



Teachers' Notes (Primary) by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Two Peas in a Pod

Chris McKimmie

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Recommended for ages 3-6+

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INTRODUCTION

Two Peas in a Pod is the fourth in a collection of gorgeously original and critically acclaimed picture books by Chris McKimmie. Like his *Brian Banana Duck Sunshine Yellow*, *Maisie Moo and Invisible Lucy*, and *Special Kev*, it's a celebration of friendship, individuality, family bonds and community told in written and visual texts with his characteristically whimsical humour. It celebrates the power of childhood friendships and also the child's resilience when faced with loss or separation. Violet and Marvin are best friends, and not even being a very long distance apart can ever change that. But, even though they are like 'two peas in a pod', Marvin and Violet learn to deal with their 'aloneness' and to enjoy the fact that they are individuals.

STORY SUMMARY

Violet and Marvin have lived in Raven Street since dinosaur time – almost! They play together and dream together until one day Violet moves 'to the moon' and Marvin is left all alone. What is he to do with himself? He mopes around, until one day his mum tells him that he's off on a journey... to visit Violet!

THEMES

There are several key ideas or themes which flow through this work:

- Friendship
- Difference & Individuality
- Belonging
- Imagination
- Family

These themes could be considered in conjunction with the following school curriculum areas.

CURRICULUM TOPICS

1. Study of history, society and environment
2. English language and literacy
3. Visual literacy
4. Creative arts
5. Learning technologies
6. Mathematics

The notes which follow are designed to be used largely in pre-school and lower primary classrooms, although some activities might be useful for upper primary or even secondary students. Teachers should be able to adapt them to suit the demands of their particular curriculum.

STUDY OF HISTORY, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

1) Friendship

Violet and Marvin are best friends who like to spend every waking minute together.

- *Activity:* Write a sentence about friendship beginning: 'My friend is special because...'
- *Question:* Violet calls Marvin 'Marvellous'. What makes him so marvellous to Violet?
- *Question:* Violet is a very imaginative person. She sees things in clouds, and can see a train in her lounge room, a ghost in her kitchen and all sorts of other things. Do you play games with your friends and imagine things too? What sorts of things do you imagine together?

2) Feelings of Separation and Loneliness

When people move away we all experience a mixture of feelings. In each of Chris McKimmie's books he explores the child's feelings with honesty and perception.

- *Question:* What did you feel like when your friend or family member moved away?
- *Activity:* There are several things you can do to stay in touch with someone. For example, you could write a letter. Create a letter as if it's written by Marvin to Violet telling her about all the things which have been happening since she went away.
- *Question:* Pets are always a comfort when we are missing someone we love. Marvin loves his chook, T Rex, and Violet loves her dog, Wolf. Have you got a pet? Why do you love it? Describe some of the funny things your pet does.

3) Neighbourhoods and Communities

Every street and community is different.

- *Question:* What does the picture tell you about Violet and Marvin's Raven Street?
- *Activity:* Describe your street and the people who live there. What makes your neighbourhood special? You might also like to draw a picture of the street in which you live.
- *Activity:* Create an alphabet about the streets in which the members of the class live. eg A is for Argyle Street which is where Heather lives; B is for Beacon Street which is where Ellie Lives; C is for Cameron Lane which is where Andrew lives etc. Then have each child draw a picture to accompany it, and make a frieze to display, or a book to bind.
- *Activity:* Have students create an individual book about their street or suburb. Head each page: My House; My Street; My Local Shopping Centre; My School; My Park or Playground; My Doctor's Surgery; etc. Then have them draw pictures and write captions for each one.
- *Activity:* Discuss the idea of a community by reading other books which feature a street or neighbourhood in the plot. eg Sesame Street TV series and books are one popular example, and another is '*And To Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street*' by Dr Seuss. Others include: *Stories from Our Street* by Richard Tulloch and Julie Vivas and *What Zeesie saw on Delancey*

Street by Elsa Okon Rael and Marjorie Priceman. Discuss not only the things and people you see on the street but the things you hear and smell as well. eg Komninos's *High Street, Kew East* illustrated by Diana Reynolds celebrates the noises in a busy Melbourne street.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

