

# Author Study: Ursula Dubosarsky

## Contents

Stage 2 Learning Resources: 'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby' and 'Poor Teddy'

Stage 3 Learning Resources: 'The Birthday Party' and 'Christmas Eve'

Stage 3 Learning Resources: 'The Night Parrot' and 'The Statue who came to Dinner'

Ursula Dubosarsky, Australian Children's Laureate 2020 – 2021, has written novels, picture books, non-fiction and short stories. For each month in 2020 story starters and [writing ideas](#) can be found on her website.

**Introduce** Ursula Dubosarsky to students through your school library. Ask the teacher librarian to create a display of all of Ursula's books and present an overview of the stories to the class. Students vote for the story they think they would like best. The top 3 or more books are borrowed for the class library.

A [complete list of Ursula's books](#) and her [biography](#) could be shared with the class to provide an overview of her work. [Teaching notes for Brindabella](#) could also be used if the school library has a copy of the book.

Students develop a list of interview questions for Ursula based on their research of her biography and books. Students should use the 5W's and H strategy:

- Who
- Where
- What
- When
- Why
- How

Interview questions are shared with the class and a set of 6 questions are voted upon to use as an interview. You may like to use some of the questions in the [transcript of the interview with Ursula](#) as an example of how questions can make the author think about their work differently.

## Stage 2 Learning Resources: 'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby' and 'Poor Teddy'

In the stories of 'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby' and 'Poor Teddy', Ursula Dubosarsky has created characters, settings and situations that are quite different. She has done this by making careful language choices and by using some of her own life experiences to inspire her. Her stories are then combined with illustrations that add another dimension and build on the mood or atmosphere of the story.

How do the illustrations reflect Ursula's stories?

### EN2-8B | ACELA1483

Prior to reading these two stories complete the following activities:

#### **Colour:**

Introduce the idea of colour connotations or colour associations. You might like to draw up a table of colours where students fill in objects, emotions or concepts that they associate with a list of colours. The [Meaning of Colours](#) page from the Colour matters for kids website is helpful for this activity.

Once the colour table has been completed, then students can compare the illustrations for 'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby' and 'Poor Teddy' identifying the main colours used in the illustrations for each of these stories.

You might like for students to draw up a table. The following are examples of answers that students might come up with.

Sylvie Quick - Bright Colours – with two colours that stand out – Orange and Green

Poor Teddy - Dark colours – grey, brown, dull red/maroon

Lead a discussion with the students about the colour choices and the mood or feeling it creates, for each story.

For 'Sylvie Quick', students might answer that the bright colours set up a mood of fun and games, which reflects that the story includes some silly or humorous incidents.

For 'Poor Teddy,' students might respond that the dull colours do the opposite, they give the reader a feeling of sadness or concern for Teddy. They reflect his worried expressions.

#### **Salience and reading path:**

Salience is the part of the image that grabs the viewer's attention first. Ask students to look first at the illustration of Sylvie and Baby Elk on the seesaw, found on pages 8 and 9. Students identify which part of the picture they noticed first. Then they can reflect on why this stood out to them – they should think about colour and composition to do so.

Students may suggest that Sylvie stands out first because she is in the foreground and larger than Baby Elk. Also her hair is bright orange.

Reading path is the way in which illustrators set viewers up to 'read' images in a particular way, leading them to discover the particular elements of the drawing. Students should then think about where their eyes were drawn to next; how did they move their eyes around the illustration? A possible answer might be that they moved their eyes from Sylvie Quick along the seesaw (which is a vector) directing them to look at Baby Elk, before then investigating parts of the background, including the Elephant pushing the pram.

Direct students to look at the illustration from the story 'Poor Teddy' on page 12. They should complete the same investigation into the salience and reading path. Students may discover that they notice the girl first, because of her red coat and her positioning at the centre of the illustration. Students might also notice that the shadows of the other people on the platform point to her like arrows, almost. Once the viewer has noticed the girl, their eyes might then move to the bear who has fallen down the gap between the train and the platform. He is harder to see because of the dark colours, but he is also central in the image, and the girl is looking at him.

Now it is time for students to put on their illustrator's hats. Students imagine that they were the illustrator chosen to illustrate 'Sylvie Quick' and/or 'Poor Teddy'. They should read through the stories again and use a highlighter to underline the sentences or words chosen by Ursula Dubosarsky that convey the mood, atmosphere or feeling of the story. The question that you could ask students is 'What words and phrases influenced the illustrators decision about the colours that they used?'

Students might highlight the following words from 'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby:'

big yellow house, fine and hairy, party, park.

Students might highlight the following words from the story 'Poor Teddy:'

poor teddy, desperate, wet, sad.

Delving into Ursula's writing as a craft

## Characterisation

### EN2-8B

Ursula has developed a rich range of characters. Some are just ordinary people, while others – like Aunt Alligator – are quite fantastical. Sometimes she chooses to write in first person, from the perspective of one of the characters, and sometimes she likes to use third person narration.

