

Penguin Random House

TEACHERS' RESOURCE KIT

Abigail and the Birth of the Sun

Matthew Cunningham

Abigail is a curious little girl. She likes to discover the answers to really BIG questions.

One night, she thinks of a question that's SO BIG she can't sleep until she knows the answer.

'Daddy,' she asks as he tucks her into bed, 'where did the sun and all the plants come from?'

To find out the answer, Daddy and Abigail take a magical journey through time and space. Together they explore the birth of all living things.

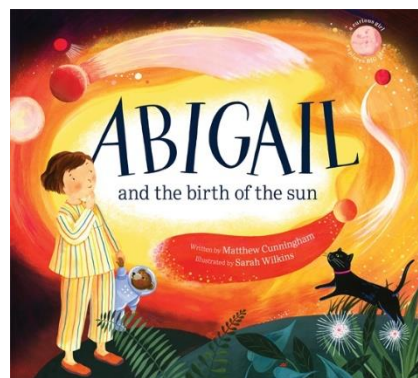
By the next morning, Abigail has thought of another big question . . .

A bright and beautiful exploration of a supernova and the birth of our solar system!



Since writing his first masterpiece in kindergarten, **Matthew Cunningham** has turned his hand to a number of different styles of writing. A passionate and dedicated historian, he has published oral histories, peer reviewed articles and research commissions.

Matthew's desire to communicate, explore and test complex ideas in a way that engages the reader, no matter their age, has brought him to children's fiction. He lives in Porirua, New Zealand with his wife and daughter Abigail, who, like her namesake, also like to ask big questions.



SPECIFICATIONS:

Imprint: Puffin
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Format: Paperback
Extent: 32 pages
Readership: 3-7 years

RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Before reading
- During reading
- Comprehension questions
- Language and style
- Vocabulary
- Illustrations
- Research and creative responses



Abigail and the Birth of the Sun

Written by Matthew Cunningham

Illustrated by Sarah Wilkins

BEFORE READING

Pre-reading Questions

- 1) Before you read the book, look at the cover illustration. What do you think this book is about? Are there any words that stand out? Discuss as a class.
- 2) Look at the back of the book. What description, summary or synopsis is given? Does this match what you think the book is about?
- 3) Sometimes authors and illustrators like to dedicate their book to a person.
 - a) What is a dedication?
 - b) Who do you think Matthew Cunningham's 'Abigail' is in his dedication? How do you know this?
 - c) Sarah Wilkins, the book's illustrator, dedicates the book 'in memory' to her sister, Miriam. What does 'in memory' mean?
- 4) Look at the illustrations on the dedication page and cover page. We can see a bath, bubbles, planets and a cat. How do these things indicate what the book will be about?
- 5) Look at the size of the book. Why do you think *Abigail and the Birth of the Sun* is this size?

DURING READING

Themes

This book examines several ideas that may be interesting to you.

The natural curiosity of children is explored, with Abigail asking a big question at the start, and thinking about another big question at the end.

The patience of **parents as first teachers** can be seen in the way Abigail's father explains the story to her, and earlier, when her mother reads her a bedtime story.

The book is also showing us how we are all an **important part of the universe**. It looks at a supernova and the birth of the solar system.

Finally, the book explores how **fundamentally beautiful astronomy is**, through the stunning visual interpretations of Sarah Wilkins.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) What is a 'big question'? How is it different from other types of questions?
- 2) What five activities are completed by Abigail as she thinks about her 'big question'?
- 3) What is the 'big question' Abigail asks her father?
- 4) What is the one-word answer Abigail's father gives her?
- 5) How does Abigail's father begin the story of the 'big old star'? Can you think of other books or films that start this way?
- 6) How do you feel reading about the 'big old star' at the start of Abigail's father's story? Why?
- 7) What bursts from the big old star's chest?
- 8) What happened when the clouds met?
- 9) In Abigail's father's story, what is the sun described as?
- 10) How is Earth described?
- 11) What happened on Earth after these events?
- 12) Why do you think Abigail's father says 'You will shine brighter than all of the stars in the sky'?
- 13) What does Abigail dream of that night?
- 14) What do you think Abigail's next 'big question' is? Why?

Language and Style

This book uses figurative and descriptive language and techniques to make the story interesting to read. Here are some definitions to help you:

Metaphor: a direct comparison; saying one thing IS another (for example, 'the boat was a ghost at sea, floating eerily over the waves').

Simile: a comparison that uses like or as (for example, 'the boat was like a ghost at sea, floating eerily over the waves', or 'the boat was as quiet as a ghost at sea, floating eerily over the waves').

Personification: human characteristics given to something non-human (for example, 'the boat rocked playfully back and forth upon the waves'). Being playful is a human quality.

Repetition: when a word or phrase is repeated for effect (for example, 'the boat rocked playfully back and forth, back and forth, back and forth upon the waves').

