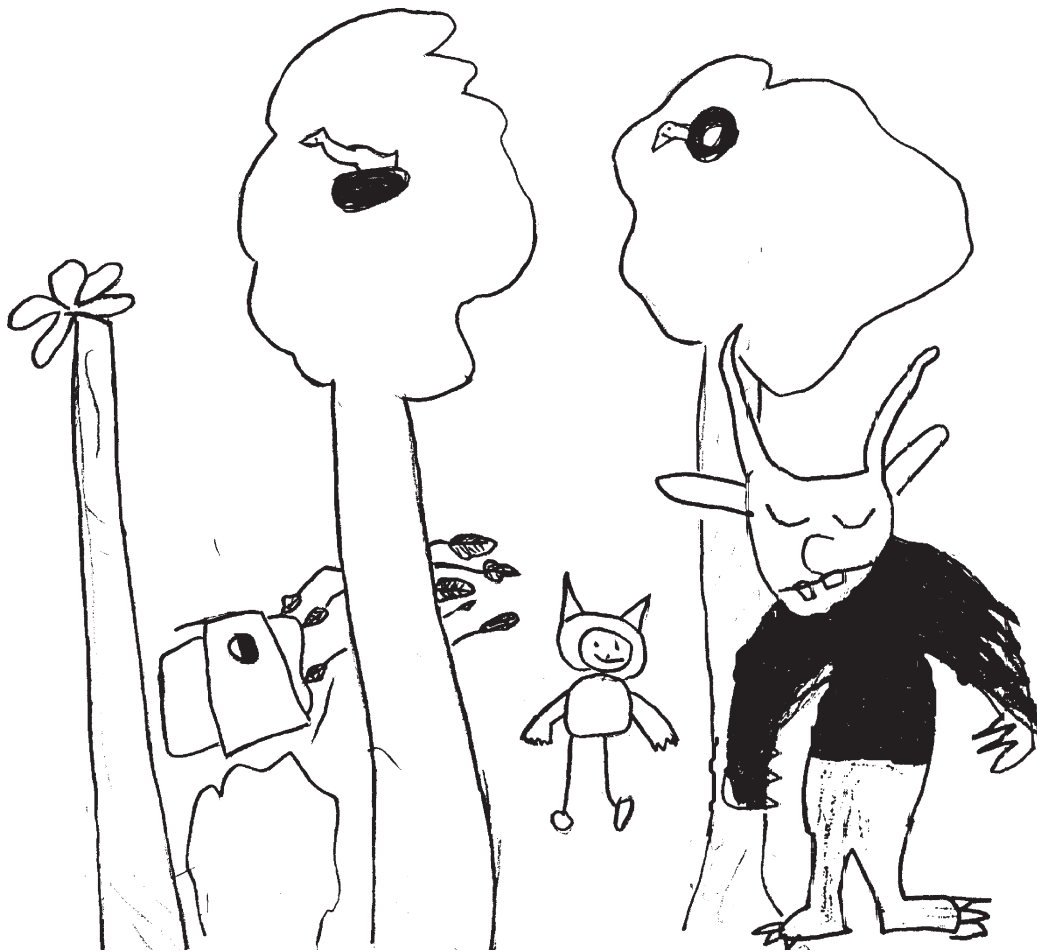


# Where the Wild Things Are



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## The author: Maurice Sendak

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**Intriguing Ideas.** For some of the powerful intriguing ideas this story raises see *Web of Intriguing Ideas*. For example: *anger; dreaming; love; punishment*.

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**Book details.** Harmondsworth Puffin Books, 1963

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North American writer and illustrator, Maurice Sendak, was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1928. Sendak began his working life as a display artist at F. A. Schwarz, a famous toy-shop, and studied at the Art Students League in the evenings. He illustrated his first children's book in 1951. The turning point in his career was publication in 1963 of *Where the Wild Things Are*, which won the Caldecott Medal in 1964. This book has sold millions of copies since and has been translated into many languages. It has also been adapted as an opera, for which Sendak designed both the sets and the costumes. He has also designed sets and costumes for a production of Mozart's opera *The Magic Flute* and for other ballets and operas.

Sendak has won many other prestigious prizes for his contribution to children's literature. His other famous picture books include *Outside Over There* and *In the Night Kitchen*. He says that many of his stories are inspired by Jewish tales and that his characters are often modelled on his own relatives. Sendak says that he doesn't write books for children, but that this isn't the same as not caring for them. What interests him in particular is what children do when there are no rules, no laws, and when they don't know what's expected of them emotionally. In his writing and illustrations he projects his favourite music, pictures, and passionate affiliation with childhood. His own fears dominate his childhood memories. He was frightened of his parents, his nine-year older sister and the vacuum cleaner, which still frightens him. It's only when he started to draw the monsters in *Where The Wild Things Are* that he recognised in them the uncles and aunts he didn't really care for. When they visited his house when he was little he was stuck for hours with them in the living room while his Mum was cooking Sunday dinner. Sendak resented the fact that they were eating his food and was very reluctant to share it with them. Sitting and waiting for the dinner gave him plenty of opportunity to examine every spot, mole, blackened tooth, bloodshot eye, and hair sticking out of a nostril. His concern was what might happen if his Mum would take too long over cooking dinner. They could lean over and decide to eat him – after all they ate everything in sight!

