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KUMIKO AND THE DRAGON'S SECRET

Briony Stewart



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising primary school teacher

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SYNOPSIS

Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret is the sequel to *Kumiko and the Dragon*, a contemporary fantasy story for younger readers. Kumiko is older now and has fully embraced her guardian dragon, Tomodo, of whom she was once terrified. When her three-year-old sister, Arisu, is kidnapped by the evil Shadow Catchers, Kumiko's gift of courage once again comes to the fore.

THEMES**Family:**

- Although Kumiko's little sister Arisu can be irritating, Kumiko loves her and risks her own life to rescue her from the Shadow Catchers.
- Kumiko's Obasaan has been reunited with her guardian dragon after telling him to 'shoo' at the age of fifteen.
- Kumiko's mother still does not believe in dragons. Her guardian dragon is invisible.
- Family is the most important theme of the story.

Courage:

- Kumiko's gift of courage helps her to rescue Arisu.

Culture:

- Aspects of Japanese culture feature in the story.

Good vs Evil:

- Kumiko and the dragons unite their special gifts to help rescue Arisu from the evil Shadow Catchers.

WRITING STYLE

Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret is told in first person and is written in the present tense. It features poetic language that is unique and engaging. Kumiko is a very forthright and honest narrator.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION written by Briony Stewart

Kumiko and the Dragon started as an activity. My uni tutor said, '*remember a time you were afraid when you were a child.*' Well, I didn't think of my own childhood, probably because it was a very safe and happy and normal one. When I got thinking, I started imagining my grandmother's life because she grew up in Japan during World War II. Her name was Kumiko and when she was ten years old she witnessed the atomic bomb go off in Hiroshima. She even played in the radioactive fallout that blew across her village. As much as this frightens me, her most frightening childhood moment actually happened shortly afterwards. One day, she came across an American Soldier, one of many now occupying her village. It was the first time she'd ever seen any kind of foreigner before. He turned to her and said, "I eat little girls for breakfast."

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Well, the tough guy was probably joking, but he frightened my grandmother all right. She ran home terrified of being eaten!

From this memory, I started forming a story about a little girl called Kumiko who is afraid of being eaten. Only in my story she is afraid of a dragon. As I wrote the story, it became really important to me that it sounded lyrical when read aloud. This was because my grandmother didn't get to complete much schooling and couldn't read very well. I wanted this story to be for her, for that little girl all those years ago who would have listened hungrily to this tale. She might have felt better after hearing it, because maybe then she would have discovered that like the Kumiko in my book, she was far braver than she ever knew.

This story was my chance to explore some of the things I love about my grandmother's culture, and to go on a grand and mysterious adventure like I always dreamed of doing when I was a kid.

STUDY NOTES

- Read the opening paragraph of *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret* aloud. Give students a copy of the paragraph.
 - Ask them to underline their favourite descriptions or phrases e.g. 'spray of moonlight' or 'until our lungs are empty'.
 - Discuss what makes Briony Stewart's writing so unique and descriptive.
 - Ask students to write a paragraph about something they like, using descriptive language.
 - Use a highlighter to highlight particular grammatical language conventions e.g. verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc.

- What is the first hint of tension in Chapter One? Discuss how stories are structured and the importance of the problem arising early in the story.
 - Keep a record of the various problems that arise in the story.
 - How are these problems overcome?
 - Is there one problem that is more difficult than the others?

- On p4, Kumiko says that her mother may fold up like a paper crane and fly away if she were to see Tomodo.
 - Discuss similes and how the author uses this poetic device effectively throughout *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret*.
 - Print similes from the book and display these around the classroom. Add to this display as the book is read.
 - Make origami paper cranes to hang around the classroom.

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- Kumiko is fearful that her mother will prejudge Tomodo because of his big teeth and sharp claws.
 - Do people prejudge others based on their appearance? Discuss what it means to prejudge or to be prejudiced.
 - Why is it dangerous to base your opinions solely on what someone looks like?
 - Did Kumiko also prejudge Tomodo in *Kumiko and the Dragon*?
 - What are good ways to measure a person's qualities? What qualities would you like to have?
 - Use this question as a discussion point about the importance of traits such as humility, courage, patience, tolerance, forgiveness and perseverance.
 - Incorporate your school's motto if applicable and the key values of your school's pastoral care program into this activity.
 - Use a range of picture books to examine some of these same traits and qualities.
 - Have students keep a 'Values Journal' in which they reflect on ways they can show or have shown these qualities over a period of time. They may wish to draw pictures to show what some of these traits and qualities look like.

- Arisu rips a page from Kumiko's book. Explain how this event contributes to the rest of *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret*.
 - Kumiko feels that her mother never takes her side. Is this really true or just how Kumiko sees things?
 - Do you sometimes see things the way you want to, rather than how they really are? Discuss.

