

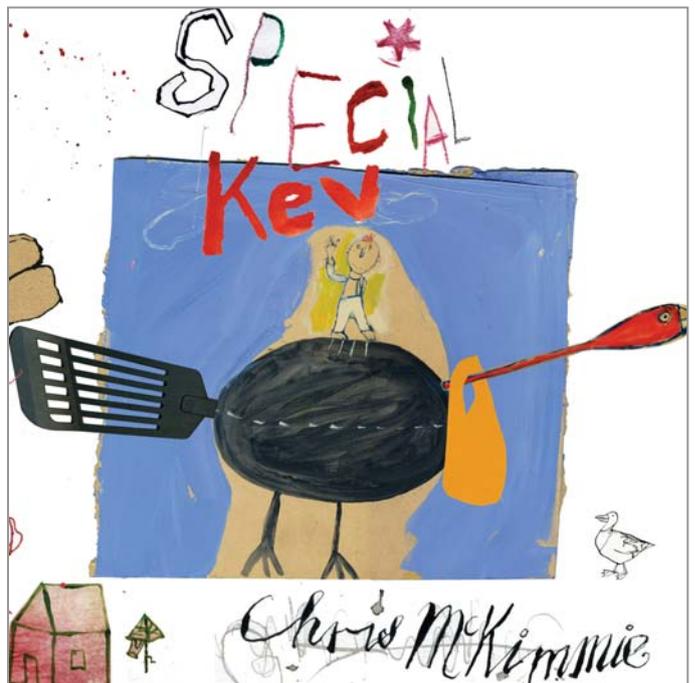
Teachers Notes (Primary)
by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Special Kev
Chris McKimmie

ISBN 978 174175 550 3
Recommended for ages 4+

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INTRODUCTION

Special Kev is the third in a collection of joyous and hilarious picture books by Chris McKimmie. Like his *Brian Banana Duck Sunshine Yellow* and *Maisie Moo and Invisible Lucy*, it's a celebration of individuality and whimsical humour. Like those books it's also a celebration of colour – in this case, bright red. Like the stars in the sky, we are each very special and very different. *Special Kev* certainly is!

STORY SUMMARY

Special Kev was born on April Fool's Day, has 'red hair, curly hair with freckles' and his mum thinks he's very special. None of his 'eleventy million cousins' have his qualities. He's always getting up to something...but when his favourite cousin Fatty Boombah moves to Tumblegum, and Kev's left with no one to play with, he hooks up with a new kid. Then he ties Nicky Bathgate to a tree, and no one's laughing anymore...Kev hits an all-time low, and needs someone to show him again just how special he really is.

THEMES

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

- 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

Chris McKimmie's latest book offers his customary encouragement to children to 'think outside the square' in investigating their world from different angles, and recognise that everyone is different.

1) Differences

Some people have red hair and some have blonde; some have glasses; some have particular mannerisms. Everyone is special!

- *Activity:* Discuss the differences between people.
- *Question:* Kev's a special kid. He's 'a one-off'. He's one of a kind. He's an original. He's unique. How else would you describe him? What other words mean special?
- *Question:* Kev is a quirky individual. He's got a hot temper and a soft heart. He is lonely but has 'eleventy million' cousins. He's special to some people and a terror to others. Are we all made up of such paradoxes? Do different people always see us in different ways? Describe yourself like this: 'My mum thinks I am...' 'My dad thinks I am...' 'My sister thinks I am...' etc. How many different words could be used to describe you?
- *Activity:* Find other books about being different.

2) Feelings of Insecurity and Loneliness

We all feel like 'the odd man out' at some time. Kev is an only child (just like Brian and Maisie in Chris McKimmie's earlier books) but he has lots of cousins, none of whom have red hair! He never mentions the desire for a sibling, but clearly he is lonely, particularly after Fatty moves away.

- *Question:* What is it like to be an only child?
- *Question:* Kev calls himself 'Nigel No-Mates'? Is that a nice thing to call someone?
- *Question:* Sometimes having a pet can be a comfort to someone who is alone. Fatty has a cat called Gary Junior. Do you have a special pet?
- *Question:* Kev has a special relationship with his Aunty Pav. His mother seems to be a little sorry for Aunty Pav, who lives alone. Why do Kev and his Aunty get along so well? How would you describe Aunty Pav?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

1) The language in this book is **childlike and full of quirky humour**.

- *Question:* What was your favourite expression?

2) **Names and Naming** are one of the hilarious joys of this work. Kev has an Aunty Pav and an Uncle Nobby. All the cousins have nicknames, and Special Kev has a few of his own – for example, Nigel No-Mates, Carrot Top, Ginger Nut, Bloodnut.

