

Jake's Monster Mess

Ken Spillman
with illustrations by Chris Nixon

ISBN: 9781 921 696 039
PUBLICATION DATE: MAY 2010

ABOUT THE BOOK

Synopsis

Jake's room is only slightly messy — until he tries to clean it! First Jake empties his sock drawer, his jock drawer and his toy cupboard, then he drags out all the dusty forgotten stuff beneath his bed.



Now everything is piled on the bedroom floor and, to make matters worse, it all seems to have expanded! But Jake is determined to do the job properly. There's a surprise in store for Dad — but it isn't the one Jake planned!

Themes

Jake's Monster Mess is a familiar tale of a child cleaning his bedroom. It explores the situation of good intentions gone wrong.

The relationship between Jake and his father is central to the story. This father-son relationship is firm and loving, and drives parts of the narrative. Jake's family is also a reflection of the diversity of families in today's society, in which many family units are small. Jake is an only child with a single father (and no mention of his mother). Similarly, only one grandparent (his Nana) appears in the story.

Cleaning and tidying provides a backdrop and is the main activity in the story. The theme of community could also be explored to some degree, since this family obviously involves their friends in their home life.

Writing Style

Jake's story is told in the third person. The narrative voice stays close to the child's point of view. The narration gives insight into Jake's thoughts and plans, and is broken up with short dialogues. Although each chapter complicates the action and increases the suspense, a lighthearted tone concludes the novel.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Author Background

Ken Spillman became interested in writing stories in Year 4, when a teacher named Sister Carmel gave his class interesting topics like 'The Autobiography of a Horse'. During the summer holidays at the end of that year, Ken wrote a story about a kitten that was born to a stray cat under his house, and which later won the title of 'Most Beautiful Cat' at the Collie Show. In Year 10, another teacher gave Ken permission to skip English classes and write whatever stories he wanted! He is now the author of around two dozen books. For more information about the author, visit www.kenspillman.com.



Author Motivation

Ken Spillman writes:

"I really wanted to write a book about good intentions, and how they sometimes go wrong. My Jake character was a perfect vehicle for this idea because he's a good kid with ideas that are bigger than his head! That means he's going to mess up things at times — and his bedroom is a metaphor for other big mess-ups. When my son Paddy was three, he said to me once: "We all make mistakes." I had been quite angry with him, but what he said was so wise and I just thought — you're so right! Most kids have good intentions — and all of them make mistakes, just like adults!"

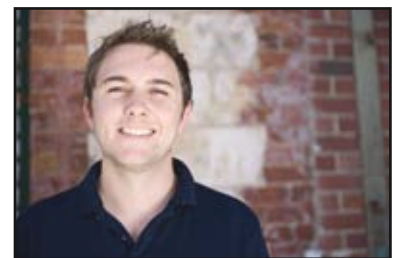
Illustrator Background

Chris Nixon is a freelance illustrator and adventure tour guide. He grew up in the foothills of Perth, spending all his spare time outside, and feels passionate about getting kids to experience the natural world. He graduated from Curtin University with a Bachelor of Design, majoring in Illustration.

Illustrator Motivation

Chris Nixon writes:

"My room and my studio are almost always messy so I knew I would have no trouble illustrating *Jake's Monster Mess*. Jake is a great character with such a wide range of expression and wonder and it's a pleasure to bring him (and his imagination) to life. When I first read the text, I had ideas pouring out of me onto the page, so the creative process worked really well. I'm hoping to take Jake to the next level soon and take him from books to animated film — should be a lot of fun. In the meantime, I look forward to working on more books with Ken."



STUDY NOTES

Pre-reading

Look at the cover of *Jake's Monster Mess*. What does the illustration tell you? How would you describe Jake's expression?

What does the title tell you about the story? BEFORE reading the blurb, write your own short story titled '[Your name]'s Monster Mess'.

After reading

Intentions

Have you ever tried to do the right thing, and ended up doing the wrong thing? Write a story about what happened.

Are you likely to get into MORE trouble or LESS trouble or the SAME AMOUNT of trouble if you mean to do something wrong, than if you accidentally do something wrong? Why or why not?

If you realise you have accidentally done something wrong, what is the best thing to do? If you don't tell anyone, what might happen? If you tell someone straight away, what might happen?

If you have done something wrong on purpose, what is the best thing to do?

What's the biggest mess you've ever created? How did you clean it up?

Have you ever had a big idea and found that it was a lot harder to make it happen than you thought? Perhaps you created something or tried to fix something. Could you have done it better, or not?

Have you ever tried to create a surprise for somebody? Did it work, or did it backfire?

Think of a nice way you could surprise somebody.

Dinner Parties

Do your parents ever invite people to visit? What is your favourite thing about having guests to visit? What do they do to prepare? Do they expect you to help? What sort of jobs do you have to do?

Who would you invite if you had your own dinner party? If you could cook anything, what would you cook? What else might you do to prepare for your guests?

