

## Title: Up To Something

**Author:** Katrina McKelvey

**Illustrator:** Kirrili Lonergan

**Publisher:** EK Books

**Price:** \$24.95

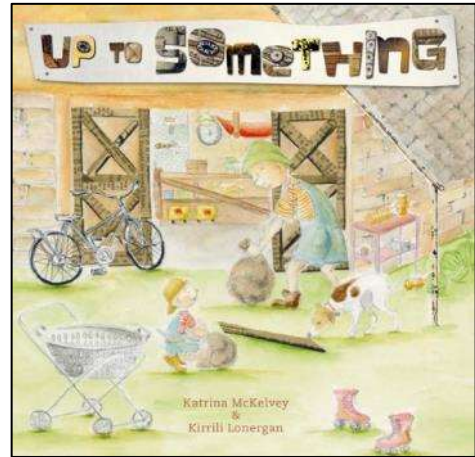
**ISBN:** 978-1-925335-70-5 (Hardcover)

**Publication Date:** May 2019

**Audience Age:** 4 to 9 years

**Type of Text:** Picture Book

**Key Curriculum Areas:** English, Environmental Studies, STEM, HSIE, PD/H/PE, The Arts



### SYNOPSIS:

When Billy finally gets invited into Dad's shed, Billy thinks they'll be working together on a building project. Soon Billy discovers he's only going to be his dad's assistant. It seems Dad has underestimated Billy's talent and now it's time for Billy to show him what he can do, and ultimately what they can do together!

### THEMES:

Father-son relationship, recycling, creativity, imagination and invention, teamwork, bonding, learning new things, how to build a motorless cart

### SELLING POINTS:

- A fun story about a father-son relationship with a subtle recycling message.
- The story can be linked to STEM outcomes and many other parts of the curriculum.
- This story is perfect for families and classroom/education settings.
- The ending highlights the power of teamwork.
- The text and illustrations give lots of hints on how to build a motorless cart.
- This story is full of wonder, curiosity and creativity.
- There's a subtle message to parents about remaining focused on/engaged with their kids when they're together.
- This story points out that sometimes children know more and can do more than their parents and teachers realise.
- It highlights the differing ways children and adults see the same things.
- The author has used lots of verbs and minimal text. The detailed illustrations work hard to show hidden objects and the emotional reactions of the characters.
- Objects used to build Billy's cart and the final cart are in the background of the illustrations from the beginning of the story.

**WRITING and ILLUSTRATION STYLE:**

*Up To Something* is a gentle story, beautifully reflecting the relationship between a father and his son. Anticipation and excitement is felt by Billy, the main character at the beginning of the story. However, this quickly changes as Billy's dad is reluctant to allow his son to use tools. This mirrors the protective nature of parents but children have little fear and they want to experience lots of new, physical things as they grow and develop in the early years.

This is an emotional story told with minimal text and leans heavily on the detailed illustrations. It will take several reads to spot all the details in them. You'll discover new, hidden gems with each reading experience.

The author has used lots of verbs during the building process in the story, but hasn't fully explained the building steps. The full step has been left to the reader to imagine, supported by the illustrations. The illustrations also beautifully portray Billy's changing feelings throughout the story. Keep an eye on these.

Monty, Billy's dog, runs around in the background having fun as well. See if you can find what he gets up to, as his adventures are not described in the text.

As this is a story with a recycling theme woven throughout, keep an eye on the illustration backgrounds. Lots of items used in Billy's cart and their combined cart at the end are in the illustrations from the beginning, including the cover!

The term, 'billy cart' is only used in Australia so the author has not used the term in the text. The illustrator has called the final cart, 'Billy's Cart' as a reference to the Australian term. The author also called the main character, Billy, after the Australian term. Other international terms include, motorless racer, downhill racer, gravity racer, and soap box derby cart.

Does Dad and Billy win the big cart race? That's up to you to interpret as you wish. Though the final endpapers may give you a hint.

The colours used throughout the book are warm and beautiful – just like Dad and Billy's relationship. The illustrator used recycled paper to collage parts of the illustrations to reflect the recycling theme.



### AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

This story came to me while I was asking my son to take out the recycling. I assumed he was taking it to the recycling bin outside, but then I had a crazy thought he may have been hiding it elsewhere to make something extraordinary (like an intergalactic rollercoaster) – and all the while I thought it was just a pile of recyclable items. After some refining, the story evolved as a lovely, realistic story of a boy and his dad and how they bond over the simple act of hand building a cart. The recycling element is still there but in the background.

### AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

**Katrina McKelvey** is a children’s author living in Newcastle with over ten years primary school teaching experience. She is highly involved in the Children’s Book Council of Australia, is an advisor and participant in literary conferences and festivals, and enthusiastically spreads her love of reading at regular school visits. *No Baths Week* and *Up To Something* are Katrina’s second and third publications, after her very successful debut picture book, *Dandelions*. There are two more picture books coming in 2020. She loves chocolate, but doesn’t like chocolate cake. She’s left-handed but plays sport right-handed. She loves tea, but dislikes coffee. Her website is [www.katrinamckelvey.com](http://www.katrinamckelvey.com)

**Kirrili Lonergan** is a picture book illustrator and art therapist residing in Newcastle NSW. She is a former paediatric nurse and a mother of four and is passionately involved in the children’s book community. Kirrili is the illustrator for the *Lessons of a LAC* series and has a further three picture books; *Dandelions*, *Ollie’s Treasure* and *Portia the Cricket Loving Pig, Goes to London*. She has been an active committee member of the CBCA NSW Branch Newcastle sub-branch for many years. She also volunteers for Book 4 Outback ensuring good quality literature reaches children in outback NSW. Her website is [www.kirrililonergan.com](http://www.kirrililonergan.com)



**INTERVIEW:**

**AUTHOR**

**What is the inspiration for this story?**

The idea began from me asking my son to take out the recycling. He was 10 at the time. Then I started asking myself, 'What if he wasn't taking it to the bin and he was putting it somewhere else to build something extraordinary later?' Then my mind went crazy!

**What was the most rewarding part of this project?**

There were several. Firstly, my publisher planting the idea of a billy cart. (Great suggestion!) Secondly, receiving a call that my manuscript had been accepted for publication after many ups and downs and lots of waiting. Thirdly, seeing the final illustrations all over Kirrili's house. OMG! Finally, launching our book together at the 2019 Newcastle Writers Festival.

**What was the most challenging part of this project?**

Getting the manuscript right so it was a great story and publishable. Getting the title right as well. It had four different ones along the way.

And the waiting! Three years from first draft in my computer to when I had the book in my hands.

**ILLUSTRATOR**

**What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.**

Illustrations were created using mixed media. Gouache, pencil, pastels, and felt tip pen were also used. Given that the story had a recycling theme, I collaged with aged music sheets and newspaper to enhance the illustrations.

**What was the most rewarding part of this project?**

I enjoyed researching for the illustrations by incorporating items and memories from my grandfather's workshop as well as the addition of the dog, Monty, owned by a dear friend. I enjoyed getting photographs of Monty in different poses so I could effectively portray him and his emotions within the book. Incorporating snippets of family and friends in my illustrations adds to the pleasure of illustrating books.

**What was the most challenging part of this project?**

The most challenging part of the project was the late decision by me to add the dog. A challenge well worth it!





## SUGGESTED TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:

### ENGLISH

#### Before reading:

- Look at the cover. What can you find?
- Who are the characters?
- What could this book be about? (Don't give away it has a billy cart in it before reading – this will spoil the 'up to something' part of the story.)
- How do the colours make you feel?
- Where are the endpapers? Any hints on what the story might be about?
- Now read the blurb. What else have you learnt about the story?
- Now visit Katrina McKelvey's YouTube channel and watch the trailer for this book.  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgfVHAHyIHP14oeEkGI2jtA?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgfVHAHyIHP14oeEkGI2jtA?view_as=subscriber)
- What else have you learnt about the story?
- Now read the book and find out if you were correct.