- 1) The **language** in this book is like that used in all the books by Chris McKimmie, **full of rich and childlike description**. eg Violet says 'I can see cottonwool castles and marshmallow kingdoms in the clouds.' To which Marvin responds: 'All I can see are cauliflowers.'
 - *Question:* Ask your students to describe the clouds in an original way.
- 2) **Pairs of Things** are included in the text.
 - *Question:* 'A pair of wings.' What other pairs can your students think of? [See also **BLM 2 PAIRS** below]
- 3) **Australian Place Names** are sometimes curious in spelling and sound, and this idea has been used humorously in songs such as 'I been everywhere' which was originally written by Geoff Mack and sung by Lucky Starr who made it a huge hit in 1962.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I've_Been_Everywhere Later, US versions appeared such as that sung by Johnny cash, featuring US place names:
<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/johnnycash/ivebeeneverywhere.html> In one scene in this book, Violet has a train in her lounge room which goes to places with 'double o' such as Toowoomba, Katoomba, Woop Woop etc.
 - *Question:* Can you think of any other place names with repeated letters in them like this?
 - *Activity:* Have your students write their own version of the song, listing places they've been to. [See also **Learning Technologies** below]
- 4) **Nicknames** are used in each of Chris McKimmie's books.
 - *Question:* Marvin is called Marvellous Marvin. Have you got a nickname? Would you like one? What would your favourite nickname be? What nicknames do you not like? [Note: Teachers may need to be careful here as nicknames are a sensitive topic for many kids. This activity, though, might be used to skilfully defuse some of the simmering tensions in a group or class, too, if handled carefully.]
 - *Activity:* Make up an acrostic poem using the letters in Marvellous Marvin's name. eg Marvin is marvellous. Always a friend to Violet. Ready to tackle anything. Etc.
- 5) **Expressions of Speech or Idioms** are often used to describe something else. This **playing with words** is just one aspect of what we might call the '**sub-text**', or what some people call '**intertextuality**' [See also **Visual Literacy** below]

- *Question:* 'Two peas in a pod' is an expression meaning that two people are very alike. What other expressions mean something similar? [See also **BLM 5 IDIOMS** below]
- *Question:* Marvin says they've lived in Raven Street 'since dinosaur time'. What does this mean?
- *Question:* When Violet leaves she says she is going 'to the moon'. What does this mean?
- *Question:* Marvin 'had almost put Violet in with the forgets'. What does this mean?
- *Activity:* Write a list of expressions that you have come across. Discuss their meaning with the class. [See also **BLM 5 IDIOMS** below]
- *Activity:* What does the word 'marvellous' mean? Write a poem about yourself using a word that means '*marvellous*' in each line, for example: 'I am marvellous because... I'm an exceptional athlete...I'm an incredible scholar...' Try to add other words which mean marvellous or exceptional.

6) Humour is always evident in Chris McKimmie's books.

- *Question:* What funny things did you notice in the book?
- *Activity:* What is your pet's name? T Rex is a funny name for a chook, isn't it? Think of some funny or unusual names for pets.

7) The conclusion of a story is important in cementing its themes. This story ends with the word 'Marvellous.'

- *Question:* Marvin is referring to the fact that his chook T Rex has laid three eggs, but do you think that the ending means something else as well?

VISUAL LITERACY

1) Chris McKimmie's drawings of Brian, Maisie and Kev's worlds, and that of Violet and Marvin, are child-like and impressionistic. They might be called 'naive' in being suggestive of a child's drawing and actually do include some drawings by Chris's grandchildren.

2) The Typography and lettering is like a child's drawing as well.

- *Activity:* Take the picture of your street (which you've drawn above) depicting all the people who live in your neighbourhood. Use speech balloons to show what they might be saying to each other. Colour it in, in your favourite colours.
- *Activity:* There are several animals lovingly drawn in the book. eg dogs, a chicken, a cat, a cow and a kangaroo. There are a number of birds as well. And there's even a dinosaur! Invite the students in your class to draw one of them in their own style. [See also **Learning Technologies** below]

