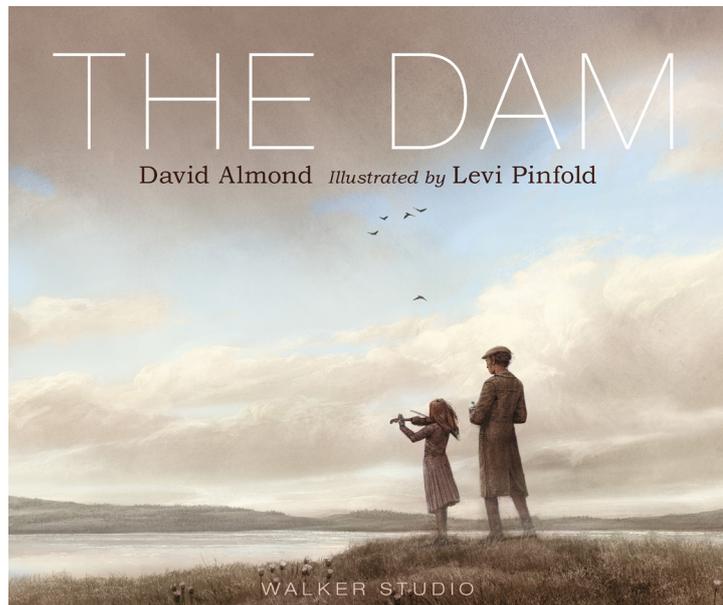


TEACHERS' NOTES

THE DAM

David Almond
illustrated by Levi Pinfold

For readers aged 5+
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Outline

When a great dam was built by the Kielder Water in Northumberland, the valley below slowly filled with water. But just before this, when the villagers had been moved out, two musicians went back to the abandoned valley. They tore down the boards over the houses, stepped inside and started to play – for this would be the last time that music would be heard in this place. In this astonishing picture book that combines themes of loss, hope and music, David Almond pays homage to all musicians, showing the ancient and unstoppable power of creativity.

Author Information

David Almond has received several major awards, including a Hans Christian Andersen Award, a Carnegie Medal, two Whitbread Awards, an Eleanor Farjeon Award, and a Michael L. Printz Award. He is known worldwide as the author of *Skellig*, *Clay*, and many other plays, stories, and novels, including *The Boy Who Swam with Piranhas*, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers; *The Savage*, *Slog's Dad*, and *Mouse Bird Snake Wolf*, all illustrated by Dave McKean; and *My Dad's a Birdman* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into the Moon*, both illustrated by Polly Dunbar.

Levi Pinfold studied illustration at University College, Falmouth where he developed his distinctive stylized realism. He has won numerous awards for his picture books, which include *The Django*, *Greenling* and *Black Dog*, which won the Kate Greenaway Medal. He lives in Queensland, Australia.

How to Use These Notes

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Before Reading

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end? After reading, revisit your answer to this question. Were your predictions correct?

Exploring the Text

Much of the text is written in short sentences and short pieces of dialogue. What effect does this have on the reader? Rewrite several pages of the text with more description and compare it to the original text. How is it different?

Why do you think the man takes his daughter into the valley? How do you think they feel about what is about to happen in the valley?

Exploring the Illustrations

Examine the colour palette used throughout the book. What are the dominant colours? What mood or feelings do they create? How do Levi Pinfold's colour choices convey meaning in each spread? Does the colour palette change throughout the book? Why do you think that is? Find an ad in a magazine or newspaper. Discuss how colour is used. Re-create the ad using a different colour scheme and discuss how the meaning of the ad changes with a different colour scheme.

Some spreads have full-bleed illustrations, while others are bordered with white space. How does this design help to draw your eye or highlight certain parts of the illustrations?

The illustrations not only interpret the text, but extend the story by giving the reader more information. Choose a spread and discuss what information is in the illustrations that is not in the text.

Some spreads have no words on them at all. Why do you think the book has been designed this way? What story is being told on the wordless pages?

Further Activities

Take turns describing/retelling the story as if you were explaining it to someone who hasn't read it yet. What do you think are the most important parts of the story? Why do you think that?

Write a journal entry/reflection after reading the book. Some questions to consider could be:

- What did you feel while reading the book?
- Which parts of the story made you feel most emotional?

- Do you know anyone who is like a character in the book?
- If you were telling this story, what would you change?
- Why do you think the author wanted the story to end as it does?
- Were you satisfied with the ending?
- What do you think is the main message of the story?
- If you could speak to the author or illustrator, what comments would you make?
- Where and when do you think the story is set? What clues did you get from the text?

The author's note at the end of the book explains that the characters are based on Mike and Kathryn Tickell, who told David Almond the story of Kielder Water, the largest artificial lake in the U.K. Watch these videos of Mike and Kathryn Tickell to gain an understanding of the type of music they play in the houses.

- <https://youtu.be/bWkmer6cgiM> - Kathryn Tickell live at the Proms 2011
- <https://youtu.be/2MHmpQe3FDc> - Mike Tickell live at Whitby Folk Week 2014

The Dam explores the idea that memory and history is contained in music. Choose a song that evokes a particular memory in you, it could be something your parents sang or played when you were younger, music that was played at a special event, a song that reminds you of a particular person, time or place, or any other piece of music that has special meaning to you. Write a paragraph about the music and why it means something to you, then compare it to the relationship the characters in *The Dam* have with music.

This book is based on the real area, Kielder Water. Find Kielder Water on a map and visit www.visitkielder.com and answer the following questions:

- Where is it?
- What is around it?
- What could you do there if you were to visit?

What research do you think David Almond and Levi Pinfold did while making this book? Do you think their research would have been similar or different to each other? Why?

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