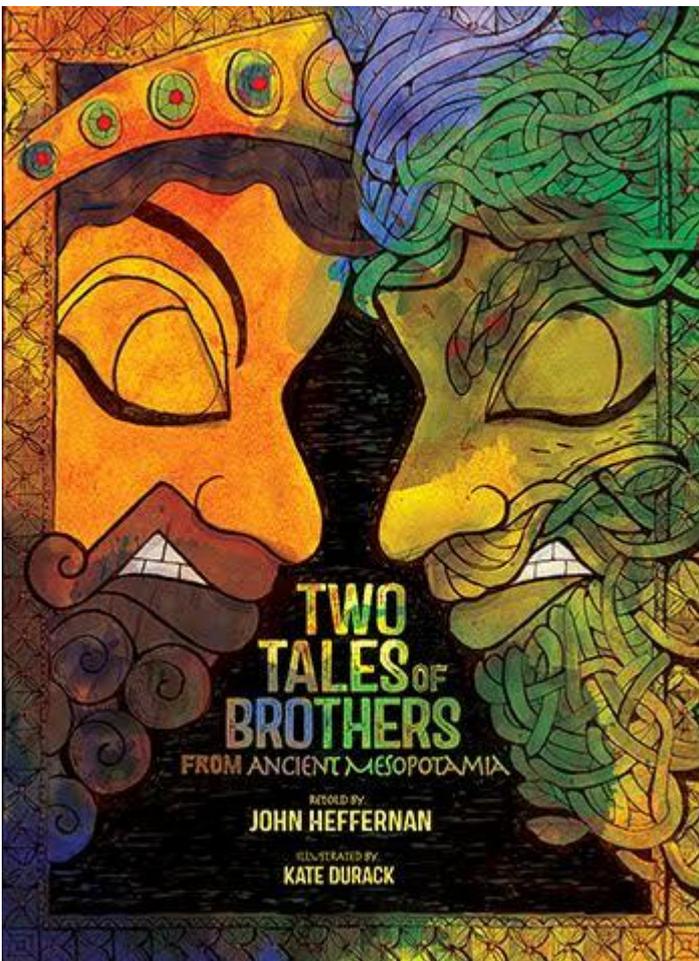




Teachers' Notes for ***Two Tales of Brothers from Ancient Mesopotamia***

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**Two Tales of Brothers from Ancient Mesopotamia**

Retold by John Heffernan

Illustrated by Kate Durack

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*The ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, located in what is now Iraq, Syria and Kuwait, produced one of the world's great heroic sagas, the Epic of Gilgamesh. In this exciting, lively retelling, popular author John Heffernan brings two stories from the Epic to engaging life for young readers, while new illustrator Kate Durack's striking illustrations, inspired by Ancient Mesopotamian art, superbly illuminate the mythical world of the heroic brothers.*

### **About the author:**

For as long as he can remember, multi-award-winning author John Heffernan has been fascinated by the power of the story.

'People are captured by stories,' he says. 'They live the characters, they enact the dramas, they feel the tension and the emotion. Stories are the very basis of what we are about.'



John has written over thirty books under his own name for all ages from early readers to young adults. He's particularly passionate about the stories behind some of his award-winning books: the Spud series, *My Dog*, *The Island*, *A Horse Called Elvis*, *Where There's*

*Smoke, Marty's Shadow*, and his latest novel, *Naveed* – the story of a young Afghan boy's struggle to keep his family together. He has written a further twenty books as Charlie Carter. But that's another story.

### **About the illustrator:**

Born and raised in Brisbane, artist and illustrator Kate Durack lived and worked in Sydney and Malaysia before moving to the regional NSW town of Walcha, where she now lives. Her work has featured in several exhibitions. *Two Tales of Brothers from Mesopotamia* is her first picture book.



### **Something from the Author:**

From a very early age I wanted to be an archaeologist. That didn't eventuate, but I've never lost my love of ancient history, and one area that has held a deep fascination for me is ancient Mesopotamia. All those wonderfully evocative names - Akkadians, Babylonians, Sumerians, Hittites, Egyptians - oozing with the essence of antiquity. Fierce warrior societies, the growth of great cities, arts and religion, myths and tales of great kings and queens. And right up there as one of the greatest tales of all is the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh is one of the oldest tales ever told, and stands as a template for many of the great epics that followed. The Sumerian version dates from earlier than 2000 BC, while the

twelve cuneiform tablets of the Akkadian version from around 1300 BC are signed by the oldest known author in history, Sin-liqe-unninni. That is so exciting to me as an author.

When I read Gilgamesh I'm gripped by the sheer thrill that this is one of the places where it all began, where we started writing stories, creating myths, religion, culture, civilisation, where we developed organised society, kings and queens, priest and pharaohs, ultimately leaving our wild ways behind. This is where we began to really manifest our potential as creative, thinking creatures. And yet there is also a sense of tragedy here, for this is where we began to lose part of us that we will never regain - a deep connection with Nature.

