



**INGA SIMPSON**

Illustrated by Tannya Harricks

THE  
PEACH  
KING

TEACHERS RESOURCES

# THE PEACH KING

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Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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# INTRODUCTION

*When Little Peach Tree was just a sapling, all they could see was row upon row of other peach trees. And, on top of the hill, watching over the orchard – the Peach King.*

As seasons pass, Little Peach Tree grows and grows.

But darker changes are stirring. Soon rain is scarce, the forests turn brown, animals flee and the sky turns red.

The Peach King must confront grave danger to protect the orchard, and the Little Peach Tree must find their voice.

This contemporary fable about the resilience of nature, by Inga Simpson, one of Australia's leading nature writers, with paintings by acclaimed illustrator Tannya Harricks, is a masterful work of immense beauty.

Canvassing climate disaster and the concept of immortality, it is a fable that pays tribute to both the wonders of nature and its strength to heal itself.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

[<australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>](http://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/)

### ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE'S RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY

**Discussion Point:** The visual and written text in this book celebrates the wonders and beauty of nature. The changing of the seasons, the blossoming of peach trees, the animals that live on this farm are all celebrated in a rich visual pageant. Even when disaster strikes, the environment repairs itself and new growth emerges. Discuss with students the regenerative powers of nature. Invite them to observe their local environment and how things change as the seasons unfold.

**Discussion Point:** There are several examples of how nature responds to challenges in this book. For example, when the peach trees are in danger of being eaten by grasshoppers, the Peach King calls up a cloud of birds:  
*And instead of feasting, the grasshoppers were feasted upon.*

What other examples of nature's responses did you notice in this book?

**Activity:** Invite students to create a nature diary and to observe the creatures in their school playground, home garden or nearby park. Ask them to identify flora or fauna and write a brief fact and a personal observation about what they have found. [See **Worksheet 2.**]

## FARM LIFE

**Discussion Point:** Topics to discuss in relation to this book might include: Farm house. Farm Life. Animals. Birds. Crops. Weather. Climate.

## BUSHFIRES

**Discussion Point:** The plight of people and animals affected by bushfires is also covered in this book. The gradual change in climate and weather which leads to catastrophic fires is also addressed. Discuss with students the cause of bushfires and the possible responses to them. [See **Bibliography.**]

**Discussion Point:** First Nations people have been using fire to manage nature and as a symbol in their stories. Research this topic as well. [See **Bibliography.**]

## IMMORTALITY

**Discussion Point:**

This book opens with: *When Little Peach Tree was just a sapling, not much more than a stick bending in the breeze, all they could see was row upon row of other peach trees.*

*And, on top of the hill, watching over the orchard, branches tangled together like a crown – the Peach King.*

And the book ends with the sense that while the Little Peach Tree has taken on the crown after the Peach King has withered and died, the Peach King will still live on in the memories of the other peach trees.

*And they'll sing, about the old Peach King who faced fire to save the orchard. Who lives on and on, watching over their dreams.*

Peach trees in Chinese mythology symbolise immortality and this book attributes to nature that capacity. Research this topic and discuss in relation to this book.

[Read Inga Simpson's Author's Note at the end of the book explaining the origin of her story.]

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

<[australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/](http://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/)>

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**Activity:** *The Peach King* is a contemporary fable or fairytale. Invite students to research the tropes and themes of fairytales, and to read both the traditional tales as well as contemporary revisions. Invite them to read other original contemporary fairytales and discuss their meaning and themes along with that of *The Peach King*.

**Discussion Point:** This is a third-person omniscient account that reveals both the Little Peach Tree's and the Peach King's perspectives on the action. Imagine the story as if written in first person from the Little Peach Tree's perspective.

**Activity:** Poetic language is used in this gorgeously written tale, for example:

*Spring came with a rush.*

*Sap surging, buds budding, growing in spurts.*

And:

*Smoke hid the sun, fouling the air.  
Blackened gum leaves rained down.*

*The Peach King leaned into the fire, spreading his branches wide –  
like a shield. The heat was so fierce, his leaves shrivelled and crisped.*

Invite students to identify the literary devices employed in these quotations.