- *Question:* 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.]
- *Question:* Some of Kev's cousins have names which rhyme: Chrome Dome and Shirls Kurls. Some use alliteration: Megan the Meanie or Nobby Nutso. Some are made up of a name and another word: Barry the Rabbit, Tommy the Zombie, Tumbly the Gump. What kinds of nicknames do people you know have? [See also **BLM 2 Matching Names** below.]

3) Expressions of Speech 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 **Visual Literacy** below].

- *Question:* When Kev is born his mum 'planted red roses and rolled out the red carpet'. What does this mean?
- *Question:* Kev says 'Uncle Nobby reckons bloodnuts are nearly extinct like cassowaries.' What does the word 'bloodnut' refer to?
- *Question:* When Nicky puts the helmet on him, Kev says 'I saw red!' What does this mean?
- *Question:* When Kev says that 'Mum and Dad got the glums up with me', what does he mean?
- *Question:* When Mum says that Aunty Pav 'lives in a house of raindrops', what does she mean?
- *Activity:* Write a list of expressions like these that you have come across. Discuss their meaning with the class.
- *Activity:* Write a poem about yourself using a word that means *special* in each line, for example: 'I am special because... I'm a 'one-off' because... I'm one of a kind because...' etc. Try to add other words which mean *special* or *original*.

4) Humour is one of the most obvious things about the writing. For example, when Kev is sent to his room he says 'Nothing to do except play join the dots with my freckles' and there's a picture of him with lines on his face, joining his freckles.

- *Question:* What other things did you find funny?

5) The conclusion of a story is important in cementing its themes. This story ends with the words 'Even Nicky Bathgate.'

- *Question:* What does this ending suggest, and how does it further develop the theme?

[See also **BLM 3 Quiz** and **BLM 4 Word Find** below.]

VISUAL LITERACY

- 1) **Chris McKimmie's drawings of Kev's world are child-like and impressionistic**, just as they were in the earlier two titles. They are often suggestive of a child's drawing and actually do include some drawings by Chris's grandchildren. The **Typography and lettering** is like a child's drawing as well.
 - *Activity:* Draw a picture of yourself in your favourite place or with your favourite toy or pet and print your name below it. Colour it in, in your favourite colours.
- 2) **Medium** is described on the back page 'The pictures are done with Acrylic paint on MDF board and paper. Other media include ink collage, cardboard box, egg flip & wooden spoon. Oh, and also pencils, pastels, jiffy bag and star stamp.'
 - *Activity:* Try to paint a scene in any of the media mentioned here, or in a combination of them, depicting the people in your extended family.
- 3) The pictures in this book have **emotional impact** too.
 - *Question:* What effect does space and colour have on the reading of this text?
 - *Activity:* Look at the picture on the second double page spread in which Kev draws himself as a bird flying over his family each of whom is doing something creative. Podgy is dancing. Jo Jo is swinging on a tightrope. Cher is walking on the tightrope. What does this picture remind you of? What does it tell you about the family?
- 4) Each of Chris McKimmie's books contain **intertextual references** and jokes in the pictures which refer to underlying themes or ideas.
 - *Activity:* For example, there is a talking sulphur-crested cockatoo in many of the pictures saying cheeky things such as 'Who's a Special Kev?'. He appears on the endpaper and on the opening spread when Kev was born and on the closing page. Find the cockatoo in other pictures. What role does he play in the action?
 - *Question:* Birds appear throughout the book in many guises. When Dad makes the model scrub turkey, Kev wishes that he 'could get on it and go to Tumblegum to see Fatty Boombah and say, 'Hello'.' What do birds represent in this book?
 - *Activity:* The stars and their constellations in the sky are used symbolically to denote the many different people in the world. Read each picture and see how many references to the stars and the planets you can find.
 - *Question:* 'Mum said we are all made of stars. We are all special.' Who is the 'star' in your sky?
 - *Activity:* Fatty and his family move to Tumblegum near the Big Avocado. In his earlier book *Brian Banana Duck Sunshine Yellow*, Chris McKimmie included references to lots of other 'big

things'. Research and find out about some of the 'big things' in Australia, such as the Big Banana, the Big Golden Guitar, the Big Prawn, the Big Cornish Miner – there's even a Big Avocado in Durandah NSW! Then invent and draw a big thing, making it as funny as you can.

- *Question:* What other 'sub-texts' did you discover in the images in this book?
- 5) **Colour** is just as important in this as in Chris's previous two titles. Kev is special because he has red hair and freckles.
- *Activity:* What red things can you find in these pictures? Clue: Start with the cover and endpapers before looking at the pages in the book.
- *Question:* What does red symbolise?

[See also **BLM 1 Colour in a Present for Special Kev** below.]

