

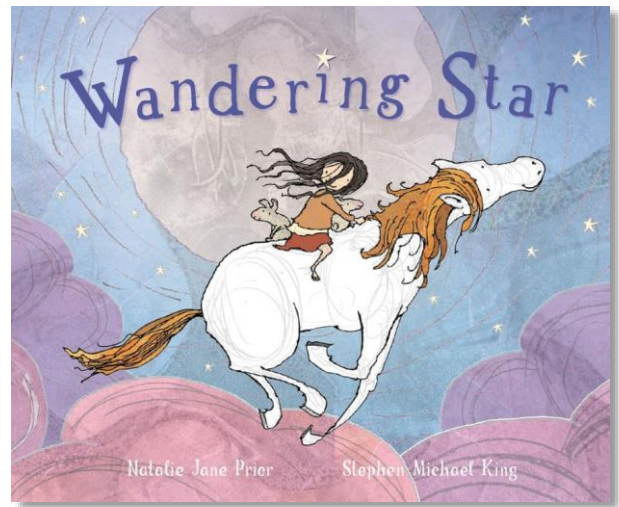
Wandering Star

Author

Natalie Jane Prior

Illustrator

Stephen Michael King



Synopsis

Wandering Star is a story of a magical adventure that a little girl sets out on with her horse Wandering Star. Fuelled by imagination, they venture across the paddocks, visit the circus and the beach, and flee wolfish shadows into a cave where they meet the fairy King and Queen. With the night nearly over, they fly home using the enchanted cape they received from the fairies, and finally descend into a well-earned and peaceful sleep together, content with both their wandering adventures and each other's company. An exploration of the world of the imagination as fuelled by the Australian countryside, and the companionship and love that can exist between a child and their beloved horse, *Wandering Star* is a gentle and enchanting tale that shows how the ordinary can become extraordinary when seen through a child's eyes.

About the Author

Natalie Jane Prior is the author of numerous books for children and young adults. She is the author of the internationally successful fantasy series *Lily Quench*, which has well over half a million copies in print.

About the Illustrator

Award-winning author and illustrator Stephen Michael King has illustrated more than fifteen books for Scholastic. His first picture book, *The Man Who Loved Boxes*, skyrocketed to popularity, winning the Family Award for Children's Books in 1996. It was also shortlisted in the Crichton Award for Children's Book Illustration and has been sold around the world. Stephen describes drawing as something that he simply can't live without. He works mainly with watercolours and ink. He works fast so that his ideas stay fresh and his brush and linework fluid.

Themes

Magic; adventure; exploration; freedom; companionship; imagination; horses.

Writing Style

Written throughout in the first person from the point of view of the unnamed protagonist, the story is told entirely in verse. The language used is rhythmic and well suited for reading aloud to a youthful audience, while the descriptive passages are evocatively complex enough to maintain interest while being clear and simple enough to be comprehended by the very young. Prior blurs the line between imagination, dreams, and reality throughout; reflecting the lack of differentiation between real life and imaginative play that is so familiar to small children. A gentle tale of friendship and wonder, *Wandering Star* is a story that will both engage and entertain the intended readership of the very young.

