

Scary Bird

Author/Illustrator
Michel Streich



Synopsis

When a new bird arrives in the aviary, all the other birds start to panic. The new bird is unknown and different. He is scary! They fuss, and they flutter, and they stay as far away from the scary bird as they possibly can. And when a mouse points out that they're all exotic birds, they completely ignore him and happily continue panicking. But gradually, the birds all start to get used to the scary bird being in the aviary with them. His new and interesting songs are nice to listen to and are kind of fun to sing. His stories of life in the jungle are fascinating. And he doesn't seem so scary at all now. Everyone feels happy and safe again. Until, of course, something dreadful happens. Another new bird arrives and he is terrifying! But luckily this time, not for long. The storyline is a clear reflection of some of the difficulties faced by human immigrants and refugees, and explores the ways in which communities can react to new arrivals and how everyone can benefit from acceptance.

About the Author/Illustrator

Michel Streich started his illustration career as an educational illustrator in Germany before moving to London, and later Australia. After ten years in Sydney, he now lives in the Blue Mountains. Michel's illustrations have appeared in publications such as *the Times*, *the Financial Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and ABC Magazines. He has been a regular contributor to the *Australian Financial Review* and *The Economist's 1843 Magazine*. His previous work with Scholastic includes illustrating *Wesley Booth Super Sleuth*, written by Adam Cece.

Scary Bird is Michel's first solo book with Scholastic.

Themes

Friendship; differences; fear of the unknown; familiarity; immigration; cultural differences; second language learning; acceptance; social dynamics; happiness.

Writing Style

Written throughout in the third person, the action of the story takes place entirely within an aviary. The viewpoint shifts between that of the original inhabitants of the aviary, and that of the new bird, with all of their thoughts and feelings being shared with the reader. Consisting of a combination of narration and dialogue, Streich's text is both thought-provoking and humorous. Sentences are brief and easily

understandable by a young readership, while containing a range of interesting and evocative descriptive phrases to engage the reader and enhance the story. Well suited to reading aloud, the story is simple enough to share with the very young, but contains complex and important concepts that can prompt further thought and discussion for readers of all ages.

Illustration Style

Created using both digital and traditional tools, Streich's artwork uses a palette of predominantly soft yellow-toned shades. Line work is clear and figures are outlined in crisp and unfussy detail, in contrast to the perches and aviary bars which are solid in colour and have no outline. The background has been left white, with a restrained use of shading to create depth and the illusion of ground beneath the animals' feet. The characters are all shown with large eyes, and minimal details to their feathers, wings, and feet, creating a cast of expressive cartoon-style characters whose feelings are as apparent in the visual narrative as in the text. The illustrations parallel the textual narrative throughout, expanding upon details mentioned. The majority of the dialogue and speech within the story is presented comic-book style as part of the illustrations rather than as part of the main text, blurring the lines between the dual narratives.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title and discuss what you can learn about the story from it. Some things you might wish to include in your discussion are:
 - What is the picture on the front cover of?
 - Who do you think is the scary bird?
 - What does it mean when someone or something is scary?
 - How do people react when they find someone or something scary?
 - What do you think might happen in the story?
 - What do you think a scary bird might look like?
- 2) After discussing what you can learn from the cover and title of the book, but before reading it, individually draw a picture of what you envision a very scary bird would look like. Write a short paragraph describing what your bird looks like and how it acts, and why this makes it scary. Share your artwork and writing with your class. Are there any things that a lot of the Scary Birds have in common? Make a list of all the different features that are commonly found on your class's Scary Birds.
- 3) After reading the story, discuss whether you think the Scary Bird in the story was actually scary. Some things to consider in your discussion might be:
 - Does the Scary Bird have any of the features that were common on the pictures of Scary Birds that your class drew?
 - What would you have expected a Scary Bird to look and act like? (Think about your pictures and discussion in activity 2.)
 - How does the Scary Bird in the story look and act?
 - Why do you think the new bird scares the others?
 - In what way is the new bird different from the other birds?
 - What were the other birds scared might happen?
 - How did the flapping and fussing make the new bird feel?

- 4) Draw a picture of the scary bird picking ticks from a tiger's ears.
- 5) What do you think the mouse's opinion of the birds and their behaviour was? What do you think the owner of the aviary felt about what was happening amongst the birds? Retell the events of the story from the point of view of either the mouse, or the human who owns the aviary.
- 6) The Scary Bird told stories, sang songs, and talked about the customs of his old home. What are some of the stories, songs, or customs that you would like to teach people who don't know your home and family? Choose a story or song that is one of your family favourites, and share it with the class. You can sing or tell it yourself, or you can write it down, find a copy of the story from the library, or play a recording for everyone to listen to. Write a short piece sharing what your chosen song or story is, why it is important to you and your family, and why you chose this one to share. Illustrate your written work and create a class wall display featuring everyone's work for your class to look at and discuss.
- 7) Learn a song from a country other than Canada. You might even want to learn it in a language other than English. Practise your song as a class, and perform it at an assembly or for another class.
- 8) At the end of the book, how did the original scary bird feel about the new bird that everyone else found terrifying? Look carefully at the picture of all the birds together — what can you learn about Scary Bird's thoughts and feelings from this picture? Draw a picture of a group of birds, and have each bird show a different emotion. Before drawing your picture, reread the story, paying particular attention to all the pictures in the book. As a class discuss how the artist has shown different emotions in the different illustrations. See how many of these techniques you can use in your own artwork.
- 9) What is the funniest thing to happen in the story? What makes it funny to you?
- 10) The mouse tells the birds in the aviary that they are all *exotic birds*.
 - What does it mean when we say an animal or bird is exotic?
 - What are some exotic birds that are commonly found in Canadian Aviaries?
 - What are some of Canada's native birds?
 - Would a Canadian native bird be considered an exotic bird if it was in another country? Why/why not?
 - Choose a bird that you like and research online or in the library to find out more about it. Use your research findings to create a poster featuring your bird to share with the class. Some things to include in your research might be:
 - What is your bird usually called?
 - What is the scientific name for your bird?
 - What parts of the world is your bird native to?
 - What does it eat?
 - What weather and climate does your bird like?
 - What does your bird look like?
 - How big is your bird?
 - How many chicks does your bird usually have at once?
 - What sort of nest does your bird build?