

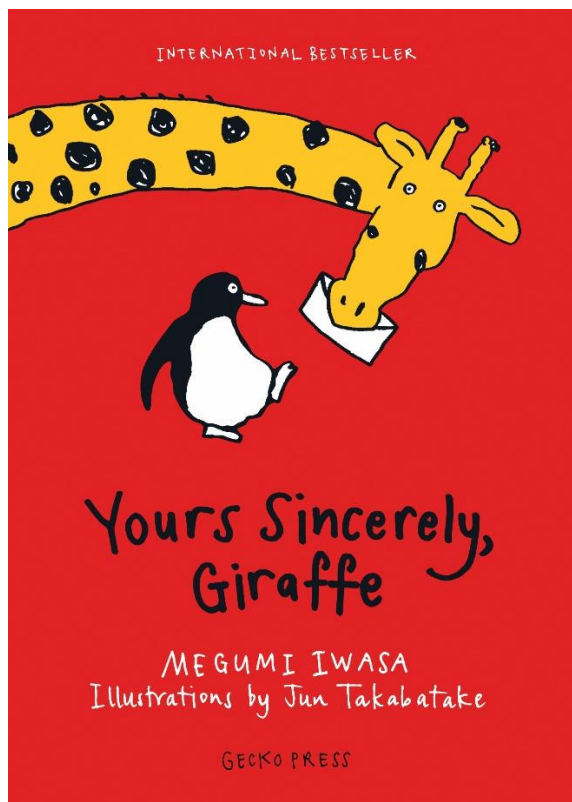


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## Teaching Notes

### *Yours Sincerely, Giraffe*

By Megumi Iwasa & illustrated by Jun Takabatake



#### Synopsis

It's hard to imagine someone you've never seen. Giraffe is bored, as usual. He'd love a friend to share things with. So he writes a letter and sends it as far as possible across the other side of the horizon. There he finds a pen pal - Penguin. Giraffe knows nothing about penguins and his letters are full of questions. What does a penguin look like? Where is a penguin's neck?

And so the letters begin to fly from horizon to horizon.

*Yours Sincerely, Giraffe* is a funny tale of mistaken assumptions and friendship.

#### The Author

**Megumi Iwasa** studied graphic design at Tama Art University in Tokyo. After graduating, she worked there until 1986. She lives in Tokyo, Japan.

#### The Illustrator

**Jun Takabatake** is one of Japan's best-loved children's illustrators. His illustrations have been exhibited throughout the world, and he has won many international awards, including the Graphics Prize (Bologna Children's Book Fair), a Japan Picture Book Award, and the Kodansha Award for Picture Books.



## Themes

This quirky and endearing chapter book has several themes.

The themes of boredom and curiosity are evident. Pelican's boredom leads him to start a mail-delivery business and Giraffe's boredom leads him to take advantage of Pelican's business venture when he requests Pelican to deliver a letter to the first animal he meets on the other side of the horizon. Their curiosity is soon piqued when they receive a letter in return from a mysterious animal named Penguin. Soon, not only does an unlikely friendship between Pelican and Giraffe develop, but their mutual curiosity about Giraffe's new pen pal grows stronger and stronger with each correspondence.

As well as curiosity, the themes of learning and knowledge are also explored, through the book's teacher and student characters. Professor Whale decides to retire from his position at Whale Point school when he 'runs out of puff'. However, even when this does happen, his natural curiosity and lifelong love of learning, indicate that even in retirement he will not get bored. His student, Penguin's curiosity and thirst for knowledge sees him, alongside his letter writing, pondering science and philosophy, as well as making plan to one day build his own school.

Misunderstandings and assumptions are other themes that are illustrated. Through interpreting the letters from Penguin, Giraffe and Pelican form a humorous and somewhat absurd picture of what Penguin looks like. Their Penguin creation is based on misunderstanding and the assumptions they have drawn from their world around them. This leads to a somewhat awkward and comical scene when the two pen pals eventually do meet.

Hard work and finding your calling are themes that are demonstrated by Seal. As a tenth generation mail-delivery animal, Seal's hard work and dedication to the job inspire and drive Pelican to continue with his new business and grow to love flying to the other side of the horizon and back.

