

Tree Teacher's Notes

Written by Danny Parker

Illustrated by Matt Ottley

Published by Little Hare Books, 2012

Synopsis

Tree begins as just a sprout, a green shoot emerging near the base of an old, tall tree. Day by day, season by season, tree starts to grow taller until one night everything changes.

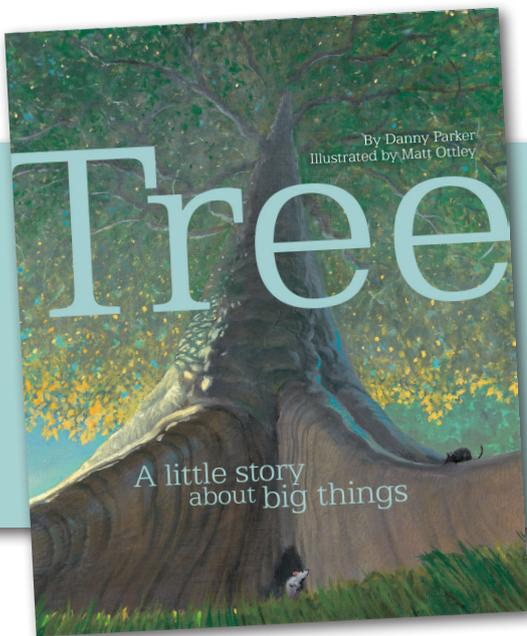
A storm strikes, and suddenly the shelter of the big tree is no longer there. The remains are demolished and the small tree stands alone, watching a new landscape develop. The once open green space becomes grey with fog, the sun is blocked with the shadow of a city. Tree stands alone, a splash of colour amidst the cold, impersonal city.

Until one day. Tree notices that poking out of the ground near his roots, a new sprout is growing. Tree has become the protector. The book finishes with a beautiful balance of city and garden, with life nature offsetting development.

This is a simple book, but it deals with big issues. The simplicity of the story and illustrations make it ideal for students of an earlier reading age. The depth of themes carries it further though, and there are definite opportunities for extension work with older readers.

Themes

- Life cycle
- Family
- Nature
- Development
- Seasons
- Balance
- Sustainability



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Danny Parker

In another life **DANNY PARKER** worked as a Nurse, an actor and an undertaker before settling into work as a Drama Teacher. He is currently the Director of Drama and Youth theatre at Hale School, in Perth, WA.

A chance meeting with fellow WA based illustrator and author, Matt Ottley, lead to Danny discussing his story idea and inspiration for *Tree*. They plan to collaborate together again on future projects.

Danny lives in Perth, WA with his wife Judy and their 2 children.

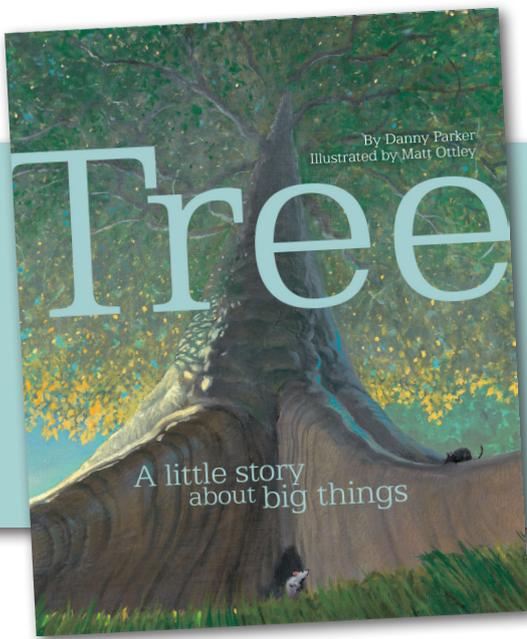
Matt Ottley

MATT OTTLEY, talented picture book illustrator and author, painter and musician was born in New Guinea. He moved to Sydney with his family when he was twelve. After leaving school he worked in a variety of jobs and studied Fine Arts, classical guitar and musical composition. Now Matt divides his time between painting, writing and composing music as well conducting workshops. He is also involved in wildlife rescue.

