

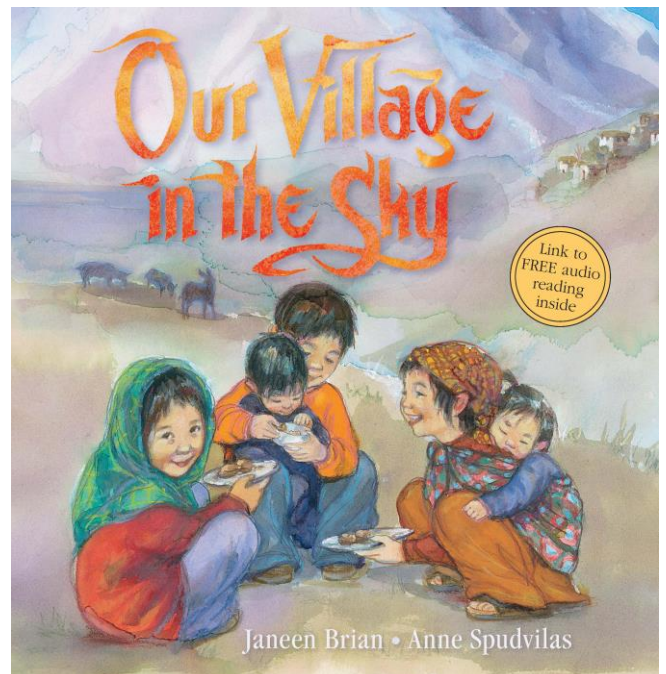
Teachers' Notes
by Julie Miller

Our Village in the Sky
by
Janeen Brian, illustrated by Anne Spudvilas

ISBN 9781743318140
Recommended for ages 6-10 yrs

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INTRODUCTION

Its summer here and school is closed for holiday time

Its summer here and this is what we do on those days – our village in the sky

Summer holidays for children who live in a remote village in the Himalayan Mountains are quite different from the experience of young readers of this book. It is a family life without running water, washing machines and dryers, excursions to the beach or movies. Children contribute to looking after their siblings and help build a mud brick house with their parents. For children in first world countries, this book is a window into a different kind of life, but there is a universality about the chores described, and the games played, that all children can identify with.

CURRICULUM TOPICS

Our Village in the Sky is relevant in three **curriculum areas**:

- English Language and Literacy, Visual Literacy
- History, Society and Environment
- Creative Arts

It could be used to explore **Themes** such as:

- Cultural characteristics of families
- Similarities and differences between ways in which families express their culture

And explore **Values** such as:

- Care and Compassion
- Responsibility in Families
- Respect

Use quotes from the book to explore these themes. For example:

At the water pipe

I fill the tub

It grows heavy and

The long walk home

Is silent.

The notes and activities that follow are aimed to support the new Australian curriculum. In addition, the book supports the cross-curriculum priorities of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Cross-Curriculum-Priorities>). While the activities have been written for lower primary, each of the activities can be easily adapted for both younger and older students.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Our Village in the Sky is a picture book written in a free verse style, using poetic language to describe activities of everyday life for children living in a village high in the Himalayan Mountains.

ACTIVITIES

Poetry

Discuss with students about the author, Janeen Brian, having a story to tell and how she has done this by carefully selecting the words she has used. Explain that the story is written in a poetry style called "free verse", and is meant to be read out loud. It is important that students understand that poems do not need to rhyme, and this style of poem can tell a story in a different way.

- Discuss how the author creates pictures with words and how the chosen words must be the best ones possible- "Sometimes my fingers flutter like small, brown butterflies and the sound is their heartbeat." Would the story be different if the author had not used this style? Read the story to students, pausing to explore the descriptive passages.
- Discuss how the rhythm and beat of the verse can echo the actions described with repeated words such as:
 - "All rubbed, rubbed, rubbed..."
 - "My hammer pounds and pounds and all around..."
- Discuss how poets employ a variety of devices to create vivid and appealing images for the reader. Read and listen to a variety of rhyming and non-rhyming poems and compare and contrast the different styles.
- Compare the simple, compound and complex sentences that make up *Our Village in the Sky* to the poetry style Haiku. (Google 'Haiku lessons' for a wealth of classroom support.) Haiku uses a strict structure to describe the essence of a moment. Have students write a haiku using a 'scene' from the book as inspiration.

- What family activities do the students participate in with their family and friends in summer? Provide opportunities for students to write vivid descriptions of everyday events that happen with their friends and family.