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- Study the illustration below from p6 and read p6/7



- What tells us that Kumiko and Tomodo have a positive relationship? Use both the text and the illustration as clues.
- What does 'slip into the folds of dark sleep' mean?
- Read the description of Obasaan's guardian dragon, Farelli on p14.
 - Draw a picture of Farelli.
 - Create your own guardian dragon. Use words to describe him/her and then illustrate your description.
- Create a table that compares the different dragons in *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret*.
 - As a class, brainstorm headings for the columns of the table. You may wish to reread the descriptions of the dragons to help with this brainstorm. Examples may include:

▪ Name	▪ Special gift/s
▪ Appearance	▪ Personality traits
▪ Characteristics	
- Create a book trailer for *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret* using a program such as Windows Movie Maker or Photostory 3.
 - Look at examples of book trailers at www.learningplace.com.au/deliver/content.asp?pid=39948
 - Download Photostory 3 for free at www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/digitalphotography/photostory/default.msp

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- What does Kumiko mean when she says, 'I always imagined that dying would be the worst thing that could happen to anyone, but I was wrong. Being forgotten would be far worse.' (p27)
 - Do you agree with Kumiko? Explain.
- It is Kumiko's anger about the Shadow Catchers that reminds her of her love for Arisu? Is she only angry with the Shadow Catchers? Might she also be angry at herself for the way she has treated Arisu? Discuss.
- Read the first three sentences of Chapter Four starting on p31.
 - 'I have never seen this kingdom during the day. The sun shining off each dragon paints different colours on the clouds. It's like waking up inside a rainbow.'
 - Illustrate this description. This could be a whole class piece of art or an individual piece. This may work well as a collage using different materials, textures and mediums.
- Discuss the following figurative language and how it contributes to the richness of the story telling:
 - 'The clouds above have begun to twist like an angry sea.' (p15)
 - 'Like the fast fading light of a candle the sky becomes darker and darker until it is almost as black as night.' (p15)
 - 'There is blue sky and thin autumn sunshine.' (p18)
 - 'Like a wild bird in a cage, my heart flaps fearfully (p21)...
 - '...we find an empty cloud like an old silk cocoon (p24)...
- Make an illustrated timeline of the events that take place in *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret*.
- Look at examples of acrostic poems. Choose one of the dragons and write an acrostic poem about it.

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- Using the illustration below as a guide, describe what's happening in this part of the story



- In your own words, what does this book have to say about courage? (See p42 'You have to be afraid to be able to be brave.')
- Make a diorama of Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret.
- Write a book review of Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret.
- Examine the dialogue in the text. Revisit the language conventions associated with dialogue.
 - Write the dialogue between Arisu and the Shadow Catchers after her capture.
 - Alternatively, choose your own scene for which to write the dialogue.
- Use Wordle to create a word cloud of the important aspects of *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret*
www.wordle.net

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- Use a journal to reflect on one of the following:
 - What if ...
 - you had your own guardian dragon?
 - you were kidnapped by a Shadow Catcher?
 - you woke up in the middle of a rainbow?
 - Have students create their own 'What if' scenarios to put in a 'What if' box. Students choose one at random and write a response.

- Make up questions for the following answers:
 - Obasaan
 - blue kimino
 - rope of silver whiskers
 - bonsai
 - Farelli

Students can create their own 'answers' for which to pose questions

- Illustrate the main idea of *Kumiko and the Dragon's Secret*. Place illustrations in a school gallery (e.g. at the library) and invite parents to the exhibition that includes readings from the book.

- Reread Chapter Five, starting at p43. Create a Y chart to show what Kumiko may have been feeling, seeing and hearing immediately before jumping from the cloud to rescue Arisu.

	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">What did Kumiko see?</div>	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; transform: rotate(-90deg);">What did Kumiko feel?</div>		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; transform: rotate(-90deg);">What did Kumiko hear?</div>

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- Which dragon would you most like to meet? Why? List five questions you would ask that dragon.
- Hold a 'Dragon's Chair' session in which a student sits in the centre of a circle acting in the role of one of the dragons. Have other students ask that dragon questions that relate to the text.
Brainstorm suitable types of questions, including open-ended questions.
- Write a paragraph starting with the following:
'If I was Kumiko ...'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Western Australia in 1984, Briony Stewart grew up in the inner city suburbs of Perth, peeping over alleyway fences in search of great mysteries and honing her excellent tree climbing abilities. Despite dabbling in entomology, crime solving and a desire to own a deli, Briony showed a talent for both art and writing during her school years. At fifteen she decided she would not be happy unless she could become both an author and an artist. After receiving a scholarship from the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Briony went on to study a double degree in fine art and creative writing at Curtin University. Shortly after graduating, she published her first book, *Kumiko and the Dragon*, which won the Aurealis award for children's short fiction, and was a CBCA notable book of 2008. Briony currently lives in Perth with her husband Harry and their beloved pet rabbit Winston, writing and illustrating for children.