Illustration Style

Created using pencil, watercolour, ink and digital compilation, King's artworks are rendered using crisp fluid linework with soft-edged sweeps of colour in a palette heavily dependant upon natural hues and muted earth-tones. Consisting predominantly of double page spreads, the visual narrative parallels the textual narrative throughout. King's figures are realistic and he manages to make the animals deftly expressive without anthropomorphisation. The depth of background colour and detail varies between the different spreads, maintaining visual interest throughout.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, look closely at the cover and title, and as a class discuss what you can see. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What is the picture on the cover showing?
 - Who do you think the story is about?
 - What do you think might happen in this story?
 - Who or what do you think is *Wandering Star*?
 - What does the phrase *Wandering Star* mean?
- 2) As a class discuss what you can see in the first double page spread. What does the countryside look like in the background? What evidence of people can you see? Why do you think that the people live down on the flat land and not in the hills?
- 3) What other animals do *Wandering Star* and the little girl come across in their travels? What animals would you most likely encounter in your local area if you were free to roam around the countryside by yourself? Draw a picture of an animal that you might meet if you went exploring near where you live.
- 4) The little girl and *Wandering Star* visit a circus encampment, and join in with their practice. Plan, practice, and create a class circus performance of your own. As a class think of all the different possible acts you would like to see, that you might be able to perform. In small groups choose one of the acts you have discussed and make it your own. It might be juggling, doing somersaults, a dance or a magic trick, or just clowning around. Perform your circus acts for another class or at assembly.
- 5) *Wandering Star* and her rider pick up some rabbits, and herd the sheep into a paddock where they will be safe from a fox. Foxes and rabbits are introduced species to Australia, and native animals are

at risk from foxes while rabbits harm the environment. In small groups investigate the effect that introduced predators such as foxes and cats, and herbivores such as rabbits, have had on native bird and wildlife populations, and what we can do to help protect our environment from them. In pairs choose one native animal, and research the ways in which it and its habitat have been threatened, damaged, or destroyed by introduced animals and human activities. Create a poster to present your findings, being sure to include a section on what we can do to help protect our native species and ecosystem.

- 6) Visit the beach, or a wetland area near you, and look in the rockpools or shallows for treasures of your own. You probably won't find a pendant like the little girl in the story, but take photos or sketch all the interesting rocks, shells, seaweed, and creatures that you can see. When you return to class use your sketches and photos to help you create a rockpool or wetland themed collage.
- 7) When the little girl finds a necklace in a rockpool, she creates a magical story about its history; where it came from, and how it ended up in the rockpool. Choose one item that you saw in your trip to the beach or wetland area, and write a short fantasy story featuring it.
- 8) When *Wandering Star* and the little girl visit a cave, they see both bats and glowworms. What other creatures might live in a cave? Why do bats often like caves, and do all bats roost in them? In pairs, choose either glowworms or bats to research further. Use your research findings to create a poster or powerpoint slide sharing what you learnt. Some things to include in your research are:
 - Where do they live?
 - What do they eat?
 - How do they reproduce (how do they have babies)?
 - What predators threaten them?
 - What different types are there?
 - How do they hunt their prey?
- 9) If you could receive gifts from a fairy king or queen, what would you like them to be and why? Paint a picture of the gift you would most like to receive, and caption it with your explanation of what it is and why you would like to have it.
- 10) Look carefully at the two scenes within the cave. What colours has the artist used to create these pictures? How does he show what is happening in the dark? Using these two scenes for inspiration, create a shoebox diorama of the inside of a fantastic cave of your own. Your artwork might feature glowworms and bats like the artist's, or you might want to include glowing fungi or a phosphorescent water source! Be as imaginative as you can in creating your underground fantasy world.
- 11) If you had a horse like *Wandering Star*, and could spend the day riding around your local area visiting places that interest you, where would you go and why? Write a paragraph describing where you would like to ride to, what you would do there, and why you would choose that place to visit. Illustrate your paragraph with a picture of you and your imaginary horse.
- 12) Create a collage showing a paddock full of sheep. You can use cotton wool balls for the sheep, pieces of bark and twigs collected from the schoolyard for the fence and trees, and coloured paper for the sky and grass.
- 13) If you had a horse of your own who was also your best friend, what would you name them? Draw a picture of the horse you would most like to own, and write their name in large decorative letters underneath.

- 14) The world looks very different when *Wandering Star* and the little girl are flying high and looking down on it. What would your school and home look like from above? Look online for a satellite picture of your school and the surrounding area, and then create a colourful artwork showing what it looks like from above.
- 15) Where do you think *Wandering Star* and the little girl will go tomorrow, and what might they do there? Write another verse of their story sharing what you think their next adventure could be.