

## The Great Cold

Gladys Milroy

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### Synopsis

Moon has tricked Sun into changing places and the world has been plunged into a great cold. The animals seek refuge in a protected cavern, but Crow has an unhatched egg in her nest and is afraid to flee. When she finally flies for the cavern she finds she is too late, and it is already sealed shut against the cold. Her tears of distress wake a sleeping goanna who, for the price of Crow's best wing feathers, reveals a secret entrance. In the safety of the cavern Crow and Goanna become firm friends and a remarkable thing happens. Goanna sprouts black feathers and learns to fly. He becomes Goannabird. When Baby Bird hatches however, he has no wings. Goanna feels guilty and offers to be Baby Bird's wings. Together Baby Bird and Goannabird convince Moon to return to her rightful place in the sky and release the world from cold. They are hailed as heroes.

### Writing Style

Narrated in the third person, *The Great Cold* is part of a larger story given to the author in a dream by her old people. Broken into short chapters, the writing is compelling with its exciting action sequences and lively dialogue.

### Themes

*The Great Cold* is about relationships and consequences. The narrative raises issues of reconciliation, friendship, achievements, teamwork, sacrifice, secrets, destiny, and environmental concerns.

### About the Author

'My name is Gladys Milroy. I was born in Perth in 1927. I grew up at Parkerville Children's Home in the Darling Ranges, just outside of Perth. My people's country is Palkyu country, which is in the eastern Pilbara in the north west of Western Australia. The languages of my family are Palkyu and English.

'When I was young my favourite foods were boiled eggs and cake. I loved playing in the bush and watching the birds and animals, like magpies and wallabies, and especially the brumbies. My favourite places were the bush and the deep swimming hole we used to visit near Jane Brook, which runs into the Avon River. I felt happiest when I was on a bush picnic with my mother.'



## Author Motivation

'My story was inspired by my concern about the damage that is being caused to our environment, especially the effect it is having on the birds and animals. This story is part of a larger story which was given to me in a dream by my old people.'

## Study Notes

### *Pre-reading*

- Based on the title alone, what do you expect the book to be about?
- Based on the cover illustration and the title, what do you expect the book to be about?
- Is your answer to questions 1 and 2 different? Why?
- Write, draw or tell your own story, *The Great Cold*, using just the title and cover illustration as your start point.
- Read the back cover blurb. Does this change your ideas about the book?
- Does the blurb make you want to read the book? Why/why not?

### *After reading*

#### **Structure and presentation:**

- After reading the story look again at the cover illustration. Which elements of the story are illustrated on the cover? Why do you think the illustrator chose to paint those elements?
- Write an alternative blurb for the story.
- How important are the internal illustrations to your understanding of the story? Draw your own pictures (not necessarily based on those in the book) of Goanna/Goannabird, Crow, Baby Bird and others.
- This is a short chapter book. Why do you think the story is divided into chapters? How do the chapters generally begin and end?
- List the main events of the narrative. What was the first complication and how was it resolved? What was the second complication and how was it resolved?

#### **Friendship:**

- Think about the friendships you have. How have you become friends with people?
- What was Goanna's motivation for first helping Crow? Was it a good motivation? Why/why not?
- Why did the other animals call Goanna a hero? How did this change Goanna's attitude?
- Describe the way Crow treats Goanna, and vice versa.
- How does Baby Bird's affection change Goanna?

#### **Dreams, hopes and plans:**

- Discuss the importance of having dreams, hopes and plans.
- Write down some of your dreams for the future. How can you achieve them? Choose one dream and write down several steps you could take to make it happen.
- Think about Goanna trying to fly. How important is the support of his friends in achieving his goal? Will you need friends and family to help and encourage you in achieving your goals?

- How important is it that Goanna has confidence in his own abilities?

## **Cooperation:**

- What does Baby Bird help Goannabird with, and vice versa?
- When have you worked in a team? For a class project, or playing sport?
- How were the different members of the team able to help each other?
- Was there anything difficult about being in a team, and how was it/could it have been made easier?

## **Self-sacrifice:**

- Goanna and Baby Bird sacrifice their safety in order to save the earth, knowing they might be burnt by Sun's heat. What does the word 'sacrifice' mean?
- Has anybody ever sacrificed anything for you? Have you for somebody else?
- There are many kinds of sacrifices people make for others every day. Name three jobs that involve regular risk.

## **Destiny:**

- Crow thinks Baby Bird is special before he hatches, and later suspects Goanna is special in the same way.
- What is meant by 'special' in this story?
- Were Goanna and Baby Bird destined to achieve what they did?
- Do you believe in destiny? Why/why not?
- Could anybody else have done what Goannabird and Baby Bird did?
- What physical abilities and character traits did they each need/use?

## **Secrets:**

- Goanna keeps a secret from everybody, including Baby Bird. When is it okay to keep a secret from a friend?
- Why did Goanna not tell anyone of his plan?
- Was it okay for Baby Bird to hide and not tell Goanna or Crow what he was doing?
- Why did he do that?

## **Environment:**

- The great cold puts the lives of all the animals in danger. What sort of environmental dangers are animals facing today?
- Why is it important to take care of the environment? What can you do to better care for the environment?
- Research issues relating to the environment, such as: reduced habitat; water resources; feral species; the impact of climactic extremes; pollution; endangered species; types of native vegetation (especially trees) and animal species.

## **Animals:**

- How important is each animal to the story? How would the story be different if Crow and Baby Bird were wallabies, or Goanna was a moth or caterpillar?
- Try rewriting part of the story using different animals.
- What is your favourite animal? How might it survive if the world was frozen?

- Goannabird is part bird and part lizard. Make up your own half and half animal. Make up a name for it. Draw a picture of it. Write a story about it.

### **Indigenous Story-telling:**

- Discuss the role of teaching stories. Do other cultures use teaching stories? Do you know any other teaching stories?
- What do you think this story is trying to teach you?
- Are Indigenous stories different to other kinds of stories you've read? In what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?
- Read other crow stories by Indigenous authors (eg. *Crow and the Waterhole*; *How Crows Became Black*; *The Story of Crow: a Nyul Nyul story*; *Wargan the Crow*).
- Locate the Pilbara on a map of Australia
- Find out about the Palkyu people and/or the Pilbara region.
- Invite a local Indigenous spokesperson to come and talk to the class about their people's storytelling and culture.
- Arrange for a language lesson in Palkyu or the Indigenous language of your local area.

### **Aboriginal perspectives:**

There are substantial resources for exploring Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum available at:

- <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/apac/lessons/index.html>
- <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/hsie/crosscurriculum/aboriginal/index.htm>
- <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/indigenous/>
- <http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/English/abtorres.htm>
- <http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/pages/Educators/>