#### After reading:

- What is the story about?
- Does it have a beginning, a middle and an end?
- What is the complication? How is it resolved?
- What are the story elements? (Characters, Setting, Plot, Conflict, Resolution, Time)
- Have you ever made a billy cart? Discuss.
- Show pictures of billy carts and billy cart races.
- Draw Dad and Billy. List their personality traits. How are they the same? How are they different?
- List all the verbs found in the story. (banging, drilling, sawing). The full billy cart building instructions are not in the story. Can you design a 'How to make a billy cart' poster and fill in the missing bits?
- Continue the story - Write about what happens during the race on the last page. Did they win? What went wrong? How did they resolve the complication?
- Come up with a new ending to this story.
- Discuss how the ending would have changed if Dad let Billy help with the first cart.
- Write a poem reflecting the story, about building something, or about being up to something.
- Can you write this story from Dad's point of view?
- Why is the dog in the story? (His name is Monty) What does he get up to? Why didn't the author mention the dog in the text?

### ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

- Why did Dad use bought materials while Billy used recycled materials to build there carts?
- If you could make a recycled billy cart, what could you use to make it?
- How can you recycle more? How is this happening in your home and in the classroom.
- What is landfill? What is global warming? How are these terms linked to the story?

**STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)**

- Look at the cover again. Discuss what items you can see on there. Discuss what is around your classroom or backyard that you can use to build a cart.
- In a table, list the materials Dad and Billy used to build their carts. How were they the same/different?
- Gravity – what is it? How is it used to make the cart go. Why does a billy cart not have a motor and pedals?
- What materials would you use to build a cart out of recycled materials. Draw a diagram or design it digitally. Can you build it as a class or homework project. Did you build it in teams or on your own?
- What skills do you need to build a cart? List them. (fine and gross motor, measuring, designing, imagination, drawing, working collaboratively)
- What other factors must be considered when designing a cart besides gravity? (ie wheels, slope, steering, quality of materials used, etc)
- Visit a bill cart derby. (eg. Gresford, Bangalow, Muswellbrook)
- Movement – How does a billy cart move?
- Use a hammer, saw, drill, screwdriver, and paint (with adult permission and supervision) and build something. How did it make you feel to build something on your own? (Cooperation, decision making, problem solving, persistence – active participation and safe use of equipment.)
- What safety precautions do you need to use when using tools? Did Billy and Dad use them? (active, safe fun play, health)

**HSIE:**

- Find out the history of carts. Did your parents or grandparents make and ride billy carts in their childhood? Do they have any photos like this one you could share?
- What are motorless carts called in different countries? Make a table of the different terms and in what country they're used in (soapbox derby carts, gravity racers, downhill racers)
- What countries have races/celebrations with carts?
- What other types of carts are there besides gravity carts? (eg. Go-carts)

**PD/H/PE**

- Do you feel adults sometimes stop you from doing things you know you can do? How does this feel? What can you do when this happens next time? What did Billy do? (resilience, stubborn, independent)
- Discuss the relationship between Billy and Dad. How did this change throughout the story?
- Discuss the feeling of disappointment and frustration.
- Discuss what Dad and Billy learnt, or how they changed throughout of the story.





## THE ARTS

### 1) VISUAL ARTS

- Given a variety of collage materials such as magazines and newspapers, design a 2D cart. How does yours look different to others?
- Explore line, shape and texture of the carts in the book and then design your own cart.
- Can you find all the materials Billy and Dad used in the final cart throughout the book?
- Discuss how collage can enhance illustrations.
- Design your own posters and host a cart race at school.
- Can you paint a picture reflecting the moods Billy experiences during the story (excitement, disappointment, frustration, pride). What colours did you use?

### 2) DRAMA

- Role play the feelings Billy experiences during the story.
- Role play reporters interviewing Dad and Billy after they win the race.
- Re-enact the story in pairs. Show feelings/emotions, action, plot, and be in character!

### 3) MUSIC

- What music/songs reflect the different moods in the story. What would be the song played during the race?

## SOME RESOURCES

- Gresford Billy Cart Derby FB Page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Gresford-Billy-Cart-Derby-108851879145635/>
- Bangalow Billy Cart Derby FB Page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/BangalowBillyCartDerby/>
- Katrina's Billy Cart Craft Board on Pinterest:  
<https://www.pinterest.com.au/katrinamckelvey/up-to-something-billy-cart-craft-ideas/>
- Katrina's website: [www.katrinamckelvey.com](http://www.katrinamckelvey.com)
- Kirrili's website: [www.kirrilionergan.com](http://www.kirrilionergan.com)

