



Dandelions

Author: Katrina McKelvey
Illustrator: Kirrili Lonergan
Publisher: EK Books
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Audience: Children aged 4–8

SYNOPSIS

Dandelions beautifully explores the father–daughter bond. A little girl notices her father mowing the lawn, in the process destroying her favourite flowers: the dandelions. She rushes out to stop him, but she’s too late, they’re all gone. There’s nothing for it: she’s just going to have to sit outside and wait until they grow back! But fortunately, Dad has another idea.

Taking her hand, he leads her to the verandah, and there, nestled against a post, are two tiny dandelion puffballs. Father and daughter each blow as hard as they can, and the tiny dandelion parachutes spiral and spin, up, up and away, spreading their seeds to create new generations of dandelions far and wide. Father and daughter lie down together on the grass, watching as they whirl and twirl through the air. Perfect for readers aged 4–8, this is a book that will be cherished by families and recommended by teachers and librarians. It is a wonderful addition to your school library.

Type of Text

Picture book

Key Curriculum Areas

English
Science
The Arts
Health and Physical Education

Themes

Father/Daughter relationship
Forgiveness
Love
Hope
Imagination
Lifecycle of the dandelion
Resilience of nature

Notes prepared by

Katrina McKelvey & Kirrili Lonergan

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AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Katrina McKelvey is an author, former primary school teacher, and mother of two. She is passionate about inspiring a love of all things literary in kids of all ages. *Dandelions* is Katrina's first picture book. She lives not far from the beaches of Newcastle.

Katrina is the president of the Children's Book Council of Australia's Newcastle sub-branch, and is a Newcastle Writers Festival committee member. She is also a Books In Homes role model.

You can find out more about Katrina by visiting her website at www.katrinamckelvey.com

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Kirrili Lonergan is a children's book illustrator and former paediatric nurse, whose illustrations display a profound understanding of the needs of children.

Kirrili is the illustrator of *Lessons of a LAC* picture book and co-creator of the anxiety early intervention program. She is also the Vice President of the Children's Book Council of Australia's Newcastle Sub-branch and an active member of SCBWI. She can be found enjoying good times with her husband and four children in Newcastle, Australia.

You can find out more about Kirrili by visiting her websites at www.kirrililonergan.com and www.lessonsofalac.com

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

The illustration style is soft and whimsical with a palette of green, blue, pinks and yellow. The colours and style of illustration helps to enhance the setting of a warm spring day.

SELLING POINTS

- a heart-warming story of the bond between a father and his daughter.
- includes a simple message on the resilience of nature and the importance of hope.
- exquisite illustrations complement the text perfectly.
- features the lifecycle of the dandelion
- encourages children to use their imaginations

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

1. What was the inspiration for the story?

As a toddler, Lara, my daughter used to climb in gutters to pick dandelion seed heads on the way to preschool. She would then ask me to help her blow them apart. I soon started feeling guilty about digging out dandelion plants as they grew in our lawn. I wanted Lara to be able to pick them in our lawn instead of the gutter. Then I wondered how Lara would react if she knew her dad was mowing the dandelion plants flat.

I was also fascinated by whether people had connected blowing the puffballs with spreading their seeds. The dandelion seed head is so beautiful — one of nature's amazing creations.

2. What was the most rewarding part of this project?

I'm absolutely in love with dandelions. I love the colour of the flowers and the perfect formation of the seed head. I'm so lucky as I get to write about them and photograph them. Watching Kirrili paint them and bring them to life in our picture book was such a rewarding experience. I see them everywhere now and I want the world to see just how beautiful they are.

3. What was the most challenging part of this project?

It took four years from when I started writing the story until I had a published book in my hands so the waiting was the hardest. I can be very impatient!

It was also very challenging to break the main character's heart. I cried as I created the beginning of the story. It felt like I had broken my own daughter's heart.

ILLUSTRATOR INTERVIEW

1. What media did you use to create your illustrations? Can you briefly describe your process?

I used mixed media, predominantly gouache, with pastels and ink.

