

Teachers' Notes

by Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright

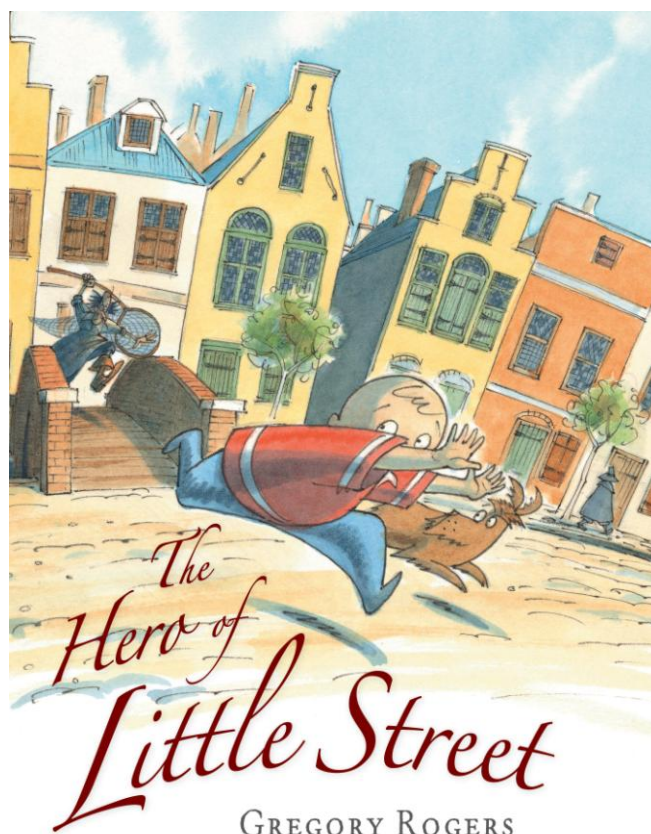
The Hero of Little Street

Gregory Rogers

ISBN 978-1-74114-524-3
Recommended for ages 4-8+

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INTRODUCTION

In this, the third in his 'Boy Bear' series of wordless picture books, Gregory Rogers creates another rollicking adventure for 'the boy', having him once again stumble back in time, although here he visits the world of the Dutch Masters of the seventeenth century, rather than the world of Shakespearean England.

STORY SUMMARY

The mischievous 'boy' is again escaping from trouble, this time beginning in the streets of contemporary London, when he upsets a trio of youths by kicking their ball into one of the fountains in Trafalgar Square. He escapes their wrathful pursuit and finds refuge in the National Gallery, where he ventures into the gallery which houses the works of the seventeenth century Dutch Masters such as Johannes (Jan) Vermeer and the earlier artist Jan van Eyck. When a dog escapes from van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait*, he and the boy join forces and then leap into another painting, Vermeer's *A Lady Seated at the Virginals*, which transports the boy into a past age, this time the world of seventeenth century Delft. He and the dog join in the music, before the dog escapes into the streets.

The boy sets off in pursuit of the dog, upsetting a number of people who stray into his path. He eventually finds his way into a cellar where the dog is being held (with many other canine friends) by a sausage maker. The boy locates a key and frees the captive dogs who thus escape their fate at the hands of the butcher. The latter pursues the boy and the dogs which end up in the painting of the lady again. An impromptu concert takes place with all the animals joining in the fun.

The boy escapes the painting and the gallery, only to find his original pursuers waiting for him in the square. He plays the recorder and a pack of local dogs answer his call and chase the three boys away, leaving the boy to continue on his merry way... to who knows what further adventures...

THEMES

There are several key ideas or themes which flow through this work:

- Encouraging a love of art and particularly that of Johannes Vermeer and the Dutch Masters of the seventeenth century, and of the earlier Flemish artist Jan van Eyck
- An appreciation of the topography of cities (London and Delft) viewed from the air
- Accident and Fate
- Conflict
- Heroism
- Love and Friendship
- Adventure, Mischief and Fun!

