

Teacher's Notes/ Readers Report

Title: Last Tree in the City

Author: Peter Carnavas



1. Synopsis

Last Tree in the City is the story of a boy who lives in the city. Edward's city is a place of concrete and cars, a world without colour, so every day he visits the last tree in the city and forgets the dull world around him. Then one day the tree is gone. Edward thinks of a clever way to revive his fallen tree, inspiring the entire city to follow his lead and understand that life is better with trees.

2. Author/Illustrator style or medium

Peter has used watercolour and black ink for the illustrations in the book. The use of colour is very important to the story. The city is painted in dull brown and sepia tones while Edward and the tree stand out in bright colours. The use of these colours reflects the theme of the story, that trees brighten our lives and happiness is achieved through a meaningful relationship with the environment. Peter has used white space for the sad, empty moments in the story, reflecting the emptiness Edward feels without his tree. As hope emerges, the colours become

warmer and the final spread of the tree-filled city shows the dull buildings completely overpowered by the life and colour of the trees.

3. Author/Illustrator Motivation

Peter comes from a family of gardeners and has always been fascinated by the warmth and joy one gets from a healthy relationship with the environment. Our biggest challenges facing us today are related to the environment and how we intend to preserve it for future generations. While it may seem difficult to make a difference, Peter wanted to write a story that demonstrated how one small boy could inspire an entire city. One humble act of environmentalism can flow on to others, motivating them to simply plant a tree...anywhere. Their faces are happier, their lives are brighter. The more trees the better!

4. Author/Illustrator Background Information

Peter grew up as the youngest of four kids with two parents that somehow allowed and encouraged him to pursue his interests without him realising. He learnt the violin and guitar and was pretty certain he would one day become one of the world's greatest songwriters, sitting somewhere alongside Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Brian Wilson.

This didn't happen, so it was lucky he could draw little pictures of people.

Peter has always written stories and scribbled pictures. After making little books for family and then teaching for a few years, he began immersing himself in picture books. He immediately fell in love with the work of the great picture book creators: Quentin Blake, Stephen Michael King, Peter H. Reynolds, Freya Blackwood, Libby Gleeson, Shaun Tan, Armin Greder, Bob Graham and more.

Peter's first book, *Jessica's Box*, was published by New Frontier in 2008. His tale of a little girl's attempt to find friendship was shortlisted for the 2008 Queensland Premier's Literary Award, the Children's Book Council of Australia's 2009 Crichton Award for Emerging Illustrators and was listed as a CBCA Notable Book for 2009.

Peter's second book, *Sarah's Heavy Heart*, was released in 2009 and his third book, *The Important Things* was released in 2010.

Last Tree in the City is Peter's fourth book.

5. Educational Applicability

The key theme in this book is the environment and how one small person can make a big difference in brightening our lives with trees.

Discussion topics



Before reading the book

1. Ask the children to close their eyes and think of a city. What do they imagine? What things do they think of? Buildings? Cars? What sorts of colours do they imagine when they think of a city?
2. Introduce the book. Talk about the title and what stands out on the cover. Ask the children why they think the buildings are so dull and the tree is so bright. What do they think will happen in the story?
3. As you read the story, talk about how Edward feels to be living in the colourless city. What makes him happy? Why does the tree make him happy?
4. As you approach the solution (the sequence page of Edward planting the tree), ask children where they think he will plant his tree.

After Reading the book

1. Ask the children what happened to the tree. Did it fall? Did somebody cut it down? How can they tell? Why would somebody cut down the last tree in the



city? Why does anybody cut down a tree? (There could be good reasons for cutting down a tree, too)

2. After Edward planted his piece of tree in the tricycle, the story says, “Then something wonderful happened...” What is the wonderful thing that happened?

3. Why does everybody copy Edward at the end? How do the people feel now that the city is full of trees? How can trees make us happy?

4. Talk about the use of colour in the story. How has the illustrator helped to tell the story with colour? Why is Edward bright throughout the book when the background and buildings are dull?