Travelling, therefore, is another theme found in the book. Giraffe's mission for Pelican leads Pelican to enjoy travelling to and from the horizon, and in turn leads to Giraffe travelling to meet his new friend Penguin.

The theme of friendship too is evident as Giraffe and Penguin become friends through their letters, and Pelican and Giraffe form a strong friendship based on their initial mutual boredom and then the excitement and intrigue of the mysterious pen pal, Penguin.

A final theme is that of humour. This consistently funny book entertains and delights as the reader joins Giraffe, Penguin, Pelican, Seal and Whale in a literary, letter-writing escapade.



## Activities

1. Before reading the book, look at the cover image and title. Discuss what you think this book might be about.
2. *Yours Sincerely, Giraffe* is an illustrated chapter book. After reading the book, choose and discuss your favourite chapter and character. Then write a plot summary of your chapter and a character study.
3. Anthropomorphism is when gods, animals or things are depicted with human attributes and behaviours. Find five examples of this from the book. Find other books where animals are depicted in this way, for example, *What Dog Knows* (Gecko Press, 2016), *The Day No One Was Angry* (Gecko Press, 2014) and *Travels of an Extraordinary Hamster* (Gecko Press, 2015).
4. Exclamation marks, question marks, speech marks, ellipses, full stops and commas are all types of punctuation found in the book. Find and list an example of each from the book, as well as finding out the grammatical purpose of each.
5. Language features and literary devices from the book include:
  - Metaphor - 'Cream puff clouds drifted slowly by' (p.8).
  - Onomatopoeia - 'Clankety-clank, clankety-clank' (p. 59).
  - Rhetorical questions - 'Shall we take a peek at Penguin's life?' (p. 30).
  - Alliteration - 'the setting sun' (p. 45).Either find, and/or, think of another example for each of these literary devices.
6. Examine the illustrations in the book. Do you like the style? What kinds of lines and textures are used? Choose your favourite 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. Featured in the book are several letters sent between Giraffe and Penguin. Choose an event and a character from the book and write a letter about the event from your chosen character's point of view. Think about how you would describe the physical scene and your feelings about the incident. Or, write a letter from one character to another about the event.
8. Choose one of the animals from the book to investigate, for example, a penguin, giraffe, pelican or whale. Find out where your chosen animal lives. What is its natural habitat, call, food, predators, etc? Present your findings to your class. Create a diorama of it and its natural habitat.
9. Penguin is studying 'The Mysteries of the Sea' at Whale Point School (p. 36). Use Penguin's school study as inspiration for your own investigative inquiry into the mysteries of the sea.
10. In the last chapter, Whale writes a letter which 'may be on its way to your place right now' (p. 102). Write a letter in reply to Whale, using the formalities of letter-writing etiquette.



11. Penguin and Giraffe become pen pals (p. 63). Choose a student from your school to become pen pals with. The student you choose could be from another class and/or different year level.
12. Seal is a tenth generation seal to be in charge of the mail (p. 68). Find out what kind of jobs your grandparents and/or ancestors had. Write an information report based on your findings.
13. Giraffe and Pelican draw a picture of Penguin based on his description (pp. 74-5). In pairs, think of an animal to describe to each other. Draw a picture and try and figure out which animal your partner is describing.
14. Pelican brings Stork's baby-delivery blanket to give to Giraffe (p. 82). Use Stork and his baby-delivery blanket as the premise and inspiration for a short story about Stork's job. Write, illustrate, bind and publish your own children's picture book of your story.
15. At the end of the book Penguin returns to his island to build a school (p. 99). Draw a picture of Penguin's school, accompanied by a descriptive paragraph about what you think would be included in the curriculum that Penguin would teach his students and why he would choose to teach it.
16. In pairs, discuss what you think are the most humorous elements in this book and how they succeed in being funny and entertaining.
17. In pairs, take turns to read your favourite part of the book aloud to one another. Discuss why you have chosen this part of the book? Do you like with your partner's choice? Why/why not?
18. In groups, choose and adapt a chapter each from the book for a puppet theatre performance in your classroom. Devise a script, create scenery, choose music and make puppets to represent each character. Act your adaptation. If you have access to a video camera, tape it.
19. 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.