Read through the following examples from the book. Can you tell which are personification, metaphors, similes or repetition in *Abigail and the Birth of the Sun*?:

- 1) 'She thought about it while she brushed her teeth. She thought about it while she had her bath and put on her pyjamas and chose her teddies for bed. She thought about it while Mummy read her a story and kissed her goodnight.'
- 2) 'A long, long time ago, when the universe was still young, there lived a big old star.'
- 3) 'She was very lonely. All of her friends had stopped shining, and one day soon her light would go out too.'
- 4) 'At first it was a little rumble, like a kitten purring.'
- 5) 'But soon her chest was roaring like a thunderstorm.'
- 6) 'It spread outwards like a growing bubble.'
- 7) 'Outwards it went, further and further ...'

- 8) 'They grew and grew and grew until they became comets, meteors, planets and stars.'
 - 9) 'In time the Sun was joined by a whole family of planets, including a little blue-green marble named Earth.'
 - 10) 'Comets whizzed past her eyes like fireflies, and meteors burnt through the sky like fireworks.'
- a) Write five of your own similes and metaphors. When could you use this in your own writing?
 - b) Write a sentence in which you personify something. What did you choose to give human qualities to?
 - c) Write a short poem, like a limerick or haiku, in which you use repetition. What did you choose to repeat?

Vocabulary

This book is about the beginning of the solar system. Here are some words that relate to the story Abigail's dad is sharing.

- a) Galaxy
 - b) Stardust
 - c) Nuclear Fusion
 - d) Planet
 - e) Cosmos
 - f) Supernova
 - g) Elements
 - h) Yellow Dwarf
 - i) Big Bang Theory
 - j) Cycle
 - k) Meteor
 - l) Comet
- 1) Choose five that you like.
 - 2) Look up their meanings and write them down.
 - 3) Explain what they mean to a partner.
 - 4) Write your own story using these five words.

Illustrations

- 1) On the title page, the font of the name 'ABIGAIL' is uneven.
 - a) What is 'font' and how is it used in this book?
 - b) Why do you think Abigail's name is designed in this way?

- 2) Look at the illustration of Abigail's mother.
 - a) What do you think her occupation is?
 - b) How do you know?

- 3) Look at the other illustrations on this page.
 - a) What do you think Abigail's interests are?
 - b) How do you know?

- 4) Why do you think the cat is shown in most of the pictures?

- 5) How would you describe the colours in the book?

- 6) When Abigail is sitting in the window, we can see flowers under the 'big old star'.
 - a) What are they?
 - b) Why are they relevant to the story, even though they are not described in words?

- 7) As the story progresses, the illustrations become more abstract and non-realistic.
 - a) What does abstract mean?
 - b) What does it mean when a picture is non-realistic?
 - c) Name one thing that shows that shows this non-realism.

- 8) Why do you think the stars are joined by lines to make pictures of a cat, a man, a rocket and a robot?

- 9) Why do you think there are so many creatures illustrated in this book? List as many as you can.

- 10) Why do you think Sarah Wilkins chose to illustrate the last page with Abigail sitting in a window watching the rain?

Research and Creative Responses

- 1) Make an animation of this story by either using a computer programme recommended by your teacher, or plasticine and a cell phone's recording function. See if you can make your story as colourful as Sarah Wilkins' illustrations.
- 2) Write a story in the same format, using Abigail's next big question (you can decide what this is). This time, have her mother answer as a bedtime story. You can choose to illustrate it, have someone else in the class illustrate it or lengthen it so it is without pictures.
- 3) If you wrote a book, who would you dedicate it to? Compose your best dedication for your book.
- 4) In this story, Abigail's father explains the beginning of the solar system to Abigail. Read the story several times and see if you understand how it happened. Partner up in class and take turns explaining the birth of the universe, using factual language.
- 5) Abigail's father takes his time to answer an important question from his daughter. Think of your own 'big question'. Ask one of your parents or caregivers your question for homework. Maybe they will be as good at answering as Abigail's father!
- 6) Go to the library and research what a 'supernova' is. Present to your class as a poster or diorama.
- 7) Ask your teacher or an adult to help you make a Kahoot! quiz about the Big Bang Theory. Give the quiz to your class on a day when you have individual computer access.
- 8) In a small group, make a poster of the planets in our solar system. Present your work to the class. Make sure everyone in your group has a turn at presenting.
- 9) Write a short play personifying the planets of the solar system as characters. Cast your play, practice and present to your class. Maybe your teacher will ask you to present to the whole school at assembly!
- 10) Write a letter or email to either Matthew Cunningham or Sarah Wilkins telling them what you liked about their book. Make sure you write in paragraphs and

use the conventions of the text type you choose (email or letter). If you are not sure about these things, ask your teacher.

- 11) Write a story from the perspective of a different character in the book. You might choose Abigail's mother, Abigail's father, the cat, or even the 'big old star'! See if you can incorporate similes, metaphors, personification and repetition in your story.