



OLIVE

TEACHERS NOTES

Written by Edwina Wyatt
Illustrated by Lucia Masciullo

Published in February 2021 by Little Hare,
an imprint of Hardie Grant Children's Publishing

SYNOPSIS

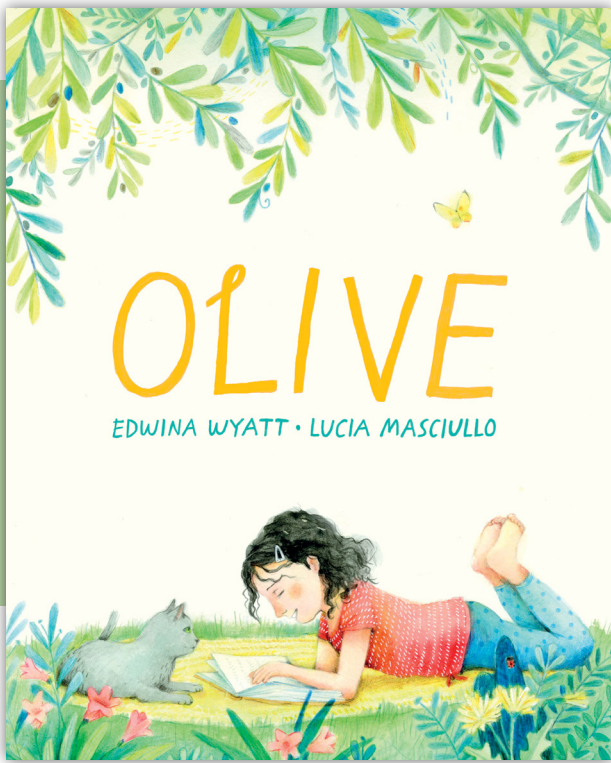
When Lilah comes home from school, Olive is nowhere to be seen, and Lilah is devastated to learn of the death of her beloved cat. Her family plants an olive tree for remembrance, but Lilah doesn't want to remember, and she doesn't want to take any part in looking after the tree. The tree is a steady presence all through the year. It hurts Lilah too much to remember, but then she starts to forget – the colour of Olive's paws, the shade of her eyes, her sweet warm smell.

Lilah doesn't want to remember, until a strange orange cat wanders into the yard. The cat sits on *Olive's* step. It sits on *Olive's* fence. Lilah is furious, but when she chases the cat away, it runs up the tree – *Olive's* tree. Lilah follows the cat up into the branches of the olive tree. When the branches wobble, Lilah looks down, and she's surprised by what she sees. Olive is everywhere – by the gate, by the swing, by the pond. Lilah's memories of Olive come flooding back. As she looks back at the orange cat, still trembling in the tree, Lilah realises that she is ready to remember the friend she lost.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edwina Wyatt is an Australian children's author. She grew up in Sydney and worked as a lawyer and a high school teacher before becoming a writer of books for young readers. Her debut junior fiction novel *The Secrets of Magnolia Moon* was awarded the CBCA Honour Book of the Year for Younger Readers, and shortlisted for the Readings's Children's Book Prize. She has twice been awarded a CBCA Notable for her picture books.

Edwina lives in the Victorian High Country with her husband, two children, a dog, cat, and too many chickens.



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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Born and bred in Livorno, Italy, Lucia currently lives on the Gold Coast, where she works as a freelance illustrator specialising in children's books. Since her move to Australia in 2007 she has collaborated with Australian and English Publishers and has illustrated seventeen books, including *Come Down Cat!* (CBCA Honour Book and shortlisted in the Prime Minister Award, 2012) and the successful series *Our Australian Girl*.

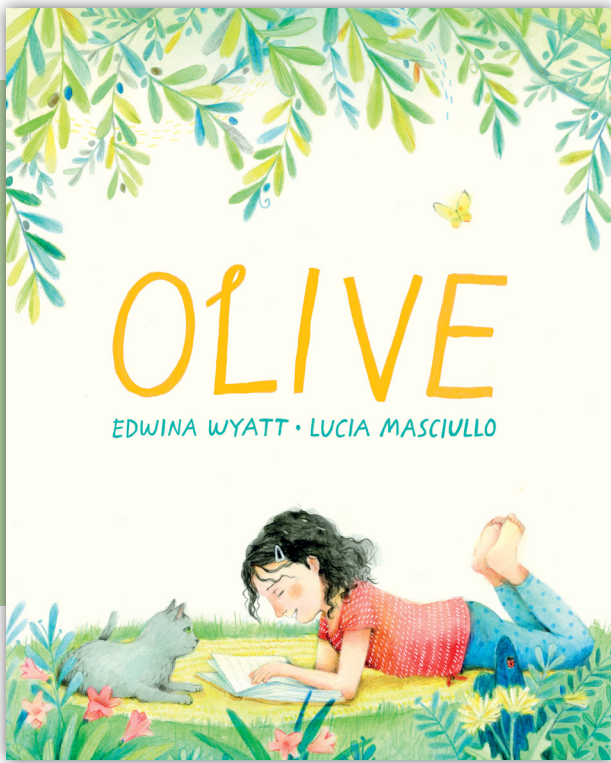
Lucia likes to create whimsical characters and dynamic compositions and she works with traditional techniques, mixing watercolour, pencil and acrylic. Her most recent books are *Together Always*, by Edwina Wyatt and *The Ballad of Henry Hoplingsea*, by Julia Hubery.

