



Fox

By Margaret Wild

Illustrated by Ron Brooks

Among the most popular forms of folk lore is the fable, the simple illustration of a moral lesson. *Fox* has all the elements of a classic fable with a new level of complexity. Ask different readers what the moral is, and you will get different answers—all appropriate. It is a story that raises more questions than it answers.

Visually the book is striking. Draw attention to the use of color; drab when describing dog and Magpie emerging as a team from adversity, brightening when Fox appears, and brilliant in the finish. The outline of the dog is solid and stable. Magpie is drawn with solid lines, but a ragged silhouette. Fox is feathery, elusive, with no solid lines on which to focus visually. The style of text is deceptive. At first it appears crude, but look closely. There are no letter reversals, no errors in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, or letter formation. It appears to be done by hand, but a literate hand. The printing adds a personal touch, as if the story is told by a close observer, or participant. It defines this as a simple story, but one of universal and essential truth.

Fox would make a great assignment for a creative writing class. Begin with the title--- why Fox? What other titles could have been used? How about Magpie, or Dog and Magpie, or Two Good Friends? It could be that conflict does not exist until Fox appears, but is that so? What of the circumstances that brought Magpie and Dog together? What of the conflict between life and death that Magpie wages within himself? Assign a prequel---write a story that ends before Fox appears. Or choose to write a biography of Fox. Describe what has occurred in his life to form him as he is now. Then assign a sequel. What happens to Magpie? Does he get back to Dog or does he die in the desert? How does Dog greet him? Who is the hero? Who is the villain? Who is the catalyst? Who is the betrayer? Who wins? Does anyone?

Moving from artistic and literary technique to content enlarges the age appropriate group. For young children emphasize the positives; the helpfulness of Dog, how well the two friends cooperate, the unhappiness of Fox that drives him to strike out at those who are happy, how sorry Magpie is that he made a mistake, and how hard he tries to put it right. In middle school ask which character they most identify with and why. Have you ever wanted something so badly that you went about it the wrong way? Have you been jealous of someone else, and tried to spoil their pleasure by belittling a possession or accomplishment?

Fox is a book for initiating discussions of unpleasant subjects. It is a book that can help children understand when disturbing events occur in their lives, their communities, and their country. Despite poor choices and mistakes we make, despite evil that we confront (sometimes in a form as beautiful as the fox), the ultimate victory belongs to Dog, as the love and help he give unselfishly is returned to him by Magpie.