These themes could be considered in conjunction with topics of relevance to school curriculum areas.

CURRICULUM TOPICS

1. Study of History, Society & Environment
2. English Language & Literacy
3. Visual Literacy
4. Creative Arts
5. Learning Technologies
6. Maths

The notes which follow are designed to be used in multiple age classrooms. Some activities are useful for lower primary and some for upper primary or secondary level students. Teachers should adapt them to suit the demands of their curriculum needs.

1. STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY & ENVIRONMENT

The world of the seventeenth century offers students reflections on architecture, streetscapes, living conditions, fashion, food, and general history and culture of the times.

- **History** – This book is set in the seventeenth century and the twenty-first century.
 - **Question:** What events were happening in the world during the seventeenth century? What sort of society did Vermeer live in?
- **Art History** – Study the works of Johannes Vermeer and the so-called Dutch Masters (seventeenth century) and of Jan van Eyck (fifteenth century) and then apply this knowledge to questions posed in **Visual Literacy** below.
 - **Activity:** Secondary students might read the novel *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier (1999) and visit the author's website for details of possible discussion topics, including comparing it to the 2003 film version (starring Scarlett Johansson, Colin Firth and Tom Wilkinson), which gives a real insight into the world of these artists in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century.
 - **Activity:** Visit the website for the National Gallery in London and research both the collections and the layout of the building.
- **Costumes** – The characters in the paintings are wearing clothes of the seventeenth and the fifteenth century. Examine the clothes of the Elizabethan era which also appear in an exhibition at the National Gallery in the opening pages.
 - **Activity:** Research the costumes of these eras on *Wikipedia* to find out what garments the people in these paintings are wearing. Eg. The short string of pearls the lady is wearing is typical of women's jewellery in this period.

- **Geography and Architecture**– Both London and Delft are depicted in this picture book in which aerial scenes show the streets and landscapes of these two cities. Sites you can identify are: Trafalgar Square; a bridge and Little Street in Delft.
 - **Activity:** Examine the pictures carefully and see whether you can identify any other geographical or architectural features of either London or Delft.

2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

This is a **wordless book, which is a unique picture book form**. Where generally the pictures and the text work in counterpoint to each other, here the pictures carry the weight of the narrative and encourage multiple readings of not only the core narrative but also of the many sub-plots, intertextual references and asides which may be construed by the reader in many different ways. Such texts can lend themselves to classroom writing activities in a myriad of ways.

- **They encourage children to read carefully and to use language and to think and observe carefully in order to interpret the images they are viewing.** Children learn about the way in which narratives work in developing as a sequence of events; the conventions of plotting and planning; how one cause leads to another consequence; and learn to both predict and make assumptions about actions.
 - **Activity:** Have the children write their own narrative based on their interpretation of the pictures in this book.
 - **Question:** Who is the 'hero of little street' and why?
Irony is a part of this question. The boy is a sort of 'anti-hero' in that he is a mischievous character, but he has a very good heart. Discuss.
 - **Activity:** Compare this book not only to Gregory Rogers' earlier two titles in the 'Boy Bear' series but also to other wordless picture books, such as *A Day on the Avenue* by Robert Roennfeldt (1983), and investigate how they work to tell a narrative without a written text. (The latter is a great favourite of Gregory Rogers who says that it was influential in his considering creating a wordless book himself.) Other wordless picture books include: Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2007); Jeannie Baker's *Window* (1991) and *Belonging* (2004); Mitsumasa Anno's *Anno's Britain* (1982); Gabrielle Vincent's *A Day a Dog* (1999) and David Wiesner's *Tuesday* (1997).
- **Gregory Rogers' series of picture books contains 'classic' elements of the folk or fairy tale.** In this and the two earlier books the central character (boy or bear) is projected into a course of action by a catalyst or event (here it's an encounter with three boys whose ball the boy kicks into the fountain); he embarks on a journey pursued by a villain or enemy (the boys, and later the sausage maker); during which he has a series of meetings with other characters or animals (pigeons, boys, lady in queue, gallery guard, dog, lady at the virginals, potter's assistant with bowls, man with cat on a leash, woman

with a basket of washing, dogs, butcher or sausage maker); magic works on the events too since the boy is transported back in time via a painting in the National Gallery; the story ends in a climax when the predicted sequence is over-turned by a change (the boy's return to the present and his defeat of the three boys by playing the recorder to summon dogs from around the area).