Gilgamesh is many things. A rich yarn packed full of action and suspense, with wonderful larger-than-life characters. An epic journey by a great king in search of the meaning of life. A tale of gods, myths and monsters in a world ruled by those things. But the part I like most, and the piece that I have retold in these two stories, is the friendship between two mighty warriors - Gilgamesh (King of Uruk) and Enkidu (Wildest of Wild Men).

These two tales can be seen as parables of ancient Man's co-existence with not only the Neanderthals but even wilder species of humanity. Enkidu represents our Neanderthal links that ultimately became extinct 30,000 years ago, but are still said to be in the DNA of some of us. His taming by the beautiful Shamhat symbolises the weakening and loss of our savage past by the lure of civilising forces. And yet to this very day we still hang onto vestiges of that wildness. To me, that makes the Epic of Gilgamesh a beautifully timeless exploration of the human condition.

*John Heffernan*

## **Something from the Illustrator**

I was born in steamy hot Brisbane in the early 70's. I have very happy memories of long summers, languishing on hot verandas and being read *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Outside Over There*, endless *Asterix* and *Tintin* - sometimes even in French (or what my grandparents would claim to be French – it sounded exotic anyway!). In those formative years, I developed a real love for children's books, particularly the drawings.

I've gone on to have a career in graphic design, which has paid the bills and exposed me to the world of print and media – but the niggling need to illustrate has still buzzed about.

In 2012, my family and I made a fortuitous tree change to Walcha in Northern NSW. And as luck would have it, I met John (Heffernan) and he suggested that I might be interested in illustrating a book with him ... I jumped at the chance and here we are!

I was vaguely aware of the story of Gilgamesh. Keen to know more, I started to really look at the incredible art of Mesopotamia (now Syria, Iran and Iraq). The striking relief sculptures in stone and alabaster were the inspiration for my illustrations.

Particularly in the first story about the brothers, I directly referenced existing sculptures where possible, and then emulated the same style when an existing image was not available.

The second story is a little different – as they are the combination of the relief sculpture style and more graphic ‘comic’ one (perhaps a bit ‘Asterix-esque!’)

A linking device between these two tales is a ‘flat linear style’, in keeping with the art of this period.

As for the colours, John early on had suggested that he saw the book as very colourful, heavy in the Prussian blues, reds and golds of ancient Mesopotamia. Wanting to achieve this with a modern twist, I felt the unpredictability of the splashed watercolour was a nice juxtaposition, and added drama to the ridged clean lines of my ink pen.

Note ... One subtle element I wanted to include (from early on), was when Gilgamesh starts out the book, he is shown in rich golds – but gradually as he becomes more powerful, his glow tarnishes, leaving him almost translucent and dull, until he is united with his brother and the glow returns.

All the illustrations were drawn with a quill pen using sepia ink, and then digitally coloured in photoshop.

*Kate Durack*

### **Classroom activities devised by John Heffernan, based on *Two Tales of Brothers from Ancient Mesopotamia***

#### **WRITING**

Research the history of writing.

Play around with various types of ancient writing: Cuneiform, Pictograms, Hieroglyphs etc.

Try to write simple messages in them.

Make a clay tablet with ancient writing.

Create your own hieroglyphs, or make a code with cuneiform symbols.

#### **STORY TELLING**

Research the history of Epic Tales. Discuss the original meaning of the word EPIC, from the Ancient Greek for poem or story.

Look at various Epics through history, especially ancient ones, and across cultures and regions. Greek, Roman, Indian, Germanic.

Obtain brief summaries of such epics as Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, Virgil’s Aeneid, Ramayana, Beowulf, and compare them to Gilgamesh. What do they have in common?

What are some of the main characteristics of Epic tales?

#### **GROWTH OF CITIES**

Mesopotamia is where cities first began to appear. Research some early cities. Ur, Uruk, Babylon.

Create models of early buildings like temples, ziggurats, pyramids.

Create a street scene from an ancient city, either by drawing or modelling in clay, fimo, cardboard etc.

#### **WEAPONS**

Research weapons of ancient history. Swords, spears, axes, bows and arrows, shields. War machines, chariots, siege engines.

Create a battle scene with models, soldiers, war gear etc

## **MYTHOLOGY**

Research the many different gods, demi-gods and heroes from various ancient cultures. Create models of these figures/characters

## **ANIMALS**

Research the roles of different animals in Ancient Mesopotamia and surrounding areas. The cow, the bullock for ploughing, the horse for transport and warfare. What about dogs, sheep, goats? What roles did they play in ancient cultures. What of wild animals like the lion, tiger, snakes? Discuss their role in mythology. Create models of the various animal deities.

## **FOOD**

What did the ancient people eat? The rich, the poor?

Write the menu for an ancient Mesopotamian Banquet of the type that King Gilgamesh might hold in honour of Enkidu. What sort of entertainment might there be at the banquet?

## **TRANSPORT**

How did the ancient people get around? Land transport? River transport? The sea?