Firstly, I played around a lot with the roughs paying special attention to the positioning and feelings of the characters. I then painted characters, the scenery and the background in hues to reflect the changing colours of the sky on a spring day. Lastly, I layered and played with pastels and ink until the desired softness was achieved.

2. What was the most rewarding part of this project?

The most rewarding part was airbrushing all the dandelion seeds.

Just prior to the deadline of when the illustrations were due to the publisher, a huge storm hit Newcastle leaving us without electricity. With a small torch strapped to my forehead I sat in my studio till the wee hours of the morning. With complete darkness surrounding me the torchlight illuminated every little white parachute. I sat and airbrushed until each spread appeared to be balanced.

3. What was the most challenging part of this project?

The most challenging part of the illustrations was to replicate the little girl's dress on each spread.

TEACHING NOTES

ENGLISH

Classroom ideas:

- Ask students what they already know about dandelions. Where have you seen them growing? What do the flowers look like? Describe what the seed head looks like.
- Ask students to identify the prepositions in *Dandelions* (pass, through, over, around, under, between). The students could add extras.
- Ask students to identify all the verbs in *Dandelions* (chase, blow, watch, wonder, imagine, swirling, spinning, twisting, whirling, turning, twirling, floating).
- The students could brainstorm other verbs to show how they think dandelions move (e.g. tumbling). Students could then write their own sentences using a similar structure to those in *Dandelions*, to describe how a dandelion seed moves and where it goes. They could illustrate their page in their own style. All the pages could then form a class book.
- Discuss the parts of a narrative and identify these parts in *Dandelions*.
- Discuss the complication in *Dandelions*. How was it solved? Write a new ending showing a different resolution.
- Students can discuss something special to them and how they would feel if it was taken away.
- Character analysis: discuss the similarities and differences in the personalities of the father and daughter. How are these shown in the illustrations? (body language)

SCIENCE

Classroom ideas:

- Investigate the lifecycle of a dandelion and represent each stage as a diagram. Students could also do this for the other plants mentioned such as roses, poppies, sunflowers.
- Investigate: What is the origin of the name 'dandelion'? What part of the plant does this name link to?
- Investigate dandelion folk names. (Irish daisy, blow ball, lion's tooth, bitterwort, wild endive, priest's crown, doonheadclock, yellow gowan, puffball, clock flower, swine snort, fortune-teller, cankerwort) Where did these names come from?
- Investigate other uses of the parts of the dandelion plant (herbal medicine, food, drink).
- Study the seasons of the year. What is so special about spring? How is it different to the other seasons?
- Students could taste dandelion tea.

THE ARTS

Classroom ideas:

VISUAL ARTS:

- Collect dandelion seed heads, leaves and flowers. Sketch each of these.
- Use dandelion seeds to make pictures and collages. Use dandelion leaves to stamp patterns. Use dandelion flowers as a brush or stamp to paint pictures.
- Design what is 'magic' to you. e.g. a fairyland.
- Observe and draw your favourite flower/plant.
- Notice the different emotions of the characters. How would you draw them? How is this done in *Dandelions*?
- Make collage artwork representing the four seasons. e.g. crunchy autumn leaves, cotton balls for snow, dandelion seed heads for spring, sand for summer.

DRAMA:

- Students can role-play their favourite part of the story, pretending they are dandelion seeds twisting, turning and spinning in the wind ...
- Students can role-play the different emotions felt by the characters (love, hope, sadness, anger, happiness).

MUSIC:

- Students can move to soft music to imitate the flowing movement of the dandelion seeds.

HEALTH and PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Classroom ideas:

- Discuss forgiveness and how to ask for it. What does it feel like to be forgiven?
- What is resilience? How is this shown in the story? How and when can we be more resilient? How are plants resilient in the environment?
- Family relationships: What are the important relationships in your family? Why are they important to you?
- Discussion: What have the characters learnt from their experiences in *Dandelions*?
- Teachers could use the text from *Dandelions* to lead children through a simple guided meditation session. Use soft flowing music too.

SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS

This book would be perfect to help celebrate Father's Day.

For more teaching suggestions and craft activities, please visit:
www.dandelions.ekbooks.com.au

