

Molly and Pim and the Millions of Stars

MARTINE MURRAY

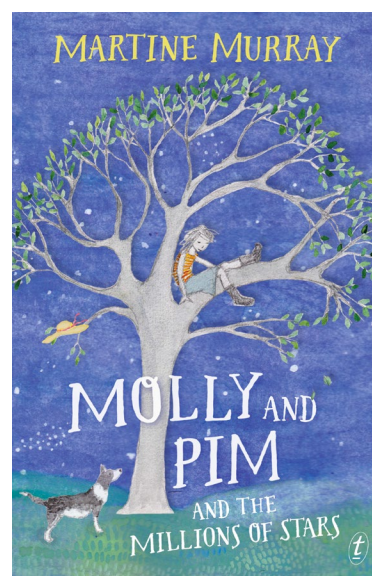
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RECOMMENDED SCHOOL YEAR LEVEL: 5–8

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TEXT'S TEACHING NOTES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

Strands	LA–Language LT–Literature LY–Literacy
Modes	W–Writing L–Listening R–Reading S–Speaking
General capabilities	 Literacy  Ethical behaviour  Intercultural understanding  Personal and social capability  Critical and creative thinking  Numeracy  Information and communication technology
Cross-curriculum priorities	 Sustainability  Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

SYNOPSIS

Molly wants nothing more than to be 'normal' just like her friend Ellen. Instead of her strange life with an absent father, brothers travelling in Cuba, a mother who makes potions, Molly wishes she was part of Ellen's comfortably normal family. She certainly doesn't want to be seen as strange like Pim, the boy at school who studies insects and hoists papier-mâché angels up the flag pole.

When Molly's mother accidentally drinks one of her own potions and turns herself into a tree, Molly learns the importance of family. *Molly and Pim and the Millions of Stars* is a story about trusting your friends, exploring nature, embracing difference and loving your life just as it is.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melbourne born author and illustrator Martine Murray, has created numerous children's books including the award winning *How to Make a Bird* and *The Slightly True Story of Cedar B Hartley*. In addition to her writing talent, Martine has a background dance and film making. She lives in Castlemaine, Victoria.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This story started with the idea of a child being 'parented' by a tree or more specifically the image of a tree as sort of a mother with a child living in its branches. In a time when the environment is in jeopardy, this image arrived with a poignancy that seemed worth exploring.

In these times, when children's experience of nature can be minimal, or at the least very controlled, and when imaginative play in the outdoors is not often encouraged or is replaced by screen time, I wanted to show a child, Molly, whose life depends on her establishing a real and vital connection with, in this



case, a tree, but also with plants. In this story the mother accidentally transforms herself into a tree, but as a tree, she continues to mother Molly by providing shelter, shade, food and support. Molly has to recall her mother's knowledge of plants and try to use them to find solutions to the challenges that befall her along the way. Facing each chapter start is an illustration from Molly's notes about common plants and weeds and their uses.

Many other themes develop as the story unfolds, the challenge of self-acceptance, the acceptance of difference and how all this is negotiated within the complex requirements and gifts of friendship. While the central problem of the story, Molly's mother being a tree, speaks to the deeper mystery of our connection to nature, whether mystical, vital, sacred or lost, it also pays tribute to universal cycles of change, challenge, growth, and transformation within the self and in relation to others.

While Molly's ostensible task is to transform her mother back before the Grimshaws cut her down, the deeper psychological challenge for Molly is to find her own emotional courage, to explore the confusing pull between the need to know and accept oneself and the need to align oneself with others.

The magic in this story is not of the elf sort, but is more the sort of magic that is born out of the deeper mysteries of the natural world and our connection to it. That mystery is felt as poetic and integral and engagement with it, whether imaginatively or practically, connects Molly and Pim to something greater than themselves.

BEFORE READING

1. Make a list of the things you think are normal about your family and what is unusual about it. How do you feel about your family? What would you like to change and why? (ACELT1613) W LT
2. How important is nature in your life? Do you have a big garden? Do you grow your own vegetables? Do you like to go bush walking? Do you have animals at home? Make a list of 5 things you could do to learn more about nature or experience it more. (ACELT1613) W LT
3. Walk around your school grounds and create a map of the school, marking out what is natural and what is built. Devise a plan to include more natural things in your school. (ACELT1613) W LT

WHILE READING

1. Why do you think Martine Murray includes the 'millions of stars' in the title of her novel? (ACELY1801) R LY

2. For each chapter, note the following on the table below:

CHAPTER	e.g. Chapter 1
KEY MOMENT IN THE CHAPTER	Molly describes how she feels about being different, waking up in the morning and what she wants her life to be.
KEY QUOTES	'today is a prickly day' P.2
RECURRING SYMBOLS	Plants and nature; self-confidence and image; feelings and instinct