Word Play

1. An unexpected misunderstanding of the text by young readers could occur when the text refers to “the monastery where lamas live...”. Students may well be more familiar with *llama*, the South American animal! This is a great opportunity to teach them the famous Ogden Nash ditty (and handy spelling mnemonic):

The one-l lama,
He's a priest.
The two-l llama,
He's a beast.
And I will bet
A silk pajama
There isn't any
Three-l llama.

This could lead to a lesson on homophones, other mnemonics or nonsense rhymes.

2. Introduce the idea of using lists of words as the basis of a poem.

- Children write down/suggest activities that they can do with their hands and then with their feet. Use their words to create a “hands and feet” class poem. Perform it!
- List animals who use their “hands and feet” in particular ways; eg. monkeys climbing or swinging. Many animals are associated with particular movements: snakes slither, horses gallop etc.
- List gaits: slouching, stalking, striding, galloping, cantering, padding, crawling, lumbering, creeping, trotting, skipping etc. Children act them out.

3. For further vocabulary development, see **BLM 3** and **BLM 4** at the end of these notes.

VISUAL LITERACY

Encourage students to observe how the illustrations often add to or illuminate meaning, complementing and enriching the text. Line, colour, style and layout are techniques used which make up the “grammar” of the illustrations.

Discussion point: Line

The illustrations are simply drawn, with a soft water colour wash. They provide a mood of friendship and fun, and effectively capture the expressions and actions of the characters.

Look closely at the illustrations - what emotions do the children show while they are working or playing? Are they happy or sad? How do you know?

Discussion point: Colour

The colours of the illustrations contribute to **the mood of the story, and echo** the simplicity of life in the village. Discuss how the images in the book enhance its positive message through the expressions on the characters' faces and the choice of warm colours.

Discussion point: layout and space

The characters are depicted in the foreground of most of the illustrations within a perspective of sparse mountainous landscape. What do you learn about the landscape around the village, and how does this contribute to the story?

Discussion point: Construction of characters

The body positions and groupings of the characters in each activity **extend** the text by adding further details to support the story. For example, the children wash clothes and dishes, play games while squatting together on the ground without chairs or tables. Look closely at the cover illustration – what do you learn about the characters? (Clothing, eating and carrying young child).

STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

Encourage your students to make connections between the events and characters in *Our Village in the Sky* and their own lives, other stories they have read, and the wider world. Discuss what the author might want the reader to think and feel as a result of reading this story.

Activity:

Before reading, use geographical tools – for example, a globe, wall map or digital application such as Google Earth – to locate the Spiti Valley in India. The Spiti Valley is a desert mountain valley located high in the Himalaya Mountains in the northeastern part of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. The name "Spiti" means "The Middle Land", i.e. the land between Tibet and India. Investigate summer and winter temperatures compared to Australia.

Discuss:

The story begins with "*It's summer here and the thick, heavy snow has gone.*" Life is very different for children in the story during summer and winter. Discuss with students how the lifestyle of the families would change between summer and winter, referring to the story that provides information such as "*downstairs for stores and animals in winter*" and

"you trudge outside for buckets of snow to heat and melt for water". Do you think children in *Our Village in the Sky* look forward to summer holidays like you?

Discuss:

Initiate a class discussion on different families. Begin with the family portrayed in the story and then have students respond with examples of their own family life. Discuss: What makes up a family? What activities do the family in *Our Village in the Sky* enjoy? Discuss the activities depicted, and how these are alike or different from their family.

Activity:

Complete **BLM1** (at the end of these notes) comparing "How families are different and similar."

For example:

- Collecting water for home use
- Washing clothes
- Drying clothes
- Playing games outside at home
- Dish washing
- Looking after baby brother

Some activities in the story may be quite different to the students' experience. Discuss activities such as:

- Making mud bricks
- Collecting cow pats for fuel and heating
- Washing clothes for the monastery

Ask students to identify some activities their own families participate in. Develop a list that includes social, sporting and cultural activities. Students explain why these activities are important in their own families. Students may record and display this information.

Activity:

Students complete **BLM2** "My Family Album". Students may draw or include photographs. Older students may also like to create an album online at Glogster <http://edu.glogster.com/?ref=com>

Display and share student family albums, discussing how they are alike to each other and what makes them different.

- Based on their family albums, students create an illustration of their family doing something they love with free verse describing the scene. Suggested phrases could be:

- "My family is special because..."
- "My family loves..."
- "My family likes to celebrate..."

Activity - Food

Rice, chapattis, dhal are all foods mentioned in the dishwashing poem.

- Children learn to cook those dishes and eat lunch together. Can they squat in a circle to share their dishes?

