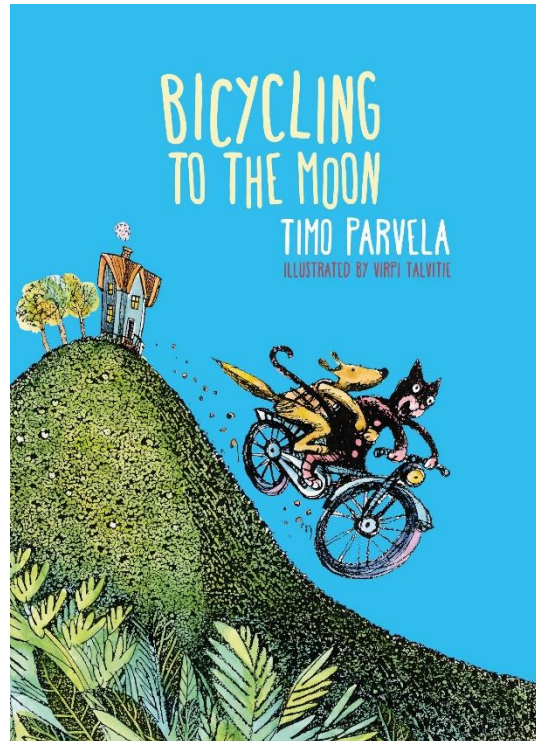


Teaching Notes

Bicycling to the Moon

Written by Timo Parvela and illustrated by Virpi Talvitie



Synopsis:

Purdy the cat and Barker the dog live together in a sky-blue house on top of a hill. Barker likes the garden. He wants to dig, to scratch up the earth and turn it over. But Purdy has big dreams: he wants to fly south with the birds, win the singing competition, be a Supercat.

One day Purdy decides that if he could just get a bicycle and ride it to the moon, he would be the happiest cat in the world, and never want anything else again. Ever.

Purdy the cat's antics, dreams, and sly manipulation of his friend are laugh-out-loud funny, while the very warm heart to these stories will have every reader wishing they had a good friend like Barker the dog.

The Author:

Timo Parvela is the number one children's author in Finland. His books are sold worldwide and have been adapted for film, TV and theatre. This multi award-winning author has won a plethora of prizes and has twice been shortlisted for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.



G E C K O P R E S S

The Illustrator:

Virpi Talvitie is one of Finland's most prestigious illustrators. In 2006 and 2008 she was nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award and was awarded the Finlandia Junior Prize in 2006.

Themes:

This warm-hearted and funny chapter book has several themes.

The main theme is that of friendship. Purdy and Barker, the cat and dog, are friends who live together. While they sometimes argue, on the whole they take care of and love each other. It is clear that Barker is aware of the clever antics and cunning ways that Purdy uses in an attempt to get his friend to do what he wants. Despite this, or because of this, Barker loves his friend enough to indulge his whims and fanciful ways, including by building sky-blue wings or attempting to ride bicycles to the moon.

Further themes evident in the book focus on individuals and personalities. Barker and Purdy have different interests, strengths, talents and motivations. Barker loves hard work in the garden and needs to have everything in its place, whereas Purdy could happily loll around in bed all day and is satisfied with the day if he manages to compose part of a song. Their different personalities compliment one another and work together to make their lives interesting and full.

Another theme in the book is that of nature. From Barker growing award-winning tomatoes to Purdy trying to migrate south in winter like the geese. The friends' lives are intricately linked to, and dictated by nature and the seasons, a fact which they react to and appreciate in their own individual and unique ways.

A final theme is that of humour. This consistently funny book entertains and delights the reader as they share a year in the life of the friends Purdy and Barker.