Although this is what the author himself says about the book, let it inform, but not direct what you find is important for the children to talk about. They will pick out what is meaningful for them. As Sendak himself clearly identifies, children make the best critics. And those adults who are determined to know what it is that scares children don't know it at all.

**The story**

Max is wearing his wolf suit and making mischief. His mother calls him “wild thing” and he replies “I’ll eat you up”. She sends him to bed without his supper. He looks very angry. In his room a forest starts to grow and the walls become “the world all around”. An ocean appears and Max happily steps into a boat and sails off ‘through night and day and in and out of weeks and almost over a year’. He arrives at a place where the Wild Things are. Max tames them and they make him the king. There is a wild rumpus. Then Max feels lonely and wants to be where someone loves him best of all. He sails home and finds his supper waiting for him in his room – still hot.

**Responses to this book**

*Where the Wild Things Are* is a very powerful book. It often evokes very strong responses from children and adults alike. Some find it magical, adventurous and exciting; others find it fearful.

**Leading ideas in the book**

The book’s themes include: *punishment; anger; dreaming; love; imagination, daydreaming, power, family*. For expansion on some of these themes please see the *Web of Intriguing Ideas*.

**Teacher preparation**

Find a quiet moment away from school and the classroom. Make sure you are not wearing your ‘teacher hat’. Read *Where the Wild Things Are* to yourself and for yourself. Look at the pictures carefully. What is your own personal response to this book? What do you find thought-provoking about it? Do you feel empathy with any particular character? Do you recognise the emotions? Do you recognise the experiences? What happens in the story? Think carefully. Has anything like this ever happened to you or anyone you know? Are you puzzled by anything that happens in the text or in the pictures? Where does it take you? Notice your own response. There is no need to write anything down.

**Some adults’ questions prompted by this book**

- Why do we sometimes want to eat those we love?
- Was Max dreaming?
- Did Max deserve to be punished?
- Why did his mother call him a wild thing?
- Why was Max able to control the monsters?

**Session one****Reading together**

Read the story with the class. Make sure everyone has proper access to the text and pictures. As a teacher, come to the material again as if for the first time. Be observant about the reactions and responses of the children. Ask the children to think about what they find puzzling about the story. Is anybody disturbed by it? Be watchful.

- Thinking time* Tell the children that you are interested in their ideas and responses. You want to know what they think about it. You are going to give them some time to think on their own, with a neighbour, to draw their ideas and write their questions. Spelling and handwriting don't matter – good thinking is what is important.
- Record questions* This is a crucial part of the process. The formulation of questions is instructive in itself. Take as long as you need to record the children's questions. Do not rush this stage. If you have a large class you might ask the children to share their questions in a small group first and then offer one question to the class as a whole. Record the questions faithfully. Write down the name of whoever asked each question.
- Just a few examples* There are hundreds of questions that might arise from this text. Avoid looking for particular questions that match your own interests in the story. Give equal weight to each question. Everyone needs to be able to see the questions. Here are examples of questions raised by children:
- Was it a dream?
  - Were the monsters real?
  - Were the monsters people dressed up?
  - Did Max plant seeds in his bedroom?
  - How come his supper was still hot?
- Examine the questions* Invite the class to clarify the questions if necessary and to establish possible connections between them.
- Choose a question* Where is a good place to begin the discussion? One example could be, 'Was it a dream?'. You might begin by asking the children to start by looking for ideas in the story itself. What are the clues in the text and the pictures about whether or not Max is dreaming? Together with the class you could note down the evidence in two columns: Dreaming/Not dreaming.
- Session two**
- Moving on*  
Revisit the story and the discussion from the first session.  
What happened to Max? What were we thinking about last time? Let's look at the notes we made. Have you had any further thoughts since we last met?
- Teacher's questions*  
We were talking about whether or not Max was dreaming.
- How can we tell whether it is a dream or not?
  - How do we know when we are dreaming?

