

## The Other Bears

Michael Thompson

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### Synopsis

Mother and Father Koala are suspicious of the *other* bears. The panda bears come with their delicious food — but Father and Mother don't like their shoes. Then come the polar bears with their jokes — but Father and Mother don't like their long fur coats. The black bears bring music — but it's too noisy for Father Koala. And the brown bears bring stories — which don't impress Mother Koala. When the sun bears arrive with their games, Mother and Father don't like their bicycles or umbrellas. They don't seem to like anything anymore! But all their grumpiness melts away, watching the littlest bears at play.

### Themes

*The Other Bears* explores ideas of tolerance and acceptance of different people and the diversity of cultural traditions. It is especially relevant to multiculturalism and a society such as Australia which has a high migrant population. Family is a significant theme of the story. Animal species (marsupials and bears) can also be explored.

### Writing Style

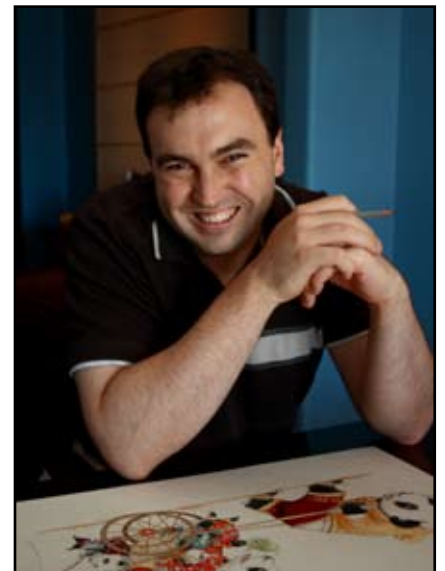
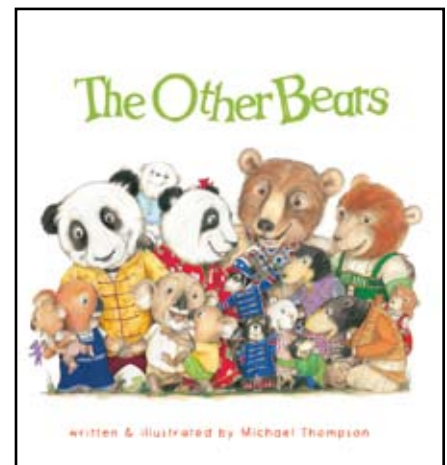
The story is written in a combination of gentle rhyme and prose. It is told in the third person, from the perspective of the koalas.

### Author/Illustrator Background

Michael was born and raised in Perth, Western Australia where he now lives with his family. *The Other Bears* was completed just in time for the birth of his first child.

Michael has drawn pictures for as long as he can remember. His Grade 2 teacher showed him how to make a picture book and he has been thinking about them (and collecting them) on and off ever since. His parents still have his first book, *How the Rabbit got its Long Ears*, hidden away somewhere (where it should stay!)

Michael has always like bears (doesn't everyone) and still has his first teddy bear, which looks like the ones in this book, but brown. Drawings for *The Other Bears* took a year and a half to complete.



## Author/Illustrator Motivation

Michael says: 'I wrote *The Other Bears* for young children with the aim of celebrating the diversity amongst different cultural groups in Australia whilst highlighting the things we all have in common. In a multicultural country we are blessed with food, clothing, music and stories from around the world and have an opportunity to learn from other cultural groups. Immigration has played a large role in defining Australia's history and *The Other Bears* celebrates this heritage while challenging our ongoing response to new families that come to live in our country.'

## STUDY NOTES

### Koalas

Koalas are often called koala bears, but they are not true bears.

- What are koalas?
- Why are they often called bears?
- As a class, make a list of everything you know about koalas.
- Research koalas on the internet or in the library. Where do they live? What do they eat? How big are they?
- Compare your research with the list you made earlier. How accurate was your list?

### Marsupials

- Make a list of marsupials.
- What makes marsupials different from other mammals?
- Form groups of two or three and choose a marsupial to research. Present your findings to the class as a poster or talk.
- Rewrite the story using a marsupial and another group of mammals, eg. a quokka and different rodents. Does this change the story? How/why?

