

TALKING POINTS

CILIP Carnegie Medal Shortlist 2013



The CILIP Carnegie
& Kate Greenaway
Children's Book
Awards

A Boy and a Bear in a Boat

by Dave Shelton

The cover

- What do you think of this unusual book cover and blurb?
- Did it make you want to read the book?

Introduction

- What were your first thoughts when you started to read the book? What kind of book did you think it was going to be? What did you think might happen?
- Where did you think the boy might be going? Had your view of this changed by the end of the book?
- Does it strike you as unusual that the bear is rowing the boat, or did you just accept it straight away? Why do you think that this is?
- Do you think that the title of the book is a good one? How much does it tell you about what the book is going to be about?

The illustrations

- What do the illustrations add to your enjoyment or understanding of the book?
- Did you find them funny?
- What is the different effect of the varying styles of illustration, such as the simple line drawings of the boy and the bear, and the double-page darkly coloured illustrations?
- What is the effect of the comic illustrations having colours in them that appear nowhere else in the book? Do you think this is significant?

The story

- What is surprising about the map that the bear uses?
- Are there ways in which you think that the bear is a typical bear?
- What are the most surprising things about the bear?
- Why do you think the bear was puzzled by the idea of being bored?
- What did you think about the boy and the bear not being given names in the book? Does it add or take anything away from the book for you?
- What is interesting about the language the bear uses when talking about their journey, such as 'unforeseen anomalies' and 'a little behind schedule'?
- What do you think about the relationship between the boy and the bear? Do you think it changes during the book, and if so, how?
- When the bear tricks the boy and the boy retaliates by telling him he stinks, what do you think each character is feeling here?
- Talk about the way in which the boy and the bear's roles change at various times during the book. What do you think this might mean?



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- A lot of humour is used in the book. Did you find it a funny book? What are the different types of humour that are used?
- Just before the pair spot the bird, the boy gets very angry with the bear and pokes him. Why do the boys actions differ from what his head is telling him to do? What is the significance of poking a bear?

The ending

- How did the ending of the book make you feel?
- What do you think will happen to the boy and the bear?

What does it mean?

Most people who read *A Boy and a Bear in a Boat* are left with a lot of questions.

- In what way does this book differ from most other books that you read? Think about a) The ending and b) The lack of character names and background knowledge.

Some people think that *A Boy and a Bear in a Boat* has a much deeper meaning, perhaps about life.

- Do you think that it has a deeper meaning?
- If you think the book has a deeper meaning, what do you think it might mean?
- If you don't think the book has a deeper meaning, why do you think it was written?

The boy and the bear on the boat develop a relationship during their time at sea.

- Is the relationship between the two characters a recognisable one?
- Can you identify with the idea of being stuck in a situation with someone who is very different to yourself?

When the boy and the bear are lost at sea, they spot a bird that seems to guide them to an empty ship.

- What kind of bird do you think that it is? Why does it appear and seem to show them the way?
- Do you think that the bird might be an Albatross? Look at the illustration of the bird and do some research into Albatrosses, including reading excerpts from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Do you think there is any connection here, and if so, why?

In the book, the bear states, 'I know where we are and I know where we're going, and that's all, but that's enough.'

- Can you think of a way that this could be used as a metaphor for life?

The boy finds a comic, written in another language, and he doesn't understand what it means.

- Do you think the comic is significant? What do you think it might mean?

Lots of events happen in the book, like being attacked by a sea monster, finding an abandoned ghost ship and surviving a major storm.

- Do you think this is a book where lots of things happen, or where nothing really happens?

This is a book that deals with the topic of being lost at sea.

- How does the author create the feeling of being adrift in the middle of a vast ocean?
- How did you feel when you were reading it?



Further reading

- *Good Dog, Bad Dog* by Dave Shelton
- *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry



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