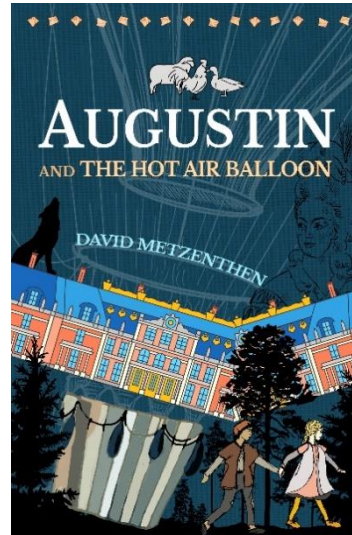


Augustin and the Hot Air Balloon

by David Metzenthen

Teacher's Notes

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BLURB

Augustin is a poor boy who lives in a barn. Celine is a rich girl who lives in a mighty palace. Together they escape into the sky . . . Only to land in a world of terrible trouble and dangerous secrets!

SUMMARY

On a whim, a very poor Augustin jumps into the basket of the first hot air balloon. Inside the basket he discovers that the very rich Celine has also stowed away in the basket. They land safely but in dangerous country where they are at risk because Celine is from the palace and the poor people are very angry that they are starving while those in the palace have plenty.

They make their way back to the palace as Celine promises to keep Augustin safe with her while he thinks about his family, who may not survive the winter. In the palace, Augustin is Celine's servant publicly and her friend privately, and she entreats him to trust her and do as she says so they may escape France and the coming revolt together. He does as she says and helps Celine and her family to escape just before the revolution, back to their native Austria.

In the final chapter, they pass by Augustin's village as they escape France and he realises that he needs to look after his family and goes home to them with the promise that he will one day see Celine again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Metzenthen is the highly-regarded author of many books for children and young adults. He has been awarded Premiers' prizes, a Prime Minister's award and a CBCA Book of the Year award.

After completing his schooling in Melbourne, Metzenthen travelled to New Zealand where he held a variety of jobs. After returning to Australia, he worked as a copywriter for Radio 3DB, for Grundy Television and for Myer before deciding to write full-time. He now lives in Melbourne with his wife and two children.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I discovered the idea for this novel quite simply. I was thinking about writing a picture book about hot-air balloons, and discovered that when the Montgolfier brothers launched their balloon in 1783 from the Royal Palace of Versailles in France, a sheep, duck, and rooster flew in the basket. I then decided to sneak a poor French farm boy along for the ride, and a very rich Austrian girl who lived in the Royal Palace.

At that time so much was happening in France that was interesting and exciting, I thought it would make a wonderful adventure story based on facts while concentrating on fiction. France was in a state of upheaval, the events of a universal nature. The poor were starving. The King and Queen were spending lots and lots of money. The weather was weird due to a volcanic eruption. An incredibly expensive diamond necklace disappeared from the Palace. Revolution was coming and midnight escapes were attempted. France was a country experiencing vast and sometimes violent (my story stops before the guillotining starts) change. This, I thought, spelled serious adventure and misadventure!

There were wonderful characters to write about: the teenaged Queen Marie Antoinette, King Louis the Sixteenth, Count Axel von Fersen, and nameless, countless mysterious people with good and bad intentions. I then placed young Augustin and Celine into settings that I felt were exciting: aboard the hot-air balloon, travelling through treacherous regions of rural France, and living in the fabulous, mighty, and unique Palace of Versailles. Finally, of course, I had them escape to very different futures.

History itself provided a timeline that I altered fractionally, using poetic license to compress real-life happenings into a cohesive story for young readers. Essentially though, the structure of the novel was lifted directly from actual events and only needed tweaking by the author.

I felt this short period of history offered themes of such magnitude that if I could write well and imaginatively, the work would have appeal. It also tested my abilities as a writer to convey the temper of the times, the amazing settings, and the outcomes for my characters. I have visited France three times but never the Palace of Versailles. Fortunately, there is so much quality written and visual material available I felt able to bring the period and places to life. I also found and enjoyed the voices of my main characters Augustin and Celine; otherwise, this story and that balloon would have never got lift-off no matter how interesting.

Beginning each chapter with a concise, generally light-hearted and relevant fact is the foundation for the story's construction and progress. It offers a further dimension to the reader and is an original format that I devised for the novel. My intention as a writer is always to entertain; there are many ways to do this (none are easy), and it's my hope this work marrying fact and fiction was successful.

Augustin and the Hot Air balloon is first and foremost an adventure novel. If it informs or sparks a reader's interest in the French Revolution, that would be pleasing; it was a period of history that influenced the world view of human rights and democracy. The process of researching and writing was intensely interesting, but it was the fantastic settings and real-life events that made it exciting. As a fiction writer, though, the most rewarding and challenging aspect of the work was to bring Augustin and Celine into being.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION POINTS

As students read the book, below are comprehension discussion points which could be used in guided reading groups. The groups do not need to be like ability. Chapters are relatively short with an average of seven pages per chapter, and can be read aloud to support students with low text decoding ability. Alternately, students could respond to these prompts at the end of each chapter as a written reflection.

