

Teachers' Notes

Granny's Place

By

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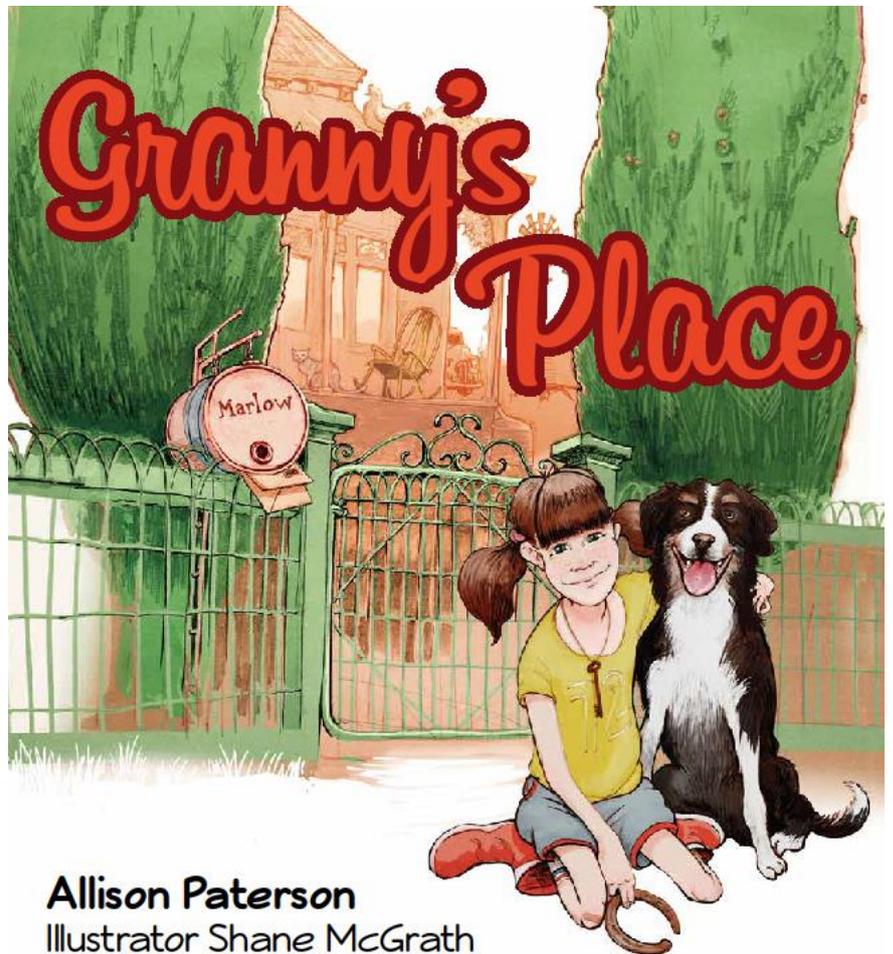
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Recommended for ages 5-10 years

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Allison Paterson
Illustrator Shane McGrath

Synopsis

Granny's Place is a touching whimsical tale of family ties and the special place a grandparent has in the heart of a child. Granny and Pa's farm was the best place in the world, brimming with treasures of the past and endless adventures to be had ... but time brings change.

Based on early memories of the narrator's visits to her grandparent's farm and told in the voice of a child, *Granny's Place* explores the love and connection a child feels for a grandparent. The granddaughter reflects on the whimsical delights of visiting Granny's place, a farm with a house lovingly built by Grandpa when he returned from the Great War, a home brimming with the wondrous possessions accumulated over generations. Delightful illustrations bring the past to life and capture the fun of cousins gathering in a country kitchen and planning adventures amongst the beauty of rural Australia in the 1960's. The loss of Grandpa brings grief and change which intensify as Grandma relocates from the family farm to town. We share the sorrow of a child and her eventual acceptance that, despite unwanted physical adjustments, nothing can change the relationship she shares with her Granny.

Granny's Place enriches both the understanding of the time and Australia's identity, through a wonderful story that celebrates the special bond between grandparent and child. The targeted early childhood audience will share in the delight of adventure while gently being encouraged to accept that change comes with the rhythm of life.

From the Author

I am a teacher librarian and author of *Anzac Sons: Five Brothers on the Western Front* and the adult version *Anzac Sons: The Story of Five Brothers in the War to End All Wars*, true accounts of the service of my grandfather and his brothers on the Western Front. *Granny's Place*, while a fictional story for children, is based on childhood memories of my much-loved grandparents, the joy of the family gatherings on their small farm in central Victoria and my reflections on the changes that life brings.