Activities:

1. Before reading the book, look at the cover image and title. Discuss what you think this book might be about.
2. *Bicycling to the Moon* is an illustrated chapter book. After reading the book, in pairs, take turns to read your favourite chapter aloud to one another. Explain to your partner why it is your favourite chapter. Do you agree with your partner's choice? Why/why not? Then write a plot summary of your chapter.
3. Anthropomorphism is when gods, animals or things are depicted with human attributes and behaviours. Find three examples of this from the book. Find other books where animals are depicted in this way, for example, *Wolf and Dog* (Gecko,



2013), *I Don't Want to Go to School* (Gecko, 2015), *Detective Gordon: A Complicated Case* (Gecko, 2015) and *How to Be Famous* (Gecko, 2016).

4. Do you like Purdy and Barker as characters? Why/why not? Write a character study on either of them. Use quotations from the book to back up your opinions, for example, 'Purdy certainly could be lazy and comfort-loving but, when he badly wanted to do something, he could also be very determined' (p. 88).
5. Similes, onomatopoeia, alliteration, idioms, personification, metaphor and proverbs are some of the many language features in the book. Find the definition of each of these, match each with the following examples from the book, and then find more examples for each from the book:
 - 'His whole body slumped, as if his backbone had melted in the warm room' (p. 80).
 - 'Yowling, howling, shrieking, and screeching as never before' (p. 92).
 - 'Fateful Friday' (p. 39).
 - 'Barker saw tomato-red' (p. 39).
 - 'All at once Purdy looked like the cat who got the cream' (p. 53).
 - 'The icy hand of frost crept up through the floorboards. It poked its chilly fingers beneath Purdy's quilt' (pp. 55-56).
 - 'Barker believed that hard work pays off. He also believed that all's well that ends well' (p. 119).
6. Examine the illustrations in the book. Do you like the style? What colours are used? What kinds of lines and textures are used? Choose your favourite illustration from the book and create your own artistic interpretation of it, for example, a painting, drawing, photograph, model, poem, etc, or, design your own illustrations for the cover and/or one page of text.
7. Choose two illustrations from the book. Carefully study the character or characters and their expressions. What range of emotions is evident? How has Virpi Talvitie achieved these feelings in the illustrations? (Think about colour, size, composition, etc). Draw your own picture that expresses another emotion, such as sadness, happiness, anger or hope.
8. Either in pairs or individually, choose one of the activities below inspired by quotations from the book:
 - 'Then Purdy would be a hero. Somebody would write a book about him, and somebody else would read that book and wish they could be like that, too' (p. 70). Use Purdy the Supercat character as inspiration for a short story. Write, illustrate, bind and publish your own children's picture book of your story.
 - "What's my bone doing in the fruit bowl?" Barker growled. "I'm going to paint it. It's a symbol of the fleeting nature of life," Purdy said' (p. 62). Paint a still life painting like Purdy is going to paint or use the 'Fleeting nature of life' as the title or inspiration for a poem.



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- 'Barker, on the other hand, couldn't stop thinking of wings. He even had dreams where Purdy woke with huge brown wings on his back. He spread them out like a newly hatched butterfly, then soared into the sky. Barker heard the heavy beat of wings as Purdy rose higher and higher, until he joined a V of cranes and they all vanished over the horizon. Then Barker woke up, drenched in sweat and gasping for breath' (p.120). Using another medium, for example, drawing, painting, sculpture or photography, create your own artistic interpretation of Barker's dream.
 - 'Other times they would argue whether cats were more flexible, cuter, furrier, more independent, and mysterious than dogs, or whether dogs were more faithful, kind-hearted, braver, cuter, furrier, and stronger than cats. They never settled the matter' (pp. 111-112). As a class, divide into groups and hold a debate with the moot: 'Cats are better than dogs'.
9. In pairs, discuss what you think are the most humorous elements in this book and how they succeed in being funny and entertaining.
10. In pairs, discuss the ending of the book. Did you like it? Why/why not?
11. In groups, choose and adapt a chapter from the book for performance in your classroom, for example, 'A Singing Contest' (pp. 87-95). Devise a script, create scenery and choose costumes and music. Act your adaptation. If you have access to a video camera, tape it.
12. Review the book for your favourite magazine or website. What do you like about it? Why? What do you dislike about it? Why? Give it a rating, such as stars, or a number out of ten.