- 3) Medium** is described on the back page ‘The pictures are done with Acrylic on m.d.f., ink, watercolour, gouache, pastels, string and pencil.’
- *Activity:* Try to paint a scene in any of the media mentioned here, or in a combination of them, depicting the people in your neighbourhood.
- 4) The pictures in this book have **emotional impact** too.**
- *Question:* Which pages particularly demonstrated to you how space and colour affect the reading of this text?
 - *Activity:* When Violet moves away, she is depicted alone in a boat (pod) in a mauve-coloured and cloudy sky. What does the picture suggest about the feelings of the two friends who are being separated?
- 5) Each of Chris McKimmie’s books contain **intertextual references** and jokes in the pictures which refer to underlying themes or ideas.**
- *Activity:* For example, in the page showing the neighbourhood in Raven Street, a real dinosaur appears as if it is simply one of the neighbours. In two pictures, there are three men who appear: they look like garden gnomes and appear to be playing musical instruments. The chook T Rex and Wolf the dog appear in several pictures. Try to find them.
 - *Question:* What other ‘sub-texts’ did you discover in the images in this book?
- 6) Colour** plays a large part in this text as it does in Chris McKimmie’s previous two titles. ‘Violet’ is another word for the colour ‘mauve’ and in these pictures Violet’s hair is exactly that colour!
- *Activity:* What mauve things can you find in these pictures? [See also **BLM 1 COLOUR IN MARVIN AND VIOLET** below]
 - *Question:* What other names are colours?
- 7) Design encompasses every aspect of a picture book’s construction**, and includes the front and back cover image, the endpapers, a dedication page, a title page, 16 double page spreads, and a final imprint, or publication details, page. The juxtaposition of images and words on each page contributes to meaning in this and in other books.
- 8) Question:** The front endpaper depicts the garden gnomelike figures which appear in the book as well. The back endpaper features a bird. What do the **endpapers** in this book suggest?
- 9) Activity:** Examine the **front and back cover**. What meaning do you make from the images? What other information is contained on the back cover?

CREATIVE ARTS

This text might encourage students to explore it through other forms of creative arts.

DRAMA

- *Activity:* Act out the story of Violet and Marvin. Create a giant pod for them to sail in. Make it as imaginative a production as you can.

MUSIC

- *Activity:* Make up your own simple rhymed song about Violet and Marvin, using the names of the places where they journey in the 'train'.

DANCE

- *Activity:* Create a special dance for Violet and Marvin to perform together. (Incorporate in it some of the games they play in this book eg Jumping, or being ghosts.)

CRAFT AND DESIGN

- *Activity:* Make a kite and draw your own face or that of your best friend on it. Create a tail for the kite out of some unusual materials.
- *Activity:* Make a 'Two Peas in a Pod' cake. Do an internet search by typing in the words and several images will appear, for example,
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/9438541@N04/3385174602/>

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

This book might be used as a tool for investigations on the Internet.

- **Activity:** Explore **website links to related topics** such as:

Australian Place Names

Violet's train goes to several places with strange sounding names. Read about the origins of Australian place names:

List of Australian Place Names of Aboriginal Origin

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Australian_place_names_of_Aboriginal_origin

Geoscience Australia Place Name Search

<http://www.ga.gov.au/map/names/>

Drawing Animals

'Category: Drawing Animals' *WikiHow*

<http://www.wikihow.com/Category:Drawing-Animals>

'How to Draw Animals' *How Stuff Works*

<http://home.howstuffworks.com/how-to-draw-animals.htm>

MATHEMATICS

Students will find many objects to count in this book.

- *Question:* How many people are in the picture of Raven Street? (Answer: Eleven.)
- *Question:* How many animals and birds are in the picture of Raven Street? (Answer: Seven.)
- *Question:* How many birds can you find in this book? (Answer: Seven plus the one on the CIP page and another on the back endpaper.)
- *Question:* How many pieces of fruit can you find in this book? (Answer: Two strawberries, one pineapple, three oranges, four apples, two pears.)
- *Question:* How many flowers are on the cover of this book? (Answer: Four.)

CONCLUSION

This book is a warm, funny and life-affirming work about both the power of the child's imagination and of friendship. Violet and Marvin join a cast of characters, each of whom demonstrate Chris McKimmie's observation of children's behaviour and his genuine enjoyment of their foibles and eccentricities. Violet is a whimsical charmer who relishes life, and Marvin ... is simply marvellous!

ABOUT THE WRITERS

CHRIS MCKIMMIE

Chris McKimmie was the convenor and originator of the illustration program at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. He wrote, illustrated and designed a series of 8 children's books in the 70s, and has designed many covers for the University of Queensland Press. Represented in the Graphis Annual, he has worked as a graphic designer and publications designer for the ABC, the National Parks and Wildlife Services and the University of WA Press. He was production designer for the award-winning short film 'Stations' and the feature-length film 'Australian Dream', and wrote the lyrics for the songs in both films. He exhibits paintings and drawings. To see more of his art and read more about him, go to his website at www.chrismckimmie.com.

Previous books by Chris McKimmie:

apple to zoo Hicks Smith 1975
Two friends Hicks Smith 1975
The shape I'm in Methuen 1977
The caught bird Methuen 1977
The painted bird Hicks Smith 1975

One day Hicks Smith 1975
One rainy day Methuen 1977
The magic day Methuen 1977
Brian Banana Duck Sunshine Yellow A&U 2006
Maisie Moo and Invisible Lucy A&U 2007
Special Kev A&U 2008

ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT

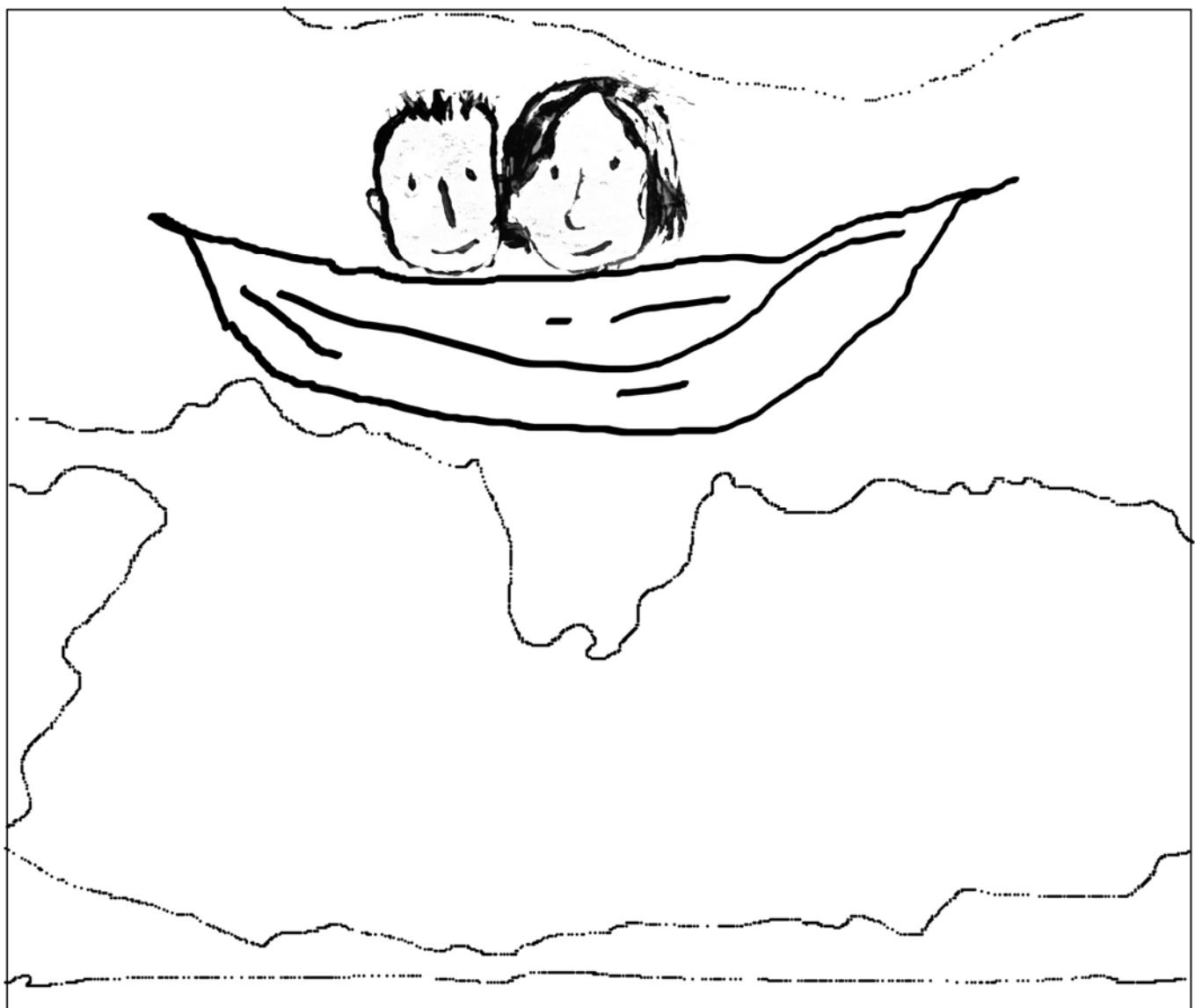
Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and publishes regularly on children's literature, Australian fiction, and publishing history. She was

inaugural director of and is a Life Member of the Queensland Writers Centre, and was co-founder of Jam Roll Press. Her latest publications include *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia (1946-2005)* (2006) co-edited with Craig Munro, *Kookaburra Shells Port Curtis Literature* (2006), and *Hot Iron Corrugated Sky: 100 Years of Queensland Writing* (2002) co-edited with Stuart Glover. She has chapters in several textbooks including *Making Books* edited by David Carter and Anne Galligan (UQP, 2007) and *Crossing the Boundaries* edited by Michelle Anstey and Geoff Bull (Pearson Education, 2002). Her PhD thesis traced the development of the Australian children's publishing industry, and she teaches for Griffith University (Gold Coast) and USQ. She is coordinating judge for the *Somerset National Novella Writing Competition for School Age Writers* and is chair of the *Queensland Premier's Literary Awards YA* judging panel.

BLM 1

COLOUR IN MARVIN AND VIOLET

Colour in this picture of the two friends.



PAIRS

1) There are a number of 'pairs' of things in the book. Below these pairs have been 'mixed-up'. Match the things in the first and second columns, by drawing a line from one word to another which is its pair.

Then in the third column, write another word which might go with either of the words beside it in the first two columns, to form a common two word phrase.

Swings	Chips	
Strawberries	Sauce	Bottle eg 'Sauce bottle'
Fish	Shoes	
Socks	Roundabouts	
Salt	Skips	
Pie	Cream	Bun eg 'Cream bun'
Hops	Pepper	

Answers: Swings/Roundabouts; Strawberries/Cream; Fish/Chips; Socks/Shoes;
Salt/Pepper; Pie/Sauce; Hops/Skips

2) Some things come in pairs. For example, 'a pair of wings' is mentioned in this book. What other things come in pairs? Make a list of five things:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

QUIZ

QUESTIONS

1. What does Violet call Marvin?
2. What is Violet's dog called?
3. Marvin has a chook named T Rex. What does the T stand for?
4. What street did Marvin and Violet grow up in together?
5. What does Violet have in her backyard?
6. What does she have in her kitchen?
7. Which airline does Marvellous Marvin travel with when he goes to visit Violet?
8. Where does Violet live in her new home?
9. Finish the two word phrase 'icecream....'
10. How many eggs did T Rex lay at the end of the book?

ANSWERS

1. Marvellous Marvin
2. Wolf.
3. Tiffany.
4. Raven Street.
5. An octopus and a jumping castle.
6. A ghost.
7. Koala Airlines
8. Mortadella Boulevarde.
9. Pillows.
10. Three.

MARVIN'S WORDJUMBLE

These words appear in the book, but their letters have been jumbled. Try to work out what they are.

1. BERSTRIEWRAS	
2. SOMRVELLUA	
3. SCREKON	
4. RADIUNOS	
5. SOLHARWMLAM	
6. GNKDIMSO	
7. KARBCYDA	
8. SPCTOUO	
9. WIODFLLEWRS	
10. TSALEPHEN	

ANSWERS:

1. STRAWBERRIES
2. MARVELLOUS
3. RECKONS
4. DINOSAUR
5. MARSHMALLOW
6. KINGDOMS
7. BACKYARD
8. OCTOPUS
9. WILDFLOWERS
10. ELEPHANTS

IDIOMS

Finish these common expressions or ‘idioms’ which describe one thing by referring to another:

1. Two peas in a
2. As fit as a
3. To blow one's own
4. As cool as a
5. The best thing since sliced
6. Don't cry over spilt
7. Keen as
8. Mutton dresses as
9. Too many cooks spoil the
10. Worth your weight in

ANSWERS:

1. Pod
2. Fiddle
3. Trumpet
4. Cucumber
5. Bread
6. Milk
7. Mustard
8. Lamb
9. Broth
10. Gold