- **Activity:** Write a cumulative text, employing repetition and rhythm in the language, in order to engage a young audience, based on the images in this visual narrative.
- **Humour** is one of the primary features of Gregory Rogers' style.
 - **Activity:** Choose an incident that you thought was funny and then write a story about it.
- This text consists of a number of **slapstick scenes** in which the boy gets into trouble. Each one of them could be described in dialogue written in speech balloons, as in a comic strip.
 - **Question:** What might the guard be saying as he orders the boy from the gallery? Write a caption for the pictures in which he discovers the boy playing pranks. What might the man whose bowls are broken when the boy runs into him, be saying? What might the sausage maker (butcher) say as the dog is biting him, or later when he tumbles into the canal?

3. VISUAL LITERACY

This book can also be used as a **model for creating picture books and for discussing how pictures can convey narrative ideas and explore emotional and philosophical concepts.**

- **Storyboarding** — This book is an excellent example of how the illustrator creates a **story board** for a picture book. Every part of the work is integral to the whole. Most picture books consist of 32 pages, in which there must be included a title page, and a series of double page spreads, plus endpapers and the publication details.
 - **Activity:** Create another storyboard for the possible outcomes of the boy's chase through the square. What else might have happened?
- The **cover** always provides a visual summary of any story. Here the cover suggests (as in Book 1) that the story will be about a chase. The boy is being pursued by another older man but the scene is obviously not London's Globe Theatre but another location entirely.
 - **Question:** What other impressions does the cover give you?
- The **endpapers** of a book appear inside the book's cover and can also act as commentary on the story.

- **Activity:** There is a small picture of the boy at the beginning and end of the book, on these endpapers. What's the difference between the two?
- The **title page** is an aerial view of Trafalgar Square showing us the boy walking. The final page depicts the same scene with some crucial differences.
 - **Question:** Examine the pages carefully and find any differences between them.
- The **double page** spreads here are often varied in design and include both pictures which bleed across a double page and other single pages which include several illustrations within their frame. Discuss the conventions of a comic book layout and read about them in books listed in the bibliography.
 - **Question:** What other aspects of the design did you notice?
- **Wordless books** rely on the images to build up symbolic thematic meanings too. They repeat and cement ideas by the placement of such images.
 - **Activity:** Examine the entire book and locate any repeated motifs or ideas. Recall is a large part of interpretation of a text. Ask the students to read all three books in this series and then to explain the role of various objects or characters; how some characters appear again in each story, often in disguise; and other such repetitions.
- **Paintings of Vermeer and van Eyck** are incorporated into the work. The first painting featured here is *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) which is actually by Jan van Eyck (?1390-) who was a Flemish painter whose work predated the Dutch Masters by 200 years. His painting depicts a wealthy merchant and his wife in a masterpiece of realism in a luminous oil painting. Rogers has the dog leap out of that painting to join the boy who then races to a later painting by Johannes (Jan) Vermeer (1632-1675) *A Lady Seated at the Virginals* (c.1670- 1675) [http://www.essentialvermeer.com/vermeer_painting_part_three.html] Vermeer was a Dutch baroque painter whose style was remarkably akin to Jan van Eyck's. This clever *segué* links the two artists via this unspoken connection. (NB: art historians tell us that Van Eyck was actually ahead of his time.) Vermeer's *The Little Street* (1657/1658) is the same scene where the boy emerges into the city of Delft in the picture book.
 - **Activity:** Research the lives of these artists and study their artworks and the characteristics of Dutch painting of the times. For example, *Wikipedia* points out that not only were historical themes, portraits, landscapes, genre painting or scenes of everyday life, and still lifes popular as subjects, but that often the paintings were 'allegories' i.e. they conveyed some symbolic meaning according to the objects depicted. Then try to locate all the references to Dutch artworks in this book.
- **Intertextuality** - Images of the bear and other characters from earlier books also litter the pages, for example as sculptures or paintings outside and inside the National Gallery; a display of Elizabethan costumes in glass cases is one of the first exhibits the boy sees

