



## Transcript



### Arts, Literature and Music A Good Read - 07

*Where is the Green Sheep*, published by the Penguin Group Australia.

*Night Noises*, published by Puffin Books.

*Hunwicks Egg*, published by the Penguin Group Australia.

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On *A Good Read* this week, I'll be looking at three fantastic children's books all written by the illustrious Mem Fox.

*Where is the Green Sheep*, published by the Penguin Group Australia.

*Night Noises*, published by Puffin Books.

*Hunwicks Egg*, published by the Penguin Group Australia.

Each tale is distinctive, yet there is a similar thread that weaves all Fox's titles together. Each story is accompanied by wonderful illustrations that entwine effortlessly with the exciting and often poignant narrative.

So sit back or get yourself a cup of coffee as we begin with **Where is the Green Sheep?** Wow what a wack-tab-ulous story. It has everything from a blue sheep to a bed sheep and even highly intelligent mechanic sheep that's capable of fixing his car! How would he hold the spanner you ask? Sheep have hooves and are basically carpet covered, jelly shaking lawnmowers that for some bizarre reason can jump super high? Well I got news for you negative Nancy, these sheep are-multi talented!

The narrative weaves a magical tapestry, imbuing each sheep with a cheeky personality that children love. This is where this story differentiates from other children's stories. It's possible to depart the narrative and explore each individual sheep. For example, the three sheep enjoying cake. Perhaps they're celebrating a birthday? Or maybe they've just discovered they can do a backward hand-stand while playing maracas in zero gravity and listening to the best of Kenny Loggins, which coincidentally is any Kenny Loggins.

Children love silly humour and sitting with your child perched contently on your lap as you natter away fantastical tales of sheep escapades is a wonderful way to spend an afternoon. You're only limited by your imagination and this is why the story remains fresh and exciting with each read.

I love stories that encourage parental participation; it adds a certain intimacy to proceedings and makes the process all the more special. 'Where is the green sheep' is a veritable smorgasbord of spontaneous interaction, so parent's, I want to hear lot's of chatting, not just a stream of constant

questions from a directive adult but relaxed conversation where children can build the skills to organize and express their thoughts through comfortable interaction.

When our journey concludes and we the reader discover exactly where that pesky green sheep is, the children feel as though they have conquered some great personal triumph and any story that makes a child feel special, unique and happy is a winner in my book.

However dearest Mem, from one professional to another, there are a few, minor criticisms that must be addressed. Perhaps you can explain why the moon sheep requires a breathing apparatus to survive the harsh celestial environment of space, yet the star sheep on the very next page is prancing around, apparatus free and without a care rattling his little sheep head? Oh and Mem, just F.Y.I, space is freezing! Do you really think their woolly coats sufficient? No? I didn't think so either? P.E.T.A will be all over you like sunscreen on sports day.

So in conclusion, no it doesn't make any sense, but that's all part of the fun. The bright, colourful illustrations by Judy Horacek will captivate the children, as will the wondrously absurd narrative. The best indicator of what makes a children's story great, something truly special, inspiring and everlasting, besides me of course, is the children's laughter that swirls the rooms every time I read this story.

The book also has a snail, which is enormous! As we all know snails are a delicacy and a snail as big as a mutated hamster as featured in the story would fetch a fair price.

The second story is **Night Noises**. Have you ever heard things that go bump in the night? If so, you're obviously in dire need of an exorcist and should switch off your radio immediately and consult your local Priest, preferably the chap from the hit 70's movie The Exorcist, although I doubt he's an actual Priest. Maybe you should just move? Anyhow, your problems aside, if you read night noises then you know as well as I do what a fantastic story it is.

Night noises is another triumph for the prolific Mem Fox, who nurtures meaning in a clear and considerate manner. The fast-paced narrative encourages the reader to continue right up to the end and as we turn each page, eloquently crafted life memories dissolve to childhood and we the reader are privy to moments of Lily Laceby's fascinating life.

The story begins with the family dog, Butch Aggie, guarding Lilly Laceyby, whom has the face of a 1950's English tea kettle and creaks like a rusty gate every time she moves. Butch hears noises, strange and frightening noises. Noises that you could imagine coming from Peter Jackson as he rode his Obviously-way-to-small-for-a-person-of-his-size bicycle from set to set when directing the 'Lord of the rings' trilogy.

As we read on, we find out that the entire ruckus is in fact Lilly Laceby's family throwing her a surprise birthday party. I'd say the family got there just in time because at hitting 90 years, poor old Lily's used-by date was fast approaching. The final pages reveal Lily to be young at heart and that her vitality is spurred by youthful exuberance.

In conclusion, although certainly not the highest regarded Mem Fox tale, Night noises is a meditative, life affirmation that the youngsters will enjoy listening to time and time again. It's fascinating to hear children recount precious memories of their afternoons and helps breathe fresh life into each reading. Two thumbs up!

The third and final story is **Hunwick's Egg**. What I loved about this particular Mem Fox story is the delicate, consummate hand that utilizes the deliberately muted palette to etch detail from the familiar and birth new life into Australia's diverse landscape and mystical inhabitants. The illustrations are void of flamboyancy, ostentatiousness and marry perfectly with Mem Fox's enchanting narrative.

The protagonist of this adventure is a clever Bilby who bucks convention and adopts an egg. Well we think it's an egg at first, but not wanting to spoil the cliff-hanger ending I'll leave you guessing. Good old Hunwick nurtures the egg despite being bombarded with tide waves of criticism from his animal friends. Old Hunwick chats to the egg about all manner of things, speaking stories, sharing his troubles, expressing his increasing dissatisfaction with the recent slump in the Nikkei. As we turn the final page, the story reminds us to accept others as is, regardless of scepticism.

The strength of Hunwicks Egg, as with all Mem Fox's works lies in the simplistic nature of the narrative. Sometimes the most effective's tales are the simplest and Hunwick's egg truly capitalises on this successful methodology. It really is a wonderful morality tale, satisfying for both children and adults alike.

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