

TEACHERS' NOTES FOR *I'VE LOST MY KISSES*

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TRUDIE TREWIN grew up on a farm in Mundulla. She wrote a weekly newspaper on an old typewriter with her brother. The farm's animals were often the subjects of their reports.

When she finished school, Trudie joined a bank and worked with numbers for several years. She moved to Cairns in Queensland after holidaying there. She returned to writing once she was married and had three boys who loved the stories she told them. She's had several articles, short stories and poems published. *I've Lost My Kisses* is her first picture book.

Trudie remembers being oblivious to everything while she was engrossed in a book, so if kids can't hear their mums calling because they're reading one of hers, she's delighted.

NICK BLAND was born in Victoria in 1973 and lived on a farm until he was five. He spent his early days climbing haystacks and sneaking into his father's painting studio. When Nick's family moved to the bush he found a whole new world to draw and explore. He wanted to be a cartoonist or a storyteller. After he finished school, he moved to the city and eventually got a job in a bookshop. The picture books in the shop inspired him and he realised he 'wanted all my words and all my pictures out of my head and onto the shelf, dancing in all that colour.'

Now Nick lives in Darwin. He had a job as a four-wheel drive tour guide in Kakadu National Park while he worked on his first book, *A Monster Wrote Me a Letter*, which was a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book in 2006. He has also illustrated Colin Buchanan's *Aussie Jingle Bells*. Now he works full time as a writer and illustrator, working on the weekends as a guardian for aboriginal boys from around northern Australia who board in Darwin.

SYNOPSIS

Matilda Rose loves to kiss, but one morning she discovers she's lost her kisses. There couldn't be a worse time for them to go missing—Poppa is coming to stay.

Matilda knows just what kisses feel, taste and sound like but she can't find them anywhere. She still hasn't found them by the time she, Mummy and baby Jeb (and the little chick) have to go and pick Poppa up at the airport. Luckily her kisses come up from deep down inside her just when she needs them.

WRITING *I'VE LOST MY KISSES*

The idea for *I've Lost My Kisses* came to Trudie after her middle son, who was two at the time, informed her husband one morning that he couldn't give Dad a kiss before work because he'd run out of them. It took a good three days before he announced that his body had made some more and he could kiss again.

Trudie says the plot and structure of *I've Lost My Kisses* didn't change much from the first draft. It started out at around six hundred words and after seven or eight drafts it had come down to around five hundred. While the basic story remained the same, it took a while to work with the words and sentences to find the right rhythm, using repetition ('Matilda Rose loved to kiss. She kissed hello. She kissed goodbye.'). The text was finally pared back to around four hundred words once the illustrations were done and it became clear that some of the words were now redundant.

The core of *I've Lost My Kisses* is explaining the feeling in your chest when you see someone you love that you haven't seen in a while. At first, Matilda Rose is optimistic as she hunts for her kisses, even singing a little song. By the time she's in the supermarket, however, she's lost heart. She doesn't sing anymore and 'trails' after her mother and brother. At the airport, Matilda Rose's spirits sink even lower, until she sees Poppa and there's 'a stretching feeling! Almost a bursting feeling!' and her kisses are there again.

One of the things Trudie had to work on was describing kisses. Matilda Rose knows just what they taste, feel and sound like because her creator did a lot of kissing to work out just the right words to use. The practice also helped her name different kinds of kisses: 'Mummy's sweet dreams kiss', 'Daddy's whiskerkiss', the 'chocolatey Easter kiss', the 'kiss-it-better kiss', 'baby Jeb's slobber kiss' and, of course, the 'smoocheroo'.

When Trudie first saw the pictures she was annoyed with herself. She wishes she had imagined Matilda Rose as a calf in the first place, as she feels it suits the character perfectly and gives her incredible appeal, with her big expressive cow eyes and soft nose.

ILLUSTRATING I'VE LOST MY KISSES

When Nick was first shown the text for *I've Lost My Kisses* the editor, Ana Vivas, mentioned that it might be a good idea to draw Matilda Rose as an animal. Nick immediately loved the idea of a kissing cow. The first time he drew her he put her in a cow-print dress because he thought it was funny, and it stayed. Even though Matilda Rose is a calf, she isn't like a real one. Features such as a ponytail and a sway back make her look more human, and her proportions are that of a human child rather than that of a thinner, gawky calf.

As with *A Monster Wrote Me a Letter*, the illustrations for this story are done with black pencil with splashes of colour. This gives the book a soft, gentle look with shadows adding depth and making the images leap off the page, especially where there are blank backgrounds (as on page two where Matilda is kissing the goldfish). Instead of relying on colour, Nick makes sure his illustrations are full of character and movement. Keeping the settings fairly simple focuses the reader's attention on the characters' expressions and actions.

For Nick, it is important that the pictures tell the reader something that the words don't already say. He has created many visual details that tell us about Matilda Rose's world and add a gentle humour. For instance, Matilda's companion, the chick, is with her on every page and a hen meets it at the airport. There are many witty touches, such as the Moosli on the breakfast table and the kissing animals in the backgrounds of many drawings.

Nick didn't add these details in as gimmicks. It took time and some experimentation for the ideas in the pictures to develop. He actually finds illustrating his own stories easier than illustrating someone else's, mainly because 'With your own stories the images form at the same time as the words and by the time you put them on paper it's all there. With someone else's words you have to create a whole world from scratch.'

As an illustrator, Nick decided early on to never use a reference. He draws from memory rather than worrying about what something actually looks like. Using an image that is likely to be in a reader's memory bank, rather than one that may be transient or trendy at the time of writing, makes the visual story flow better.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Read the story out loud for the class. More advanced readers could take turns reading to each other in groups. Give plenty of time for the children to look at the pictures. Don't forget to let them see the cover and the title pages.
2. Look through the book again, this time asking what the children can see in the pictures, noticing little things like what the little chick is doing, finding the kissing animals and looking at Matilda's face and posture to talk about what she's feeling.
3. Ask the children what the story is about. Why might Matilda Rose be worried that she's lost her kisses? Could she be nervous about seeing her grandfather after he's been away? Does she become more and more worried as the moment of his arrival approaches? Did she really have anything to worry about?
4. The little chick is not mentioned in the story but appears on every page. Children might like to make up a story from its point of view. (Don't forget to give it a name!)
5. What are some of the words that the author uses to describe kisses? Can the children think of any other types of kisses?
6. Nick Bland decided to make Matilda Rose a calf. Talk about why she works so well as a cow, and talk about other books where the characters are animals. Do some animals, such as foxes, snakes, mice or lambs, stand for certain types of people or characteristics?
7. The drawings in *I've Lost My Kisses* are black and white. With a desk lamp, show children how objects cast a shadow. Then have them spend some time drawing in black and white and including shadows, adding small amounts of colour after either in pencil, texta, paint or cut-out pieces of paper or cloth.