Matt's useful and accessible website contains a biography, a list of his picture books and artworks, study notes to support his books, information about his music and workshops. www.mattottley.com

Matt's first book with Little Hare, *Me and My Dad* (Sally Morgan and Ezekiel Kwaymullina) was published in August 2010. His second picture book, *Tree: A Little Story About Big Things*, about the life-cycle of a very special tree, will be published in 2012. Matt is also illustrating the new junior fiction series by Sally Morgan and Ezekiel Kwaymullina, *Charlie Burr*.

Matt lives in Perth, Western Australia and is a frequently in residence at the Fremantle Children's Literature Centre.



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Questions/ Comprehension

- What seasons are mentioned?
- What different times of day does the tree grow through?
- What different types of weather does the tree experience?
- How was the tree sheltered?
- Look at the pictures, what kind of place does the tree grow in?
- What happens to make the tree lost its protection?
- What different animals live in or around the tree that you can see in the pictures?
- After the storm, how do the tree's surroundings change?
- What else changes in the book?
- What happens at the very end of the book that makes tree think differently? What does it remind him of?

Activities

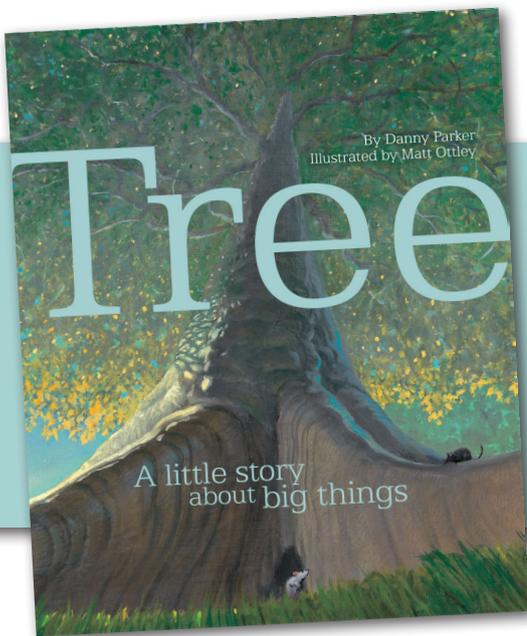
1. Look at the following moments in the book. Try writing them in a long line on a piece of paper in the order that they happen. If they happen more than once, write them again, making sure that it's in the same order as the book.

- -Birth (for example, of the young tree at the beginning of the book)
- -Growth (as the tree grows through the seasons)
- -Death (of the old tree)

Does anything happen twice?

Can you match anything to connect one end of the paper to the other? (You can illustrate these and connect them together in a loop for the classroom)

What other things can you think of that have a cycle like this?



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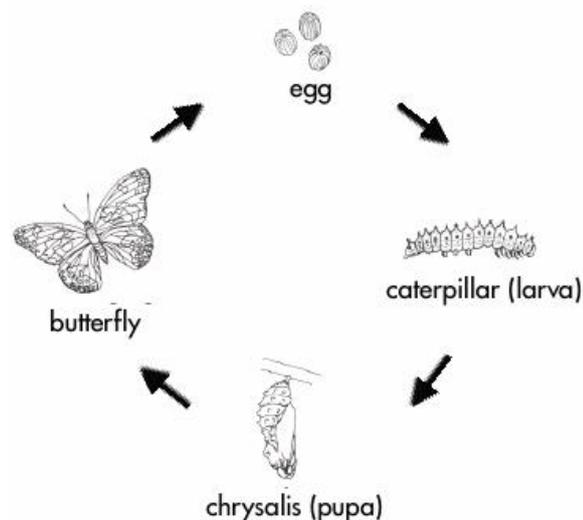
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Activities

2. This is called a *life cycle*. As a class talk about a life cycle and the things that have them. Using the picture below, discuss the elements of a life cycle in more detail, and try to see the similarities between the butterfly and the tree.



