that need to be represented in the illustration? (i.e., Susie, shearers, sheep, kelpie, swaggie).
- ✓ What is the main concept of the cover or particular page? (i.e., Susie's role in the painting, no-one noticing Susie, difference in male and female roles of the era, Susie's happiness in being noticed by Tom).
- ✓ How would you communicate that concept on your page design?
- ✓ What is the mood, time, era of the text? How would this influence the colours you use, materials or the art technique? (i.e. pencils, watercolour or oil paints, digital art, cartoon style). What combination would represent the sense of the story best?
- ✓ Remember that the composition of your illustration must also include open space for the text.
- ✓ How would you design your illustration to include all these elements?

En plein air project - older students: Refer back to earlier information about the Heidelberg artists, and their practice and style.

The Heidelberg artists were keenly absorbed in capturing the effects of transient or harsh Australian light on colours and detail. They had to work very quickly using loose brushstrokes to capture a sense of the scene. This is a feature of the Impressionist art movement.

- ✓ Consider how this way of painting might change your own painting technique.
- ✓ What brushes would be best for this work?
- ✓ What painting setup/materials would you need?
- ✓ Tom Roberts is said to have done some of the painting in the shearing shed and put the finishing touches on the work in his city studio. Without the easy access to the colour photography artists have today, what would one need to do to remember the important elements the artist wanted to present?
- ✓ Introduce or revise colour theory. Impressionist painters were well versed in colour theory. Consider how the artists used complementary colours to indicate light and corresponding shadow (e.g. blue/orange, purple/yellow). Because we instinctively recognise these colour combinations they tend to look correct or pleasing in a painting

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Girl in the Painting

Walker Books Australia

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dee wanted to be a writer since she was seven-years old. She has published more than 20 books for children and young adults and many articles, short stories and poems.

She has been lucky enough to combine her loves of writing and travel into a career which takes her all over the world writing, researching and presenting workshops.

Apart from skydiving and hot air ballooning, the craziest thing she ever did was travel around Australia in tents for nearly two years with her two children under three, her husband and the family dog.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Sarah Anthony lives in Melbourne with her three teenage children, Ted the rescue dog and three bossy chickens. She is an award-winning fine artist, metalsmith and children's book illustrator and her work is represented in public and private collections. Sarah's main creative passion is exploring interpersonal dynamics and depictions of domestic life through portraiture and narrative figurative painting. Sarah loves painting people and really enjoys bringing book characters to life in her illustration work.

Related Resources

Books:

Art A Children's Encyclopedia - Susie Taylor, DK

The ME Book: An Art Activity Book - Marion Deuchars

Katie and the Impressionists – James Mayhew

I Like Art: Impressionism - Margaux Stanitsas

Look Closer: Paint with the Impressionists - NGV

Websites:

[The Heidelberg School](#)

[Beginners Guide to Plein Air Painting](#)

[9 Simple Watercolor Projects for Beginners](#)

[Watercolour Techniques for Kids](#)

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Videos;

[How to Draw Plein Air](#) [16.05]

[Plein Air Painting](#) [11.10]

[Watercolour Techniques for Kids](#) [6.09]

Curriculum Connections

English
• navigate, read and view learning area texts • listen and respond to learning area texts • interpret and analyse learning area texts. • compose spoken, written, visual and multimodal learning area texts • use language to interact with others • deliver presentations.
Critical and Creative Thinking HASS: • pose questions • interpret the past • identify and clarify information and ideas • organise and process information. ART: • making and responding to artworks • draw on their curiosity, imagination and thinking skills • express their ideas, concepts, thoughts and feelings creatively • consider and analyse the motivations, intentions, factors and biases when responding to artworks
Personal and Social Capability
• recognise emotions • appreciate diverse perspectives • communicate effectively • work collaboratively • make decisions • identify and assess personal strengths, interests and challenges