- 6) **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.
- *Question:* In this book, the **endpapers** feature Kev in one picture and Fatty in the other. What do they suggest?
- *Activity:* Examine the **front and back cover**. What meaning do you make from the images?

CREATIVE ARTS

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

DRAMA

- *Activity:* Act out the story of Ned Kelly. Make a helmet just like Ned's. Make it as imaginative a production as you can.

MUSIC

- *Activity:* Make up your own simple rhymed song about Kev, and the day he was born, as if it was written by his mum.

DANCE

- *Activity:* What sort of dance would Aunty Pav do? Create a special dance for her and Kev to perform together.

CRAFT AND DESIGN

- *Activity:* Make a brush turkey (sometimes called a bush or scrub turkey) just like the one Special Kev's dad makes for him. He used an egg flip, a wooden spoon, a football, and some

paint, but you might like to experiment and make it with whatever you have to hand – or use some other things to make an entirely different bird or animal!

- *Activity:* Make a pavlova and have a party to celebrate Kev's birthday!

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

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

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

Ned Kelly

Kev gets into trouble when Nicky Bathgate forces him to play 'Ned Kelly'. Read about the famous bushranger:

Ned Kelly http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ned_Kelly

Ned Kelly's World <http://www.nedkellysworld.com.au/index.html>

Big Things

Fatty moves to live near the Big Avocado. Read about other big things in Australia:

Australia's Big Things http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia's_big_things

Stars And Constellations

Stars created by Jim Kaler:

<http://www.astro.uiuc.edu/~kaler/sow/sowlist.html>

The Constellations and their Stars

<http://www.astro.wisc.edu/~dolan/constellations/>

Kids Connect: Stars and Constellations

<http://www.kidskconnect.com/content/view/102/27/>

- *Activity:* Create your own web page for *Special Kev*, connected to the school website, and post on it all the work you produce when reading this book, and links to other related books and activities. Celebrate Kev's uniqueness!

MATHEMATICS

Students will find many objects to count in this book.

- *Question:* How many of his eleventy million cousins does Special Kev name in the book?
- *Question:* How many balloons are there in the picture opposite the empty box which Kev gets from Megan the Meanie?
- *Question:* How many stars are in the sky in the picture of Aunty Pav's house?
- *Question:* How many ducks can you find in this book?

CONCLUSION

This book is just as special as Kev is. It is full of warm observations about family and feelings, glorious art, and quirky humour. Kev is the same as all of us... he's just a little bit ... DIFFERENT!

ABOUT THE WRITERS

CHRIS M^cKIMMIE

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 2006
Maisie Moo and Invisible Lucy 2007

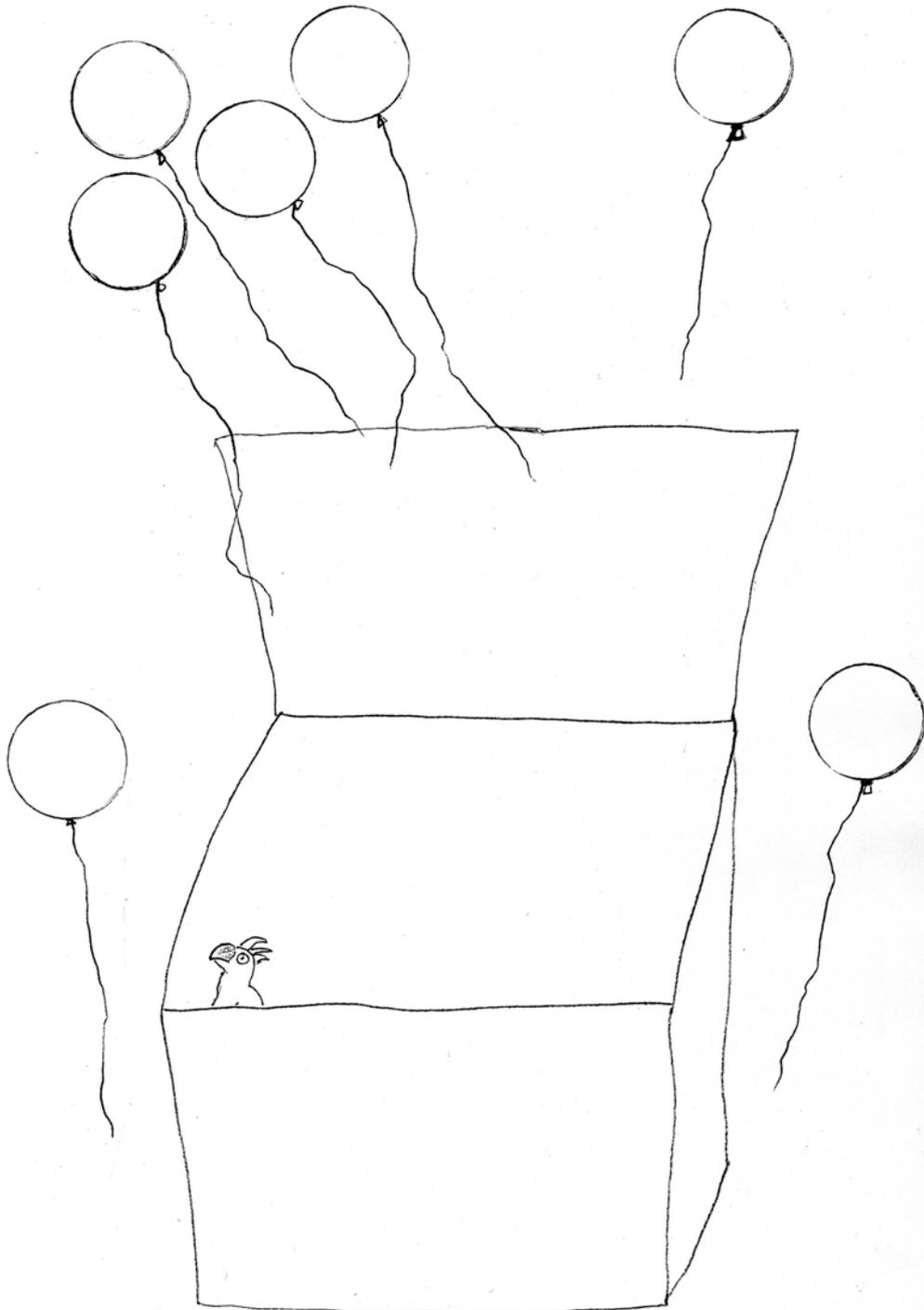
D^R ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT

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.

BLM1

COLOUR IN A PRESENT FOR SPECIAL KEV

This is a gift box for Special Kev. Don't be a Megan the Meanie! In the empty box, draw a present for Kev which you think he'd really like (rather than the nasty box of nothing sent by Megan the Meanie). Colour in the balloons for Kev, too. Don't forget to use the colour red somewhere because it's Kev's favourite!



BLM 2

MATCHING NAMES

These pairs of words are found in names of characters in the book. Write the appropriate word relating to those in the first column, in the second column.

Wobbly		Nutso
Harry		Junior
Chrome		Kev
Nobby		Kurls
Megan		Highpants
Tommy		the Gump
Barry		Boombah
Gary		the Meanie
Fatty		the Zombie
Special		Dome
Shirls		the Rabbit
Tumby		Frank

BLM 3

QUIZ

QUESTIONS

1. Which of the names in the Matching Names is that of an animal and not a person?
2. Name two of Kev's aunts.
3. Which uncle is the head of the Boombah family?
4. Who is Kev's favourite cousin?
5. Who was the kid that got Special Kev into so much trouble?
6. Where did the Boombahs move to?
7. What large tourist attraction did they live near?
8. What present did Dad make for Kev?
9. What sort of house did Mum say that Aunty Pav lived in?
10. What did Kev get for his birthday ?

ANSWERS

1. Gary Junior 2. Aunty Pav and Aunty Bingo 3. Uncle Tom 4. Fatty Boombah 5. Nicky Bathgate 6. Tumblegum 7. The Big Avocado 8. A scrub turkey 9. A house of raindrops. 10. A star named after him.

BLM 4

KEV'S WORDFIND

Find the words in the square. They are written in any order; they go across, down, in reverse, or diagonally. The words are:

Ned Kelly, footy, me (twice!), bucket; cassowaries, cousins, roses, carpet, freckles, fault, Boombah, red, star, tree, birthday, special, pretend, unique, my, all (3 times!), turkey, lake, mad, dyes, ginger, April, silly, one, go (4 times!), too, TV.

B	O	O	M	B	A	H	A	L	L	Y	B
D	U	N	I	Q	U	E	L	A	E	G	I
E	O	C	A	P	R	I	L	K	S	I	R
R	O	D	K	T	V	D	R	E	I	N	T
S	T	A	R	E	Y	U	S	O	L	G	H
N	E	M	E	E	T	M	E	N	L	E	D
I	R	O	S	E	S	Y	L	E	Y	R	A
S	G	O	P	N	E	D	K	E	L	L	Y
U	O	R	G	S	P	E	C	I	A	L	E
O	A	F	O	O	T	Y	E	A	L	L	E
C	A	S	S	O	W	A	R	I	E	S	R
D	N	E	T	E	R	P	F	A	U	L	T