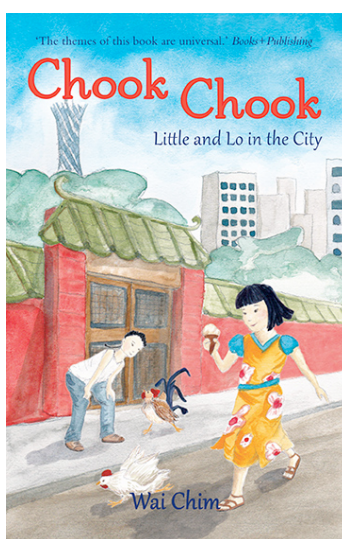


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CHOOK CHOOK: LITTLE AND LO IN THE CITY

Wai Chim



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising Teacher Librarian in context with
the Australian Curriculum (English)

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SYNOPSIS

Things have changed on the farm now that Mei's mother has remarried and Guo has left for university in the city. Feeling unsettled and confused, Mei runs away with Little and Lo.

Mei meets Captain (Cap), a young boy with a great mind but nowhere to go. Together, they set out to find Guo, getting into a lot of mischief along the way.

THEMES

Family and Relationships:

- The dynamics at home have changed now that Ma has married the one-eyed butcher. Mei has to learn to share her home with her new step-father and step-brother.
- Mei has to adjust to life at home without Guo.
- Mei makes a new friend in Cap. They help one another.

Pets:

- Pets play an important role in Mei's life.
- Mei has a very nurturing and loving relationship with Little and Lo.
- Mei is willing to make sacrifices to safeguard her chickens.

Chinese Culture:

- Aspects of Chinese culture are introduced in the text.

WRITING STYLE

Chook Chook: Little and Lo in the City is written in first person, past tense. Mei's narration is honest and forthright. Wai Chim uses an effective range of figurative language and description to draw the reader into the text. It is suitable for younger readers, aged 7+.

STUDY NOTES

- Mei has a definite strength of character that is evident from the beginning of the text. Create a character profile of Mei, using examples from the book to explain how the author uses the 'show, don't tell' method. What does the reader have to infer about Mei? What is implicit about her character? What is explicit? Consider these techniques when creating characters in your own writing.
- Mei's stomach gets queasy and her throat goes dry when she's upset. What physical signs do you get when you're upset? How is 'showing not telling' better when writing a story? How can you use your own emotions to help make your writing more believable and interesting?
- Every story needs a complication, which usually occurs soon into the narrative. What are the main complications that arise in Chapter 1?
- An effective way to structure a narrative is to make the protagonist uncomfortable in some way. Discuss this concept and how Wai Chim has

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made Mei a 'fish out of water'. Why is it necessary for the main character to face obstacles?

- Mei does not cope well with the changes occurring in her family life. Write a reflection about a time you had to adjust to change. What happened to instigate this change? How did you cope?
- When Mei wants to board the train to the city, the guard stops her as she needs an adult to accompany her. This scene is pivotal to the plot of *Chook Chook: Little and Lo in the City*, especially as this is where Cap and Mei meet. Discuss the importance of obstacles in the plot line of narratives.
- Draw a Venn diagram to compare Mei and Cap. What do they have in common? In what ways are they different?
- Re-read the description of the train as it moves out of the station on pp 35-36. Analyse the techniques that help readers to visualise this scene.
- Make predictions about what has happened in Cap's life. Why is he alone? What brings him to the train station?
- Mei is very happy that she's not going to the city alone. What role does Cap play in *Chook Chook: Little and Lo in the City*?
- Discuss the use of figurative language throughout the text. Examples include:
 - 'Speckles and splatters of chook poo.' (p38)
 - 'Like ants swarming around a sticky sesame lolly.' (p39)
 - 'Like trying to find a single marigold flower in a field of golden chrysanthemums.' (p42)
 - 'The old lady's face crinkled up like a withered shiitake mushroom.' (p46)
 - 'Her voice was a sinister cackle.' (p53)
 - 'There was a mess of wide roads going left and right and around in a circle, like the legs of a spider.' (p65)
 - 'Everything just looked murky and cloudy green, like the dirty fish tanks at the market.' (p66)
 - 'There were lines and lines of drying laundry hanging from each of the balconies, dangling like tentacles.' (p66)
 - 'The professor's eyes were as dark as coal and they looked big and monstrous behind the lenses of his round glasses.' (p85)
 - 'Guo's head was bobbing up and down like a rag doll's.' (p86)
 - 'He smelled fresh and pleasant like spring rain.' (p92)
 - 'I felt a bit like a squirrel gazing up at him, my cheeks red and puffed out.' (p102)
 - 'With the wind whipping my hair so it flapped like wings, I felt like a bird soaring through the sky.' (p140)
- How is the city different from Mei's farm? Sketch what Mei sees in the city.

