The Dog Who Found Sorrow

A picture book by Rūta Briede
Illustrated by Elīna Brasliņa

SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ACTIVITY PACK

Extra materials, prompts for discussions and ideas for activities in your book group or classroom

ACTIVITY PACK: The Dog Who Found Sorrow

This pack is about *The Dog Who Found Sorrow*, a picture book by Rūta Briede and illustrated by Elīna Brasliņa, published by the Emma Press. It is translated from Latvian: the original book is called *Suns, kurš atrada skumjas*.

The book tells the story of a dog who wakes to find his hometown suddenly enveloped in black clouds of sorrow that rob everything of colour and scent. The brave dog decides to resist the sadness and climbs up into the big cloud of sorrow to find out what's hiding up there – and to make it go away. It is a story about the power of emotions.

The Dog Who Found Sorrow is a collaboration between two renowed and widely celebrated Latvian artists: **Rūta Briede** and **Elīna Brasliņa**.

Rūta teaches at the Art Academy of Latvia, training the new generation of Latvian illustrators. She wrote this story as an illustration prompt for one of her classes.

Elīna, who was studying for her Masters degree at the time and was already an award-winning illustrator of many children's books. She created the beautiful illustrations and also did the translation (her first degree was in Linguistics!).

This activity pack contains extra information about the creators of the book, suggestions of how to start talking about the book, and ideas for activities and writing prompts.

Contents

Interview with the author, Rūta Briede

🔻 **Where did you get the idea for this story?**

Well, I've always liked clouds. And sometimes when I was little I would sit down on a balcony and watch thunder-clouds coming. And there's actually nothing you can do to turn those clouds away.

But then I thought: what if your sadness or misery was a cloud as well? Can you do something about your own dark, dusty clouds? Can you stop them coming?
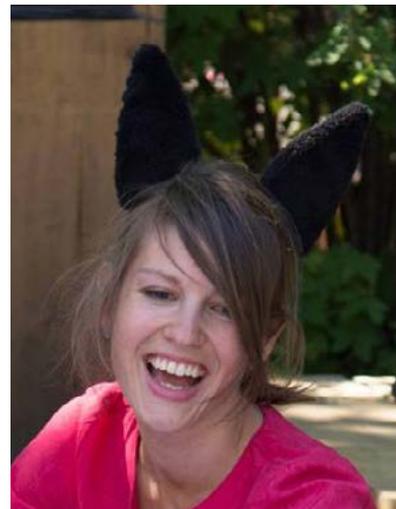
🔻 **Why is the main character a dog?**

Because I like dogs and unfortunately I don't have one. But I would like to. Would you like to? I've rarely met a dog who's sad. They're almost always so happy. Always up to something. Just like the investigator Dog in my book.

🔻 **The dog plays the harmonica to cheer up the Sorrows. What cheers you up?**

Two things – cleaning and nature.

🔻 **What was your favourite picture book when you were little?**

Hmm. When I was little there weren't very many picture books published in Latvia. And I guess you won't recognise the names of the picture books I was reading back then. But I read a lot. And one of my favourite books of all was *Ronia, the Robber's Daughter* by Astrid Lindgren.

> **Rūta Briede** illustrates books, draws comics, designs puppet shows and teaches at the Art Academy of Latvia. Her first picture book, *Queen of Seagulls*, earned international recognition and won the International Jānis Baltvilks Prize 2017 for the best debut.
>
> Rūta is the artistic director and stage designer for a puppet stage show based on *Queen of Seagulls*. *The Dog Who Found Sorrow* is her second book.

Interview with the illustrator, Elīna Brasliņa

🔴 **How did you decide what the Sorrows looked like?**

They were sort of indistinct and lumpy when I first pictured them in my head. I knew they all had to be lumped together when they were sad (in Latvian, the word for sorrow – *skumjas* – is used only in the plural), and when they became happy, they would scatter and become these separate, distinct beings. Because if they're happy, they aren't proper Sorrows anymore, are they?