Australian Curriculum Links – Responding to Literature

Year 5 - Present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage, and reflecting on the viewpoints of others ([ACELT1609 - Scootle](#))

Year 6 - Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots ([ACELT1614 - Scootle](#))

Year 7 - Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view ([ACELT1620 - Scootle](#))

Year 8 - Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts ([ACELT1627 - Scootle](#))

Chapter 1: What has happened so far? What do we think about the characters Augustin and Celine?

Chapter 2: Why have Augustin and Celine hidden in the balloon? What were their motives? What do they have in common, and what is different? Would you make the same decisions?

Chapter 3: How have the characters changed already through knowing each other? What ideas have challenged them? Discuss the following quote from Celine, "I suppose if you're very, very hungry, a loaf of bread might be more valuable than a diamond, even though diamonds are so beautiful."

Chapter 4: Augustin and Celine live in the same time and place, but they have very different skills. What skills do they each have, and why are they different? How would each of their journeys be different if they were alone?

Chapter 5: The wolves may be wolves, but they might also be symbols for other things. What else might the wolves be representing? How are the wolves similar to your ideas? Why might the author use symbolism?

Chapter 6: Why is Celine pretending to be the Queen's daughter? Is this a good idea? Why or why not?

Chapter 7: What have you learned about the problems of France in late 1700s? What do you think the solution to their problems are? What would you do if you were a peasant, or the Queen?

Chapter 8: Why did Celine set the duck free? How did Thomas feel about this? What do you think about how Celine reacted to Thomas' statements? What did we learn about Celine and Thomas from this encounter?

Chapter 9: The woman in the village square talked about a beggar-boy angel saving them and becoming the king. Why do you think the peasants thought this? How does this idea help them?

Chapter 10: Discuss the setting of this chapter. How does the author describe the setting? How does it make you feel? Is that the author's intention? Why do you think the author included this setting instead of letting Augustin and Celine sleep comfortably again?

Chapter 11: Celine says the diamonds are worth ten thousand lives. Do you agree? Who do you think would think this way, and who would disagree?

Chapter 12: Suspense is when you think something is going to happen and get excited or worried about it. What events build suspense in this chapter? How did the author build suspense? A red herring is when deliberately misleading clues build suspense about things which do not occur. Did you notice any red herrings in this chapter? What is the purpose of suspense and red herrings?

Chapter 13: Make a prediction about what will happen next, and give evidence for why you think that. What will happen to Augustin, Celine, and the Queen?

Chapter 14: Compare the description of the village and its people with the description of the palace and its people. How are they similar and how are they different? Why is this important?

Chapter 15: Foreshadowing is when a story hints at something to come. What hints can you see in this chapter that might tell you what is coming? Predict what will happen and give reasons for your thoughts. Why do authors include foreshadowing in their stories?

Chapter 16: Why does Augustin want to be rich? Why does Celine want to be rich? In the last lines of the chapter, Celine says that behind the magnificent mirrors are the money and blood of poor French people who have paid for everything. Do you think Celine has changed since the beginning of the book?

Chapter 17: Discuss what happened with Augustin and the bread. Who organised this? Why? How does this help to develop the story?

Chapter 18: What are the servants saying about the rich? What do they want to do? Do you think they have good ideas? If they set fire to the palace and steal everything, will they be happy? Why do they want to do these things?

Chapter 19: Henri says a war is starting. Which side should Augustin be on, the palace or the peasants? Why?

Chapter 20: There is a lot of excitement in this chapter as Augustin fulfils his mission. Go through the chapter and find all of the ways in which the author built the excitement, including his use of punctuation, sentence length, descriptions, and red herrings. Did you feel the excitement?

Chapter 21: At the end of Chapter 13, you made a prediction about what would happen. Are your predictions correct? What hints were earlier in the book about Mathilde and her role in story?

Chapter 22: Do you like the events of this chapter? Would you go home to your family like Augustin, or travel on to Austria with Celine? What do you think will happen next?

EXPLORING VIEWPOINTS

After reading the book, students explore the viewpoints expressed within it and their thoughts about this. This could be over many lessons to give time for students to express themselves and respond to the text. These responses could be oral or written, recorded or live. In order to give all students equity of voice, it is a good idea to provide a range of ways for students to express their thoughts. This could take multiple lessons in order to allow students time to think and dive deeply into the text.