Keeping Things Clean At Home

Do you help around the house normally?

Do you have a job or jobs you need to do every day or every week?

Do you think you could help more?

What job do you dislike the most? Which job do you like most?

Make a list of the jobs you could do every day at home to help (e.g. make bed, put away clothes, feed pets, etc.).

... School

Make a list of all the jobs in your classroom. Allocate a job to each person for a day or a week.

How clean is your school? Organise a clean up at lunchtime. See who can find the most rubbish.

Design a 'Keep our School Clean' poster.

... In Your Bedroom

Look at Jake's room at the beginning of the book. Compare it to the picture of his room at the end of the book. Which picture looks most like your room?

Draw a bird's-eye-view of your own bedroom. Draw your furniture and show where you keep different things.

Do you think your room is messy or clean? Do your parents think your room is messy or clean? Do you think adults and kids have different ideas about messy and clean? Why?

Make a list in two columns. One for reasons why it is good to have a messy room, and one for reasons why it is good to have a clean room.

Organisation

Why did Jake find that his piles of clothes no longer matched his drawers and cupboards?

Re-write his 'clothes/shelves' list. How could you fix his problem? (For instance, imagine fitting two types of clothes in one drawer.)

Do you think you could organise your room better than it is now? If yes, how would you do this? Write your own 'clothes/shelves' list for how your room is organised.

Do you share your room with anyone else? If yes, how do you share the space? What are some problems with sharing? What are some good things about sharing?

If you don't share your room, think of something that might be difficult about sharing your room, and something that might be good.

Cleanliness

Have ideas of what is clean always been the same?

For a long time people didn't understand the connection between dirt and disease.

How did people's understanding of dirt and disease change? (Clue: look for important historical figures and scientific discoveries.)

Research some of the problems associated with dirty environments.

Can things be too clean? Research some of the problems associated with overly-clean environments.

Machines

Keeping a house clean used to be much more labour-intensive than it is today.

Make a list of the machines in your home that help with the housework.

Choose a machine (eg. vacuum cleaner, dishwasher, iron, etc.) and research its history.

Find out when it was first invented and by whom. Find out how it works. How did people do this job before the machine was invented?

Jake wishes he had a robot to clean his room. If you could invent something to help in the house, what would it be?

Possessions

Jake owns a lot of stuff. Does he need it all? Why/why not?

Write a list of the toys, clothes and other possessions that are mentioned in *Jake's Monster Mess*.

Do you own a lot of stuff? Do you need everything you own? Do kids everywhere have as much stuff?

Divide a piece of paper in half. On one side write 'WANTS' and on the other side write 'NEEDS'. Cut pictures out of magazines and choose which side of the paper to glue them on.

If you were born one hundred years ago, what might your room look like? What sort of things would you own? What sort of things would you wear? Why do you think things have changed so much?

If you could only keep one set of clothes, what would you choose?

If you could only keep one toy, what would you choose?

If you could only keep one book, what would you choose?

If you had to get rid of one set of clothes, what would you choose?

If you had to get rid of one toy, what would you choose?

If you had to get rid of one book, what would you choose?

Jake decides to give away the toys he no longer wants. Challenge your class to bring in some of the toys, clothes or books they've grown out of. Choose a charity to donate them to.

Games with friends

Jake made up a game with glow-in-the-dark balloons the last time Jonah visited. What games do you think you could create with glow-in-the-dark balloons?

What is your favourite game to play when other kids come to visit?

Why do you think Jonah started laughing at the end when they opened the door?

Family

Jake's Nana comes to visit in the morning. Do you have grandparents? Where do they live? Do they visit you/you visit them very often? What is the best thing about having grandparents?

Describe Jake's relationship with his Dad. Do you think it is a good relationship? What makes you think yes or no?

Write a letter to author Ken Spillman or illustrator Chris Nixon, telling them what their book made you think about, and whether or not you enjoyed it. Send your letter c/o Fremantle Press.

Online resource

<http://www.brighthub.com/education/k-12/articles/69037.aspx>

Interview with Ken Spillman

We meet Jake again after *Jake's Gigantic List* last year. Is he older? How has he changed?

Jake had a birthday at the end of *Jake's Gigantic List*, so yes, he's older! — and of course that makes him feel much more capable of accomplishing big tasks like tidying his room. But Jake's sense of ambition will never change — just like he wants to fly, and wants a pet crocodile, he will always think BIG.

Is the story of the 'Monster Mess' based on real experience?

Hmmm... my desk is always a mess in spite of 3,489,541 resolutions that I must keep it in order. And my clothes do seem attracted to the floor — no matter how I try to convince them to behave.

Which aspects of the story do you think will appeal most to kids?

Is there a kid who hasn't made a mess? And yet, most kids do not set out to make a mess — the mess just happens while they are doing something else. Kids will identify with this, and there will be an "Oh no!" factor as things start to go wrong and Dad and the visitors arrive.

