

**The Windy Farm**  
Doug MacLeod / Craig Smith  
TEACHER NOTES  
By Janet McLean

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Author:** Doug MacLeod left his full-time TV production job in 2002 to focus on writing books for children and young adults. So far, he's written seven novels and two picture books. In 2011, his last novel, *The Life of a Teenage Body-Snatcher* was awarded an Honour Book in the Children's Book Council of Australia Awards, was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and was highly commended for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. Doug lives and works in St Kilda, Melbourne. In 2008 The Australian Writers' Guild presented him with the Fred Parsons Award for Contribution to Australian Comedy.

**Illustrator:** **Craig Smith** grew up in the Adelaide Hills, later studying graphic design at the South Australian School of Art, graduating in 1976. He worked at a variety of jobs - including undercoating the Sydney Harbour Bridge - while slowly building a career as an illustrator. He has done the illustrations for over 370 picture books, junior novels and educational readers. The humour and pathos of home and school life, and a fondness for unusual perspectives are features of his work. His books in recent years have seen a return to real painting and a turning away from rendering, or 'painting', on computer. In recent years visiting schools around Australia has invigorated him. The recurring themes of his work are about an Australian childhood. A childhood lived in an Australian landscape – usually a suburb! He is passionate about children learning to think with real curiosity, with humour, with imagination and with empathy. He lives in Melbourne, but loves getting out of it. When not drawing he loves gardening. In 2012 Craig Smith was the winner of this year's Euphemia Tanner Award. This is a biennial award sponsored by La Trobe University in Bendigo Victoria, to recognize distinguished service to Children's Literature and the encouragement of the joys of reading in children.

**SYNOPSIS** *The Windy Farm* is a witty, lighthearted look at the importance of wind power and environmental sustainability. It is so windy on Windy Hill that one day half the farmhouse is blown away. The family rebuild the house as best they can using Grandpa's power tools, and then are forced to sell Grandpa's favourite pig, Big Betty, to pay the next electricity bill. When the family's old windmill spins so fast that it causes a fountain, Mum, the inventor of the family, comes up with a clever plan – to turn the Windy Farm into a *wind* farm.

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**WRITING STYLE** In *The Windy Farm* Doug MacLeod has taken a tongue-in-cheek approach to writing about a serious subject - the importance of wind power and environmental sustainability. Doug MacLeod says that the idea for *The Windy Farm* came after visiting a wind farm near Ballarat. The theme of the story is quickly established on the first few pages. Why would anyone want to live on a farm where '*the winds are so fierce that even the pigs are blown away?*' The reason? '*It was all we could afford.*' The Family who live on Windy Farm manage the best they can with the help of 'Mum, the inventor of the family, and Grandpa, who always stays calm, even when half the house blows away - "*Never mind,*' said Grandpa." A new problem is introduced when, after rebuilding the house '*as cheaply as we could*', using Grandpa's power tools, they get a huge power bill. This provides the impetus for a solution - what if the family could make use of the windmill that '*spun so quickly that it caused a fountain.*' Mum, the inventor, thinks up an ingenious plan: '*Let's turn our farm into a wind farm.*' In the end the family are rewarded for Mum's ingenuity. They make a fortune from their wind farm, build a brand new wind-proof house for themselves (and one for the pigs). In a satisfying final twist, Mum's creative invention outlasts the *nonrenewable* oil well of mean, rich, Uncle Jeff who gets his comeuppance. Doug MacLeod wanted Craig Smith to do the pictures for *The Windy Farm* '*because he is not only a wonderful artist, but he also has a fine sense of humour.* Doug also thinks that Craig's illustrations '*prevented the story from becoming too 'preachy*'.