Activity -Responsibility

- Using scarves children carry around dolls, teddies etc. on their back for a particular length of time, taking good care of them while going about their daily routines.

Activity - Play

- Children teach each other how to play knucklebones, using any suitable objects they can find in the playground or bring from home. (For authenticity, your butcher can provide you with some real knucklebones which you can boil clean.)
- Outdoors, your students could teach each other the playground games they know. Some students may already know games from other countries.
- **Classify** the types of games that children play all around the world eg. Rope skipping, marble games, spinning tops, 'tag' or 'catch' games, circle games (Ring a Ring a Rosy), ball games, card games etc.
 - What other ways can they be classified? Eg. Large groups / teams / individuals / pairs **OR** special equipment / no special equipment etc.

CREATIVE ARTS

Music

- Children fill up various plastic containers; listen to different sounds. Use their containers to create a rhythm, or beat the rhythm as a poem is read aloud.
- Children create tunes to accompany the poems in *Our Village in the Sky*.

Reader's Theatre

- A group of children act out various elements of the poem as a narrator/s reads it.

Craft and Design

- Using a mould (like a milk carton cut lengthwise) children make their own mud brick. They can write their name on it.

- Weaving: using recycled materials, children create a weaving pattern. Shape and staple it into a basket. Children fasten it with cord or fabric around their shoulders.
- Children can create a sea-saw from a wooden ladder, plank or similar object.
- Using a variety of objects (cardboard boxes etc) children create their own playhouse/cubbyhouse. Perhaps they can incorporate their own mud bricks!

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED TEXTS AND OTHER SOURCES

Ayu and the perfect moon David Cox

Mam Panya's pancakes Richard and Mary Chamberlin

Madlenka Peter Sis

Speak Chinese, Fang Fang Sally Rippin (China)

Mirror Jeannie Baker (Morroco)

Filicudi friends Lynell Santamaria

What a mess, Fang Fang Sally Rippin (China)

Fang Fang's Chinese New Year Sally Rippin (China)

A day of Ahmed's secret F. P. Heide & J. Heide Gilliland (Egypt)

This is my Culture series published by Pearson Australia. These books are written in the first person, from the point of view of young people whose families came to live in Australia from overseas: China, Egypt, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Samoa, Thailand and Vietnam.

LINKS TO OTHER ONLINE MATERIALS AND SITES

Looking at families of the world

<http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/teaching-activity/who-are-the-families-of-the-world-f-2.html>

Global Worlds teaching units

<http://www.globalwords.edu.au/>

Videos and photos of different families around the world

<http://www.familiesoftheworld.com/>

ABOUT THE WRITERS AND ILLUSTRATOR

JANEEN BRIAN

Janeen Brian is an award-winning author of over 80 books and has a very strong educational following and a high-standing in the children's book world. Several of her books have won CBCA Honour Book Awards. She lived for one month in a remote village within the Spiti Valley in the Himalayan Mountains, and this book is based on her observations at that time. Visit www.janeenbrian.com.au or www.janeenbrian.com .

ANNE SPUDVILAS

Anne Spudvilas, the illustrator of *Our Village in the Sky* is one of the best illustrators in the country, with a formidable track record in awards and sales. Her titles include the bestselling *The Peasant Prince* (the story of Mao's Last Dancer), and the powerful *Woolvs in the Sitee* and *Jenny Angel* (CBC Book of the Year, 2003), both by Margaret Wild.

JULIE MILLER

Julie Miller is a writer and teacher who has taught in state and private schools for over twenty years, and has written units of work for NSW Distance Education. She has studied children's literacy with the University of Southern Queensland and has previously written teacher notes for other Allen & Unwin publications, including *The Coat* and *Rivertime*.

How are families different and similar?

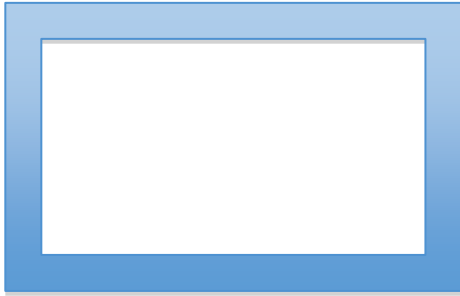
Look at the activities of the family in *Our Village in the Sky*.

Compare with your own family. How are they different or similar?