### Bears

In the story there are five true bears depicted.

- What are they? Look at the front endpaper. Find each of the bears and their proper names.
- How many true bears are there in the world? Look at the back endpaper.
- Why do you think Michael Thompson chose to include the other true bears here? Why do you think he didn't include them in the story? Write and illustrate new pages for the book to include one of the missing bears in the story.

Form groups of two or three and choose a bear to research.

- What do they look like? How big are they? Where do they live? What do they eat? Are they endangered?
- Present your findings to the class as a poster or talk.

Bears are a popular choice for children's picture books. Look through the library and see how many picture books you can find with bears — there are hundreds!

- What is your favourite bear story?

- Why do you think there are so many stories about bears? Do you think illustrators choose bears because they can be humanized without being human?
- Why do you think Michael Thompson chose bears for his story, not people?
- Do the bears in this story behave like bears or people?

Throughout the book the little bears carry and exchange teddies.

- Can you follow the exchange of teddies from beginning to end? Can you find the extra teddy in the last double page spread?
- Teddy bears are very popular. When and where did teddy bears first appear? Why are they called 'teddy bears'?
- Bring your favourite teddy to school and hold a teddy bears' picnic. Use the teddies to re-enact the story.

## Migration

- The 'other bears' arrive, but where do they come from? See if you can guess where each bear family might be from.
- What gives you clues? Check your answers against the habitats for each bear listed in the endpapers.
- On a world map locate the bears' habitats.

Australia's population is made up of people from many different countries.

- Find out where the students in your class were born.
- What percentage of the class was born in Australia?
- What other countries do students and/or their parents come from? How much do you know about those countries — eg. geographical location, languages spoken, food and culture?

**According to government data about 22% of all Australians were born overseas. On a regional basis, Europe (20%) was the largest contributor followed by Southern Asia (16%), Northeast Asia (15%) and Oceania (14%). The United Kingdom (14%) was the single largest birthplace group followed by New Zealand (11%), India (11%) and China (10%). How do these national statistics compare with the statistics for your class?**

- Why do you think people move from one country to another? Make a list of all the reasons you can think of.

Most countries have immigration laws that control the movement of people into their country.

- Why do you think this is so?
- Do you think people should be able to live wherever they want to? Why/why not?

## Prejudice and intolerance

- Why do Mother and Father Koala react to the other bears so negatively at first?
- What makes them change their minds?
- Why do you think the little koalas are more accepting of the other bears?

People are often afraid of what they don't know.

- When you meet someone new, how do you feel?
- If the new person looks different to you and speaks differently, too, does that change the way you feel towards them?
- Do you think adults and children react the same way to new people?
- Have you ever met someone who assumed things about you before they got to know you? How did that make you feel?

What makes people people?

- Make a list of all the things people have in common, eg, physiology, emotions, etc.
- Make a list of all the things that can be different, e.g. beliefs, ideas, language, skin colour, etc.
- Choose a partner. Make a list together of the things you have in common, and the things that are different.
- Discuss as a class whether the things people share are more or less important than the things they don't.

## Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of the koalas.

- How might it be different if it was told from the point of view of the 'other bears'?

Choose one of the other bears and re-write the story from their point of view.

- What might their impressions be? What would they find different or strange about Australia? How would they feel about the koalas?
- Write a postcard home from your bear.

## Language use

Michael Thompson has chosen lots of different verbs to describe the way the koalas talk: e.g. grumbled, griped, grinned.

- Why do you think he has done this?
- Read a couple of pages changing the different talking verbs to 'said'. How does this change the way the book works?
- Try substituting the talking verbs in the story with others, giving the parents positive verbs and the children negative verbs. How does this change the story?

## Illustrations

- What medium do you think Michael Thompson used to create the pictures? Check your answer against the Illustration medium note on the imprint page (at the end of the book).
- How much of the story is told in the illustrations? Would the story work just as well with different illustrations?
- Choose a spread from the book and re-illustrate it yourself using a different medium.

Write to Michael Thompson and tell him what you liked/didn't like about his book. Tell him how it made you feel or what it made you think about. Send your letter to Michael Thompson c/o Fremantle Press.