when he enters the gallery and in the cases are some objects which are part of earlier stories; references appear even as background in the paintings themselves eg The lady at the virginals has a portrait of the bear directly behind her.

- **Activity:** Invite the students to locate as many references to the characters from the two earlier books in the 'Boy Bear' series as they can. For example, who does the butcher/sausage maker remind you of?
- **Design** is used to encourage children to **predict the action** and to make up stories in their own heads about what might be going to happen next.
 - **Question:** How does the design of this book work to encourage prediction skills in the reader?
- The **title** of this book cements a range of ideas.
 - **Question:** What ideas does it suggest? What other titles could this book have had? Make up your own.
- **Medium or Style** - Gregory Rogers uses witty pen and ink drawings in a **Cartoon Style** to illustrate the story in a series of comic-like drawings. Vermeer and his colleagues used oil painting and were renowned for their treatment of light in their works.
 - **Activity:** Choose a style or medium and paint an incident in this book in that style. For example you could study the oil painting style of Vermeer and try to paint like that instead!
- **Each double page spread is full of many stories.**
 - **Activity:** Examine the page where the dog is chasing the cat through the streets of Delft. What other people and their actions are depicted on this page?
 - **Activity:** Make a list of sub-plots depicting the daily life of ordinary people in these pictures, and then conduct a class quiz to find each of these actions in these pages.
- **This story is open-ended, and since it is one in a series it invites questions about its possible alternative endings and the potential for a sequel.** At its end, the boy leaves his friends in their paintings, and returns to the present day.
 - **Activity:** Where might he go next? What happens to the people in the portraits? What might the next story in the 'Boy Bear' series be about?

4. CREATIVE ARTS

- Gregory Rogers also takes a special interest in **Renaissance(1400-1600) and Baroque(1600-1750) music** which figures here too, as the boy discovers the piece of music on the gallery floor and gives it to the lady playing the virginals, and then dances with the dog and is given a recorder with which to accompany the lady's playing. There is

a violone (double bass violin) propped up beside the virginals and later the dogs all play in an orchestra.

- **Activity:** Listen to some music from the era in which these paintings were created.
- **Activities:** Research the various instruments used in this era, the composers, and the types of compositions and dances they created.
- **Drama** is evident in every scene in this book! Repertory theatre has proved a growing inspiration in these three picture books in which Gregory Rogers (like the director in a small theatre) re-uses characters and scenes and has his 'actors' take on the different roles. For example, both the baron and the bard (Shakespeare) from the first book re-appear in other guises in this third book.
 - **Activity:** Choose one of the boy's encounters and write some dialogue to go with it, and then act it out. Alternatively you could mime the scene instead.

5. LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

- This book might prompt students to explore many concepts on the internet.
 - **Activity:** Use the list of online resources below as a starting point and then follow links to other sites which relate to the many topics covered in this book.

6. MATHS

- Many objects might also be counted in this book.
 - **Activity:** For example, count all the dogs in this book or all the people on the opening page.
- Perspective is clearly a talking point for Gregory Rogers' illustrations. Teachers might be able to link this to a geometry lesson.
 - **Activity:** Older students could try ruling the lines of perspective over black & white photocopies of selected illustrations.

CONCLUSION

The boy continues on his merry way and the world keeps turning. Gregory Rogers is no doubt already creating a further adventure for the heroes of these three spectacular picture books. Keep an eye out for the next exciting instalment in the boy's or the bear's adventures!

