

Warambi

Aleesah Darlison / Andrew Plant
Published by: Working Title Press, July 2011

TEACHER NOTES

By Janet McLean

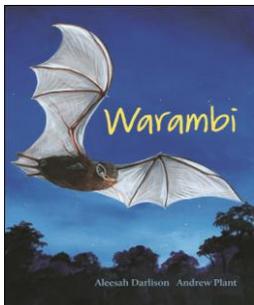
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Author: **Aleesah Darlison** grew up in a tiny country town on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. After finishing school she moved to Sydney to study marketing at university. She worked in corporate marketing for 10 years both in Sydney and overseas, before deciding to concentrate on a career in writing. When she is not writing, she looks after her three children who are a constant source of amusement, inspiration and energy-deprivation. She also reviews children's books for The Sun Herald.

Illustrator: **Andrew Plant** trained as a zoologist at Melbourne University, and works as an author, scientific artist, and a children's book illustrator specialising in natural history. He has illustrated more than 130 books published in Australia, the USA, the UK, New Zealand and South Korea and has written and illustrated a number of his own, including **Could a Tyrannosaurus Play Table Tennis?** and **Finding Dinosaurs**. He has also directed, choreographed and designed 60 children's theatre productions, and created murals for schools and museums. His most recent publication with Working Title Press was **Puggle** written by Catriona Hoy.

SYNOPSIS Warambi, a little bent-wing bat, is born in a warm, dark cave. As she grows she learns to fly, to see with her ears, and to cruise the sky searching for her food. When a bulldozer destroys Warambi's home, she becomes separated from her family. Lost and alone she finds shelter, far away in an unusual place. Scary sounds are all around and danger is never far away. Will Warambi find her way home?

WRITING STYLE Warambi is a dramatic imaginary story that is also full of interesting facts about the little bent-wing bat. Various writing strategies are used throughout the book to help children understand and respond to the story. Warambi has a classic narrative structure: the beginning establishes the main characters and the setting; the middle introduces a complication to be confronted and resolved; the ending reaches a satisfying resolution. Aleesah Darlison creates a warm and reassuring introduction to Warambi's story through her use of rhythmic language. She places Warambi, the tiny bent-wing bat, in a safe and secluded setting: *Deep in a forest, hidden in a warm, dark cave... By day she drank her mother's milk*



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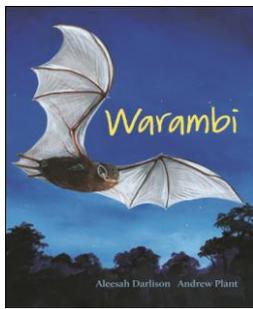
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or slept, folded in her mother's soft wings. A feeling of apprehension is introduced when the 'mother bats slipped outside to hunt for insects'. However, the reader is comforted knowing that: Surrounded by her colony, Warambi was safe. Three poetic sentences beginning with: She learned to... describe the lessons of Warambi's first night flight: She learned to see with her ears by making high-pitched clicks and listening as the echoes bounced back. Immediately following these episodes there is a disturbing twist: One day the bat colony was woken by a terrible noise. The earth shook. Now the tone and pace of the language evokes threat and danger. Scary sounds were all around. ... darkness fell. Danger was never far away. Then, while still maintaining an element of fear, a suggestion of hope is introduced: Something reached into Warambi's roost. She felt herself being gathered up and wrapped in soft darkness. In the end Warambi is rescued and set free. The final sentences evoke her sense of joy: Warambi snapped her wings open and soared into the sky ... up toward the welcoming calls of her new family.

ILLUSTRATIONS Andrew Plant used acrylic paint for the illustrations in **Warambi**. The illustrations alternate between expansive double page spreads that bleed off the edge of the paper, and single-page close-up drawings, placed within a white border. When Andrew started the illustrations for Warambi he realised that he didn't really properly understand the anatomy of the little bent-wing bat. He says, "*Their fingertips fold in a most unusual way and actually point forwards into their armpits when completely folded. The proportions of their heads are also completely alien compared to most vertebrates – all in all, they were actually quite a challenge, to my surprise.*". Andrew particularly enjoyed the opportunity to use light in an unusual way. He says, "*Very little of the book is in broad daylight – what sunlight there is tends to be reflected deep into the cave, throwing dark, velvety shadows, which I love. Dusk skies, silhouettes and moonlight are great fun to paint, and relatively easy.*". **Warambi** gave Andrew many opportunities for extreme close-ups and unusual angles. As he says, "*One of the joys of illustrating is trying to see the world from a different viewpoint.*".