Why might parents enjoy the story?

As with all the Jake books I've planned, there's a message buried somewhere in all the fun. In the first Jake book, it was the wonder of books. In *Jake's Monster Mess*, it's the value of good intentions. Jake is not a bad kid — in fact, he's quite innocently aiming to do something good. Like everybody, however, he finds that good intentions don't necessarily result in a good outcome, and that's an important lesson. I've dedicated the book to kids with good intentions, and to parents who can appreciate that — even when it's difficult. After all, we all stuff up sometimes!

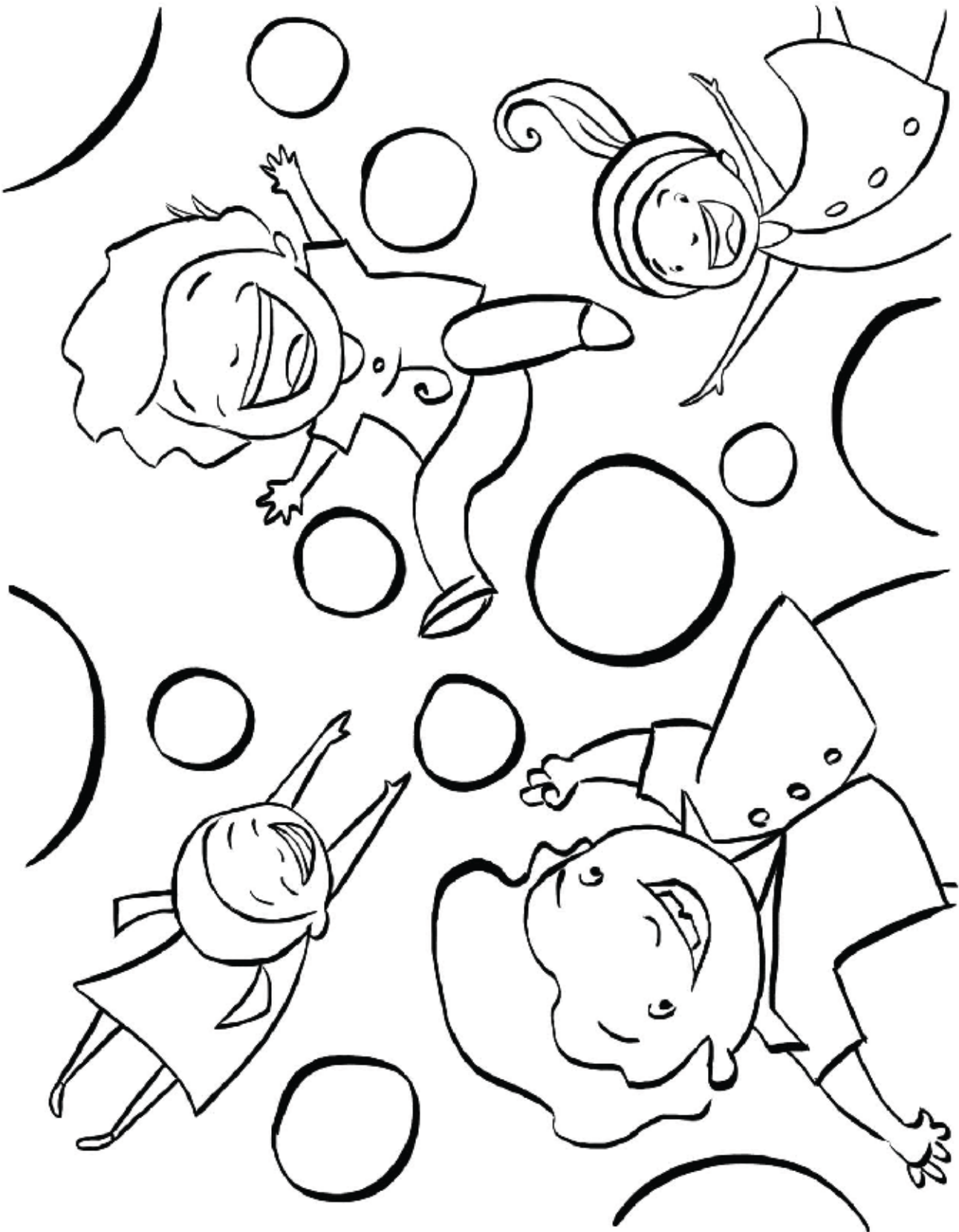
How different was it to work with illustrator Chris Nixon a second time?

Both Chris and I knew our main characters, so there was less development — it was straight into the action! Chris understands Jake really well — he totally 'gets' that Jake is a good kid with a very active mind and a great sense of fun.

Can you give us a hint about ideas for future Jake stories?

Well... In *Jake's Gigantic List* we learned that Jake would love to be able to fly ... Is that a big enough hint?

TEACHING NOTES



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