Australian Curriculum Links – Literature and Context

Year 5 - Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts ([ACELT1608 - Scootle](#))

Year 6 - Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1613 - Scootle](#))

Year 7 - Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ([ACELT1619 - Scootle](#))

Year 8 - Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups ([ACELT1626 - Scootle](#))

Learning Intention: We are learning about viewpoints in texts and how they shape our understanding.

Success Criteria:

- I can identify information about social and historical information in a text
- I can make connections between my experiences and characters' experience
- I can explain how characters' ideas are shaped by where and when the story was set
- I can explore how my ideas are confirmed or challenged by the ideas in the text

Explain to students that viewpoints are how the same idea can be seen as good or bad depending on your experience. Give an example, such as someone saving up to buy the coolest pens and then others in the class wanting to borrow them. The person who owns the pens might not want to loan them, but to the people who want to borrow them this might seem selfish.

Brainstorm some real-life examples of people having different viewpoints, and then extend this into examples in the book, e.g., the queen having a party for a sheep, but the people seeing this as greedy and unnecessary when people are starving.

Have students work in pairs and make connections between their own lives and the characters' lives. When have they felt that someone else was taking more than their share, and how did it feel? Have they ever been accused of taking more than their share, and how did that feel?

Ask students to consider the context of France in the 1780s. How would it be different if it were set today or one thousand years earlier? If hot air balloons were invented now, could this experience be recreated, or could it only exist in this time? Why or why not? Could this have occurred the same way in Australia in its early colonial years?

Finally, have students consider if it is fair that some people should have more than others, or should everyone have the same. Does it depend on the context? When is it fair, and when is it not? Have them explain what they would do if they magically became the king of France in the 1780s and had the power to leave the system or change it.

CLOSE READING OF LANGUAGE FEATURES

Work through the gradual release of responsibility by modelling the analysis of language features regarding the setting, and then having students work together to analyse the background characters, i.e., characters who aren't developed at all and just serve to set the scene. Finally, students can then choose their own language to analyse. Time should be allowed for students to explore deeply, and this activity may take several lessons.

[Australian Curriculum Links - Interpreting, Analysing and Evaluating](#)

Year 5 - Identify and explain characteristic text structures and language features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text ([ACELY1701 - Scootle](#))

Year 6 - Analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text ([ACELY1711 - Scootle](#))

Year 7 - Analyse and explain the ways text structures and language features shape meaning and vary according to audience and purpose ([ACELY1721 - Scootle](#))

Year 8 - Apply increasing knowledge of vocabulary, text structures and language features to understand the content of texts ([ACELY1733 - Scootle](#))

Learning Intention: We are learning to notice the language features author use, and their impact on the audience.

Success Criteria:

- I can identify language features which the author uses for a purpose
- I can analyse how the language features meet the author's purpose
- I can explain how language features shape the meaning of the text
- I can explain how the language features improve my deeper understanding of the text

Compare the description of a village and the palace:

The village (Chapter 9): "Augustin could smell smoke, sickness and filth. Tiny houses were packed together as if to stop each other from falling over. A pig grunted. Someone coughed and spat. A baby cried. The stones were slimy. Celine covered her nose and mouth".

The Hallway of Mirrors (Chapter 16): "Augustin was speechless. He stared at the curved ceiling decorated with pictures of heaven. The light from hundreds of tall mirrors was somehow silver and white yet also invisible. The reflections of reflections stole his every thought. So dazzling, so long was the room, he felt himself falling into it. There were golden statues and soaring windows. Huge crystal candelabra floated like icy stars".

Provide a copy of these descriptions to students and ask them to identify which words help them to shape their understanding and how. Focus on the vocabulary first, and then move to noticing the sentence structures and how these shape your views. Compare the descriptions of physical objects in the village to the less concrete description of the palace, and think about how this impacts their view. Finally, move to the symbolism, e.g., *A baby cried* compared to *Huge crystal candelabra floated like icy stars*, giving the comparison of human misery compared to lightness and impossibilities realised.

Once the passages have been analysed, ask students to work in groups of 2-3 to repeat the process with descriptions of the background characters in the village and the castle:

The villagers (Chapter 9): "Augustin saw that some of the women held knives and sticks. Their faces were fish-belly white. Their eyes were dull and sunken. He knew they would smell unclean, and unwell, like his mother. He also knew it was not their fault".

The people in the palace (Chapter 16): "Soundless, the doors at the far end of the Hallways of Mirrors were opened by two tall perfectly dressed men. They wore matching blue and gold coats, black shoes with silver buckles, and white wigs tied with blue ribbons. Three ladies with hair

decorated with jewels swept into the room. More ladies followed in gorgeous dresses that showed off the colours of flowers, stars, oceans and peacocks”.

Compare students’ findings, and then ask them find other passages in the book where they have noticed the author’s language helping them to infer meaning. Students can then report back how the passages helped them to deepen their understanding of an aspect of an idea, a setting, or a character.