**Investigate** the characters and the narrative voices chosen in these two stories. Which one is written in first person? Which one is written in third person? Engage students in a discussion about why that narrative voice has been chosen for each story. Perhaps for 'Sylvie Quick', students could be introduced to third person limited as an extension task.

'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby'

### EN2-4A

Students complete the following questions:

- Is the story told by one of the characters or is there a narrator?
- How does Sylvie feel about babysitting?
- How do we know that she feels this way?

Imagine if the story had been told from the perspective of one of the following characters:

- Baby Elk
- Father Elk
- Aunt Alligator

For each character, students are to decide the following:

- How they would feel about the events of the story
- For each character what you think the highlight of their day was
- For each character, explain how we know this about them

### EN2-11D | ACELY1675

**Create** a double-comic strip, in pairs. Students choose a part of the story. In their double-comic strip, they will use an A4 or A3 sheet of paper and fold it in half until there are eight clear boxes to use as frames. The pairs might like to cut the page in half so that the top and lower sets of four squares are separate for them to work on more easily. They can later be rejoined once the work is finished.

Placing the paper in landscape orientation, the top four boxes will show the perspective of one character from the story 'Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby' and then the lower four boxes will show the same events from the perspective of a different character.

The double-comic strip should include speech bubbles, thought bubbles, narration boxes and drawings of the characters. These should be used to convey the perspective of their chosen character.

For example, students could choose the part of the story at the park, where Sylvie and Baby Elk are on the seesaw. The top set of boxes could show Sylvie's perspective as she feels sick from motion sickness, while the lower set of boxes could show Baby Elk's joy as they 'bounce' endlessly until he is tired.

### 'Poor Teddy'

#### EN2-1A

**Discuss** how the reader is supposed to feel about Teddy. Talk about how the use of repetition of the phrase 'Poor Teddy' throughout make us feel sympathy for Teddy as he goes through ordeal after ordeal.

Engage students in a reflection about the importance of toys in a child's life. Ask students about the types of interesting places, experiences and problems that their own toys have experienced.

Connect this to the story by asking students to identify all the main events described in the story 'Poor Teddy.' Ask students what they think Teddy thought about these things that happened to him.

What inspires Ursula?

[EN2-11D](#) | [ACELT1607](#)

In most of the stories, Ursula has been inspired by her own real life experiences. In ‘Sylvie Quick and the Bouncing Baby’, Ursula used her own experience of doing odd jobs to develop the character of Sylvie and the babysitting job that she found herself engaged in.

Ask Students: What kinds of odd jobs have you done for your own pocket money? Perhaps a big list of interesting and unusual jobs that the students have done to earn some pocket money could be compiled on the board together.

Students can then use one of these as the basis to write a short story in which the odd job leads to an interesting or unexpected adventure.

[EN2-2A](#) | [ACELY1682](#)

When speaking to children about writing, Ursula often tells them that she writes about something she really likes. She wrote about her teddy because she really loved him. The following writing tasks should draw on student’s own experiences of things they like.

Ask students to imagine their own favourite toy was able to tell a story about its life. Students create a story plan as follows:

- Write a list of descriptive words to describe the toy’s character and personality. The teddy in the story seems sad and worried. What kind of personality would their own toy have?
- List three memorable events that this toy has experienced (for example being left in the rain, going on a Ferris Wheel at a carnival, being lost)
- For each of the three memorable events, consider what the toy might have felt about the experience

After these planning activities, students are to write a story about their own toy. They should try to provoke an emotional response from the reader that suits the character of their chosen toy. For example, the reader might be made to feel jealous of the wonderful holiday that a student’s toy has been on, or they might be made to feel very sad for a bunny who was lost. The story may be shared with Kindergarten.

Ask students to write a list of their favourite things that they can use as writing ideas. For inspiration they could watch a clip of the song [My favourite things](#) from ‘The Sound of Music.’

Students use their list of favourite things to write a [diamante poem](#).

### Stage 3 Learning Resources: ‘The Birthday Party’ and ‘Christmas Eve’

Ursula loves celebrations, parties and special events. She has often used these as the basis for her work. ‘The Birthday Party’ and ‘Christmas Eve’ both explore the emotions and excitement of special occasions through language and the development of an atmosphere.

How do the illustrations reflect Ursula’s stories?

#### EN3-1A | ACELY1709

Before showing the students the story and poem, write or project the words ‘Christmas Eve’ on the board. This is the beginning of a **think pair share** activity. Ask students to close their eyes and think about the image that these two words conjure up in their minds. While their eyes are still closed, ask them to think about the colours, places and objects that they associate with Christmas Eve. Then finally, before students open their eyes, they are to identify one word to describe the feeling of ‘Christmas Eve.’ Students form pairs and compare ideas before sharing with the whole class.

