



# INSIDE THE WORLD OF **TOM ROBERTS**

MARK WILSON



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## INSIDE THE WORLD OF TOM ROBERTS

(A BEN AND GRACIE ART ADVENTURE)

## TEACHERS' GUIDE

by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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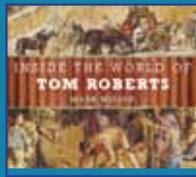
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[www.benandgracie.com.au](http://www.benandgracie.com.au)

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## Introduction

Mark Wilson continues his extraordinary works of homage to great Australian artists in *Inside the World of Tom Roberts*, his second book in the *Ben and Gracie Art Adventure* series.

Once again, he brings to life the work of another 'iconic' Australian artist. In this book, as in the first, Ben and Gracie enter the art gallery where their mother works, and are given a golden ticket by a mysterious man. They then find themselves 'inside' a painting by Tom Roberts, having been transported back in time, and encountering a number of people as they observe various scenes which appeared in Roberts' paintings.

They witness events of the times such as riding and shearing. They spot an artists' camp along the way which gives readers an idea of how artists such as Tom Roberts worked 'en plein air' to create their artworks. Then they are caught in the crossfire during a stagecoach ambush by bushrangers. Will they escape the fate which may await them?

Mark Wilson has paid tribute to an artist he reveres in faithfully interpreting Roberts' style in the art which provides the visual narrative in this book. He celebrates the workers of the times, and the traditions reflected in their bush ballads which have continued to imbue our national identity with stories of horses, stockmen and bushrangers. He tells the story in painterly spreads, several of which are versions of some of Roberts' classic artworks.

## Themes & Curriculum Topics

This picture book touches on themes which might be used in conjunction with curriculum topics with primary or secondary school students in the following suggested areas:

### Study of History, Society and Environment

#### Early Settlers or 'Pioneers' in Australia

**Discussion Point:** What values or qualities did Roberts' paintings suggest that these early 'settlers' possessed?

**Discussion Point:** Secondary students might read Henry Lawson's stories or poems to inform their 'reading' of these artworks.

**Activity:** Write a brief story interpreting any of the images of early settlers in the work. [See also Language and Literacy below.]

**Activity:** Read some non-fiction about early settlers as background to reading his work. [See list in Bibliography below.]

**Discussion Point:** Roberts is said to celebrate 'strong masculine labour' in his work. Which of these paintings demonstrates that?

#### Bushrangers

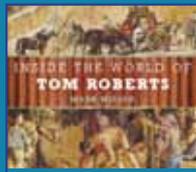
**Activity:** Research bushrangers and how they interacted with people and effected the use of and development of transportation in this period.

**Activity:** Ask your students to write a story about being attacked by bushrangers. Then draw a scene from the story.

### Visual Literacy

The visual text of a book works with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

**Activity:** Mark Wilson has 'interpreted' the work of the great master Tom Roberts, by creating masterful works of his own. He is paying 'homage' to someone he admires, in cleverly making a story out of the paintings by having them represent successive scenes in the narrative he is telling. For example, when Ben and Gracie go with Ann to her father's farm they witness several scenes along the way and then participate in the shearing scene made famous in one of his works. Discuss how artists often draw on and extemporise on the work of previous artists in their own works.



**Activity:** Impressionism was a nineteenth century art movement in which artists began to work 'en plein air' which means they worked out of doors using natural light to create the effects they desired. (In Australia it was sometimes called the Heidelberg School as well.) Students might like to research both Impressionism and working out of doors, at sites such as 'En Plein Air' *Wikipedia* <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En\\_plein\\_air](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En_plein_air)> and 'Australian Expressionism' National Gallery of Victoria <<http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/learn/schools-resources/australian-impressionism/>> and 'Heidelberg School' *Wikipedia* <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidelberg\\_School](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidelberg_School)>

**Activity:** Choose one of Roberts' paintings and invite students to make comments on what it 'says' or 'means' to them, what techniques they observe in it, and then to create their own 'interpretation' of it. For example 'By the Treasury' (1889) was actually painted on a wooden cigar box lid, a medium he often used while a student.

[See also **Blackline Master 1**]

**Activity:** Have students identify the paintings interpreted in this book using the key at the back of the book provided by the artist, Mark Wilson. They can then look up the original artworks online or visit some of them at a gallery if they happen to be close to the collections where some of them are held, in order to view them and compare them to Wilson's works.

**Activity:** Have students research Tom Roberts' work. [See **Bibliography** below.] Then have them write a précis of **ten interesting facts** that they have discovered about him.

