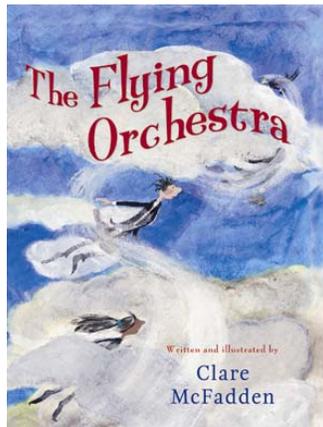


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# THE FLYING ORCHESTRA

## Clare McFadden



### Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising early years teacher

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**SYNOPSIS**

On very blustery days when even angels are blown from their perch a very special orchestra arrives in town. Like Mary Poppins arriving on the east wind so too the Flying Orchestra blows into town. Whether we're feeling up or down, at work or play or just going about our day, the Flying Orchestra knows the song to play for you. They play the soundtrack to our lives.

Upon its arrival, the Orchestra is plunged into a very hectic program of solos, symphonies and concertos that reflect the ups and downs of everyday life. Each musical piece chosen fits the emotions of the event – a melancholy violin solo for a missed train, a grand symphony for an overseas arrival, a concerto for contemplation, a sonata for a sad moment at a birthday party.

The Orchestra not only accompanies the events in the lives of the townsfolk such as learning to ride a bike, but they also respond to the special moments in the world around us, such as the sparkle of the ocean, the majesty of the stars and those beautiful times of day: both dusk and dawn. We also discover that the Orchestra plays the most exquisite music for no particular reason other than because life is special and magical.

The story ends with the blustery, whirling wind once more sending the angels flying and taking the Flying Orchestra with it. But is life the same? Not quite, because wherever the Orchestra has been the music continues to play.

**THEMES****Music**

- McFadden has explored the idea that music is embedded in our lives from the very grand and important moments to the more mundane.
- Orchestral music is vibrant, exciting and emotive – not stuffy and boring.

**Emotion**

- Events in peoples' lives are linked to our feelings and emotions.
- Life is filled with fun, magical elements and often we don't notice them. Make each moment of your life special.

**Creativity**

- The visual literacy of the illustrations adds depth to the text.

**WRITING STYLE**

McFadden's text is simple and direct, making it very accessible for young children. Few literary devices or adjectives are used to embellish the text but where language and literary devices have been used some beautiful visual images are realised, such as "when the ocean sparkles and glitters in the sun".

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McFadden's illustrations add richness to the text creating additional layers of meaning.

McFadden has beautifully combined her simply written text and imaginative illustrative style to reflect the pace of the story as the audience joins the hectic program of the Flying Orchestra.

### STUDY NOTES

- The Flying Orchestra creates a magical element with their arrival on the wind. It is also rather fun to imagine an Orchestra dashing about playing music to go with the lives of the townspeople. Talk about favourite pages with the students.
- Talk with the students about links they have with the illustrations and their own lives. Ask do any of the pictures remind you of an event or anything that has happened to you in real life?
- We feel the movement of the Orchestra through the illustrations. Explore how McFadden has achieved this through her style of brush strokes and the way she presents the images of people, places and things. For example: the Orchestra members are tall and thin and often presented with smudged outlines to depict movement, the sweep of the escalator, a car disappearing out of view, a curtain billowing in a window frame.
- Silhouettes in the artwork: find the illustrations with figures in silhouette and talk about this part of the picture. Explore other artworks with silhouettes, for example shadow puppets in Indonesian theatre, and have students create their own pictures that incorporate silhouetted figures.
- Choose an illustration and ask students to identify the elements that create the story and emotion of the event. Ask students to choose an event (special or everyday) in their own lives and create their own picture to reflect it.
- Create a whole class gallery of the art works from the previous activity. Ask students to stand by a picture that he/she is moved by, i.e. happy, sad, exciting, thrilling. Provide time for students to talk to each other or the class about their choices.
- Ask students to choose a particular illustration from *The Flying Orchestra*. Ask what would it be like to be there? Look carefully and describe where you (the reader) are – close up or far away? Why do you think the illustrator has placed the reader in this location?
- Explore feelings and emotions by choosing some of the story episodes and have students use drama to explore them. For example, students could take on the role of an interviewer who asks questions to another student who takes on the role of a particular character from one of these episodes. Feelings and emotions can be explored by asking the lost person how they are feeling about being lost; or the

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feelings of being able to ride a bike for the first time. Students will bring their own experiences to these role plays.

- Music is transporting – it takes you to times and places. Play some well known musical pieces, for example Happy Birthday and ask the class to talk about what feelings, if any, this stirs up.
- Think about experiences and occasions that evoke a musical score. Discuss and list additions to those represented in the story that have meaning for individual class members.
- How well matched are the events to the musical compositions? Listen to a symphony, a concerto, a sonata, a violin solo and discuss. Think about the mood of the illustration and discuss how well the music suits the illustration it is linked to. For example does a violin solo fit the feelings of missing a train?
- Who has been to an orchestra? Plan a visit where possible to visit an orchestra. Many state orchestras have an education program that schools can visit.
- What instruments are featured in the story? Create a list and explore the sounds of the different families of instruments: strings, woodwind, brass, percussion. Ask the school music or instrumental teacher to assist with this activity by introducing and playing the instruments featured in the story.
- What musical compositions could you choose for special and everyday events in your life? Consider exploring this theme with the specialist music teacher.
- Note the special clothing worn by the Flying Orchestra. What do they wear? Why do you think members of an orchestra normally wear evening clothes?
- Read a selection of other windy stories. Some examples include: *Pooh Bear and the Blustery Day* by A. A. Milne; *Mary Poppins* by P. L. Travers; *Hairy MacClary's Hat Tricks* by Lynley Dodd; *The Wind Blew* by Pat Hutchins; and poems about the wind.
- On windy days what can happen? Create your own list.
- Make lists of wind words – gust, breeze, gale – descriptive words for the wind, such as gentle, blustery, blowy, refreshing, wild and destructive.
- Find out about types of winds, for example the mistral or a zephyr.
- Go outside on a windy day and take a look around. Watch the trees, birds, dust papers and clouds in the wind. Talk together about the effects of the wind.
- Hang some clothing on a line and watch the effect of the wind on those clothes. Use water colours and big brushes on large sheets of paper to explore those observations.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR**

Clare is a designer and producer of arts based work for children and communities. She currently works in Community Arts and Cultural Development at Brisbane City Council. Prior to this, Clare worked at State Library of Queensland where she was the Manager of The Corner, a creative space for under 8s. Clare has worked as a set designer for theatre, film and music productions and her illustrations have been exhibited in group and solo shows. *The Flying Orchestra* is her first picture book.