🔴 **How did you draw all the smoke?**

I made a whole bunch of smudgy clouds by crumbling charcoal on paper and rubbing it in with my thumb. Then I cheated – I scanned all these clouds and, by combining some bits and erasing others, I was able to create these smoky landscapes on my computer.

🔴 **Where did you learn to draw?**

At first I drew pictures of animals from encyclopaedias – I didn't put the paper over the image and trace it like my classmates did, I looked at it and struggled to draw one that was just as good. I couldn't, obviously. After that, I drew cartoons I saw on TV, then moved on to Japanese manga characters. It was only when I was 21 and started attending evening courses at the Art Academy that someone actually taught me the basics of drawing. I think all of it helped in some way!

🔴 **What was your favourite picture book when you were little?**

I don't really remember any picture books – but there were illustrated books that I loved. Tove Jansson's *The Moomins and the Great Flood* was one of my favourites. My mother used to read it to me – she did all the voices too – and I would look at the pictures.

> **Elīna Brasliņa** studied Printmaking and Graphic Arts at the Art Academy of Latvia. Since 2014 she has illustrated more than twenty titles, including *Moon Juice* by Kate Wakeling, which won the 2017 CLiPPA. She has been nominated for numerous awards in Latvia and won the Zelta Ābele (Golden Apple Tree) National Prize for Book Art twice. She was awarded the International Jānis Baltvilks Prize in 2017.

Introducing the book: getting started

Look at the dustjacket and cover and play spot-the-difference – how are they similar and how are they different? Look at the front and back endpapers too (just inside the cover) – what story do they tell? What does everyone think the dog is like – friendly? Cautious? Scary?

Then read the book all the way through, taking time to notice all the details in the illustrations and to infer from them what is happening in the story.

Talking about the book: questions to get the discussion going

Once you have read the book, get everyone to share their first responses to the story and pictures. Here are some questions to take the discussion further:

- How did the black smoke change the city? What do you remember?

- How would you feel if you were the dog and this happened where you live?

- Were you surprised by what the dog found in the cloud?

- Did you know the word 'sorrow' before?

- Which is your favourite picture in the book?

- Can you play an instrument, like the dog?

- Could you tell the story of this book to someone else in just a few words?

The Dog Who Found Sorrow: general activity ideas

Reaching the clouds

Can you draw the dog's route from his house all the way up to the cloud, and remember all the things he had to do to get there?

Lonely things

In the story the black smoke comes from 'lonely and abandoned' things. Some of the examples Ruta gives are 'rusty tin cans' and 'punctured footballs'. Can you think of five more things that fit this description?

These might be things that you see on the way to school, or the library, or a sports club – you might expect to find these kinds of things in the corners, or the gutter, or the side of the road, or trodden underneath your feet.

When you have thought of some, draw pictures of your favourites with the smoke coming out. Remember that each one might have a different place the smoke emerges from.

Making clouds

Elīna says she made her cloud drawings by smudging charcoal on paper. But how else could you make a cloud? Could you make it out of fabric, or show it as a shape you make with your body? Could two or three people be a cloud together? Could you make a cloud out of glitter and sugar paper? In small groups, make your own version of a cloud.

Smoke everywhere

Imagine the smoke from the story had got into your school, or maybe the library where your group meets. What sorts of things would it affect? Where would it get in the way, or cause problems? What could you do to get it out of the building?

Write and perform a little scene for three or so performers where you banish the smoke once and for all: for example, one of you could play a teacher, one of you could be the smoke, and the third person the broom that pushes it out of the door!

Writing ideas: KS1

🔸   Rūta says she wrote about a dog finding sorrow because she had 'rarely met' a sad dog. Pick another feeling, and then think of an animal which doesn't seem to match with it!

For example, your feeling might be ANGER – but have you ever seen an angry rabbit? Or BEING IN A HURRY – but a sloth is never in a hurry, is it? Write a short story about this animal coming across that feeling for the first time.

🔸   In the story, the dog knows sorrow has gone away because his roses are pink, and because nothing smells like smoke any more – these are just two of five signs!

Make your own list of five things which make you feel certain that happiness is in your life. If it helps, imagine looking around your bedroom, or your garden, or your whole town.