**Activity:** Compare his work to that of ` whose work Wilson explored in Book 1 in this series.

**Activity:** The **cover** of this book includes two of Roberts' paintings: 'Shearing the Rams' (1890) which demonstrates the hard work and the camaraderie necessary for survival, and 'Bailed Up' (1895/1927) which depicts the frontier lifestyle experienced by many. Discuss the two different views of life in this era represented by these paintings. Discuss the techniques used in them. [See also both notes at the back of the book and **Author's Notes** below].

**Activity:** In this book the painting 'Shearing the Rams' has been re-mastered to include Ben and Gracie in it. Compare it to the original. You might also read about the 2010 staged re-enactment of the painting: Laurissa Smith and Warwick Long from Tocumwal 2714 'Blades of Glory' Monday, 07/06/2010 <<http://www.abc.net.au/rural/content/2010/s2920518.htm>>

**Activity:** The front **endpapers** are a section from Wilson's version of Roberts' painting 'A Break Away' and the back endpapers are drawings of Ben and Gracie. Look at the drawings; they give you a good idea of how an artist 'works up' images of people by drawing them in different poses, from different angles, and performing different actions. What other designs might have featured here on both front and back endpapers? Design your own alternative endpapers for this book.

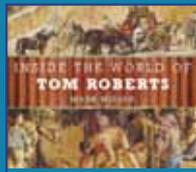
**Discussion Point:** The **title page** includes another smaller vignette from the painting 'Shearing the Rams'. In focussing on one person in a larger painting, how does that change your view of it? Experiment by cutting a piece from photocopies of various images included in the book, and sharing them amongst classmates. How would you interpret them without the surrounding 'back story'?

**Discussion Point:** The **format** of the book is **square**. The **layout of the storyboard** is varied, and the text appears either to the right or to the left of, the artwork. Why do artists vary format in this way?

**Activity:** The **medium or style** employed is the impressionistic style where Wilson uses grey lead pencil on paper and then creates a layered painted image which is suggestive and evocative. Discuss the use of the medium and how the artist captures light and shade in his work. [See **Author's Notes** below.]

**Question:** Encourage students to study how Roberts and Wilson use colours, then to paint a landscape they are familiar with.

**Activity:** **Texture** here is created by the fact that each artwork has been painted on a canvas. This adds to the painterly nature of the work included in the book. Draw a picture on paper, and then see how it changes when executed on canvas.



**Activity:** In some images there are small black and white pen drawings included on the page alongside the paintings. This demonstrates how an artist creates a drawing and then how it might later be transformed via painting techniques. Photocopy the drawing (p 11) of Ben talking to the artist in the camp, then enlarge it and give it to the students to create a painting from it. Compare the results.

**Discussion Point:** Discuss with students how paintings require planning, how an image is 'worked up' from these initial ideas, and how they might also use photographs, drawings and drafts in conceiving a finished artwork.

**Discussion Point:** Images of horses appear in a number of these pages. Discuss drawing horses with reference to books and websites, and then have students create their own picture of a horse. 'Learn to Draw Horses' about.com.

<[http://drawsketch.about.com/od/learntodrawhorses/Learn\\_to\\_Draw\\_Horses.htm](http://drawsketch.about.com/od/learntodrawhorses/Learn_to_Draw_Horses.htm)>

and 'How To Draw a Horse' How to Draw 200 Animals

<<http://www.howtodrawanimals.net/how-to-draw-a-horse>>

### English Language and Literacy

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**Question:** This story is told as a third **person, present tense account** of the children's adventures. **Dialogue** also enlivens this account. Re-tell the story in first person by either Ben or Gracie, and see how much this changes the story.

**Activity:** The story falls into the **narrative convention or trope** of a **bush adventure**, in that it depicts scenes from classic short stories. It has a chance meeting in the city; a journey to the country; an encounter with people on the road; a runaway horse; a working man's scene; and an attack by bushrangers. Read other stories by writers such as Henry Lawson with your students as background to reading and examining the images in this book.

**Activity:** Have your students write a story about what they saw at an art gallery. (This might be based on an art excursion to see works akin to the impressionist paintings of Tom Roberts.)

**Activity:** Test your students' comprehension by having them answer some quiz questions. [See **Blackline Master 2** below.]

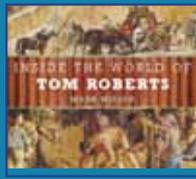
### Creative Arts

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

- **Improvise a scene** from one of the paintings included in this book. Try to convey the emotions which the painting suggests to you.
- **Create a diorama** of one of the paintings.
- After researching the paintings in this book, **imagine how a gallery guide would conduct a tour of the works**. What might she/he say about any one of them? Create your own guided commentary, including interesting facts about the artists Mark Wilson and Tom Roberts.

