

## Jake's Cooking Craze

Ken Spillman

illustrations by Chris Nixon

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Themes: Humour, Family and Home Stories

Year Levels: Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Jake's enthusiasm for the program *JuniorChef* has developed gradually. His initial interest has been limited by his dad's habit of changing channels on the TV. But Jake decides to watch the show so he too can share in classroom conversations about each new episode with his friends. Jake is soon gripped by a new-found passion for cooking. He convinces Nana to teach him how to make chocolate mousse, and is impressed with his own first efforts in the kitchen. In true Jake fashion, however, things take an unexpected turn when he attempts a repeat performance accompanied by his friend Jonah. Two cartons of eggs yield only four in total that separate correctly, with the rest becoming a rather scrambled mess. Undaunted, Jake decides cooking is definitely for him. Before he has time to start borrowing recipe books from the library there is an announcement at school. There is to be a cooking competition held at a nearby high school, and they need three representatives from each class to enter.

Jake decides to put himself forward as a contestant, despite his dad's best efforts to persuade him that he might not yet be ready for the challenge. A moment of inspiration sees him select a prize ingredient from home to use as part of a recipe he finds on a chef's website. His dish is bound to be a crowd pleaser, he decides, although Dad is not so sure. When the moment for judging arrives, Jake is surprised by the reaction of the judges when he announces his dish is called 'French salad with garden escargot'. One runs from the room and both become noticeably pale.

Jake's dad responds to Jake's latest disaster by rolling around laughing. The thing he finds funniest is that Stephanie, Jake's long-time rival at school, had sampled one of Jake's snails thinking they were octopus. When she found out what she'd eaten, she had vomited all over her own cooking. When Jake recalls Stephanie's face after the competition, he is also able to see the funny side of things. But it is Nana who has the final word, asking mischievously what Jake would like for his own dinner.

### 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. In 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) and the *Serventy Kids* series co-authored 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](http://www.kenspillman.com).



### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

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.



## THEMES

Humour is a key theme in the book: Jake has a tendency to leap from one unintended problem to another, and his enthusiasm for life and adventure keeps readers of all ages amused.

*Jake's Cooking Craze* also taps into the theme of cooking that continues to flourish in Australia. The book will appeal to readers who enjoy cooking, but in typical Spillman style it takes a light-hearted view that would also appeal to those who think that cooking shows and chefs in general are taking themselves far too seriously.

Being positive about life is an important theme throughout the Jake series of books. Even when things do not go according to plan, Jake bounces back to have another go. Resilience and being able to get back up and have another try is a crucial life skill and a focus of many teaching activities. By seeing that Jake has disasters but manages to still find the humour in the situation and be prepared to have another try, children can learn that things don't always run perfectly in life, and that this is okay.

## WRITING STYLE

*Jake's Cooking Craze* is the latest title in the popular Jake series. It is an early chapter book, suited to readers in the middle primary school years. With its clear, well-spaced print and extensive use of supporting illustrations, the book is ideal for newly independent readers – particularly those with a good sense of humour. It is also fun as a shared reading experience, and will appeal to a wide range of class groups in the early to middle primary years.

The characters of Jake, Dad, Nana, Stephanie and Jonah continue to evolve in this book, and we continue to build our relationship as readers with Jake in particular. Spillman guides Jake through a series of disasters in the kitchen but always manages to reflect upon the positives rather than dwell on the problems.

The frequent illustrations serve two important purposes in the book. Firstly, they reinforce the plot for beginning readers and provide frequent guides about the action and characters. Secondly, they punctuate the story's humour and bring Jake's imagination vividly to life (for example, Chris Nixon's 'smoked salmon' illustration in Chapter 2 shows Jake in safety goggles as he imagines toasters that send up plumes of smoke into a massive suspended salmon).

## STUDY NOTES

It is best to begin work on this book with an important warning: snails from the garden should never be eaten raw and should never be eaten without proper preparation, as it is potentially fatal. Snails from gardens with snail baits and other chemicals should not be eaten at all.

Here are some ways to explore the book together in a class setting:

### Exploring recipe books

Recipe books are great fun to explore with young children as the plentiful pictures reinforce the text and ensure that even beginning readers can comprehend the basics of many recipes. Recipe books can be used in a variety of ways in the classroom:

- As an example of non-fiction writing which can be located in virtually any library.
- As an easy-to-use source of an index and table of contents which can provide practice in using alphabetical order and finding page numbers in a longer book.
- As an independent reading task for less confident older readers who do not yet have the skills to manage a fiction text independently.