QUIZ TIME

Answer the following questions which relate to the book.

Questions:

1. Whose statue erected on a column is depicted in Trafalgar Square?
2. What four statues 'guard' the column?
3. Which imaginary character is depicted on another column in the square near the main one?
4. Which painting does the dog leap out of?
5. Which painting do the boy and the dog leap into?
6. Which town is depicted in the second part of the book after the boy enters the paintings?
7. What do you call the waterways depicted in this town?
8. In what period of art did Johannes Vermeer paint and live?
9. One of the three boys waiting for the boy in Trafalgar Square is wearing a hat. What sort of hat is it?
10. Where is the soccer ball in the last frame of the book?

Answers: 1. Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson 1st Viscount Nelson, 1st Duke of Brontë (1758-1805), and the statue is called Nelson's Column. It was erected in 1843 to commemorate Nelson's decisive victory over the combined Spanish and French naval forces at the Battle of Trafalgar on 21 October 1805, although he lost his life in the conflict. 2. Four bronze lions. 3. The bear who appeared in Books 1 and 2 in this series. 4. *The Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) by Jan van Eyck. 5. *Lady seated at the Virginals* (1673/5) by Johannes Vermeer. 6. Delft, Holland. 7. Canals. 8. Baroque. 9. A beret. 10. In the fountain.

WORD FIND

Find the words in this crossword which includes words describing people or objects in this and in the previous book. The words can appear horizontally, vertically or diagonally and backwards or forwards. Try to find the pictures which match the words in the book as well.

Painting	Dog	Tourist	Waterlily	Ball
Pigeons	Bear	Basket	Net	Cellar
Boy	Trafalgar	Lion	Key	Tree
Fountain	Hero	Barrel	Frame	London
Gallery	Window	Art(twice)	Lace	Roof
Virginals	Rail	Staircase	Bar	Door

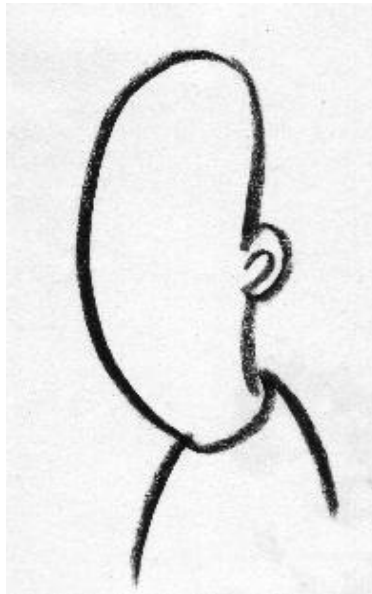
P	W	A	T	E	R	L	I	L	Y	L	T
I	A	B	C	W	O	D	N	I	W	O	R
G	T	I	A	E	H	E	R	O	U	N	A
E	E	B	N	L	L	I	A	R	N	D	F
O	K	A	I	T	L	L	I	R	E	O	A
N	S	R	A	B	I	S	A	D	T	N	L
S	A	R	T	O	T	N		R	O	A	G
B	B	E	N	Y	E	K	G	I	C	O	A
E	A	L	U	G	A	L	L	E	R	Y	R
A	R	T	O	V	I	R	G	I	N	A	L
R	O	O	F	R	A	M	E	T	R	E	E
S	T	A	I	R	C	A	S	E	G	O	D

CREATE YOUR OWN CHARACTER!