### Further Topics for Discussion & Research

- **Research the work of Mark Wilson.** Compare this book to other works such as *My Mother's Eyes*, *Angel of Kokoda* and the first book in this series.
- There are several picture books which explore the art of famous artists. You may wish to conduct a class unit on some of these. For example *Seen Art?* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith (Viking, 2005); *Linea in Monet's Garden* by Cristina Bjork, Lena Anderson, and Joan Sandin (R & S Books, 1987); *The Hero of Little Street* by Gregory Rogers (Allen and Unwin, 2010). [See list in **Bibliography** below.]
- Conduct a **class visit** to the local state, city or regional gallery. Create a list of questions which you'd like the students to answer about the works they see.
- You might also conduct a virtual tour of a range of galleries by encouraging students to visit a number of collections online. [See list in **Bibliography** below.]



## Conclusion

Mark Wilson is an original and inventive artist who has learned from his admiration for other great artists. This work is a tribute to Tom Roberts by another great artist who in these works is advising students to learn by observation, and then to develop their own unique style.

## Author's Notes

By Mark Wilson

*Inside the World of Tom Roberts* is my tribute to another great Australian painter. It is the second book in the Ben and Gracie's Art Adventures series.

This is how the story goes . . . When I was only eight years old, I came home from primary school and told Mum that I had to go to the technical school when I finished grade six, because they had an art course there and the high school didn't. We lived in Sale, a country town where, in those days, the technical school was pretty tough, so Mum didn't want me to go there, particularly as my brother and sisters were already going to the high school. But I eventually convinced her to send me there, and it was the best decision of my life!

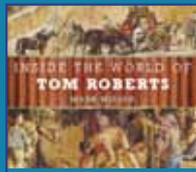
Growing up in the sixties – the era of 'flower power', the Beatles and 'doing your own thing' – when everything was changing so fast was very exciting for a young artist. It was a time of total freedom to express yourself however you wanted. Abstract painting or, more specifically, abstract expressionism, was the worldwide style of the moment. But I was a realist painter, with slight abstract leanings, and that was frowned upon at art school. I loved the work of William De Kooning, Edouard Manet, Francis Bacon, Fred Williams and Frederick McCubbin. Although my teachers knew my work was good – My first-year report card read: 'Mark has excelled in figure painting' – and I consistently received the highest scores in drawing, because my paintings weren't abstract they barely gave me a pass each year. I was unconcerned, though. I was about to be drafted into the army during the Vietnam War, so I had other things on my mind at the time!

I have never followed trends, especially in my paintings. When I came back from army service, I kept painting the way I wanted to. I went on to study the paintings of Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin, Claude Monet, Francis Bacon and Arthur Streeton out of pure admiration for these artists, and still love their work today. In fact, the magic of their paintings seems to intensify as I get older. There is a little bit of each of those great painters in my work, especially in my application of single brushstrokes of pure colour to the canvas, relying on the viewer's eye to 'mix' them. (This technique is called impressionism.) Tom Roberts' paintings seem to me to have an intensity and presence that make his work stand out above that of all the others, though, which gave me the inspiration for the story of *Inside the World of Tom Roberts*.

The main painting in *Inside the World of Tom Roberts* is *Bailed Up*, one of my all-time favourites. It is stunning and brilliantly executed, with fine and detailed brushwork. It's almost a landscape painting with the underlying danger of bushrangers taking second place to the stillness of the bush under the heat of the midday sun, which you can almost feel. The riders and horses and the stagecoach become part of the setting.

Paintings can be interpreted in a number of ways, as you can see from my versions of ten of Roberts' paintings. I have simply woven them into my story about the pioneers and bushrangers, with glimpses into the kinds of lives people led one hundred years ago. As with Ben and Gracie's first adventure, inside the world of Frederick McCubbin, I copied the work of Tom Roberts in paint on canvas as faithfully as I could. I even used black, as he did, which I had never done before. I then painted or sketched the other illustrations in a style as close to his as possible. I hope it has worked!

The paintings in *Inside the World of Tom Roberts* were all created using acrylics on primed cotton canvas. Tom Roberts painted on a similar canvas one hundred years ago. The drawings and sketches throughout the book were done using simple grey lead pencil on paper.



