

JAKE'S CONCERT HORROR

KEN SPILLMAN AND CHRIS NIXON

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THEMES: Humour, Family and Home Stories

YEAR LEVEL: Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: History, OI.Asia

AWARDS: Shortlisted, Children's Book Council of Australia

Older Readers, 2013; Longlisted, Miles Franklin Literary

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Jake's Concert Horror shows how anyone can overcome their fears, even when those fears involve standing on a stage in front of an audience playing a lead role in a play and pretending to kiss a girl! When Jake's teacher, Mrs Paul, tells the class they are going to put on a play based on the movie *The Little Mermaid*,

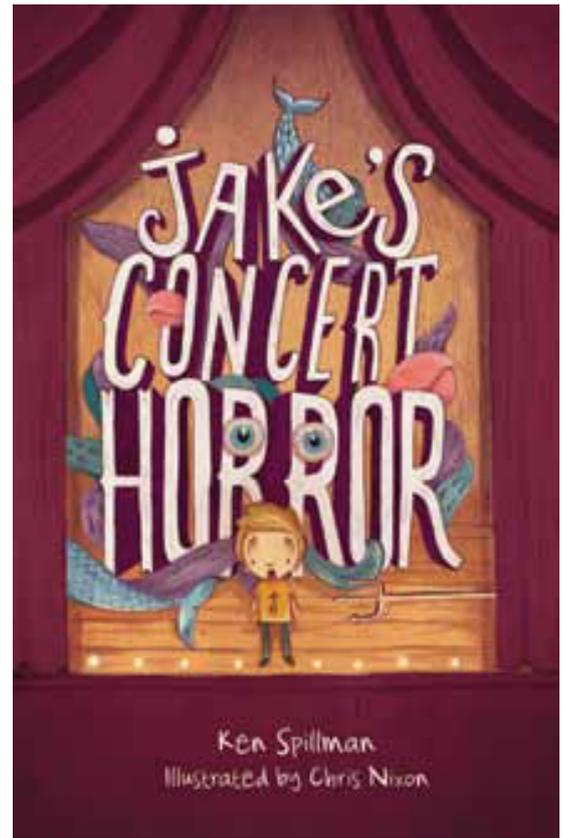
Jake decides he would quite like to take on the role of Sebastian, the crab. He can envisage himself doing a neat sideways scuttle across the stage dressed in a crab costume. He is horrified to discover that Mrs Paul has bigger plans in mind for him when she casts him instead in one of the lead roles as Prince Eric. His horror continues when he learns that he has to pretend to kiss Stephanie, who plays the part of Ariel, the mermaid.

Jake finds it is hard work learning all his lines in the four short weeks until their performance in front of all the parents. Fortunately his nanna is there to help him, and she offers to read the other actors' parts from the script. Jake gradually grows in confidence and learns to project his voice so that he can be heard at the back of the hall. He discovers that it feels good to master his lines and not have to rely on his script any more. But he is still worried about the idea of having to kiss Stephanie in the play.

Eventually Jake's nerves begin to get the better of him. He has a nightmare where he dreams the whole audience has turned into a giant sea of eyeballs and he finds himself on stage unable to speak a word. Jake's dad is quick to dry Jake's tears and reassure him that everyone gets nervous sometimes. He tells him how he once had to speak on stage at his high school graduation, and he was extremely nervous. But once he was actually on the stage, he found the audience just looked like a big, still pond and it felt fantastic to succeed at his speech. He reminds Jake that all he needs to do is his best, and that he will be proud of him no matter what happens.

The night of the concert finally arrives, and Jake is so nervous that he feels like tiny kangaroos are jumping around inside him.