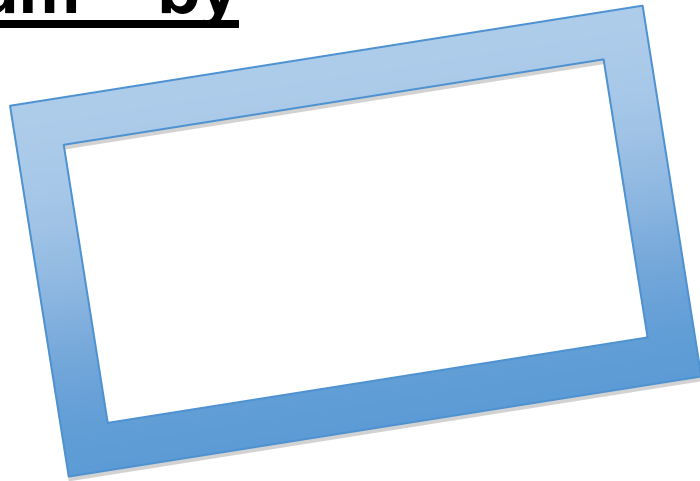
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Our Village in the Sky</i>	<i>My Family</i>
Getting water to drink		
Washing clothes		
Washing dishes		
Heating the home		
Playing games with Friends		
Looking after brothers and sisters		

My Family Album by

This is where I live

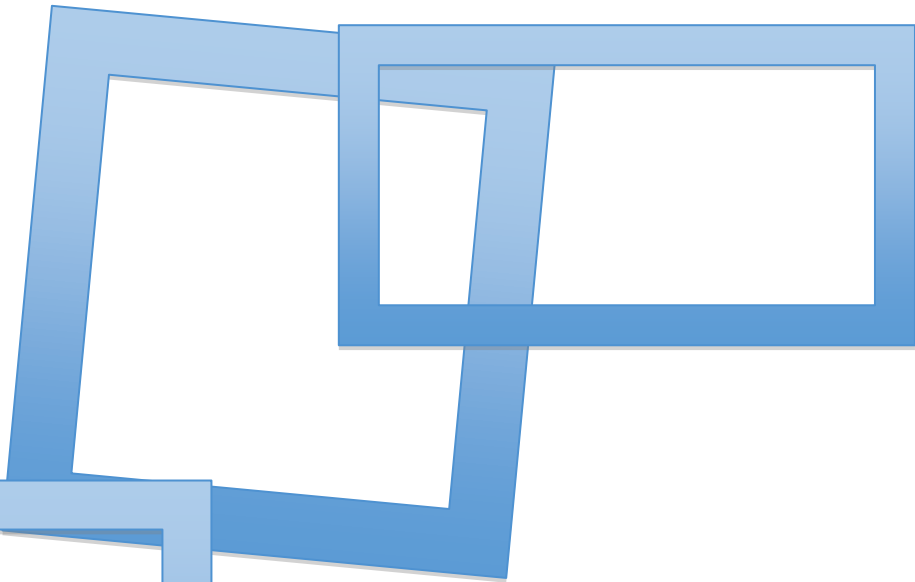


This is my family



In summer we like to _____

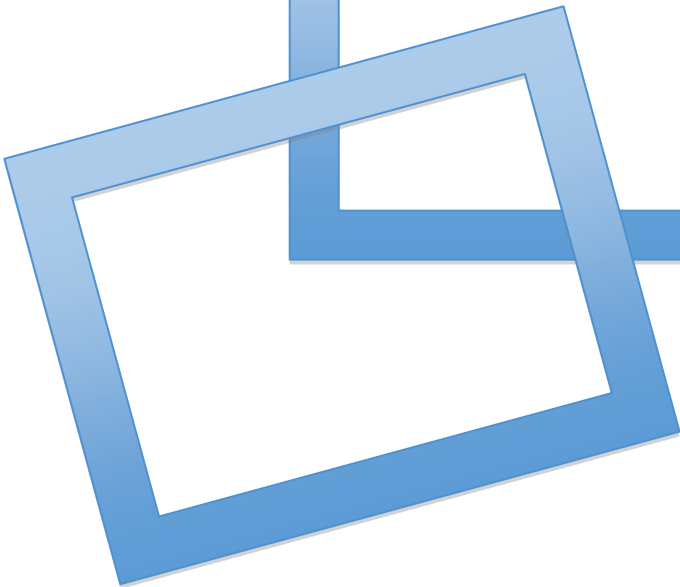
My family loves to celebrate together



*In winter we like to _____
I*



My family and I like to play



Word Detective 1

1. Use a dictionary to discover the meanings of the following words used in the poems:

monastery	
raven	
lama	
yak	
chapatti	
dhal	

Word Detective 2

2.. Look these words up and match each drawing to the correct word.

Can you find pictures of these things in the book, *Our Village in the Sky?*

Shalwar kameez
Jerrycan
Pannier
Knucklebone
Shawl