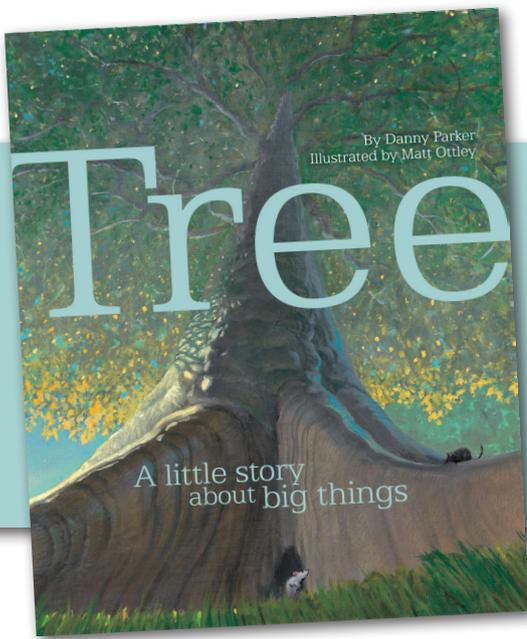
Copyright c 1992 Town of Shrewsbury, MA, The National Academy of Science

3. The balance at the end of the book comes when nature and the city each have equal space. Talk in class about sustainability and particularly about growing plants or food.

- Make a list of all the things you will need to grow something (light, shade, water, dirt, seeds etc)
- Is there somewhere that you can find all of these things at home? At school?

As a class or individually plant a seed (this can either be outside, in a window box, or even in a glass of water [<http://www.avocado.org.au/howto/grow.aspx>])

Keep a diary as it grows (this can include pictures, stories, photos and if you have a school blog set up, could be done online as a multimedia extension including videos) What do you hope the end result will be? What will the seed eventually give you? How will the life cycle start over again?



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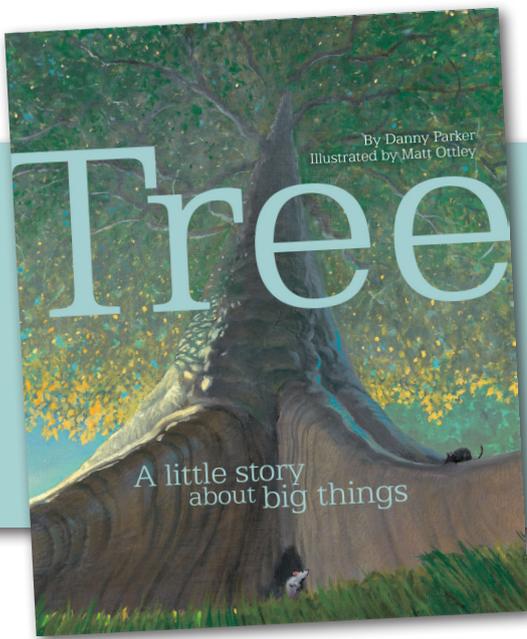
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Activities

4. Look at the list of words on the back of the book. Some of them are clearly shown in the story (seed, season, growth etc) and some of them aren't as obvious. In groups or individually pick one of the less obvious words.
 - What does it mean?
 - How do you think it is connected to the story in the book?
 - Why do you think they are all written in a circle on the back of the book? Is it still a part of the story?

5. In the book, colours are used to show the difference between nature and the city.
 - Make a list of words describing the colours used for the tree and nature.
 - Now make a list describing the colours used for the city.
 - How are they different?
 - Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to use these colours?
 - Are the colours in nature really like this? The city? Why do you think the illustrator has made them so different?
 - Choose a spot (outside or in the classroom) that you can see and paint or draw a picture of what you can see. Do this in as much colour as you can, using the colours that you see in front of you.
 - Now look back at your lists describing the colours in the books. Which words describe your colours? Are the lists true for what you have chosen to paint, or can you find natural colours in a building or other objects?

6. Imagine that you are one of the following and write a letter that you can read out to the class.
 - The older tree, writing a letter to the younger tree.
 - The young tree, writing a letter to the city.
 - One of the animals living in the tree, writing a letter to its home.
 - One of the people living in the city writing a letter to one of the trees.



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Extra Resources (for sustainability/ school gardening)

<http://www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au/>

<http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s2451183.htm>

<http://www.organicschools.com.au/>

<http://ediblegardens.com.au/edible-gardening-in-schools/>

http://www.ngia.com.au/Category?Action=View&Category_id=445

