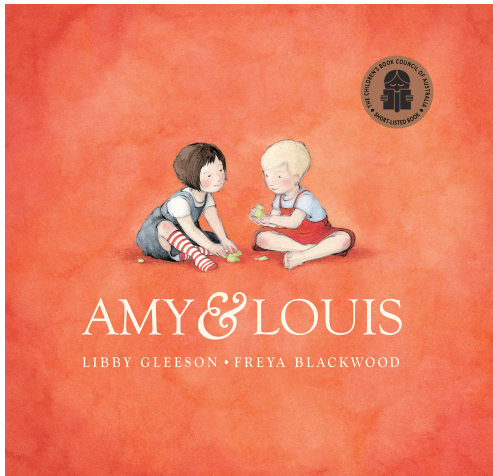


AMY & LOUIS



Illustrated by Freya Blackwood

Written by Libby Gleeson

Published by Scholastic Press 2006

Also published in the USA by Arthur Levine Books, with the title *Half a World Away*, and in many other countries around the world.

Amy & Louis was Freya Blackwood's first big success as an illustrator. It won prestigious awards, sold into many countries, never went out of print, and began a long creative partnership with Libby Gleeson.

THEMES

friendship | separation | loss | connection

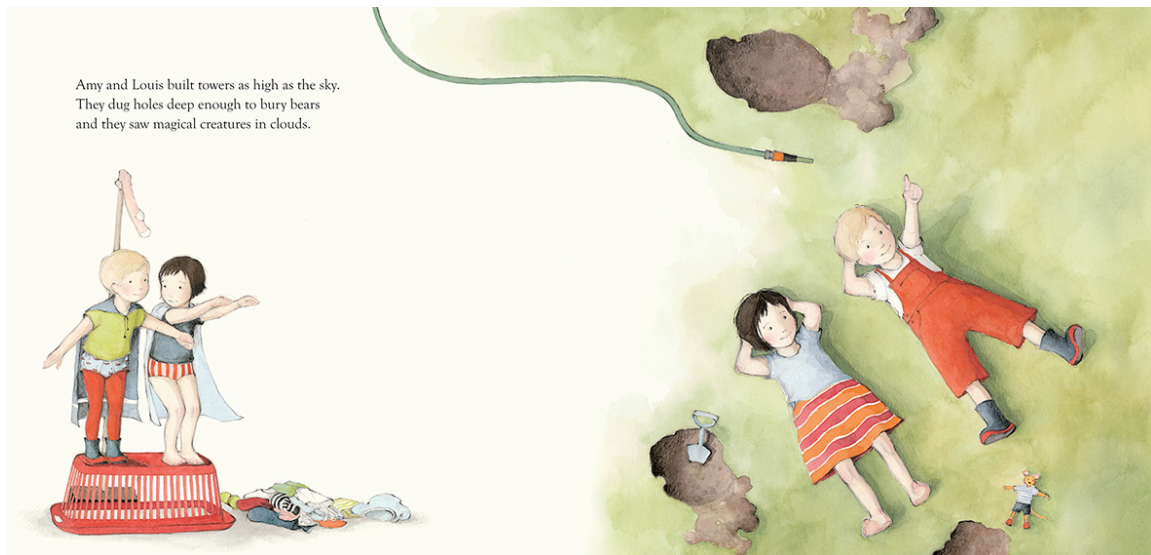
STORY

IN BRIEF

Amy & Louis is the story of two close friends, Amy and Louis. They do everything together, until Amy moves half a world away. At first their separation from one another seems almost too hard to bear, but then Louis calls out to Amy with all his heart, and she hears him in her dream.

IN DETAIL

Amy and Louis have the kind of friendship where they spend as much time together as they can. They enjoy the same things, understand one another's imaginations, they seem to know what the other is thinking and feeling, and have a special way of calling to one another across the fence that separates their gardens.



The wrench they experience when Amy and her family move overseas turns both their worlds grey. They find no joy in the objects that used to give them pleasure. Dressing up, building towers, finding magical shapes in the clouds seem empty and pointless without each other. But Louis has a passionate heart and plans to reconnect with Amy the only way he knows how: by calling her name. His father and mother explain how this is impossible, especially as Amy would be asleep whenever Louis is awake. Only Louis' grandma suggests that he might as well try and see what happens. What happens is that Amy has a dream about Louis in which she hears him calling her name. Their connection is intact, half a world apart.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

IN BRIEF

The magic of illustration is that pictures can tell more than the words. Even though the words tell us what *happens*, the illustrations show us *what* happens, *where* it happens, *how* it happens, what the characters *look* like and how the characters *feel* about everything that happens. Although there are not many words in *Amy & Louis*, there is a lot of *story*. Freya uses all sorts of illustration techniques to build characters, a world, a mood and, most importantly, a feeling.

IN DETAIL

Freya is particularly skilled at adding depth and emotion to a story. Libby Gleeson's text in *Amy & Louis* is sparsely and simply written. There are no flowery descriptions, and no unnecessary words. The story travels through a range of strong emotions, yet the text never mentions an emotion by name. The illustrations, on the other hand, build simple story of friendship, loss, sadness and hope into a complete experience.