I grew up on a farm near Pyramid Hill, the small Victorian town where I was born. I have two big sisters. We travelled 24 miles to school at Kerang on an ancient bus – top speed 40mph. I now live on the beautiful Sunshine Coast. When I am not being a teacher-librarian I am reading, reviewing children's books, writing or planning a holiday (anywhere will do!). I can also be found on a long walk at the beach or cooling off in the pool.

Writing Granny's Place

When I was a child, my grandparent's property was a 20 minute drive from our farm. Granny's place was very special for all my family, it was a place where the cousins would gather. My grandfather bought the small block of land when he returned from the Great War and set about creating his livelihood and a home for his new wife, the delightful Eva. He made the mud bricks and built the home himself, which he named Passchendaele after a dreadful battle in which he was involved in 1917. It is just off the railway line between Pyramid Hill and Bendigo in northern Victoria, near an old railway siding called Mologa. There was once a busy little town there but it melted away after the Depression years. My grandparents were self-sufficient on their small farm and I marvel at their persistence and spirit. Stories of the constant visits by hungry swagman using the railway line as a

route always intrigued me. Grandma would give them bread and dripping. The home still stands today but is no longer liveable or owned by the Marlow family.

I wrote *Granny's Place* when I was a young mum about 25 years ago and I was thinking about the relationship my child had with his grandparents. I was missing my own grandma who had passed away a couple of years before. I had also migrated from Victoria to Queensland and I suspect was feeling a little longing for the familiar landscape. After my children's version of *Anzac Sons* was published I dug the manuscript out of a drawer. I played with the text of *Granny's Place* and then sent it to the publishers. Lucky me, they loved it!

Granny's Place links to the adult and children's versions of *Anzac Sons* which are both based on a collection of over 500 letters that my grandfather and his four brothers sent to home during WWI. They all served on the Western Front and only two of them made it home, Grandpa was one of them. You will see some connections in the illustrations to *Anzac Sons* – the Marlow surname on the mailbox, the stained glass window above the door (which really did exist) and the photos on the walls.

I was very fortunate to be able to work with such an awesome artist. I created an early version of the book with dreadful stick figures, then translated that into some thoughts for Shane, I didn't let him see my stick figures! It was magical to see Shane's interpretation come to life. He created concept drawings, we discussed these and then he waved his magic paintbrush. Shane's blending of simplicity and meticulous detail in his illustrations is outstanding, he captures movement and mood and seamlessly enhances the story, check out the pantry!

The Illustrator

Shane was born in Melbourne and has a brother and two sisters. His dad says he was named after a Hollywood cowboy. His mum says he was always talented (all mums say that) and one of the first artworks Shane made was when he bit his toast into the shape of a horse. He always loved drawing pictures and reading picture books, especially *Where the Wild Things Are* & *Asterix* comics. When at school, Shane would sometimes draw pictures of his teachers on the blackboard, which everyone found funny (except his teachers).

Shane also had lots of cousins that he loved to visit in places like Ballarat and St Arnaud in country Victoria. He would explore the old buildings, climb over old machinery and chase geckos through the bush. The sounds and colours of the countryside are what he remembers most.

In *Granny's Place*, Shane has included lots of little details to look out for. One of the boys likes to wear his red & white footy jumper that belongs to an old team from Cocoroc, Werribee called *The Herefords* (named after a big cow).

On page eight the tin box is filled with knick-knacks and tchotchkes that grandpa has collected over the years. Things like old and foreign coins (the one with the horse is Irish), enamel pins from the war, good ol' Kiwi boot polish, a deck of cards from a boat trip to New Zealand, even some jacks and marbles. The large, brass plate is what you would use to polish your buttons in the army, it protected your woolen jacket from getting button polish on it! And the shiny object that looks like a spinning top is a numbered dreidel that you would spin instead of rolling a dice.

Shane likes to draw the old-fashioned way with pencil and paper first, and then scans them into Photoshop. Using a drawing tablet he then gives the pictures colour, adding shadows and textures and trying all types of things.

Curriculum Links

Specifically, Granny's Place targets children of Years Prep to Year Two with the focus of providing a significant resource for the following key national Australian History Curriculum content descriptors:

Prep – Personal and Family Histories – How can stories of the past be told and shared?

Year One - Present and Past Family Life – How has family life changed or remained the same over time? Including the differences and similarities between the daily lives of students and life during their parents' and grandparents' childhoods -family traditions, leisure time and communications.

Year Two – The Past in the Present - What aspects of the past can you see today? What do they tell us? How have changes in technology shaped our daily lives? Including the impact of changing technology on people's lives (at home and in the ways they travelled, communicated, and played in the past).