**Activity:** Invite students to write their own contemporary fairytale.

**Activity:** Test your students' **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text.

## **VISUAL LITERACY**

[www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/)

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations. Explore this with the activities below.

**Activity:** The **cover** of a book is an important part of its message. This cover depicts a flowering peach tree. The message is one of abundance and also implies seasonal change. Invite students to design their own cover for this book after they have read it.

**Activity:** The **endpapers** depict rows of peaches. Invite students to draw a peach. [See **Bibliography**.]

**Discussion Point:** The **half-title page** depicts the Peach King in full floral bloom. The **title page** contains the title framed by peach tree blossom branches. These pages introduce the idea of nature's blossoming and regeneration. Later in the book, we observe the tree with its leaves falling then threatened by fire, and the final frame depicts the tree covered in ripe peaches ready for picking. How does the sequence of images in the storyboard inform the meaning of the story?

**Activity:** The **medium or style** employed is oil painting. The **colours** used in this book are rich and reflect the changing of the seasons and weather. Tannya Harricks has described her style in an interview as: 'textured, painterly, loose and expressive' ('Meet the Illustrator: Tannya Harricks' *Kids' Book Review* 10 September 2020, [www.kids-bookreview.com/2020/09/meet-illustrator-tannya-harricks.html](http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2020/09/meet-illustrator-tannya-harricks.html)) Study her style with students and invite them to use it to create an original drawing of their own.

**Activity:** Invite students to draw, paint or collage a scene to accompany the contemporary fairytale they wrote above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1** below.]

**Activity:** Take students outside and encourage them to respond to nature by drawing any image from their surroundings that interests them. Read Deborah Frankel's *Naturopolis* (2022), illustrated by Ingrid Bartkowiak, which explores how nature is evident even in cities of asphalt, steel and concrete.

**Activity:** Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography**. See also **Worksheet 4**.]

## CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

Use fallen leaves to create **leaf pictures on chart paper**. Use a sponge to apply paint to the leaves and then print leaves on paper with them.

**Make a Springtime Wreath** attaching various items such as leaves of different colours, flowers, gumnuts or berries to a circle of wire or something similar. This can either be hung on a door or worn as a crown by the student who has created it. *Note:* Use only materials that have already been dropped by trees or shrubs rather than picking them from the branches.

**Organise a Nature Scavenger Hunt** with your class. Invite students to bring objects they discover on the ground, which have fallen from shrubs, trees or plants, back to the classroom. Then ask them to display the natural items on craft paper and write what they are beside them to identify them. Items might include bark, gumnuts, leaves, ferns, feathers, sticks or stones. *Note:* Ensure that students do not pick plants, fruits or berries, and that they scavenge only things from the ground.

**Create a Poster or Create a Book Trailer** to promote this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

**Create a diorama** of one of the scenes in this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

**Organise a festive ‘Peach King Party’.** Decorate the classroom with the images that your students have drawn. Read this book and then party! Serve bowls of peaches or slices of peaches, a Peach Blossom cake and peach flans etc. Wear or display your Springtime Wreaths to add to the festivities.

## LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

**Activity:** Research the topics of **Environment and Nature’s Resilience and Adaptability, Farm Life, Bushfires and Immortality** online.

## FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

Read Inga Simpson’s *The Book of Australian Trees* (2021) and compare it to *The Peach King*.

Research Tannya Harricks’s picture books. Compare *The Peach King* to her other books.

Students might like to further research themes covered in *The Peach King* by reading other picture books, such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.

Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

## CONCLUSION

This is a contemporary fable of great power and resonance. Simpson’s poetic text combines with Harricks’s dramatic artwork to create an allegorical tale that will inspire children to look closely at the world around them, and to value the way in which nature is able to adjust to challenges and to develop and grow.

