

## Teacher's Notes



### ONE LAST LEAF

Written by **PATRICK GUEST**

Illustrated by **JESS RACKLYEFT**

Teacher's Notes by **Bec Kavanagh**

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### LEARNING OUTCOMES

#### RECOMMENDED FOR

primary-aged readers (ages 3–8, grades prep+)

#### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
  - Ethical Understanding
  - Critical and Creative Thinking

### THEMES

- Anxiety
- Letting go
- Loss
- Grief
- Life cycles

### SYNOPSIS

A powerful and touching picture book about love and connection, separation and letting go.

Autumn has passed and winter is here ... but the little brown leaf clings on.

Through cold and snow and howling winds, a mighty oak tree stands tall, with one last leaf on its empty branches. One last leaf.

Can it find the courage to let go?

From two of Australia's favourite picture book creators, bestselling author Patrick Guest and award-winning illustrator Jess Racklyeft, comes a story your family will treasure for a lifetime.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

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**Patrick Guest** was raised in the Melbourne beachside suburb of Seaford. He works as a physiotherapist by day and a bestselling children's author by night. Patrick received huge acclaim for his story *The Second Sky*, illustrated by Jonathan Bentley, and it was shortlisted for the 2018 CBCA Picture Book of the Year Award. Likewise, Patrick's fourth title, *The Dress-Up Box*, illustrated by Nathaniel Eckstrom, has established itself as a much-loved Australian classic, and was shortlisted for the 2019 CBCA Picture Book of the Year Award. His 2020 lockdown-inspired *Windows* was shortlisted for an ABIA, screened on the ABC, and adopted as a beacon of hope by families and schools around the world.

**Jess Racklyeft** is an author and illustrator based in Fitzroy, Melbourne. From her home studio, Jess creates original paintings and prints for greeting card companies and various clients. But her favourite work of all is producing children's books! Jess has authored and illustrated several picture books and board books and has won several awards. Her books include *Australia: Country of Colour*, *Welcome Baby to this World*, *Before You Close Your Eyes* (written by Scott Stuart) and *Iceberg* (written by Claire Saxby).

## THEMES

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Although there are several themes that can be explored through this book (friendship, love, loss and the natural world), the central message of its parable is that letting go of something doesn't mean losing it altogether. Given the imagery, this concept might be considered in the context of nature or human relationships. It offers a gentle introduction to exploring themes of loss and grief, allowing readers to bring their own understanding and experience to the page.

Ask students to share what they think the moral of the story is. Invite them to reflect on its relevance to their own experiences.

## WRITING STYLE

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*One Last Leaf* can be read as a **parable** – a simple story that uses relatable characters and events to illustrate a moral or ethical lesson. Parables are common in religious texts such as the Bible, but there are plenty of contemporary parables too. A parable is like a metaphor in that it uses simple, concrete imagery to convey complex themes or emotions. The language is clear and direct, deliberately simple to enable readers to fully engage with the moral of the story.

Look closely at each of the sentences. The author uses statements and short sentences. Compare this to the language in other picture books and invite students to discuss the differences between the two.

## COMPREHENSION

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- During which seasons does the little brown leaf hang on to the tree?
- Where are the other leaves?
- Which creatures visit the leaf during the winter?
- How does the wind blow?



- What does the mighty oak tree roar? Why is it holding onto the leaf?
- What do you think the oak tree is afraid of? How does the forest reassure it?
- How does the oak manage to let go of the leaf without losing it?

## WRITING EXERCISE

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Using the following moral, try to write your own parable:

‘small actions can cause big change’.

Come up with a clear image that can be used as your central metaphor. Use short sentences and direct statements to tell the reader what happens. Give your parable to a friend and see if they can understand the moral of the story. If not, think about what you need to change to make it clearer.

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE

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Jess Racklyeft uses a glowing watercolour palette to infuse the illustrations with a gentleness that matches the theme. In particular, you might encourage students to think about the way she uses colour to show the changing seasons, and the blue and white highlights used to capture the chill of deep winter. Draw their attention to the illustrations of the forest, and notice how in the earlier drawings only a few central characters have clear facial expressions, whereas towards the end, when the perspective shifts and zooms in on the leaves, acorns, and other forest creatures, every character is drawn with a face. What does this shift in detail and perspective reflect about the theme of finding comfort in community?

## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

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- Think about the way the illustrator shifts perspective to highlight specific details that reveal something about the story. Look out the window and draw what you see. Now look closely. What interests you? What makes you feel something? Zoom in on a particular object and draw it in more detail, thinking about what these details reveal about the scene.
- Read aloud the following page: “Winter grew colder. A wild wind blew. ‘Stop holding on,’ howled the wind. ‘It’s time to fall!’ But the leaf didn’t fall. The wind blew faster, colder, angrier...”
  - What emotions are being expressed on this page? Why do you think the wind is so angry?
  - How do you think the oak tree feels during this scene?
  - Rewrite the scene from the perspective of the oak tree.
- The wind wants the leaf to fall because it’s part of the natural cycle of life. Choose a living object and make a poster of its life cycle. What seasons does it follow? Why do we draw life cycles as a circle rather than a straight line?



- Go through the story and make a list of words that describe emotions. What kinds of emotions is the book describing? Do they match how you felt as you read the book? Think about how words and colour can influence the way a reader feels. Choose a page in the book that made you feel sad. What would you change in the words and pictures to try to make the reader feel happy?

## RELATED READING

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*The Giving Tree*  
By Shel Silverstein

*The Tiny Star*  
By Mem Fox and Freya Blackwood

*The Invisible String*  
By Patrice Karst

*The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*  
By Charlie Mackesy

*Beginnings and Endings with Lifetimes in Between*  
By Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen