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- How do Little and Lo help Mei when she is feeling alone and unwanted?
- The Chinese characters on p42 are new to Mei. Take time to examine some Chinese characters and their meaning. Read the picture book *Liu and the Bird: A Journey in Chinese Calligraphy* by Catherine Louis which explains the stories behind many Chinese characters.
- Why does Mei treat the older lady at the train station with respect? How does this practice help her?
- How does Mei feel when she realises her chickens have escaped from the boxes?
- Create a comic strip of the scene on p50 in which the chickens end up with jewellery and scarves draped over them.
- Discuss the structure of Wai Chim's narrative, especially the way in which chapter endings hook the reader to continue reading the next chapter.
- Cap uses the science of rainbows to get Little to perform. Investigate light and rainbows. Present a poster that explains how rainbows are formed.
- Why is Guo so cross that Mei has run away to the city?
- Mei, Cap and Guo eat at a restaurant on p81. Create the menu from this restaurant.
- Mei is quick to jump to conclusions about Jin. How does Jin show that he is different from Mei's initial perceptions?
- Is running away the answer to Mei's problems? Or does she cause even more problems by doing this? Discuss.
- In small groups, hold a Literature Circles meeting in which you discuss your reactions to and opinions of the text. This could be done after reading just one chapter, or after completing the whole text.
- Select an episode from the text to dramatise. Perform this scene to your class.
- Professor Law recognises Cap's giftedness. What do you think the future holds for Cap?
- How are Jin and Professor Law similar in nature?
- Use the tic tac toe patterns and ideas at the end of *Chook Chook: Little and Lo in the City* to investigate patterns and puzzles. Hold a tic tac toe tournament.
- Devise other tic tac toe tricks and tips and email them to the author Wai Chim at mail@waichim.com.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wai Chim grew up in New York City but has spent the past several years living in sunny Sydney. When she was five years old, she started her first book about a 'daddy chicken'; it came to three pages, most of it pictures. It only took her more than twenty years to come up with the rest!

Chook Chook: Mei's Secret Pets is Wai's first published book. Part of the internet generation, Wai currently works in digital marketing. You can find her online at www.waichim.com.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The themes in this book once again resonate around family and Mei's struggles with dealing with rapid change. I'm an only child myself so I never really knew what it was like to have siblings – except that I did get a tiny taste of it when my aunt and uncle and their children came to live with my family when I was around ten years old (which is just a little bit older than what I imagine Mei to be in this story). It was only for a few months, but the reality of having four new people invade our peaceful home was quite confronting. Suddenly, I wasn't an only child anymore with the addition of my two cousins that I had never met before. All up, there were seven of us in our two-bedroom flat that I had once believed to be so big. As Mei would say, the place really did seem very, very small.

Mei has always trusted and loved her family, but readers will notice that her circle of friends has been small. In this book, we meet Cap who is very different to Mei and at first she doesn't really know what to make of him. But over time, Mei and Cap grow quite close and learn to trust each other, so that they're like of brother and sister. In Chinese culture, family is one of the most important things in life and there's a natural desire to extend the kinship of family beyond blood ties. Children will call their friends' parents 'Auntie' and 'Uncle' as a sign of respect and also to demonstrate a level of trust and the extension of the family unit. The evolution of Mei and Cap's friendship speaks to this very well.

One of the other themes the book explores is the contrast between rural and urban lifestyles. I grew up in a city and know very little about living on a farm. There can be a lot of misconceptions, like the ones the Professor and the housekeeper have about animals and life on the village. The experiences we have are very different and for me, it's important to share our stories so we can all learn more.