## AUTHOR’S NOTES

Read Inga Simpson’s Author’s Note at the end of the book explaining the origin of her story.

## ILLUSTRATOR’S NOTES

The illustrations for *The Peach King* were created with oil paint on watercolour paper. The watercolour paper was approximately 55 x 75 cm and primed with acrylic gesso to support the oil paint. Tannya pins the paper to the studio wall to paint standing up or while seated on a stool. Various tools were used to create

the painterly marks in the illustrations including large and small brushes, palette knives and hands/fingers. Tannya uses pencils and charcoal sticks to draw into the wet paint to outline finer detail.

Tannya visited two different peach farms at various times of year as research for the sketches and paintings in the book.

While illustrating the little peach tree finding their 'voice' and singing, Tannya wondered if trees do 'sing'? She found fascinating research about how trees 'sing' conducted by bioacoustician, Bernie Krause. Trees exude a rhythmic 'song' as well as sap after long periods of no rain that attract a microhabitat of bees and birds created by sound.

<[www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWkMWDSVZuQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWkMWDSVZuQ)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Inga Simpson** began her career as a professional writer for government before gaining a PhD in creative writing. In 2011, she took part in the Queensland Writers Centre Manuscript Development Program and, as a result, Hachette Australia published her first novel, *Mr Wigg*, in 2013. *Nest*, Inga's second novel, was published in 2014 and was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and the Stella Prize and shortlisted for the ALS Gold Medal. Inga's third novel, the acclaimed *Where the Trees Were*, was published in 2016.

Inga was awarded the final Eric Rolls Prize for her nature writing and has obtained a second PhD, exploring the history of Australian nature writers. Inga's account of her love of Australian nature and life with trees, *Understory*, was published in 2017. Her first book for children, *The Book of Australian Trees*, illustrated by Alicia Rogerson, was published in 2021. *The Last Woman in the World*, her critically acclaimed environmental thriller, was published in 2021 and shortlisted for the 2022 Fiction Indie Book Award. Her bestselling and critically acclaimed 2022 novel, *Willowman*, was shortlisted for the BookPeople Adult Fiction Book of the Year 2023 and in 2024 was selected by Australia's leading booksellers in BookPeople's 100 Must-Read Australian Novels. Her 2024 literary thriller *The Thinning* has been shortlisted for the 2025 ACT Literary Award for Fiction and was longlisted for the 2025 Stella Prize and the 2025 Fiction Indie Book Award. Inga lives on the New South Wales south coast among trees. See also: <https://www.ingasimpson.com.au/>

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Tannya Harricks** is an illustrator and artist who lives in Sydney. Her award-winning art practice draws inspiration from the Australian landscape, its animals and her love of adventure. Tannya studied Graphic Design and Illustration at Randwick TAFE (now Design Centre Enmore) and will soon complete a degree in Visual Culture at Curtin University. She has previously illustrated six picture

books, including *Night Watch* and *Mallee Sky*, both by Jodi Toering. Tannya illustrated *The Heartbeat of The Land* by Cathy Freeman and Coral Vass which was shortlisted for the Wilderness Society Karajia Award. Tannya has illustrated the titles *Kookaburra* and *Dingo* both by Claire Saxby. *Dingo* was joint winner of the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature at the NSW Premier's Literary Award (2019), won the Royal Zoological Society of NSW's Whitley Award (2018) and was shortlisted in 2019 for the CBCA New Illustrator Award as well as for Best Picture Book in the Educational Publishing Awards.