WRITING STYLE

Edwina Wyatt uses sparse, straightforward text, to navigate the complex themes of grief, loss, and anger. When Lilah first comes home to discover that Olive is gone, Wyatt lets the illustration speak for the loss, creating a space for children and adults to interpret what has happened using language that they feel comfortable with.

The places that first signal Olive's absence – the step, the fence, the roof – are repeated throughout the story – as the places the fruit falls from the olive tree, and the places the strange cat chooses to sit. Finally, when Lilah is able to remember Olive, the style of the language is repeated, but now Lilah sees her pet everywhere – by the gate, the swing, the pond, on her pillow, her book, and her toes. The language is released, in the same way that Lilah's anger at her loss is.

There are many ways to approach conversations about death and grieving in this book – through the immediate story, the specific language, and the textual reference to seasons and the natural world. The olive tree and its fruit, reinforced by the changing seasons, reflect the cycle of life without being prescriptive. Young readers might find this comforting, and will allow them to explore their anxieties about the death of pets or people through the life cycles of other living things.



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ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Lucia Masciullo's illustrations have been described as 'exuberant and whimsical', which perfectly captures the feeling of her work. In *Olive*, her illustrations are realistic, showing a genuine respect to the real feelings of grief children (and adults) experience upon the death of a beloved pet. Masciullo's faded watercolours reflect the whimsy of childhood, as well as the blurry and often confusing emotions that children experience when something or someone dies, and she uses black and white and sepia to separate moments of memory and loss from the everyday journey of time passing.

In *Olive*, the illustrations step in to fill the space in the story where there are no words. Rather than the author telling the reader what has happened in the story, the illustrations show Lilah's grief at learning that her pet has died, leaving space for readers to describe what is happening in their own words. Her illustrations also mark the passage of time – the olive tree grows bigger and stronger in the background of the book, its presence solid and comforting as Lilah goes through her own stages of grief. When she is ready, the olive tree is there to help her remember, taking over the narrative in a two-page spread – the tree is no longer in the background, but surrounds Lilah and gives her the language to remember and describe Olive, and to hold onto her memories moving forward.

THEMES

Olive is a gentle introduction to young readers about death and the complicated processes of grief and remembering. Grieving a pet is often the first experience of grief that children will encounter, although the discussion around the story in this book has the potential to spark broader discussions around death and the ways we remember and honour the people and animals we love.



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There are a lot of heavy themes in this book, but they are discussed gently, and with respect to the way that different people grieve differently. Olive explores loss in a genuine, hopeful way.

- Loss
- Remembering
- Life cycles
- Grief
- Pets
- Anger
- Death

STUDY NOTES

1. Look at the illustration on the second page of the story, where Lilah learns that Olive has died. Why do you think there are no words on this page? What words would you use to describe what is happening here?
2. There are particular places in the book that Lilah thinks of as belonging to Olive – the steps, the fence, and the roof. Make a list of three places that remind you of a person or pet who is special to you.
3. Why do you think the illustrator uses black and white illustrations on the pages where Lilah remembers Olive?
4. Why doesn't Lilah want to remember Olive at first? She is angry when the orange cat first appears in Olive's special places. What other emotions do you think she is feeling in the story?
5. How do you think Lilah feels at the end of the story? Why do you think she might find comfort in being able to tell someone else about how special Olive was to her?
6. Are there particular words in the book that make you feel certain emotions? Make a list of the words in the story that make you feel comforted, sad, happy, or angry. What other words might you use to describe each of these emotions?



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ACTIVITES

1. When Lilah remembers Olive, the picture shows all the places that Lilah and Olive played together. Draw a picture of your own house that shows all of the places that you share with someone special to you.
2. Death is something that can be very sad, and difficult to understand. What do you understand about death? Can you use the olive tree as a way to describe the cycle of life? What are the various stages of life and death? What other things can you see in the illustrations that have a life cycle?
3. Why do you think Lilah's family chooses to plant an olive tree to help them remember Olive? Do you have a special tree, place, or object that helps you to remember a pet or a person who has died? Draw a picture of it, and describe how it reminds you of them.
4. Imagine that you are Lilah, sitting in the tree with the orange cat at the end of the book, telling it all about Olive. What do you think she tells it? Use words or pictures to show their conversation.