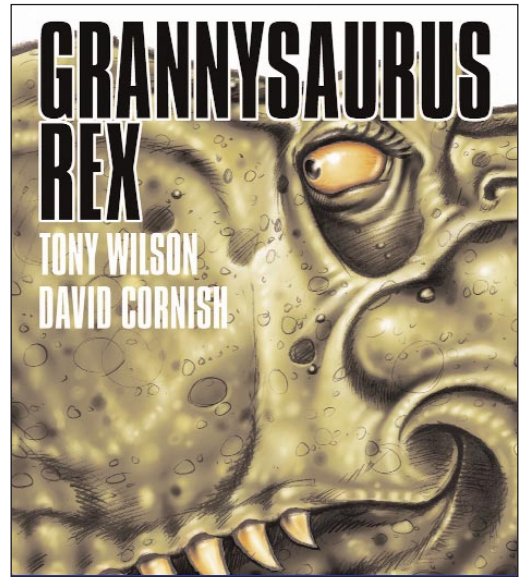


Grannysaurus Rex

Written by Tony Wilson
Illustrated by David Cornish



◀ The Back Story ▶ with Tony Wilson

Grannysaurus Rex is your first picture book. What made you want to write for kids?

I've always loved kids books. I remember the books I loved as a kid, and I like the idea that someone in the future might think of my books in the same way. I have a huge love of and respect for Dr Zeus. My first attempt at writing for kids was a long poem that was rejected by a lot of publishers.

How did you come up with the idea of a story about sugar rampages and nightmares, dinosaurs and grannies?

I thought of the idea one day while I was doing the dishes. I was thinking about how my mum gets migraines and turns into a monster. It made me think of the phrase 'My Grannysaurus Rex'. I realised straight away that the concept was too difficult for kids as they don't really know what a migraine is. I still liked the idea because it pulled together the idea of grannies and kids who like dinosaurs. Instead of a migraine, the story came to be about sugar nightmares – kids definitely understand lollies.

Lots of writers say that writing a picture book looks easy, but it is hard to boil a story down to such a few words and to leave lots of room for the illustrator to help tell it as well. How did you find writing a picture book?

My first version of *Grannysaurus Rex* was 1500 words long. I got a letter from Omnibus saying that they liked the story and they could see it as a picture book, but it would need some changes. I followed the publisher's directions. I cut the story back from 1500 words to 500, and got rid of a character – a mum who kept giving warnings about the bad things lollies could do to your teeth and so on. This version was accepted.

I was delighted as I saw the illustrations that David was doing. I had to make some more changes as he progressed. Sometimes the story had to be changed or words had to be cut. The final version of the story is only about 400 words long.

As a first-time writer for kids, I needed guidance from the editor as to what suited the reader's age group and what wasn't needed because the pictures told the story. Occasionally I found these editing decisions tough, because sometimes I had to cut lines that as a writer I was proud of, or thought were funny. I found it hard to let go of my idea of Granny's transition into Grannysaurus being bold and dramatic, say a double-page spread. It was thought that the transition should be shown over three smaller panels, to soften it and make it less scary for little kids. I could see that the reason was good, but the idea was still hard to let go of.

You have a very busy working life as a writer and broadcaster. How do you manage to fit in both?

I do my radio show from 6 to 9am, have a breakfast until 10 with my show co-hosts, and then go home until 12. I try to stick to the rule that by 1pm I have to be at my office. It is about ten minutes away from home. I work in my office until 6pm.

I stuck to this plan really well for about a year and a half. After I finished my first novel, *Players*, I was exhausted and had to have a break. I find that ideas for picture books come just as rarely as ideas for novels, but it is more time-consuming and exhausting working on novels.

What projects for children are you working on at the moment?

Two more picture books are in the pipeline, one called *Harry Highpants* about a town where someone tries to regulate the height of everyone's trousers, and one called *The Minister of Traffic Lights* about the invention of the mauve traffic light, a cure for road rage.

◀ with David Cornish

What appealed to you about *Grannysaurus Rex* and made you want to illustrate it?

I love dinosaurs. When I was a kid I loved to draw them. In the last illustration in *Grannysaurus Rex*, Granny and the little boy are looking at a dinosaur book, which is in fact the first dinosaur book I ever got. I still have it.

What was the inspiration for your wonderful granny with her big hair, bobbly jewellery and motor bike?

The granny in *Grannysaurus Rex* is based a bit on my mum, especially the capri pants she wears. She's also based on the granny from the TV show 'The Nanny', although she isn't quite so over the top. I wanted her to look like a bit of a non-conformist.

