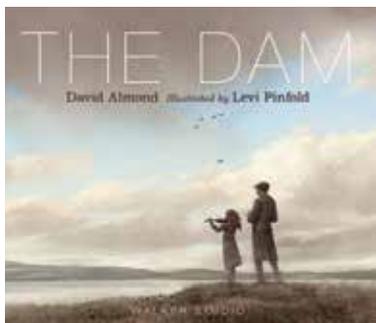


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The Dam

By David Almond

2018

Walker Studio

Sydney

Hardback, 32 pages

Illustrated

RRP \$24.99

Reviewed by Ingrid Perkins
St Patrick's College, Ballarat

It shouldn't surprise anyone who has read David Almond's other prize-winning works that *The Dam* is an extraordinarily beautiful story that captures the mystery and loss of the past. This picture book is an eloquent exploration of how we keep memories alive through music. Teamed with the ethereal artwork of Australian illustrator Levi Pinfold, *The Dam* recounts the true story of the damming and subsequent flooding of a Northumberland (UK) valley.

Kathryn and her father wake early to visit the valley for one last time. 'All this will be washed away. And this will never be seen again. And this will drown. And these can never live here again,' her father tells her as they look at a tiny flower, a barn owl, mice, a fox and a deer. Together they recall the gatherings of friends in the grey stone cottages of the village, and the music they played together.

Her father charges her to play her fiddle 'for all that are gone and for all that are still to come.' Kathryn responds, 'Sing, Daddy, sing. Dance, Daddy, dance,' evoking the traditional north-east English folk song *Dance Ti Thy Daddy*.

After the valley is flooded, however, 'The lake is beautiful' and 'the music rises. It continues... We hear it when we are nearby, when we are far away, when we remember, when we dream. The music is inside us. It flows through all the dams in us.'

There is an element of acceptance of the rule of change in this deceptively simple story; that 'the new must oust the old.' There is also recognition that change is not entirely about loss; it may bring about a beauty of its own, albeit different from that which it replaces. What remains constant are the stories and music that bind us to the past.

This book would be of value in exploring and expanding on themes of continuity and change. There is scope to use it with younger audiences alongside other picture books, like Nadia Wheatley's *My Place*. It could also be used to great effect in VCE Religion and Society when exploring themes of sacred place and ritual, and as a springboard to discussion of similarities and differences in individual and collective identity from both British and Indigenous Australian perspectives.