(ACELT1637) R LT

3. In the opening pages Molly lies in bed and takes in her surroundings. Tomorrow morning, do the same. As soon as you wake up take a moment to listen, smell and feel your surroundings and write down what it is like first thing in the morning in your house. Is there lots of noise? Are there familiar smells? Is the air cold? Use similes and metaphors to help describe that feeling to someone else. (ACELA1518) (ACELA1525) (ACELT1613) R L W LA LT
4. Molly knows that her mother is different from other mothers. Make a list of the things that set Molly and her mother apart from others. (ACELT1620) R LT
5. Describe Molly's neighbours, the Grimshaws. Do you think their complaints are fair? Do you agree with the way Molly and her mother handle the complaints? How would you handle their complaints? (ACELT1620) R LT
6. Draw a map of Molly's environment, include the location of her home, the Mama tree, the park, school, Ellen's house and other details mentioned in the book. (ACELT1618) R LT
7. Molly says that they 'just tolerate Claudine', but what tells us that Molly really cares about her cat? (ACELT1620) R LT
8. What do we learn about Molly's family? What does this tell you about them? (ACELT1620) R LT
9. Imagine you are one of Molly's brothers. Write a letter home to her about what you are doing. (ACELT1618) R W LT
10. Molly thinks that she is the only one who has strange things in her life. Is she correct? What strange things happen to other people in the novel? (ACELT1620) R LT
11. What Molly refers to as vibrations, her mother calls harmony. What do they mean? What creates harmony in your life? (ACELT1613) R LT
12. What lessons does Molly learn from her mother? (ACELT1620) R LT
13. Molly says to Ellen that 'Nothing is impossible, just hard.' P.34



Do you think she is right? What happens in the book that is 'impossible' in some people's eyes?

(ACELT1613) R LT

14. What does Pim do to 'explore' his environment in the novel? Consider his interaction with nature as well as people. Some examples to consider are hoisting the angel up the flag pole, taking photographs and collecting samples in the park. (ACELT1613) R LT
15. What are some of the assumptions that Molly makes in the novel. For example, what does she assume about Pim? (ACELT1613) R LT
16. How does Molly's feelings about the environment change after her mother turns into a tree? Consider the following quotation, 'The garden was still; the trees looked like dark figures.' P. 69 (ACELA1525) R LA
17. What is a moral? What is the moral of this story? (ACELT1613) R LT

AFTER READING

THEMES

Friendship

1. Molly and Ellen are best friends, but they don't understand each other as well as they think. What misunderstandings do the girls have about each other? (ACELT1620) R LT
2. What does Molly learn about true friendship in the novel? (ACELT1613) R LT
3. While Molly says that she doesn't want to be seen by or be friends with Pim at the start of the novel, the two have a lot in common. In what way are Molly and Pim alike? (ACELT1620) R LT
4. Not all of Molly's friends are people. Who are these other friends? Why is it important to have friendships like this? (ACELT1622) R LT

Nature

1. What are the things Pim finds interesting in nature? Why do you think the other children think that this is strange? (ACELT1613) R LT
2. What do the following quotations tell us about the connection that Molly and her mother have with nature? Find 2 more quotations. (ACELT1619) R LT
 - 'The birds were noisy...tell her where mama was.' P.6
 - 'Molly's mama stood alone in the shade of the buddleia bush.' P.19
 - '[Molly] could only bear to let the bright sunny world in bit by bit.' P.56
 - 'Molly pressed her ear to the trunk. It was warm.' P.70
3. What suggestions are there that Molly's mother feels more comfortable with nature than she does with people and built places? Think about

when she collects Molly from school or the way they travel around town. (ACELT1620) R LT

4. In the novel it is the Mama tree that is under threat, but it reminds us that nature is often under threat. What threats does our natural environment face today? (ACELT1613) (ACELT1619) R LT

Identity

1. What tells us that Molly wants to change her identity at the start of the novel? For example, 'There was a time when Molly had known a lot about herbs, but she had recently decided not to know anything about them at all.' P. 7. (ACELT1620) R LT
2. Despite wanting to be 'normal', Molly also wants to be seen as interesting. What do you think is interesting about Molly? Are there also things that make her 'normal'? (ACELT1627) R LT
3. What does Molly learn about being herself in the novel? (ACELT1627) R LT
4. How do we form a sense of identity? What can we do to create a positive sense of identity? (ACELT1613) W LT
5. If you were Molly's mother or friend, what advice would you give her about the way she feels about herself and her family? (ACELT1627) R LT