Then do the same with the words “Birthday Party”

Extension Task: Create a class celebration poster on the wall where all students contribute illustrations, shapes or craft or items (like balloons or Christmas decorations) showing their interpretation of special occasions. This could be expanded beyond birthdays and Christmas to include any special event.

Now students are to view the illustration for ‘The Birthday Party’ on page 18 and 19 and the illustration of ‘Christmas Eve’. Ask students to use a graphic organiser to **compare and contrast** the ideas they developed in the Think Pair Share activity and the illustrations in the publication. Ask students what surprised them? What challenged their expectations?

**Discuss:** How did the illustrators decide on the type of illustration for each of these two pieces of writing?

Delving into Ursula’s writing as a craft

#### EN3-4A | EN3-5B | ACELY1701

Ursula (and most writers) are lovers of language. She makes specific language choices to engage the reader and draw them into the world of her stories. Ursula has painted a picture of special occasions using sensory writing and making use of interesting and unusual vocabulary.

### ‘Christmas Eve’

#### EN3-3A

After reading the poem, introduce students to the technique of sensory writing. Sensory writing uses the senses (see, hear, feel, taste and smell) to immerse the reader in the scene. Ask students to use three different colours to highlight what can be seen, heard and felt in the scene described in the poem ‘Christmas Eve’ on a copy of the poem. Possible answers include:

- Sight – Any of the descriptions of the lights – ‘There are lights In the sky In the park In the windows of houses On the curving bridge And on the trees.’
- Sound – ‘That sound you hear It’s the ocean The waves moving...’
- Feel – ‘How warm the night is!’

Introduce the concept of repetition in poetry. Ask students to use a different colour and highlight the words that are repeated. The word ‘waiting’ is repeated all the way through the poem. The effect is to develop the anticipation of the next day – Christmas! Have a class discussion about the use of repetition and how it builds suspense and anticipation.

### ‘The Birthday Party’

Before reading the story, engage students in a spelling quiz.

Read out the following words for students to spell:

furtive, worried, reconciled, vulnerable, ironic, magnetic

Then read the story as a class, with students underlining the words from the spelling list when they see them in the text. After reading, they can check their work and add a definition to these new spelling words.

Ask students to think about why Ursula would choose such unusual words for her story, and why she would have chosen to use capital letters for these words. Answers might include that it makes them stand out ... it draws the reader’s attention. As a lover of language, Ursula wants her readers to be exposed to new vocabulary so that they can use it themselves.

### EN3-5B | ACELY1801 | EN3-7C | ACELT1616

Ursula loves encouraging children to read, as you can see in her interview where she tells everyone to get a library card and read, read, read! You can tell she really wants to engage her reader because she often directly addresses them in her work.

Ask students to draw up a **T chart** with one column for ‘Christmas Eve’ and one column for ‘The Birthday Party.’ Students are to read through the poem and the story and find some sentences in which the author has directly addressed the reader.

Examples from ‘The Birthday Party’ include:

- Imagine having a teacher at your birthday party! They’d probably get you to play spelling games or sing your times tables
- In case you don’t know, furtive is how you look when you’re doing something you shouldn’t and you think someone might see
- You can learn a lot of things from your parents.

Examples from ‘Christmas Eve’ include

- Listen! That sound you hear It’s the ocean
- Shhhh.

### EN3-2A | ACELT1609

Ask students to compose an opinion piece in which they answer the following:

Do you prefer authors to create characters that talk to the reader (like in 'The Birthday Party')? OR

Do you prefer the characters to just get on with the story, as though you are just an invisible observer?

Children brainstorm the titles of any stories where this happens.

What inspires Ursula?

Ursula says that the chaotic nature of parties makes them perfect settings for a story, because anything can happen.

### EN3-2A | ACELY1704 | EN3-7C | ACELT1618

Students choose an event – something significant to them – for example a birthday party, Easter, Halloween, Christmas Day or ANZAC day. They use a [concept map](#) to describe what they hear, see, feel, taste and smell on that special occasion. For example, on Anzac Day, the scene might include the scent of rosemary, the chill of the morning air, the sound of the bugle, the taste of Anzac biscuits and the sight of wreathes and medals.

Once students have completed their sensory planning, they should think about a feeling or emotion or concept related to their chosen special occasion, and they should choose a word or two that can be used effectively through the poem as repetition to emphasise the mood or atmosphere.

Once students have completed this brainstorming, they can write a short story or a poem for their special occasion and complete it with an illustration.



## Stage 3 Learning Resources: ‘The Night Parrot’ and ‘The Statue who came to Dinner’

Ursula shows us how writers can be inspired by history to develop interesting stories. Both ‘The Night Parrot’ and ‘The Statue who came to Dinner’ require further research to fully understand their significance.