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*Sample of young children's dialogue on the above*

*What does it mean to dream? – Why do we dream?*

teacher: How do you know when you're dreaming?

child 1: 'Cos you've got imagination going through your head.

child 2: I feel like I'm dreaming now at school.

teacher: How can we tell if this bit's a dream or not?

child 3: We're babies and we're dreaming that we're at school.

child 5: When we're at school doing work we are dreaming about doing work.

child 6: I don't think we're dreaming because the juniors are here.

child 7: We're not dreaming, because we didn't go to sleep first.

child 8: We only have dreams when we are at home in bed.

child 4: I think we're in a book.

child 9: I think we're on TV

child 10: We can't be on TV because there would be cameras all around us

child 11: When you're dreaming it's like a video

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*Concept map of discussion*

It is helpful to demonstrate to children different ways in which we can organise ideas on paper. One way to clarify thinking or move discussion on is to use a concept map (See Chapter 2 of *Teachers' Guidance* for more details. Concept maps on dreaming might be built around the following key themes:

- Theories: about how we know when we're dreaming and about what makes us dream particular dreams.
- Associations: for example, of dreams with sleep and bed, of dreams with films and books.
- Important distinctions: for example, between dreaming and day-dreaming, and between dreaming and imagining. If the children bring up the distinctions, you can do photocopyable Sheets 1 and 2 which are printed at the end of this section.

*Philosophical puzzlement: the Web of Intriguing Ideas*

The concepts and ideas underlying the children's questions may be developed using one or more of the 'intriguing ideas' supplied with each edition of *Storywise*. Look in the index to see what is available. In the case of this imaginary series of sessions, the intriguing idea of *dreaming* would be one to choose. Reading through the text of each intriguing idea will give you ideas for questions to pose in discussions and for follow-up work of your own design.

### Children's speculations

- Maybe I'm dreaming. Maybe we're all dreaming. Maybe everyone in the whole world is dreaming. Maybe we won't wake up. (Louis, age 5)
- I think Max read the book and put on the costume and that made him dream about it. (Ian, age 6)

### Session three

*New question:* Were the monsters real?

#### *First thoughts*

- The monsters were mums and dads dressed up.
- They were people wearing masks.
- They were big because one person was sitting on someone else's shoulders like they do in pantomimes.
- Max made them up in his mind.
- They weren't real because nobody has ever seen monsters like that.
- They had human feet.
- They were bits of animals mixed up.

#### *New question to emerge*

If monsters like those aren't real how do we get the ideas in our minds?

#### *Review*

Invite children to reflect on how their thinking has changed or developed during the work together.

- When we first read this story I thought ... Now I think ...
- What I want to think about next is ...

### Some possible follow-up activities

- Make a class book of drawings and questions about the story.
- Make a wall display of your concept maps – don't forget to show how ideas are connected.
- Have a discussion wall in the classroom where children can write any thoughts they have between sessions.
- Have a dream diary in the classroom in which children can record their dreams.
- Let them brainstorm, constructing their own metaphors and similes of dreams. Start them off by asking 'Dreams are like ... ?'
- Make a drawing of what your bedroom would be like if you could turn it into something very different.
- Invite the children to suggest ideas for follow up.

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For other ideas that might emerge from the story, see the 'Leading ideas in the book' p.5 in combination with the index of the *Web of Intriguing Ideas*.

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# Where the wild things are

Name:

Class:

## WHAT IS POSSIBLE?

What do you think can and cannot happen? Tick what you think is the right answer and find out whether you agree or disagree with the other children in the class and think about your own and their reasons. More than one answer is possible!

### 1. A forest grows in your bedroom?

- It can happen in thinking.
- It can happen in dreams.
- It can really happen.
- It can happen in my imagination.

### 2. Becoming King of the Wild Things?

- It can happen in thinking.
- It can happen in dreams.
- It can really happen.
- It can happen in my imagination.

### 3. To be both in bed and where the Wild Things are, at the same time?

- It can happen in thinking.
- It can happen in dreams.
- It can really happen.
- It can happen in my imagination.

### 4. To tame the Wild Things with the magic trick?

- It can happen in thinking.
- It can happen in dreams.
- It can really happen.
- It can happen in my imagination.

### 5. To have Wild Things around you and still be lonely?

- It can happen in thinking.
- It can happen in dreams.
- It can really happen.
- It can happen in my imagination.

### 6. To travel for almost a year and smell your supper at home?

- It can happen in thinking.
- It can happen in dreams.
- It can really happen.
- It can happen in my imagination.

# Where the wild things are

Name:

Class:

## **DREAMING, DAYDREAMING, IMAGINING?**

**Cross out the sentences you think are false and leave the sentences you believe are true.**

Dreaming is real.

Daydreaming is real.

Imagining is real.

I can change what I dream.

I can change what I daydream.

I can change what I imagine.

I am dreaming.

I am daydreaming right now.

I am imagining.

I can find out whether I am dreaming.

I can find out whether I am daydreaming by pinching myself.

I can find out whether I am imagining.

When I am dreaming, I am asleep.

When I am daydreaming, I am asleep.

When I am imagining, I am asleep.

I can imagine what it would be like without dreaming.

I can imagine what it would be like without daydreaming.

I can imagine what it would be like without imagining.