## About the Author/Illustrator

**Mark Wilson** was born in Brunswick, Victoria. He took to drawing from a very early age, and also loved comics. He went on to spend most of his teenage years 'pretending to be a drummer in a rock band (and trying my hardest to sing like John Lennon)'. He studied mural design and painting at C.I.T. (now Monash, Caulfield Campus). He also did National Service, followed by a Diploma of Education. In the early seventies, he became designer and illustrator for The Education Magazine and Pursuit Magazine, and also started illustrating for various publishers including Penguin, Rigby and Brooks Waterloo. In 1981 he held his first solo exhibition of paintings and drawings. Recently, he has focussed on writing and illustrating children's books and also picture book presentations in schools and at literature festivals. His recent books include *Journey of the Sea Turtle*, (2010 Whitley Award, Children's Picture Book), which highlights the fragile existence of sea turtles, *Last Tree* (2007 Whitley Award for Children's Picture Books), which deals with the effect deforestation has on the creatures that inhabit our forests, and *My Mother's Eyes-The Story of a Boy Soldier* (2010 CBCA Notable Picture Book Award and Eva Pownall (CBCA) Notable Picture Book Award), which is about World War One, were published by Hachette Australia in 2009, and *Angel of Kokoda* which is about World War Two, in 2010. And he began the Ben and Gracie series in 2010 as well, with *Ben and Gracie's Art Adventure: Frederick McCubbin*. <<http://www.markwilson.com.au/>> <<http://www.mymotherseyes.com.au/>>

# INSIDE THE WORLD OF TOM ROBERTS TEACHERS' GUIDE

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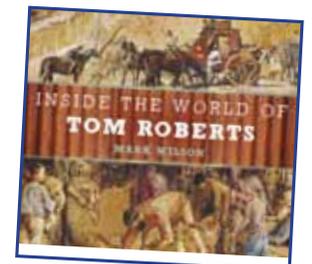
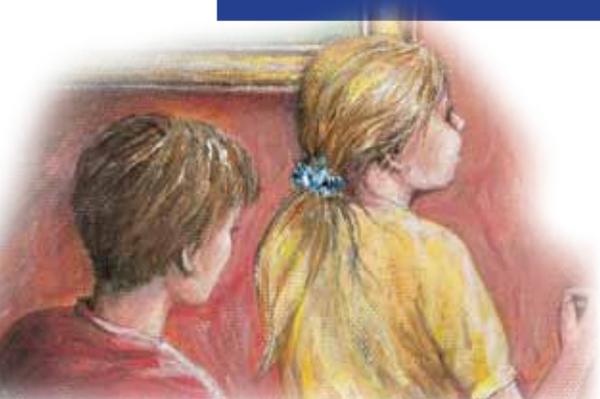
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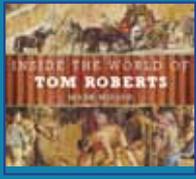
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## BLACKLINE MASTER - BM 1 CREATE YOUR OWN MASTERPIECE

Ben and Gracie are admiring a painting. Create your own masterpiece in this frame.





## BLACKLINE MASTER - BM 2 QUIZ

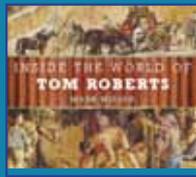
These questions can all be answered by reading or interpreting the art and text in this picture book.

### Questions:

1. What is the magic item which gives the children access to time travel?
2. What happens after they see the painting 'Harper's Weekly'?
3. When they are transported back to the time of Tom Roberts, who do they meet?
4. When they pass the Artists' Camp who do they see there?
5. When they get to the farm what work do they do?
6. When the bushrangers are holding up the stagecoach how many troopers arrive?
7. What happened to one of the bushrangers as he was chased?
8. Which famous bushranger is mentioned?
9. What does Ben come back with?
10. What painting is on the front cover?
9. What is their mother's name?
10. In the picture on the title page what are the children doing?

**Answers:** 1. A ticket given to them by a man as they enter the gallery. 2. A strange glow emanating from one of the paintings. 3. A 'salon hang' is where the curator chooses to arrange works on a wall in close proximity to each other, and sometimes in a non-symmetrical manner, which was popular in the nineteenth century. These days, works are generally hung in isolation with a large amount of white space around them, but in some state galleries you'll still see works hung in 'salon' style. 4. They read the woman's journal about the long journey from England to Australia. 5. They go to collect wildflowers and hear a baby crying and go to investigate. 6. They are cutting and collecting wood on a cart. 7. They go to find Mary, and she is watching fairies so they play with them, and then find themselves lost. 8. They follow the cattle path.

9. Mrs Green. 10. They are running through the gallery.



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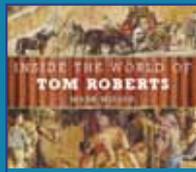
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### About the Author of the Notes

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright has operated justified text writing and publishing consultancy services since 1997, is widely published on children's and young adult literature, publishing history and Australian fiction, and manages publishing projects, including the APA's biennial Residential Editorial Program (REP). She writes reading group and teachers notes for several publishers, and judges a number of literary awards. She was the founding director of the QWC (1991-7) and a co-founder of Jam Roll Press. She has taught at a number of universities as a casual lecturer. Her books include Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946-2005 (co-edited with Craig Munro, UQP, 2006), and Hot iron Corrugated Sky 100 Years of Queensland Writing (co-edited with Stuart Glover, UQP, 2001). She is a member of the ASA Board, and president of the Curtis Coast Literary Carnivale Inc Committee.