Themes

- Family
- Grandparents
- The Past
- Change
- Changing technology
- Pets
- Farm life
- Grief

Class Discussion and Activities

This story reflects changing times –household items, transport, a way of life, and most importantly, the changes that time brings to family.

Pre-reading

1. Discuss Grandparent's – children share their grandparent experiences or other significant family members.
2. Introduce Granny's Place. What does the cover tell you about the book? What sort of things might happen in the story?

Viewing/Reading the Text – progressive page suggestions

Take time to talk and allow comment enabling the children to express feelings, to grasp the meaning, mood and atmosphere.

1. Consider the title page – what does this tell the reader about the setting and perhaps the time?
2. Turn to the first page. What clues are there that this story is set in the past?
3. What clues are there that this photo is from the past? What year was the house built?
4. Look at Grandpa's box of treasures on page 8 and discuss the illustrator's description above. Discuss with the children the keepsakes they, or members of their family might have.
5. Consider the double page spreads of the children outside. How are they feeling?
6. Consider the double page spread which shows the time when Grandpa passes away. What does the empty chair signify? How does it make the readers feel? How does the illustrator depict the emotion of losing a family member?
7. Why would Grandma leave the farm? Why are the cars leaving at night? What could the storm clouds and coming night also signify? What other character is now missing from the story (the dog)? Where might the dog have gone? Why could this be?
8. Consider the double page spread of the girl on the fence. What is she doing? How does she feel? Reflection/Loneliness/sadness/adventures gone. What does the bird indicate?
9. What do the children notice about the use of colour in the illustrations and the lack of colour/white space on some pages. Consider a selection of pages, how do they enhance the story?

After Reading

1. Explain to the children that here is a link to a previous book called Anzac Sons. Find the links – the name of the family on the mailbox, the mud brick home, the name on the glass plate above the door, photos of soldiers.
2. Look for things from the past:
 - Changes in transport – horse and buggy in 1924, the old ute and the 1960's style of car, the train.
 - Furniture – bedroom scene, chamber pot, wash stand, metal trunks, wrought-iron bed, wardrobe, cases, lounge chairs.
 - Kitchen – oven, sink, high chair, table and chairs, knives.
 - Pantry - Vacola bottling unit, bottles, biscuit tins, scales, light, mincer, Arnotts biscuit tins, milo, vegemite. How have some of these changed over time, how have they stayed the same?
3. List some changes in household items from Granny's old home to her new home – beds, furniture, heater, toilet, lights, table, pantry, kitchen, birds, garden, the dog.
4. Compare Granny's old house and her new house – how have they changed? How are they different/the same to the homes of the children?
5. Consider the sources of entertainment depicted in the story including dominoes, the organ, cards, crochet and self-made adventures. Have they changed over time?

Discussion

1. What length of time is the story set over? How can you tell? – change of season.
2. What role does the cat play? Why is the dog not at Granny's new place? What might have happened?
3. Why did we not see Granny's face until the last page? What does this last page tell us?
4. Explore the illustrations closely and discuss the use of colour, tone, shadow, line and space – how do they create atmosphere? Leaving the farm, Granny's shadow in the second last page, the movement of the children and animals.
5. Ask children what the message of the story might be?
6. Brainstorm feelings before Granny leaves her old home, feelings at the turning point when Grandpa passes away, feelings as Grandma settles into her new home and feelings at the conclusion. Introduce the word *grief* to the children. Children may like to share moments when they have experienced feelings of grief e.g. sad, angry, anxious, lonely.

Writing activities

1. If someone was feeling sad about the loss of a family member or even a pet make a list of ways you could help e.g. hugs, kindness -helping, sharing, listening, going for a walk, looking at photos, sharing memories.
2. Brainstorm the ways that grandparents can teach or help us, the ways that they are special. Write a letter of gratitude to grandparents in general or to the child's own grandparents.

Art activities

1. Collect pictures of Grandparents and create a class collage. Include words that describe grandparents.
2. Create a family tree which includes grandparents and immediate family with images (photos or children's own drawings) for display.
3. Explore the items in Granny's pantry, view and collect images of how household items have developed over the past.

Key Points

- Accessible, lyrical text told in a child's voice that captures both the joys of childhood and the sorrow of loss.
- Charming illustrations that bring the tale to life, enhancing and complementing the story with reflections of the Australian landscape, of childhood adventure and times past.

- A story that explores grief and change and the acceptance that both are part of life's journey.
- An excellent resource for the early childhood Australian curriculum exploring family life of the past, changing technology over time and life in rural Australia.

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