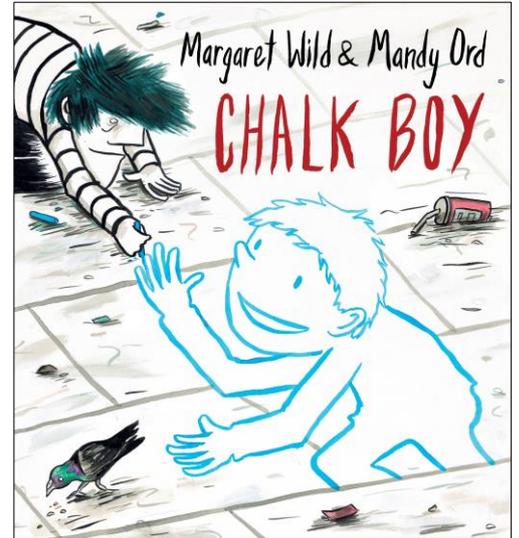


Chalk Boy

By Margaret Wild,
illustrated by Mandy Ord

July 2018 ISBN 9781760630683 Picture Book
Recommended for 5-8+ year olds Hardback



Summary

A soulful and heart-warming story about what happens when a pavement artist's drawing comes to life.

Barnaby is a pavement artist. This morning he started drawing me.

I have a head that can think, eyes that can see, ears that can hear and legs that can run.

Best of all, I have a heart that can feel.

Thank you, Barnaby.

Award-winning writer Margaret Wild compresses epic themes into a poetic, poignant story, while Mandy Ord's sharp-edged figures, armed with mobile phones and blank stares, beautifully capture the cityscape. Together, text and image describe a life-and-death struggle that occurs in plain sight yet is overlooked by the multitude.

Use in the curriculum

Chalk Boy can be used with students of all ages to develop visual literacy: the text is minimal but the book says so much. The activities in these notes are designed to help students find out why/how this is so.

Chalk Boy is also an excellent example of an apparently simple picture story book that can generate very sophisticated discussions with older students. The final page, in particular, is open to spiritual/metaphoric interpretations. Compare this ending to the 'happy ever after' ending of *Pinnocchio*, whose wish to become a real boy is granted.

Themes

- art & creativity
- friendship
- life on the streets of the city & 'passers-by'
- compassion

Deeper themes that may arise from a thoughtful interrogation of text and images:

- the transience of life / enjoying the moment
- homelessness
- sense of community/belonging vs social alienation
- the power of the imagination

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Discussion questions

1. **Pre-reading Activity:** Before reading the story, show the front cover of *Chalk Boy* to your class and ask them where they think the story will be set: (a) in the country (b) in the jungle or (c) in a city? What on the cover helped them guess the answer? Follow this by asking students to guess what might happen in this story.
2. Read the story through once and ask students to retell it in their own words. Ask questions such as: What is a pavement artist? What does Barnaby use to draw images? Who is the 'me' in the story? Why does Chalk Boy think life is so wonderful? How does Barnaby save Chalk Boy when the rains come? What is the 'one last picture' that Barnaby paints, and why does it mean so much to Chalk Boy? Is it a happy ending?
3. Turn to the first double-page of the story and re-read the text: *Barnaby is a pavement artist*. Now ask students if they have heard the saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' and ask students to look very carefully at the image of Barnaby to come up with information about him that the text doesn't give. If this proves difficult, get them started by suggesting that the words on the page don't tell us what Barnaby looks like but we know he has a thatch of thick blue-black hair, has a sharp nose and chin, and wears dark jeans and a striped shirt. What else can they discover from the illustration?
4. Turn the page to see Barnaby and Chalk Boy and compare the colours used for both characters. Ask students why they think the book's illustrator decided to use dark colours for Barnaby and simple, light-blue lines for Chalk Boy. Ask students if they think colour plays a part in whether each character looks sad or happy?
5. Turn to the double-page spread where Chalk Boy climbs out of the paving stones (text: *But right now I don't care.*) and look at the image of the bird on the left and right pages. What do you think the bird is thinking in these images? What visual clues has the illustrator put in to help you recognise what the bird is thinking?
6. Turn the page and ask students why they think Chalk Boy thinks life is so wonderful. Now ask them what other things they would add to the images that show living is fun.
7. Turn to the next page and ask students why they think the strangers passing in the street have stopped and are now paying attention to Barnaby and Chalk Boy. What in the picture shows us that the crowd are suddenly focussing on the artist and his work?
8. Turn to the page where Chalk Boy is crying out for help and the two images of him that follow. How has the illustrator used size and perspective to emphasise his anguish? What other elements in the pictures tell us he is terribly unhappy?
9. **[For older students.]** Margaret Wild says the book is about the transience of life. What do you think she means by this?
10. Spend a lesson outside in the playground so that students can practise becoming pavement artists. Encourage them to use lots of space and colours and to draw anything that makes them feel happy.
 - See *Chalk Drawing Tips* in 'Related Texts/Further Reading', below.
 - For inspiration, show students the results of a Google Image search on 'pavement chalk art for beginners'.
11. **[For older students.]** Encourage students to research the life and work of Arthur Stace, a pavement artist who spent over thirty years writing the word *Eternity* around Sydney. What do they think he wanted to achieve by doing this, and if they had to choose one word, what would it be?