Imagination

1. Molly has an interesting way of describing the world and her feelings. On page 2 she declares that it will be a 'prickly day'. With a partner, make a list of some of the interesting or unusual ways that Molly describes things. Then create a list of your own interesting phrases to describe your day, the weather or other ordinary things. (ACELA1518) R LA
2. What do 'vibrations' tell Molly? What does she mean? (ACELA1518) R LA
3. Molly's home is described as a place full of unexpected and imaginative things. Imagine things that you could add to your home that would make it exciting and unique. It might be your own forest or even a Mama tree to sleep in. You could choose to describe this in words or draw it. (ACEY1725) R W LY
4. Molly finds the Mama tree comforting. Do you have a place that you go to for comfort or to imagine exciting things? Describe it. If you don't have one, describe a place you wish you had. (ACELT1613) W LT

Character

1. While Molly says that she would like to be part of a 'normal' family. What are some of the unusual things about Molly that we learn in the first few pages? (ACELT1622) R LT
2. Choose a character and draw what you think they would look like. Think about their personality as well as what the author tells us in the book. You can



use your own drawing skills, a computer program to create your portrait or you could cut out images from a magazine to create a reflection of your character. Label aspects of their appearance and explain your choices. (ACELT1620) 🌱📖 R W LT

3. How do other characters see the Mama tree? Choose another character and describe their first sight of the Mama tree from their point of view. Consider how the language they use might be different from Molly's. (ACELT1622) 🌱 R LT
4. How is a tree like a person? The Mama tree is a character in this novel. She has feelings, she responds to Molly's emotions. Explore how trees could be seen as just like human beings. For example, they change as they get older. (ACELT1622) 🌱📖 R LT

Style and Structure

1. Martine Murray makes reference to other events about which we do not find out all the details. What other stories are waiting to be told in this novel? Write one of those stories in your own words. (ACELY1801) 🌱 R W LY
2. Match 3 of the illustrations with a quotation from the novel. Explain how the two fit together. (ACELT1617) 🌱📖 R LT

RESPONDING

1. **Create** a map of Molly's home that shows all of the exciting and natural things but adds some creative elements to keep out the nosy neighbours. (ACELY1725) 🌱📖 R W LY
2. **Record** your own visual field book of plants and animals in your garden or in the school's yard. Label your drawings and record where you saw it or why it is important. It might be your cat or it could be a wild bird that lives in your area. As a class, you could hold an exhibition of your books and drawings. You could work with your science teacher to look at the sort of details that botanists include in their drawings. (ACELY1725) 🌱📖 R W LY
3. **Imagine** you could turn yourself into any object, what would it be and why? Write a short narrative that describes what a day might be like as that object. (ACELY1725) 🌱 W LY
4. **Research** your local park or public garden. Is it named after someone? When was it created? Discover more information about a tree or part of the garden. Perhaps plan as a class to adopt a tree. You might also choose to plant your own tree in the school grounds and find out more about the type of tree it is. (ACELT1768) 🌱📖 R W LT
5. **Discover** the history of herbal remedies. Where did they begin and what were they used for? What are some of the commonly used medicines or cures we use today that began as herbal remedies. (ACELT1768) 🌱 R W LT
6. **Explore** your local parks and gardens. On a trip to your local park, take a moment to listen to the sounds, smell the air and touch the plants and tree trunks (check that this is permitted in your gardens). Imagine what it might be like to live there all the time. Write a description of your experience. (ACELT1768) 🌱📖 W LT
7. **Consider** whether it is possible to have friends who are completely different from each other or from you. How different are you and your friends? Find out something new about your friends. (ACELT1613) 🌱 R S L LT
8. **Visit** your local Botanical Gardens. You should do some research before you do. Most major gardens have organised tours where you can discover native plants, medicinal plants and learn more about their history. Ask your teacher to book a tour or organise it with friends and family for a weekend. Write down 5 interesting things you discover on your trip and turn it into a poster or a wiki/web page to share with others. (ACELT1768) 🌱📖 W S L LT
9. **Design** a tree house for the Mama tree with a place for Molly, Pim, Ellen, Claudine, the Gentleman and Maude. (ACELY1725) 🌱 R LY
10. **Discuss** the following statements and find evidence from the novel to support your ideas. (ACELT1619) 🌱📖 R LT
 - Pim's observation that a seed goes on and on refers to more than just seeds.
 - Molly's experience changes the way she sees the world.
 - We should always cherish what we have.