Why did you decide to set the story in such a built up, city environment?

I had just come back from New York, and had been living in Sydney, so I felt like making a city with tall buildings, parks and dinosaurs drinking lattes. Also, buildings are relevant to most people. It makes the book more international to have it set in a city. It also lets Granny go wild in a more restrictive type of place.

Why did you decide to make the child in the story invisible behind his dinosaur costume?

I deliberately made the suit obscure the boy's face so that kids would be able to project themselves into the story. Granny makes his suit, which I loved the idea of because it reminded me of Max's wolf suit in *Where the Wild Things Are*, which is one of my favourite books.

Can you briefly describe the process that you went through to create your illustrations?

As a first step in creating the illustrations, I drew a series of thumbnail sketches. These roughs gave me a feel for what each page would look like. I showed them to the editor, and we discussed them. Tony did some rewriting so that the pictures and words worked better together, and then I began to work the pictures up. I did some more finished roughs, where I was able to work more on getting the characters clear.

Creating each illustration for me is fairly intuitive. I don't think, 'well if I put that there, it will show this'. So things like the boy standing in Granny's looming shadow when he's saying he's a bit scared sort of happen naturally.

When the publisher approved the roughs, I began to work on the final illustrations. I drew them in blue pencil, and when I felt they were right I drew them in black. I drew parts of the illustrations, like the boy and Granny, separately from the background and scanned them into the computer. Then I was able to position the figures in the background. Using computer tools, I airbrushed in colour, shadows and highlights. Using the computer meant that I could experiment with things like colour and placement of highlights without having to redraw a scene or figure each time. In some cases I did four versions of pictures before I settled on things like a colour scheme. The palette I settled on was warm and a bit dark.

Using the computer was also handy because, although I am a painter, I had only recently returned to Adelaide and my studio wasn't set up yet. I'm working on another book now – *Emily and the Dragon* – and I'm using a totally different technique. I enjoy trying different techniques and styles. It certainly stops me from ever getting bored.

About the author: Tony Wilson

I grew up in Melbourne. I'm one of four children and both of my parents were teachers. My parents encouraged us to try everything. Among other things, I played the piano, went to athletics, joined scouts, was in school plays, worked on the school newsletter and played footy. My dad played for Hawthorn and if you had asked me what I wanted to do when I was two and then again when I was fifteen, I would have said 'play in the league'. I reached reserve grade for Hawthorn and when I was dropped it hurt.

I studied law and history at university. After practicing as a solicitor for two years I was desperate to get out. I was planning to write a travel book so when I found out about the ABC's 'Race Around the World' I didn't hesitate to apply. The Race set me on a broadcasting and writing career path.

About the illustrator: David Cornish

I was a suburban kid growing up in Adelaide. I always loved drawing. We used to make project folders on different topics like under the sea, space and dinosaurs. I used to love illustrating my manila folder at school. As a teenager I enjoyed doing science fiction and fantasy drawings.

After I studied illustration and design at university, I went to Sydney in 1995 and worked as a freelance illustrator. Then I drew for the television show 'Burgo's Catchphrase', which taught me how to work fast.

In 2003 I went on an overseas adventure and then returned to Adelaide. I showed my portfolio around and Omnibus commissioned some covers, then *Grannysaurus Rex*. Now I'm working on more picture books and covers and am writing a novel of my own for slightly older readers.

Teaching Ideas ✓

Before Reading ✓

- Covering up the title, look at the front cover of *Grannysaurus Rex*. Ask students what they think the book might be about. Then look at the back cover. What do they think of the dinosaur now? Uncover the title and ask them again. Now read them the blurb and ask them again. Discuss how each of the different elements gives a little bit more information about the story, and how it makes us interested about what might be inside without giving the story away.
- Ask students what they know about dinosaurs – some of them will know a lot!
- Ask students what sorts of things they do with their grandparents. Can grownups ever be silly? Is it fun when they are?
- Why do we love lollies so much? Discuss with students why, even though lollies are yummy, you can't eat too many of them or have them all the time. Ask students if they can remember any times when they wished they hadn't eaten so many lollies.

Activity

Dinosaur show-and-tell

Bring in your favourite toy dinosaur or dinosaur book to share with the class. Explain to your classmates why the item is your favourite.

My granny (grandpa)

Draw or paint a picture of one of your grandparents. Then write a short piece describing something fun that you have done together. Display your work in the classroom.

During reading ✓

■ Read the story aloud to the class, giving the children plenty of time to see what is happening in each picture. Reading it through again, stop and ask them to tell you what they can see. More advanced readers could take turns reading to each other. Use the following points to prompt discussion.