🔸   In her interview, Elīna says that she drew the sorrows all 'lumped together', because they seemed to be one big mass. But if a sorrow could be an individual creature, what would it look like? What would it do all day? Would it have friends, or enemies? Write a story called 'A Day in the Life of a Sorrow' where you imagine the answer to these questions.

🔸   Dancing is what makes the cloud of sorrow finally fall apart. Think of your own favourite song to dance to, and write a list of instructions for how to dance it it, for someone who is hearing it for the first time. Then if sorrow descends, perhaps they will know what they need to do!
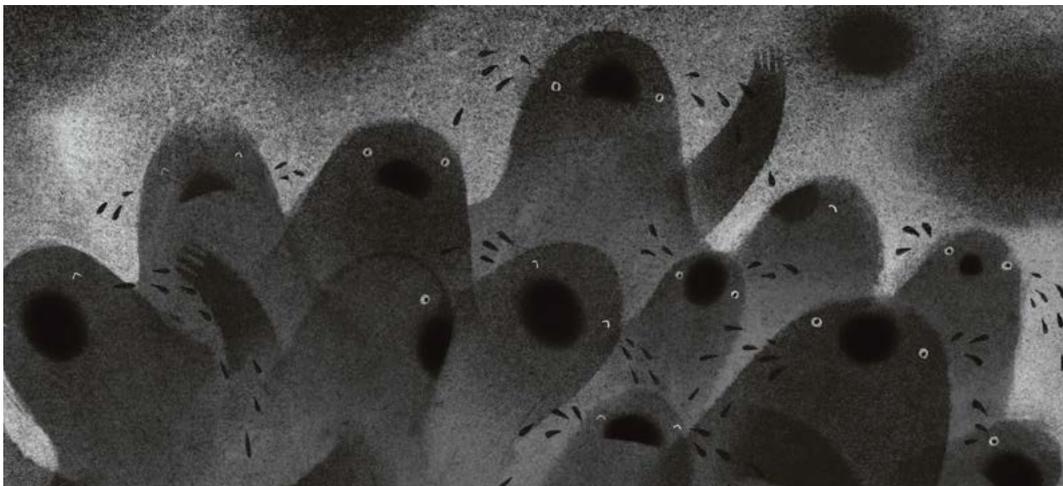
Writing ideas: KS2

🔴   In the story, to cheer up the sorrows, the dog plays a song 'about a dog with no idea how to cheer up the sorrows, and about a rosebush with no scent.' Rūta doesn't give us the words for the dog's song, so why don't you make up your own?

Remember that there should be a refrain – a line which repeats, so that all the sorrows can join in with you. If you can't think of one, you could use this one – '*And the rose-bush will smell like a rose again!*' – at the end of each verse.

🔴   This is a book from Latvia, but the idea of sorrow is something that has easily carried across to English in translation. Imagine you are describing a feeling to someone who doesn't speak your language, and you want to make it as simple as possible to understand. How could you explain it in three plain words? What about in three pictures?

🔴   Elīna has filled out the city the dog lives in with other characters: see if you can find the sad sporty unicorn wearing a number '6' vest, or the cat coughing while holding a briefcase. Pick one of the other characters you see in the streets, and imagine what they think about the events in the story.

Does this person or animal feel the same as the dog? Or do they actually quite like the black smoke? Did they have their own flowers or clothes affected by the smoke, and did they make their own plan to put things right? What happened? You could write this, like the dog's story, in the first person, or in the third person.

🔴   Imagine what it was like inside the cloud when the dog knocked on the outside. Rūta gives us some of the sounds the sorrows would hear: 'Tap tap tap' and 'Boom boom boom.' Using these as a starting point, try to describe what happened afterwards just in terms of sound – write a poem listing all the sounds that you might have been able to hear if you were up in the cloud.

Would you hear the sloshing of water – a barking voice – any conversation or street sounds coming up from below once the dog punctures a hole? Try not to use any words actually describing emotion or feeling, but just give the sense of what's happening from sound alone.