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Donkeys Can't Fly on Planes

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Kids' Own Publishing

Melbourne

53 pages

Illustrated

RRP \$22.00

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A unique and beautiful collection of short stories, *Donkeys Can't Fly On Planes* will touch the hearts of all who read it. These autobiographical stories are both told and illustrated by children whose experiences remind us as readers how truly lucky we are to live in this country. The stories are written and illustrated by South Sudanese refugees who have settled in Traralgon, Victoria, telling their stories of survival. The text is suitable for a range of age groups who are able to delve into the subject matter at different levels, with the depictions of the horrors of war and violence experienced by the children either inferred or stated in a way that the effect on the reader is numbed.

As teachers we all know that moment when you come across something—perhaps a book, film or even newspaper article—and you immediately know that you can, and must, work it into your classroom. This stunning picture book is one of those resources. From the first story about 'Steven the Donkey'—the collection's title character—you are captured emotionally and astounded by the power of the simplicity of language. All of the stories are one or two pages long and are accompanied by collage-style illustrations created by the children in a technique reminiscent of Jeannie Baker. These accentuate the authors' innocence and perspective of their own experiences.

The text links well to the primary level History curriculum. The book enables children studying the text to make clear links and contrasts between their own experiences within their family units and those of the refugee children. It encourages students

to question their lives and those of other children, encouraging critical thinking and empathy. It also links into the English curriculum, the Art curriculum, as well as Personal and Social capabilities. It connects schools to the world, with a focus on developing resilience, as well as other various values. That is one of the benefits of this text—it is a versatile style that opens the door to cross-curricular units.

As a secondary school History teacher, I am slightly more limited with options. It would be much easier to work it into an English class. I was able to use the story 'Grandma and the Cow' in a Refugee Week resource, as regardless of students' ages there are many valuable conversations to be had surrounding these stories. With my VCE Homeroom we discussed the obvious differences in childhood experiences, then delved into the political context and filled in the gaps of what was not said in the story. We examined the child's hope, resilience and gratitude, as well as her fears. I learned more about the plight of refugees through this text and was able to impart that to my students, many of whom are not exposed to this information elsewhere.

If you're debating whether or not this book will assist you, err on the side of humanity and buy a copy anyway as the proceeds go towards building a school/orphanage in South Sudan. These stories personalise and make accessible a life that many of us are too lucky to understand. Or, for those who do identify with these narratives through these strong and determined children, they may see themselves in a classroom text as they haven't before.