What research is needed to write?

[EN3-3A](#) | [ACELY1712](#) | [ACELY1702](#)

Before Ursula wrote her story, she made sure she conducted research into the real Night Parrot, a native bird to Australia.

Before students read the story, they should investigate the previously thought-to-be extinct Night Parrot. Firstly, students should be directed to an information page on the [Night Parrot](#). They could also look at the birdlife website for another [profile](#). Then they can look deeper and read a [dreamtime story](#) about Night Parrots. The ABC News article with the dreamtime story has extensive information about the rediscovery of the Night Parrot and includes some photographs and even sound clips of the Night Parrot’s different calls. A teacher guided perusal of the key information about the Night Parrot from the ABC News article is recommended. A student can be assigned to be the class scribe and note down the key information as the class finds out more. Key facts that they should take away from this research include:

- European explorers often collected specimens of birdlife in Australia.
- The bird was thought extinct for many years, but recently there have been confirmed sightings and the Night Parrot species is now subject to ongoing investigation and research.
- The bird’s history is quite interesting: it includes the dreamtime story, which portrays a shy bird not willing to interact with the others.

Students then complete a [trading card](#) interactive showing what they have learnt about the Night Parrot. They should select the ‘create your own’ option when they need to choose the card type. Then students can make up their own subheadings and questions.

[EN3-8D](#) | [ACELT1613](#)

Ursula has cleverly intertwined her knowledge of the characteristics of the night parrot in real life to develop her own storyline.

After reading the story, students should make connections between their understanding of the night parrot from the research task and the story. Students are to complete a [text to world comparison](#), specifically focused on how the experiences of the character in the story might relate to the real story of the Night Parrot. Students should also consider the depiction of the Night Parrot in the Dreamtime story they have read. This can lead to some interesting discussions around some common elements: the bird in the story not being heard for 100 years, and the call of the Night Parrot being recorded almost 100 years after the bird was thought extinct.

What messages or symbols has Ursula used?

EN3-3A | EN3-5B | ACELY1701

### **'The Night Parrot'**

Ursula has created an ideal story for exploring the use of symbolism. Students can learn about symbolism by investigating the representation of the night parrot in the story.

Ask students what they think the Night Parrot in the story represents. They should refer to their text to world comparison. Students can use [bubbl.us](https://bubbl.us) to develop a brainstorm for what the bird in the story can symbolise. They should start with the words 'night parrot' in the central box and work from there, using the plus sign to add thoughts. The next level of the web can include links to the story or to their knowledge of the night parrot from the earlier research.

Some suggested answers include:

- The night parrot can symbolise hope. In the story, Thea is waiting to find out if the baby is going to be 'found', and when she releases the bird from its glass prison, she makes a wish 'Find the baby!' The bird is a good representation of hope, because it was thought to be lost forever, but recently the bird has been rediscovered by humans.
- The bird can symbolise freedom. The night parrot in the glass dome has been imprisoned with no-one to listen to its call for 100 years. Thea sets the bird free. The next day, when her father arrives and announces that the baby has been 'found', Thea feels that she has been released too. She feels free from worry.
- The bird represents Thea and her feelings. Thea feels helpless about her new baby sibling that may or may not be lost. She is worried about what will happen. When the news that the baby has arrived and her mum is well, Thea feels 'as though a glass dome covering the whole world had been lifted up, and she was flying.'

### **'The Statue who came to Dinner'**

EN3-3A | ACELA1504 | ACELY1708

Ursula has an interest in Roman mythology and has used this as inspiration for the play 'The Statue who came to dinner.' Roman mythology is a rich source for modern writers to use as stimulus for their writing. Ancient Romans and modern day people have a lot in common, and the shared human experiences mean that their stories can be timeless and still enjoyed today.

After reading the play, show students a video of the [Pygmalion](#) story from Roman/Greek mythology. Students complete a [Venn Diagram](#) showing the similarities and differences between the play and the original myth. In this comparison they should also consider the language used, the text type and the tone (serious or humourous). Further discussion could ask students to think about the purpose of the original story (for entertainment and to teach moral lessons on how to behave) and then compare it with the purpose of the play (for entertainment).

### EN3-7C | ACELT1612

Ursula uses a metaphor when she suggests that all writing is like making a statue come to life on the page. It is time for students to be inspired by the world around them.

Students are to choose one of the following:

- An ancient story from Roman (or Greek) mythology
- An Australian animal (extinct or not)

They are to conduct research into their chosen topic.

When they have completed research and have a strong understanding of their chosen field of study, they can complete one of the following, using their research to guide the plot, characters and setting:

- Compose a short story
- Compose a playscript
- Create an animation
- Draw a storyboard using a storyboard or [filmstrip](#)
- Write a poem
- Create a comic strip
- Write a letter from one character to another and then compose the response