The boys have their hair gelled by Mrs Paul, and all the children are dressed in their full costumes ready for their turn on the stage. When the lights go down and the play begins, Jake discovers all his fears are groundless as the play is a huge success. The audience loves the performance, and the kiss that has caused Jake so much anguish becomes a highlight. The audience roars with delight at the gurgling noise that Jake adds as he puts his cheek next to Stephanie's for the kiss. At the end of the play, Jake feels as much of a hero as his character, Prince Eric.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Raised in Sydney and Perth, Ken Spillman is the author of more than 30 books. His Jake series appears in many countries and several languages. During 2011 a new series, *The Absolutely True Fantasies of Daydreamer Dev*, was launched by Puffin India, while Tulika Books released *Advaita the Writer*. Books scheduled for publication in 2012 include *The Great Storyteller* (Scholastic), *The Strange Story of Felicity Frown* (Scholastic), *Radhika Takes a Plunge* (Young Zubaan) and *The Auto That Flew* (Pratham Books). Other work includes *Blue* (Fremantle Press), the acclaimed YA novel *Love is a UFO* (Pan Macmillan 2007) and the *Serventy Kids* series coauthored by Jon Doust (Fremantle Press). Ken Spillman is a popular international speaker and the US reference work *Contemporary Authors* (Gale Group) has compiled a detailed entry on his career. For more information about the author, visit: www.kenspillman.com. Chris Nixon is a freelance illustrator and adventure tour guide. He grew up in the foothills of Perth and spent all his spare time outside. He feels passionate about getting kids to experience the natural world.

Ken Spillman writes: “At some point for every kid, there comes a time when dread itself becomes larger than life. Attempting something new, feeling unable to escape a situation or being pressured to succeed – all these can produce feelings that are overwhelming. When we’re thrown in at the deep end, we may need a little support and encouragement but can emerge from the experience feeling buoyant. Jake’s concert experience is symbolic of many challenges in kids’ lives. I wrote the story to show that we often underestimate our capacity to succeed in the unfamiliar. Jake manufactures fear but is ultimately triumphant through preparation, being in the moment and acting according to his instincts.”

STUDY NOTES

Character profiles

Explore and discuss the major and minor characters in the story, and create a character profile for each one based on the information contained in the story and the ideas and contributions of the students. The profiles could be developed on butcher’s paper, as a foldout cardboard booklet with accompanying pictures, or as single-word descriptions attached by clothes pegs to a cut-out picture of each character.

Timeline

Ensure that children have fully comprehended the plot of the story by working as a whole class to develop a timeline of the story. Focus on key events contained within each chapter, and encourage children to return to the text to help them recall the plot. The timeline could be typed on the computer or drawn by hand on a long strip of paper.

Introduce the inquiry process by prompting children with focus questions about the story *The Little Mermaid* on which Jake’s play is based. Revisit Chapter Two where we learn about both the movie version and the original fairy story by Hans Christian Andersen.

Some examples include ‘Who was Hans Christian Andersen?’, ‘Can we find out what other stories he wrote?’ and ‘What can we find out about mermaids?’.

Perform

Have children put on their own performance of a scene or two from *The Little Mermaid*. Children can enjoy learning to deliver lines, organise and dress in costumes, work together to create a backdrop or set, and perform dialogue in front of a small and supportive audience (such as a small group of parents or a group of children from another class). The addition of a narrator to the play helps support children’s understanding of story structure and keeps the play moving forward effectively.

Think and reflect

Ask children to work in pairs or small groups. The children will design a shield that shows how they can use their resources to go into battle whenever something frightens or worries them. The shield can be decorated with words and pictures of familiar people, friends and personal skills that all help make a challenge more achievable. Discuss how Jake felt at the start of the story when he first learnt he was to perform a lead role in the play. Remind children what resources he drew upon to help him get through the experience, such as his dad, nanna and friends, as well as his own resilience in having a go and practising his lines until he knew

them well. Children could then identify some of their own strategies (people, skills, qualities) that can help them deal with a difficult or scary situation. It can also be helpful to remind children that there is an important difference between being resilient enough to take reasonable risks and have a try at something difficult (as Jake did) and taking an unreasonable risk which could be dangerous.

Mer models

Use a range of materials to encourage children to create their own mermaid or merman models. Use plasticine to form the body and arms of the mermaid/merman and then add decorations such as sequins, coloured wool, beads and small sections of blue and green materials, off-cuts to create tails and hair.

I can do it

Discuss how Jake grows in confidence during the story, and moves from a position of 'I can't do it' when he has the nightmare to 'I did it!' when he feels like a hero at the end of the performance. Write each of these positions on separate pieces of paper and place them on the floor on either side of the room. Place blank pieces of paper as stepping stones in between. Ask a class to think of sentences or words to write on each of the stepping stones that would help someone move from one side of the room to the other.

Examples could include 'friends who encourage each other', 'thinking positive thoughts', 'giving someone a compliment', 'asking for help', 'practising the task' and 'not being upset if something doesn't work the first time'. Your own school may already use the 'You Can Do It' model upon which this activity concept is based.