- Looking at the title page, ask the students what they can see. Do they know anything about fossil footprints? Whose glasses might they be?
- Pages 2–3 There are no words (from the story) on these pages. What is happening?
- Pages 4–5 This is the first time we see Granny and the boy from front-on. What do the pictures tell us about them? And the words?
- Pages 6–7 What extra things do we learn about them now? Where do they live?
- Pages 8–9 What does the boy think of Granny when she pretends to be a Grannysaurus Rex wearing lolly teeth?
- Pages 10–11 What do the boy and Granny do at the park? What once happened to Granny when she ate lots of lollies?
- Pages 12–13 When Granny makes liquorice claws, what does the boy think?
- Pages 14–15 When the boy and Granny lie down in the park, what happens?
- Pages 16–25 What does Granny do? What does the boy do? How do we know Grannysaurus Rex is really Granny? How has the world they live in changed?
- Pages 26–29 After Granny has finished rampaging, the boy tells her he is a bit frightened. Does he look frightened? Why do you think he is frightened?
- Page 30–33 How does Granny help the boy not feel afraid anymore? Does he enjoy himself again after that?

Activities

Find the dinosaurs

David Cornish, the illustrator, loves dinosaurs. All the dinosaurs he included in the pictures are real ones. Using the list on page 2 (the imprint page) and some non-fiction books about dinosaurs, try and work out which dinosaur is which.

Tricky words

There are some difficult words in the story, such as 'rampaging', 'unbreakables', 'public transport' and 'sweet tooth'. Do you know what some of these words mean?

After reading ✓

■ When the book has been read, discuss it as a class. Use the following questions as discussion points and prompts:

- Ask students what makes *Grannysaurus Rex* a funny story.
- Is *Grannysaurus Rex* scary? What are the things that make the students scared?
- At the beginning of the story, the boy and Granny are playing. The boy knows it is just a game. How do we know this? How does the illustrator show what is real and what is imagined (pretend)?
- When the boy and Granny have a rest in the park, the line between imagination and reality becomes confused. How do we know this? Is this why the boy becomes scared?
- Once he knows it is only a dream or a game, the boy feels all right again. Talk with students about dreams and imagination games and why they can be scary if they feel too real.
- Ask students if they can remember times when they got scared about something they dreamt of or played. How did they make themselves feel better?

Activities

Travelling dinosaurs

The illustrator set *Grannysaurus Rex* in the city. To allow students to think imaginatively, set up several activity tables with different 'settings' that you normally wouldn't put dinosaurs in. Put a pile of plastic dinosaurs on each of these tables for the students to play with.

Working together

Grannysaurus Rex was written by one person and illustrated by another. Have students break up into pairs to collaborate on making up a story about dinosaurs together, with adults helping them write the words down if needed, and illustrate it.

Older children could write a story each, then give it to their partner to illustrate. Afterwards, they can discuss what was fun or difficult about collaborating on a story in this way together. Was it exciting to see what the other person had done when they illustrated the story? Did it change the way the writer thought about their story?

Granny collage

Make a large outline of Grannysaurus. As a group activity, have the children use collage to fill her in. Perhaps balls of green scrunched up paper could be stuck on to make her bumpy skin. Don't forget her glasses, necklace and lolly bag!

Re-telling the story

As a written or oral storytelling exercise, try changing the narrative style in the story from the first person to the third. Give the boy a name and have students try to tell the story in a different way. For example, they could put their own name in the story: *Ned's granny owns a lolly bag that's lumpy and green.* You could also change the story from present tense to past tense: *My granny owned a lolly bag that was lumpy and green.*

Literature study

Use the following ideas to prompt student's understanding of their reading of *Grannysaurus Rex*. Some questions are suitable for younger children, and some for older students.

- Ask students what they like about *Grannysaurus Rex*.
- What are the ideas behind the story in this picture book? What ideas do the students think the writer and illustrator are trying to share with us?
- There are lots of lollies in the story. List the lollies and talk about what they are used for in the story.
- The illustrator decided to set the story in a big city. What do students think the book would be like if it was set in a different place?
- How do Grannies often look in picture books? Think of some reasons why the illustrator chose not to make his granny a typical picture book granny who does knitting and wears flowery dresses. Is his granny more like real grannies?
- How does the writer let us know that even though Granny is different when she turns into a dinosaur, she is still Granny? How does the illustrator show that Grannysaurus is really Granny?
- Look at the drawings and ask the students to find the parts of the story that the illustrations show. What extra information do the pictures give that the words don't tell us?