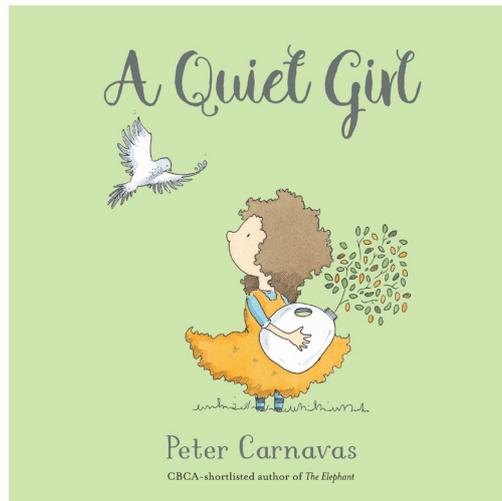


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# A QUIET GIRL

## Peter Carnavas



### Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian  
in context with the Australian curriculum  
(English)

ISBN: 978 0 7022 6002 5/ AUS \$24.95

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**SYNOPSIS**

Mary is a quiet girl who appreciates the small but beautiful things in life. Her family, however, is loud, and Mary often feels invisible. When Mary disappears to quietly relish the world around her, the family finally stops and listens for long enough to notice her absence. And in doing so, they learn to see and enjoy the beauty of the world around them.

**THEME**

- Appreciation
- Acceptance
- Nature
- Listening

**WRITING STYLE**

*A Quiet Girl* is written in third person, past tense. Peter Carnavas has beautifully captured the world of Mary, in which she often feels overlooked. His spare use of language combined with evocative illustrations is perfectly nuanced, reflecting the text's powerful yet subtle message of appreciation and acceptance. *A Quiet Girl* would appeal to an early childhood audience, however it also has applications for middle readers.

**STUDY NOTES**

- Before reading, use the front cover and title to predict what the story may be about. What connotations are generally associated with being quiet? In what way is being quiet a strength?
- We are told on the first page opening that Mary 'thought quiet thoughts'. What are quiet thoughts? Discuss what thoughts Mary may be having on this page. Why is it important to have internal thoughts, rather than always sharing them with others?
- Why does Mary hear things that nobody else hears? What sorts of things does she hear? Go outside and spend time listening. Write a list of everything you hear. Use phrases and clauses to be more explicit with your ideas.
- What does it mean to be a good listener? Why is it important to be an effective and active listener?
- Mary has a voice, but often feels as though she is not heard. Have you ever felt like this? Write a reflection to share your thoughts.

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- How are the illustrations of Mary's mother, brother and father, a metaphor for people who are not active listeners? How do the illustrations add meaning to the written text?
- Why do you think it is so difficult for Mary to be heard?
- Why does Mary decide 'to be quieter than she had ever been before'? Why does it take so long for her family to realise that she has disappeared?
- In the role of Mary, write a journal entry sharing all of the things you have enjoyed taking notice of throughout the text.
- Using an X Chart, brainstorm the things that Mary sees, smells, feels and hears throughout the text.
- In what ways is *A Quiet Girl* a book about appreciation and acceptance?
- What does Mary's family learn from her? What have you learnt from various members of your family?
- What role do the doves play in *A Quiet Girl*? What do they symbolise?
- Carefully examine the illustrations on the page that reads 'Soon she became so quiet she felt like she just wasn't there'. How do the illustrations reflect the way Mary is feeling?
- What does Mary's family learn from her? Mary is a quiet girl. What adjective would best describe you? Create a story that reflects your personality and the way in which your family engages with you.
- Using the last page opening, brainstorm all of the things the family would see, hear, smell and feel.
- What importance does the text place on appreciation of beauty and nature?
- How has Peter Carnavas used repetition to create a sense of calm?
- Why do some of the objects in the illustrations consist of a black outline devoid of colour?
- One of Mary's character strengths is her appreciation of beauty. What are your main character strengths? Consider asking students aged 10 and over to complete the Via Character Strengths Youth Survey
  - Youth Survey - <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths-Survey>
  - Information about character strengths - <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/Character-Strengths>

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**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

Let's be honest. There's a bit of me in all of my characters and the character of Mary in *A Quiet Girl* is no different. As a child, I was always told to speak up and report cards encouraged me to use a nice loud voice when talking in front of the class. As an adult, I've been told to be a bit more bold and assertive. It hasn't been awful, just a bit irritating for, throughout all of this, I couldn't help wondering, 'Why can't everybody else be a bit quieter? A bit less assertive (and more considerate)?'

This was one of my motivations for *A Quiet Girl*. More inspiration came from reading *Quiet* by Susan Cain. This book describes the hidden power of introverts, the quiet ones that use their quietness to listen and consider before talking and acting. It struck a (quiet) chord with me and so I set about writing a picture book about a girl who appreciates the beautiful things in the world, just by being quiet. There is no superpower, Mary doesn't necessarily save the day, but she just gently illustrates the wonderful things we notice when we are quiet.

I've used a limited palette to allow the illustrations to reflect the quietness of the story. There is a lot of white space, and some things have been left uncoloured, to declutter the page and draw the reader's eye to the simplicity of the story. I've also used fine black pens and watercolours to further depict the gentleness of Mary's world.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Peter Carnavas writes and illustrates books for children and the grown-ups in their lives. He has made many picture books, including *Jessica's Box*, *Last Tree in the City* and *The Children Who Loved Books*. He won the 2016 SCBWI Crystal Kite Award, an Australian Book Industry Award in 2017, and his novel *The Elephant* won a Queensland Literary Award in 2018, as well as being shortlisted in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards and the CBCA Awards. He is a popular presenter in schools and his work has been translated into many languages, including Italian, Portuguese, Korean and Dutch. Peter lives on the Sunshine Coast with his wife, two daughters, a dog called Florence and a cat named Harry.

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