

MARIO BRASSARD

GÉRARD DUBOIS

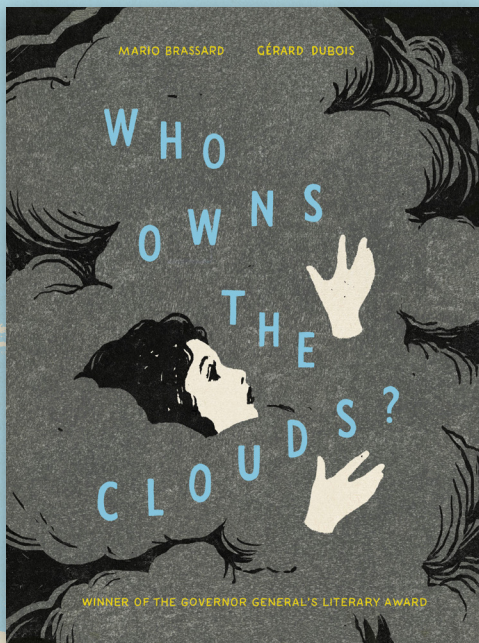
WHO
OWNS
THE
CLOUDS?

A stylized illustration in a dark, textured grey and black palette. A woman with dark hair is shown in profile, looking upwards with an open mouth. Above her, a hand reaches down from a dark, stormy sky. The sky is filled with dark, swirling clouds and lightning bolts. The overall mood is mysterious and dramatic.

WINNER OF THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S LITERARY AWARD

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE





ABOUT THE BOOK

A powerful and visually arresting fictional memoir of trauma, memory and hope in the aftermath of war, for readers 12 and up. For fans of *Maus*.

Even though Mila is no longer a child, she is overcome by memories — memories of a childhood halfway between reality and dreaming, and not knowing which is which.

In her dreams, Mila and her family leave their bombed village to stand in line for weeks on end, suitcases in hand, hoping to move on to better lives. But the memories of her uncle's disappearance, and the approach of looming clouds, keep blurring the lines between past and present, real and unreal. How can Mila move forward? Perhaps if the clouds can remind her of where she's from, they can also show her where to go . . .

Winner of a Governor General's Award, Canada's most prestigious literary prize, and the BolognaRagazzi Award, this stunningly evocative book about experience, trauma and healing will stay with readers from beginning to end.



MARIO BRASSARD

received a bachelor's degree in French Studies from the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivières. He has published four children's novels in French, including *La saison des pluies* (2011), which was awarded the TD Prize for Canadian Literature for Children, nominated for the Governor General's Award and selected for the IBBY 2012 Honor List and the White Ravens; *Quand hurle la nuit* (2015), a finalist for the Governor General's Award, and *Ferdinand F., 81 ans, chenille* (2018), which won the Governor General's Award. *Who Owns the Clouds?* is his first illustrated work.

Translated by **YVETTE GHIONE**



GÉRARD DUBOIS

studied graphic design at the École Supérieure des Arts Estienne in Paris before moving to Montreal in 1991. His 2015 children's book *Enfantillages* received a Special Mention from the BolognaRagazzi. His illustration work has appeared in the *New York Times* (in weekly column "Gray Matter"), the *Wall Street Journal*, *Time* (in Nancy Gibbs' ongoing column), *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic* and others, as well multiple Folio Society editions, and he has received multiple awards from the Society of Illustrators. His art has been exhibited in galleries around the world. In 2018, Canada Post released a stamp with his art as part of the Great Canadian Illustrators series. He currently teaches at the Université du Québec.

WHO OWNS THE CLOUDS?



by Mario Brassard and Gérard DuBois

Translated by Yvette Ghione • 9781774880210 • Tundra Books



Maybe memories are like clouds. Some, lighter, float high above; others are darker, weighing heavily on our shoulders for a long time, until the day we're finally ready to let them fly away.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RL.6-12.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RL. 6-12.2, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RL. 6-12.3,
CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RL.6-10.4, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL. 6-12.1.

1. Why is the book called *Who Owns the Clouds*? How does the dust jacket reflect the use of clouds as a metaphor? How do clouds appear in different ways in the pictures?
2. Describe where the narrator is from. Study the picture of a photograph that she is looking at when she says, "I still don't recognize myself." Compare it to an illustration of the same setting about 10 pages later that shows the scenery partly destroyed. What does the comparison show about what's happened to her and her family?
3. Discuss the illustrations and their use of dark and gray colors. What is the emotional impact of the palette? In what pictures does blue appear? What is the feel of those pictures? Find where the illustrations use the color red. Explain what it's used for and talk about the effect.
4. Analyze the double-spread pages that have no words on them. Why do you think they are wordless? How effectively is the story conveyed in those pictures?
5. Why do cats appear in pictures throughout the book? Why are the cats so often looking out a window? Why do you think the narrator found "what was left of gentleness in the world" in a group of stray cats?
6. Discuss the role of crows in the pictures and text. When do they appear? Early on, in a dream scene, the narrator is in the line and a crow perches on her shoulder. Later in the book, she says, "The crows didn't come perch on our shoulders." Why not? What changed?
7. Talk about the line in which they wait, which appears in dreams and real life. Where do different people think it goes, and why? Why is it so exhausting to stand in? How does it feel to read about it? Discuss the narrator's statement, "I'll spare you the blistered feet, the hunger, the thirst, the horizon that kept moving farther away, and the rest."
8. Although the narrator doesn't identify a particular country or why the people have to leave, what are some of the dangers that the narrative and pictures convey?
9. What does the narrator's uncle do, and why? What happens to him? Describe the scene about him, how it ends and what it conveys about their circumstances. How does it show the brutality of how they are being treated? Why does the narrator say of him, "One man knew the truth"?
10. Discuss the final pages of the book after the narrator explains that "we found our way to the same country, the same city, the same house." What is her new life like? Why does she say, "I know I'm different from other people"? Talk about her narrative voice throughout the book, including times she speaks directly to the reader.

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CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES

The Power of Pictures

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Choose a wordless double-page spread and write a paragraph about it. Discuss the pictures in detail, what they show and what emotions they convey. What led up to the scene and what follows?

Today's Refugee Crisis

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.W.6-12.7. CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL. 6-12.1.

Although their country of origin isn't identified, the characters are clearly refugees. Do research online or using print sources to learn about refugees in today's world. Gather at least five facts about the current refugee crisis to share with the class and find two or three ways in which countries or organizations are helping refugees. Hold a class discussion on the findings.

A Letter to Her Younger Self

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.W.6-12.3.

What would the narrator write to her younger self about her journey and her future? Compose an encouraging but realistic letter of three or more paragraphs for that younger self, drawing on information and emotions in the book.

Graphic Novels

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.RL.6-12.1, CCSS.ELA- Literacy.SL. 6-12.1.

The author could have chosen other formats, like a traditional novel or poems, to tell this story but instead chose a graphic novel. Meet in small groups to discuss that choice. Compare graphic novels to traditional novels that have no pictures or just a few. What are the strengths of each? If possible, each member in the small group should bring another graphic novel to inform the discussion.

Pack Your Suitcase

CCSS.ELA- Literacy.W.6-12.3.

The family members and the people around them in the line are each carrying a bag or suitcase. If you had to leave home suddenly and were likely to never return, what would you pack? Make a long list of what you'd want to take and then shorten it to what might actually fit in a suitcase that you could carry while you walk. Give a brief explanation for your final choices.

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These questions were prepared by **KATHLEEN ODEAN**, a school librarian for more than 15 years who now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. Kathleen chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award Committees.