**ILLUSTRATIONS** Craig Smith used mainly gouache for the illustrations in *The Windy Farm*, and the wind was painted with acrylic. His 'fine sense of humour' is evident in the lively, witty illustrations that bring Doug Macleod's simple, but 'zany and inventive', text to life. Throughout the book Craig Smith uses a cinematic aerial perspective to capture the effect of the wind on everyone and everything on Windy Farm. The reader is 'up there with the wind', viewing the havoc - the house bending in the wind; people, pigs, and planks flying away. The white-painted wind sweeps across the pages. Visual details on each page add to the comic effect. For example, the kitchen, that Mum has set up as a workshop for her inventions, and the stylish wind-proof house for the pigs (complete with rocking chair and computer). From beginning to end, the force of the wind pushes everything from left to right through the book - the trees, the people, the animals, objects, - until it comes to rest against the walls of the wind-proof house. And then in one last twist Uncle Jeff blows away. As the family (anchored by their sensible heavy metal shoes) watch, Grandpa calmly says, '*Never mind.*' - a perfect example of the words and pictures working together to tell the whole

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story. The citation Craig received when he received this Award states, '*Craig's sense of humour and acute observation skills allow him to portray the emotions of his characters and the dynamics of their stories with wit, insight and empathy. He truly is a master of illustrating body language and movement*'.

## **DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES**

- Introduce the book to the children – show them how to 'read' the story.
  - Before you read story with children help them to interpret what is happening through the text and the illustrations by talking with them, and pointing out what to listen for in the text, and to find in the pictures. This will help them to build a deeper understanding of the story, and its implications.
  - Open the book out to show the whole cover. Tell the children the title of the story and ask them what they think is happening in the picture.
  - Show the children the title page and ask the children what is happening to the pigs and the rooster.
  - Talk with the children about how the font for the title, on the cover and title page, looks windswept.
  - Looking at the first few pages, talk with the children about how the wind affects everything on Windy Farm.
  - Use this method to talk through the whole story with the children.
  - Then, when you read the story be prepared for the children to participate in the reading.
  - Read expressively, changing the tone of your voice and the pace of your reading.
- *The Windy Farm* is a great introduction for young readers to an important Australian curriculum topic - the importance of environmental sustainability
  - Ask the children to find out more about renewable and nonrenewable resources and the positive and adverse effect that they can have on our shared environment. Find information in books, on the Internet, and through having conversations with people outside of the classroom.
  - Doug MacLeod tells a story about growing up '*in The Latrobe Valley not far from the Hazelwood coal-fired power station. I used to sail a boat on the small lake or 'pondage' that was a source of water to cool the turbines. The water, which would be recycled to*

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*cool the turbines, was always warm, even in the cold of winter. Thick vapour would rise up and you'd find yourself sailing in the middle of a peasoup fog. It was eerie'.*

- Doug MacLeod thinks that wind towers can look beautiful, and wind is a good renewable power source, but he has expressed his concern about the divisions that occurred in one community where a wind farm was established. Find out, and talk about why this may have happened.
- Talk about how Mum, using her imagination and problem-solving skills found a way to benefit from the wind.
- With the children, think of ways that you can contribute to environmental sustainability in your setting. Gardening, saving water, recycling, etc.
- Create your own stories and illustrations focusing on the theme of wind power.
  - Craig Smith has said, “*The framing - words and pics - of this book (is)... a genuine collaboration between author, editor and myself.*” Collaborate with each other (teachers and children) on the development of your own stories, friezes, and picture books.
  - Look at Craig Smith’s illustrations. Think about how he uses line, movement and colour to portray expressive body language and facial expression. E.g. Look closely at the pigs and the people in the middle of a windstorm. Using Craig Smith’s rhythmic style, draw pictures of people, animals and anything else you can think of, flying around in the wind. Think about how you will depict the wind.
  - Think of a short sentence or caption that simply describes what is happening (Refer to the way Doug MacLeod and Craig Smith did this in the story).
  - Make up your own stories that come up with alternative solutions to the problem of living on a windy farm.
- Using humour to convey a serious message.
  - Talk with each other about the funniest scenes in the story.
  - Children in small groups can choose an illustration they think is the funniest, and make up their own story about what makes it so funny.
- Links
  - Doug MacLeod <http://www.dougmacleod.com.au>
  - Craig Smith <http://craigsmithillustration.com>
  - AusVels <http://ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities/Sustainability>