Exploring recipe books can introduce children to some useful life-long reading skills that will serve them well when they become adults in their own households.

### Procedural writing task

This book lends itself well as a prompt for a procedural writing task. In procedural writing, children need to master the use of chronological order. Materials should be listed in the order that they are used, and the steps need to be explained concisely and clearly. Procedural writing often begins with a brief introduction or statement about a goal or aim. In the case of a recipe, this is generally a short statement about what follows in the recipe, and may refer to the type of cooking

method used, who the dish might appeal to or a short anecdote by the writer. Children may benefit from reading some children's cookbooks before they begin writing. They may enjoy talking about and brainstorming recipe ideas, and deciding what style of recipe they will create.

## Recount writing task

A recount piece of writing describes something which has happened. It provides background information about who, where and when something occurred. Like procedural writing, a recount gives information about a series of events in the order they happened. A recount often includes the opinions, thoughts and feelings of the writer. *Jake's Cooking Craze* could be a useful prompt for a piece of recount writing, with children encouraged to write about something they have cooked themselves at home. Children may enjoy talking about cooking disasters they have seen in their own kitchens, or reflect on cooking experiences which have worked well. For many children who are beginning writers, humour can be challenging to master, and they may find it easier to write a simple reflection on what has happened during a cooking activity. If you plan on encouraging a humorous recount from your students, give them some guidelines and examples of how to introduce a situation and its resolution for humour.

## Cooking in the classroom

Cooking in the classroom is a fabulous activity to explore with children. Simple recipes such as pikelets, scones, biscuits, pasta, homemade pizza, fresh garden salad or fried rice can all be successful and achievable in a group cooking situation.

## Cooking across cultures

Cooking is a great way to explore cultures, and recipe books that feature food from around the world are easy to find. Ask around amongst the parents of the children in your classroom and see who would be willing to come in and talk to the children about the food from their own cultural heritage, and perhaps show a simple recipe being prepared. If no one is available to talk in class, you could try watching an episode of a cooking show which features multicultural cuisines.

## Cooking as a vocation

Invite a chef from your local community to talk about cooking as a career. You might ask the person to talk about the hours they have to work, what steps they needed to take to become a chef, some of the positives and negatives of their career, and whether that is what they always wanted to be.

## Snail art

Snails, with their swirly, spirally shells, can form the basis for some fabulous artwork. Take some close-up photos of snail shells with a digital camera and show these on the interactive whiteboard. Talk about the patterns, shapes and colours that you can see in the shells. Compare one shell with another to see if all snails have individual markings or if there are some similarities. Ask students to create their own piece of snail art. This could be a snail shell design, a map showing where a snail has moved through a garden, or a 'snail character' with a face and its own personality. Keen artists might also enjoy extending this task by making their snail character a feature of a cartoon strip or part of a Powerpoint slideshow story.

## Research skills

In the story, Almina cooks a dish called 'sarma' in the cooking competition and scores two 'nines'. Challenge students in your class to find out what sarma is and which culture it comes from. So you can be one step ahead of your students, here's what you need to know:

Sarma is a savoury dish made by wrapping leaves such as pickled cabbage leaves around a filling of meat, rice, onion and spices blended together. The word 'sarma' comes from the Turkish verb 'sarmak' which means 'to wrap'. Sarma is common as a celebration food, and is often served on special occasions such as birthdays. Variations exist across a number of cultures, including Romanian, Bosnian and Croatian cuisines. The shortcut that Almina refers to in the book is probably that she wouldn't have had time to boil the sarma for several hours before serving, as is the usual method of cooking. With the cooking competition limited to just half an hour she would have needed to shortcut her cooking time and boil the sarma for only a short time before serving it.

This research task could be extended by providing children with a list of interesting foods from a range of world cultures and asking them to find out what the food is, which country it comes from and how it is cooked. Examples include:

1. guacamole (Mexican dip made from avocado)
2. spanikopita (Greek dish made with a mixture of cheeses)
3. pad thai (Thai savoury dish of rice noodles, prawns and vegetables)

## Other books in the Jake series