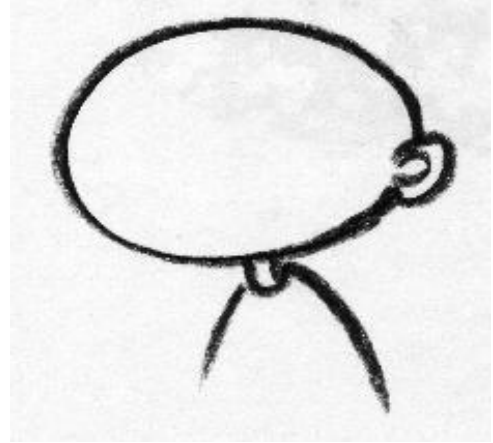
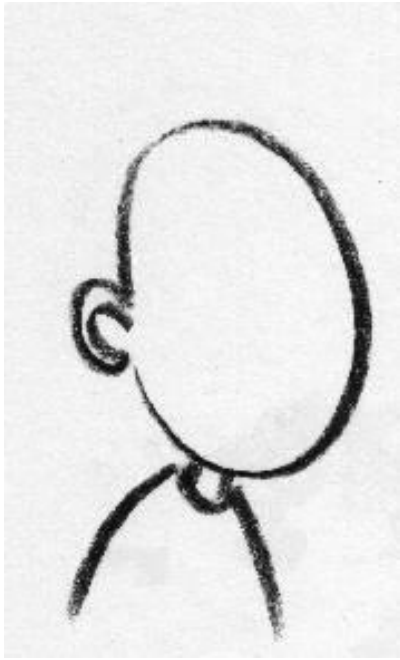
Here is a character head drawn by Gregory Rogers – and two more on the next page. Choose one and add to it and make a character of your own.

Then give your character a name and make up a story about him or her OR get together with classmates and make up a story that involves all your characters.

Create a simple comic storyboard outlining your story.



BLACKLINE MASTER 3



'B' IS FOR...?

Find at least 25 images in the book which begin with the letter 'B'. 'Boy' and 'bear' are two of them to get you started. Look very closely at the pictures in order to find words to describe the details contained within them.

1. Boy	6.	11.	16.	21.
2. Bear	7.	12.	17.	22.
3.	8.	13.	18.	23.
4.	9.	14.	19.	24.
5.	10.	15.	20.	25.

Score:

10 – Average

15 – Good

20 – Excellent

Over 20 – Brilliant!

Possible Answers: 1.Boy 2.Bear 3.Barrel 4.Bar 5.Basket 6.Block 7.Ball 8.Bag 9.Bench 10.Bread 11.Breeches 12.Beret 13.Book 14.Bowls 15.Bridge 16.Birds 17.Box 18.Boots 19.Balustrade 20.Blood 21.Baby 22.Bow 23.Branch 24.Building 25.Binoculars

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Gregory Rogers was born in 1957 and lives in Brisbane. He studied fine art at the Queensland College of Art and worked in the public service for many years before teaching himself graphic design and taking up freelance illustration in 1987. His first major illustration commissions were book covers for young adult novels for University of Queensland Press, and he has since illustrated scores of book covers for many publishers and has illustrated a large number of educational and trade children's picture books. Among these are *Auntie Mary's Dead Goat* by Margaret Card, *Way Home* by Libby Hathorn, *Running Away From Home* by Nigel Gray, *Tracks*, *Lucy's Bay* and *The Rainbow* by Gary Crew, and more. In 1995 Gregory was the first Australian illustrator to win the prestigious UK Kate Greenaway Medal for his illustrations in *Way Home*, which also won a Parents' Choice award in the USA and was shortlisted for the ABPA book design awards.

Gregory is a talented musician with an intense interest in the music of the 16th and 17th centuries. He also has an extensive collection of CDs, antiques, books, and anything that might collect dust.

The Boy, the Bear, the Baron, the Bard was shortlisted for the CBCA's Book of the Year: Younger Readers award and was included on the NY Times Best Books of the Year list in 2004. *Midsummer Knight* was published in 2006. Gregory is working on the fourth book in the series and other projects.

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ABOUT THE WRITER OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. She also teaches writing for children and young adults at Griffith University (Gold Coast) where she gained her PhD for a thesis on the development of the Australian children's publishing industry, and an online course for the University of Southern Queensland. Her latest publications are *Paper Empires a History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005* (co-edited with Craig Munro) (UQP, 2006) and *Kookaburra Shells Port Curtis Literature* (justified text press, 2006).