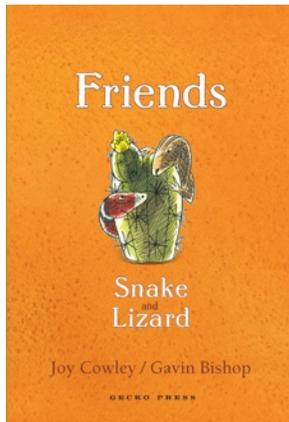


Friends: Snake and Lizard

by Joy Cowley; illustrated by Gavin Bishop; Gecko Press

Teaching Notes by Raymond Huber



Synopsis

Two different creatures live together and learn about the give-and-take of friendship in the desert. Snake is a little self-centred and Lizard is more exuberant. In this series of fables, other creatures come to them for help because they appear to be wise. Meanwhile, the humans are encroaching on the desert, bringing cars, tents and balloons: each thing presenting a challenge to the animals.

Author: Joy Cowley is one of New Zealand's most popular and prolific writers (including over 600 early readers!). She's won the Margaret Mahy Medal, NZ Post Children's Book Awards 2006 and 2008, and the Distinguished Companion of the NZ Order of Merit. She lives in Wellington, New Zealand.

Illustrator: Gavin Bishop is an acclaimed illustrator, artist, and author. His awards include Book of the Year in the NZ Post Book Awards (1993, 2000, and 2003); Grand Prize, NOMA CONCOURS, Japan; and the Russell Clark Medal (1981, 2006). His forty books include many traditional Maori and European tales, as well original writing.

Themes: The Snake and Lizard books are loosely based on Joy Cowley's relationship with her husband. She says the stories are an attempt to help children 'navigate their way' through the up and downs of friendships. The book shows how friends can be very different yet still find common ground; and how close friends can argue yet remain friends.

Another theme is the interaction between humans and the animals in a wild environment. We aren't always aware of the impact we have on plants and animals.

Activities

1. Friendship: What kind of problems do Snake and Lizard have in their friendship? How do they resolve them? For example, the way the argument 'shrivels' in the chapter titled Loss). Discuss the meaning of compromise (eg. as shown in chapters Doors and Life Cycle).

2. Viewpoint: The characters see human intervention in the landscape from an animal point of view. Describe how they see humans. What do they consider the human's weaknesses and strengths? Illustrate the River of Death and the monsters from Snake's viewpoint.

Imagine you are a small creature such as a house fly or a bee. Describe the humans around you. Try to use a unique 'insect' language.

3. Language: There is a lot of imagery in the writing. For example: 'a voice as rough as two rocks rubbed together' (p.25); 'flatter than a shadow' (p.26); 'as strong as mountains' (p.34); the shadows of cacti were long fingers' (p.83).

Write some alternatives to the metaphors above.

4. Discuss what these wise sayings mean:

'When neighbours become good friends, walls can come down between houses.'

'If we use words carelessly, they lose their meaning.'

Read some *Aesop's Fables* and compare the messages with Snake and Lizard.

5. In the chapter Sister 49, how do Snake and Lizard deal with the problem of bullies? What does it mean to say she is 'not brave beneath her teeth and claws'?

6. The character of Snake is complex. For example, he seems concerned with truth, yet he sometimes lies. He is often caring, yet he eats spider and frog.

Describe his best and worst features.

7. Science: The chapter Life Cycle describes some food chains in the desert. Food chains always start with a plant. Draw a diagram of a food chain that might be found in your home garden. For example: lettuce, snail, thrush, cat.
8. In the chapter Balloons, the sky egg 'hatches'. Design a new creature that emerges.
9. Dance: Make up your own rain dance, and a rock dance.
10. Illustrations: What kind of desert colours are used? What attracts your attention to the characters? Discuss the use of frames around the pictures (especially 'breaking the frame'). Look at some desert photos and paint a desert scene.