Related texts/Further reading

Picture books with deeper narratives below the surface story

Wild, Margaret, *Old Pig*, illustrated by Ron Brooks (death)

Wild, Margaret, *Fox*, illustrated by Ron Brooks (betrayal)

Wagner, Jenny, *John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat*, illustrated by Ron Brooks (death?, inevitability of change)

Bunting, Phillip, *Sandcastle* (transience, connectedness of all things)

Visual literacy

Anstey, Michèle, and Geoff Bull, *Reading the Visual: Written and Illustrated Children's Literature*. Sydney: Harcourt, 2000.

Gleeson, Libby *Making Picture Books* Scholastic, 2003

'Chalk Drawing Tips' <http://www.drawingonearth.org/resources/tips/>. Useful tips for teachers (too sophisticated for young kids) on how to produce a good pavement drawing.

The author



Margaret Wild's thoughtful, award-winning children's books have been published with great success in many countries. They include *Old Pig* (shortlisted, CBCA Picture Book of the Year), *Fox* (winner, CBCA Picture Book of the Year), *The Dream of the Thylacine* (honour book, CBCA Picture Book of the Year), and *On the Day You Were Born*, all illustrated by Ron Brooks, plus many more. Margaret has been the recipient of the Nan Chauncy Award and the Lady Cutler Award for her contributions to Australian Literature.

Author's inspiration

'I was at the library looking at various books on art. I came across a book about pavement artists around the world. Some of their work was amazing – so detailed and exquisite. Drawing in chalk is such a generous act, it seems to me, because the work is ephemeral, soon to be eroded or washed away. All the artist has left is a photograph of their work.'

'I started dreaming up a story about a boy drawn in chalk. What sort of person would he be? What sort of things would he do? And how would he cope with the reality that when the rain comes, his life must end. The ending is poignant, of course, but I think the overall feeling of the book is one of joy because Chalk Boy totally embraces his life, short though it must be.'

'I think this is a book for older children, perhaps middle to upper primary. It lends itself to discussing the transience of life for everyone, human and animal. And, hopefully it will encourage children to make their own artworks in chalk.'

— Margaret Wild

The Illustrator



MANDY ORD has had a passion for comics for as long as she can remember. Her involvement with the local underground comic community has inspired the production of a range of self-published mini-comics, as well as contributions to local and international comic anthologies. She calls Melbourne home and finds endless inspiration within it. Her books include *Rooftops, NY* and *Sensitive Creatures*.

Illustrator's inspiration

'I am always inspired by comics. I aim to home in on the images that are key to telling the story. I attempt to do this with powerful clarity combined with a gentle vulnerability that I see as inherent to the story. My initial response was to draw the two characters looking quite different to each other but still having a very strong

connection. I saw Barnaby's act of drawing Chalk Boy as one of necessity more than any other reason. I didn't think it would matter if Barnaby was a great artist or not, and even though Chalk Boy is drawn in a very simple way there's a knowing in the way Barnaby draws him, as though the outline of Chalk Boy is used to capture the depth and energy of his spirit more than the specifics of his outer appearance. I see Chalk Boy as a reflection of the vibrant inner world of Barnaby, his energy and his dreams.

'Always in the back of my mind I kept thinking of Arthur Stace, the famous Sydney sidewalk chalk artist known for writing the word *Eternity* across Sydney. I liked the idea of a person being compelled to do something so simple and so public for neither fame nor fortune. It was a beautiful pure gesture, very peaceful, and I like the idea that it was also impermanent; that the rain could easily wash it away and that one day there would be no one to write the word *Eternity* anymore. Perhaps someone else would be inspired to write a different word. Perhaps someone like Barnaby would start to draw someone like Chalk Boy.'