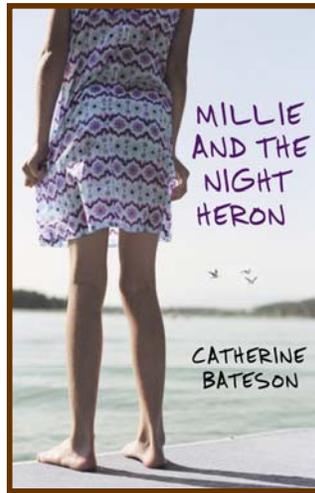


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# MILLIE AND THE NIGHT HERON

## Catherine Bateson



### Teachers' Notes

Written by Dr. Wendy Michaels

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**SYNOPSIS**

Catherine Bateson is a prolific award winning writer of prose and verse fiction for young people. Her stories often explore the ways in which various kinds of families manage their daily lives. *Millie and the Night Heron* tells the story of two single mothers, their children, and their desire for partners and fulfilling careers as artists. Told in the voice of the first person narrator, Millie, it celebrates the power of love, parenting and the power of art. Catherine Bateson's finely tuned narrative has a poetic quality that will make it enjoyable to read aloud to the class. Her use of different forms of writing offers opportunities for student experimentation with writing. It is particularly suitable for students who are on the cusp of moving from primary to secondary school.

**CLASSROOM APPROACHES**

Talk with the students about their ideas of "family". What constitutes a family? What do they think about single parent families? Perhaps students could ask their parents and grandparents about the kind of family situations they grew up in – possibly extended families. Or they could research different kinds of families in different cultures and religions. Allow time for discussion and encourage students to develop understandings about the different ways in which families organise themselves. Explain that the book focuses on two single mothers who initially live in the same house with their children until each mother seeks to develop a relationship with a 'boyfriend'. As you read the book encourage students to note how this issue is explored – eg by juxtaposing Millie's 'crush' on Rowan with the two women and their boyfriends. After finishing the book have students write an article for a magazine for young people about 'families'. They could use the information from their research as well as from *Millie and the Night Heron*.

The adult characters are introduced in terms of their work – artist, scientist, counsellor, teacher, photographer, etc. Have students re-read the sections that introduce each adult character and talk about the ways in which their work relates to their personalities. Have students draw up a profile for each character that describes their personal and professional lives. Encourage them to find a photograph or make a drawing of each character to accompany their written profile.

Point out to students the ways in which Millie uses her journal to jot down her ideas and thoughts. Look at the different kinds of writing that she includes from her journal in the story – including the poetry. Encourage students to talk about why people keep journals. Millie's mother also keeps an artists journal in which she sketches things. Examine some of the journal entries and talk about how

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Millie felt at the time of writing. Have students keep a journal during the reading of this book. Allow time each day for writing/drawing in the journal. Encourage students to record their thoughts about the book as well as about anything else that they feel strongly about. Encourage students to read back over their jottings and develop at least one piece of finished work from their initial thoughts.

Dr Wendy Michaels is Lecturer School of Humanities University of Newcastle

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Catherine Bateson's books have received much acclaim. Commendations for her books include:

*Rain May and Captain Daniel*

Winner CBCA Book of the Year Awards Younger Readers 2003

Winner Queensland Premier's Literary Awards Best Children's Book 2003

Shortlisted NSW Premier's Awards – Patricia Wrightson

Recommended Reading List for Australian Family Therapists Award for Children's Literature

*Millie & the Night Herron*

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Australian Book 2005

*Painted Love Letters*

Winner Australian Family Therapists Award for Children's Literature 2003

Honour Book CBCA Book of the Year Awards Older Readers 2003

Shortlisted NSW Premier's Literary Awards – Ethel Turner Prize 2003

*The Year It All Happened*

Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable Australian Book 2002

Catherine Bateson grew up in a second-hand bookshop in Brisbane frequented by leading Australian writers including Tom Shapcott and Bill Jones. This, she says, gave her 'the incredibly false view of the world that everybody reads and writes'. The daughter of a journalist mother and father who was for many years Editor of The Australian Journal, Catherine's passion for writing is a lifelong one.