See also: [tanyaharricks.com/](http://tanyaharricks.com/)

'Meet the Illustrator: Tannya Harricks', *Kids' Book Review*, 10 September 2020, [www.kids-bookreview.com/2020/09/meet-illustrator-tannya-harricks.html](http://www.kids-bookreview.com/2020/09/meet-illustrator-tannya-harricks.html)

# WORKSHEETS

## WORKSHEET 1. COLLAGE

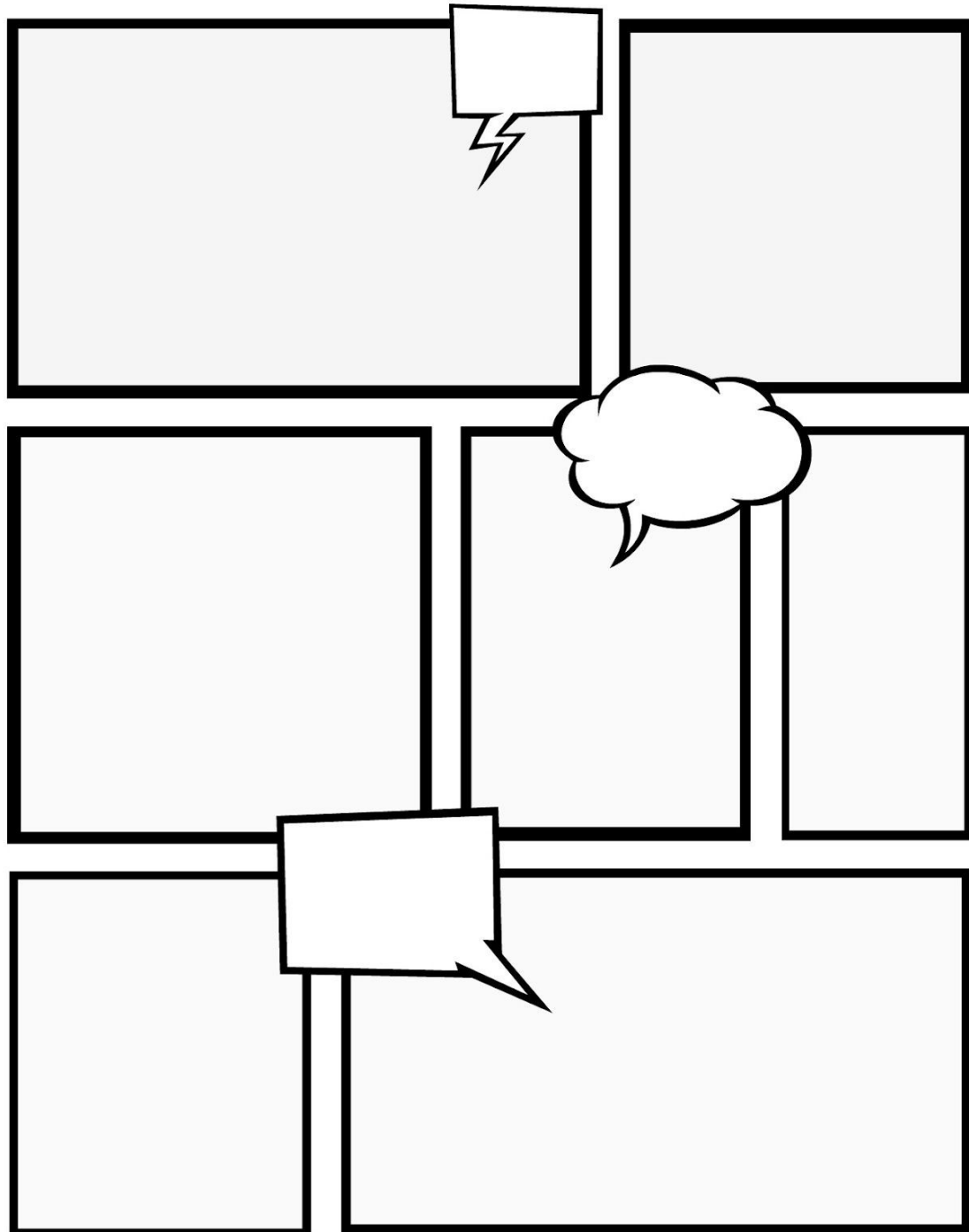
Create a collage with this image. You might photocopy and enlarge to A3 to give you more room to work.





### WORKSHEET 3. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in *The Peach King*. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Comic Book Template viewed at: <[www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/](http://www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/)>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia.