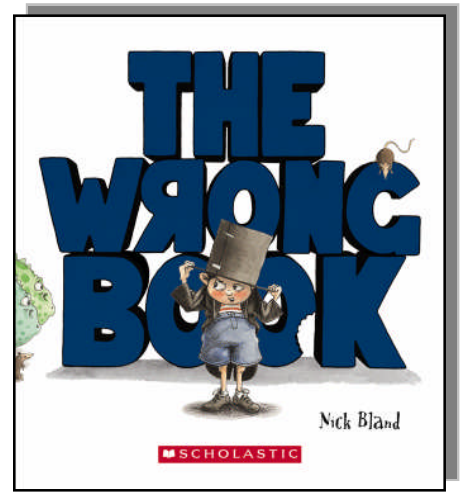


TEACHER NOTES

The Wrong Book, by Nick Bland

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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.'

Today 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 named as a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book. He has since illustrated Colin Buchanan's *Aussie Jingle Bells* and Trudie Trewin's *I've Lost My Kisses* and in 2008 published *When Henry Caught Imaginitis*, *The Very Cranky Bear* and *Donald Loves Drumming*. Several of Nick's books have been published overseas and he is now a fulltime writer and illustrator, working on the weekends as a guardian for aboriginal boys who board in Darwin.

SYNOPSIS

Nicholas Ickle is trying to introduce a book but before he can begin the pages are invaded by other characters. He is interrupted one after the other by an elephant, two monsters, a pirate, a queen and her two servants, a horde of curious rats and a puppet. They soon get busy and take over. Nicholas loses his temper and sends these interesting characters on their way. Just as he introduces the real subject of the book – himself – The End descends.

WRITING AND ILLUSTRATING THE WRONG BOOK

With *The Wrong Book*, Nick Bland wanted to make one simple point about growing up, something about his own childhood that he had reflected on. He says that, 'The most important thing we learn as we grow is that everything is not about us.' Nick says that when he was growing up, one of the things he found hardest to understand is why the world didn't revolve around him and what he wanted to do. It

took him some time to learn that regardless of how important he thought what he had to say and what he wanted to do was, life kept going on around him.

In *The Wrong Book*, Nicholas Ickle hasn't learnt this yet. He is desperate to tell us all about a very important subject, himself, but that isn't how things turn out. The characters that wander into his story don't listen to him at all. The elephant just wants to sit peacefully, the pirate hunts for treasure, the monsters play dress ups and have a tea party, the queen almost has her crown stolen, the rats poke their noses into everything, and the puppet – well, he doesn't get time to do much. It doesn't matter that Nicholas stamps his feet, waves his arms and shouts; they all carry on regardless with whatever they want to do.

On page 27 when Nicholas screws up his fists, screws up his eyes and looses it, all the other characters finally look at him. He is the focus for just a moment but everyone else looks rather bemused impressed by his tantrum. And what happens when Nicholas Ickle finally gets his way and they all leave? He is left standing on a blank page again. The story seems to ask, without the world going on about us, who would we be? We can only imagine how much fun Nicholas would have had if he'd joined in with the friendly monsters, the adventures he would have had if he'd followed the pirate and the queen, the friend he would have had if he'd stopped to talk to the puppet.

Nick says that the goings on of the background characters 'formed on their own.' Through the drafting process, their activities evolved as several simple but intriguing props were added. Changes were still being made in the final versions of the illustrations. Nick notes that, 'Each player has his or her own frustrations and that all of them feel quite sure that the focus is entirely on them.'

Nick made these characters deliberately reminiscent of storybook regulars without taking them from specific books. While he went with characters that he was familiar with from his childhood in the 70s, he didn't check any references, instead relying on the images as his mind had retained them. Using this method, he came up with the archetypal queen, pirate, monster and so on. He loved all these characters as a child.

The illustrations were made with black ink drawing and watercolour wash, which for Nick is 'a classic picture book style for the 70s, and highly recognisable to anyone now.' The background is white, a 'blank page', perfect for being empty at the beginning and gradually filling with the characters that annoy Nicholas so much. The landscape of the book is bare, and this leaves all the focus on the characters. They have very expressive faces – the worried elephant, the haughty queen and her menservants, the sweet monsters, and above all the increasingly cranky, frustrated and dishevelled Nicholas Ickle. And when the intruders leave, the white page is like a blank stage where Nicholas has all the focus – for a short while.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Look at the covers. What might this book be about? Who do the students think is in the wrong book – the boy or the other characters? Discuss the expressions on the different character's faces to work this out.
2. Read the story out aloud without going too fast, so the children can hear all the words and see the pictures. Use plenty of expression for Nicholas's outraged protests. Can the students spot the different characters as they enter the book? Can they guess what they are from the first little glimpse they get? What goes on around Nicholas?
3. As the story is read aloud, pause and consider these points to stimulate discussion:
 - Spread 1: How is Nicholas dressed? Does he look pleased with himself?
 - Spread 2: How does Nicholas react when the first character intrudes?
 - Spread 4: Do the monsters look friendly?
 - Spread 7: How does Nicholas look now? Is he still neat and tidy? What is the pirate doing?
 - Spread 9: Does Nicholas look even more angry and frustrated? What are the other characters doing?
 - Spread 13: What happens when Nicholas finally really loses his temper?
 - Spread 14: How do the other characters react?
 - Spread 15: What happens when Nicholas finally clears all the other characters out of his book? How does the book look – empty?
 - Spread 16: How does Nicholas look at the end of the book?
4. Nicholas Ickle wants to tell us all about himself. Why don't the other characters seem interested? Are they too busy? Do they have their own things to get on with?
5. What might Nicholas have said about himself if he had the time? Students can draw Nicholas and make up a bit about him.
6. The characters that invade Nicholas's book are doing lots of fun things. Discuss what might have happened if Nicholas hadn't tried to stop all the other characters from being in his book. What sort of an adventure might he have had with them?
7. Students can draw a picture of what fun Nicholas Ickle might have had if he hadn't been so worried about his own story.
8. Nicholas Ickle has made his own top hat. Have fun making costumes for the characters from the story from the odds-and-ends box.
9. Make the story into a simple play. Everyone can have a part – kids can dress as their favourite characters from books, and they can work out what little adventures they can mime around Nicholas as he gets more and more frustrated.