DISCUSSION POINTS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- As you read **Warambi** take time to talk with the children about what is happening, and allow time for them to comment, to ask questions, and to express their feelings. This will



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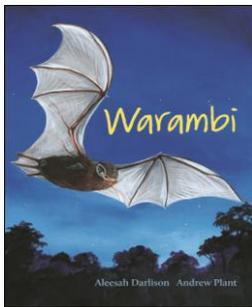
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help them to grasp the underlying meaning, and the mood and atmosphere created by the words and the pictures.

- The text says that when Warambi was born she '*was no bigger than a bean*'. Give the children a bean to hold, and a bean pod cut to a 45mm length. It is almost impossible to imagine a bat that is so small. She would fit into the palm of your hand. Look at the illustration of the hands holding her just before she takes flight near the end of the book.
- When Warambi is born ... '*Her eyes were sealed shut and there was not a scrap of fur on her body*'. Find out more about little bent-wing bats. What is its scientific name? Where is it found? What is its habitat? Is it endangered? Why? What can be done to help recover this species?
- Use the colourful lists on the endpapers of the book to answer these, and other questions.
- You can also find out more about little bent-wing bats on the Internet. Look for films of them flying, and catching insects.
- Aleesah Darlison based **Warambi** on a true account told to her by her mother, who found a little bent-wing bat in the pocket of a coat hanging on the verandah. Ask the children if they have found an animal in a strange or interesting place. The children's stories could be made into picture books for sharing in the class.
- Andrew Plant has used a number of different techniques to depict the story of Warambi.
 - Point out how the single page illustrations are enclosed within a white border, and focus more closely on a single aspect of the story. For example: a hand reaching into a coat pocket.
 - Other illustrations span two pages and bleed off the edges, allowing for more distant and / or wider perspectives.
 - Talk about how the words, pictures and design combine over six pages to portray the destruction of the bats' habitat. Firstly, across a double page spread, the bulldozer is glimpsed from the back of the cave. Then, one single page illustration shows Warambi and her mother huddled together. The next shows a close-up of the huge shovel, breaking into the cave. And the words convey the terrible impact



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on the bats: *'The pups and their mothers squeaked in terror, whirring and wheeling about.'* The last pages in this sequence, another double page spread, show a panic-stricken Warambi in vast, bright, unfamiliar surroundings, and the story moves on to the next stage: *'In the confusion Warambi was separated from her colony.'*

- How does Andrew Plant use colour, tone and shadow to represent the dark and coolness of night, and the light and warmth of day? Paint your own night and day pictures.
- Talk about how Andrew has used colour, line, and space to show changes in time across the day. For example: the dark trees and the cave silhouetted against the wide spread of warm red / yellow / orange sky at sunset, as the mother bats fly out to hunt for insects, and the silvery glow of the moonlit water as the bats swoop low for a drink.
- The ending of the story is dramatically depicted across five pages through the use of “extreme close-ups and unusual angles”, and the dramatic use of colour. The dark blacks and blues of the night sky, and the kelpie, are in striking contrast to the bright yellow grass, and the red dirt track that are lit by the car lights. (Andrew Plant says, *“I’ve also got a soft spot for kelpies, so it was nice to be able to slip one in!”*)
- The unusually placed life-sized hands add to the drama of this picture. The next pages show the scene from Warambi’s perspective as she *‘soared into the night sky...’* and on the last page Warambi is finally reunited with her new family.
- Make posters and friezes using the information on the endpapers, the illustrative techniques, and the lyrical words and phrases from the book.
- Dramatise the story of Warambi.
- Aleesah Darlison and Andrew Plant both have their own websites. You can visit them at:
Aleesah Darlison: <http://www.aleesahdarlison.com/>
Andrew Plant: <http://www.andrewplant.com/>