SETTING

The street where Amy and Louis live (before Amy moves away) is based on an inner-city suburb of Sydney called Annandale. It has narrow streets and lanes that wind up and down hills, and is full of small, old, cosy cottages that were built comfortably close to each other, but that were also given enough space for their own gardens. Annandale isn't near the beach, so Freya drew the suburb near the sea so the clouds – that have an important job to do at the end of the story – didn't have far to go!

The city that Amy moves to is based on New York city, where most families don't have a separate house with a garden. Freya knew this visual difference was important to the story, to show the dramatic change Amy experiences when she moves overseas. The city buildings are all a little warped and out of scale to show the towering height of the city compared with the open skies and cosy little homes where Amy had come from.

Freya often draws aerial views as well as street views. Aerial views can sometimes be included in a picture book for variety and surprise, but Freya uses the aerial point-of-view for story-telling purposes. In *Amy & Louis*, when Louis tries to make contact with faraway Amy by shouting 'Coo-ee, Ameeee!' the two accompanying aerial views have the task of giving the reader the experience of actually being those words as they fly high over the streets and houses, and set off on their journey across the ocean to where Amy now lives.



CHARACTER

There is an interesting story around how Freya was chosen as illustrator for *Amy & Louis*. Freya had only ever drawn older children and adults in her previous three books (*Two Summers*, *The Man From Snowy River* and *Waltzing Matilda*), and she wasn't sure she could draw younger children successfully enough for a Libby Gleeson book. When she first started designing Amy and Louis they looked about 12 years old. The proportions of children are very different to those of adults, and are also different at different ages as they grow. Countless character studies were emailed back and forth between Freya, Libby and their editor. Each time she redrew Amy and Louis they got a little younger: first they became nine years old, then around seven, and over time they grew looking younger and younger until they finally arrived at an age that Libby thought looked right.

Now, of course, Freya is one of the best in the world when it comes to drawing small children!

Freya also worked on getting the parents and grandmother right. For example, the grandmother was at first an plump old lady with an apron and grey hair in a bun. But Freya's editor asked Freya what her own mother looked like ... and Freya then drew a more contemporary grandmother with a trendy haircut and slightly bohemian clothes. You could easily imagine this grandmother being an artist (Freya's mother is in fact an artist).



EMOTION

Amy & Louis is both a happy and a sad story. The early parts of the book show how carefree and relaxed Louis and Amy are in each other's company. We can see how they trust their world will always be safe and happy, and that they will always be there for each other. All they have to do is shout 'Coo-eee'. There is no hint of the shock that is to come.

The magic of Freya's illustration is that she shows both feelings and thoughts in the same small marks of a pencil. If we look closely at Louis' face in the pages following Amy's departure, for example, we see not only sorrow but also memories, bafflement, loss, questioning, wonderment.

MOOD

As well as showing individual emotions, illustrations are capable of creating an overall mood in a picture book. Mood and emotion are slightly different. Both are based on feelings, but while emotions are feelings that can come and go quite quickly, moods are feelings that can tend to stick around for hours, days or even weeks and months. There are a number of techniques illustrators can use to suggest mood. In *Amy & Louis* Freya uses colour and tone to show the change in mood from carefree and happy to mournful and alone. The day Amy moves away, the sunny little street where she lived next door to Louis changes to a sad grey. Even the sky loses its blue.



The street outside Amy's new home, where Amy is dwarfed by looming dark buildings on all sides, is similarly a bleak, monotonous grey. This visual drabness helps the reader feel the characters' sadness for themselves.

Freya also uses empty space to suggest mood. After Amy leaves, Louis stops all the games he and Amy used to play together. We see him sitting lonely and sad in his wheelbarrow, or standing forlornly in dress-up clothes that are no longer any fun, and all around him is nothing but blankness. This expanse of emptiness mirrors the emptiness Louis is feeling inside now that Amy is gone.

MEDIUM

Freya used pencil, watercolour and charcoal in *Amy & Louis*. The charcoal pencil gives strength and contrast to the illustrations. Deep tones have the effect of creating somber

feelings in the viewer, and this is especially effective on the pages where the two children first feel the devastation of losing their friend.

ENDINGS

Sometimes the ending is the hardest part of a story to write. Some authors (and readers) like endings to be open, leaving readers to ponder what happens next, or to decide for themselves if the ending is happy or sad, or if the story is even resolved. This kind of ending is called 'ambiguous'. The original (Australian) ending of *Amy & Louis* is ambiguous, because we aren't told whether Louis knows Amy heard him calling her name. We are left wondering. For the American edition, Libby and Freya added an extra page to make the ending less ambiguous: we see Louis smiling in his sleep at the same time as we see Amy smiling out of her window and remembering her dream. Each kind of ending – ambiguous or unambiguous – has its own kind of magic.



You can find other resources about the book here:

<https://readingaustralia.com.au/lesson/amy-and-louis/>

http://www.scool.scholastic.com.au/schoolzone/toolkit/assets/pdfs/amy_louis_tn.pdf