5. What do you think Edward will do when his tricycle tree gets bigger and bigger?

6. Activities

Tree Planting Day

Get involved in Planet Ark’s *National Tree Day* to brighten up the school or community. <http://treeday.planetark.org>

Trees in odd places

Collect old and broken containers from home, such as cracked cups, old watering cans, or a chipped kettle. Plant seeds or seedlings in the containers. Look at the ending of the story for inspiration.

Tree collage

Collect different coloured leaves from the ground. Arrange and glue the leaves into the shape of a tree. Use a dark background to make the tree stand out.

Class garden

Get help from the school janitor/grounds person to make a class garden in a part of the school that needs brightening up. Find out which native plants are suitable for the area, or perhaps turn it into a vegetable patch.

Colour contrast

Discuss the use of colour in the story, particularly the bright colour of Edward and the tree against the dull buildings. Draw or cut out pictures of bright trees, plants and flowers. Glue them onto an A4-sized piece of newspaper, or use rectangular pieces of newspaper to represent buildings in the background.

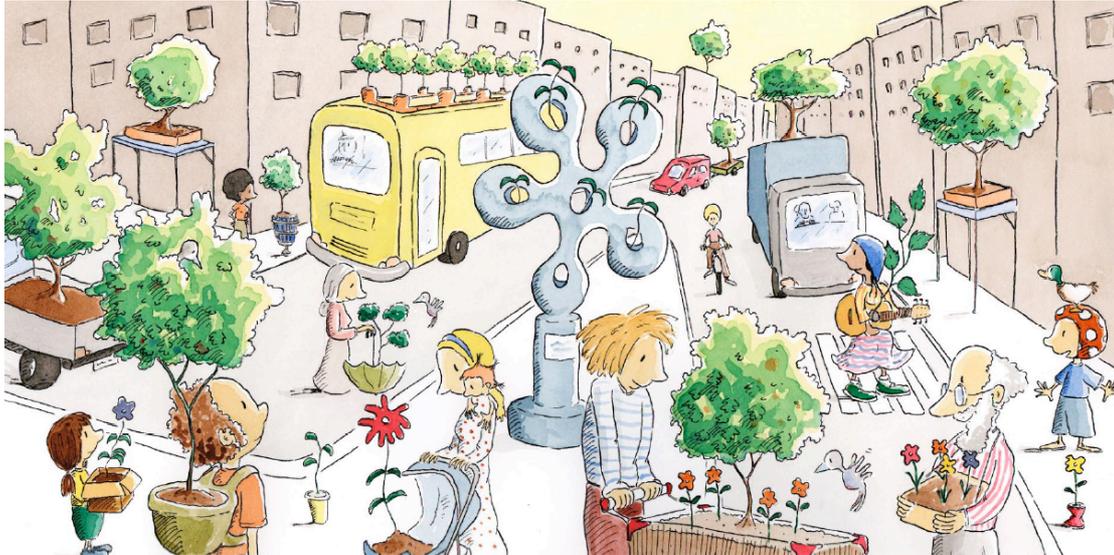


Changing cities

Look at old photographs of your local city or town centre (aerial photographs will work well). Compare photographs from different eras. Do you notice a difference in how many trees there are? Are there more trees or more buildings now? Can you see where some trees have grown bigger? This could also be done with photographs of your school. It may also lead to an activity in which children can design their own “green” city or school.

Further research

1. Why do trees make us happy? No, really – what do trees do for our environment and why are they important to our health? Read some books, research websites and ask people who work with trees. Make a list of the scientific reasons why life is better with trees.
2. What kinds of jobs are there for people who want to work with trees? Ask your librarian to help you find some information about environmental occupations.



3. Trees are not only important to us, they are important to animals as well. Find out some information about an animal that depends heavily on trees to survive and thrive.

7. Marketing & Selling Points

- The greatest challenges facing us today are related to the environment. This book focuses on the theme of nature under pressure from human development and what we can do to change the situation.
- The book depicts the message that one small act of goodwill can make an enormous difference. It is an empowering message for children. It encourages them to believe that they can make a difference in looking after their environment.
- The story is a tale of triumph over adversity. It portrays a strong, independent character who unwittingly becomes the hero of a city. It is a story that can appeal to all ages and demographics.

