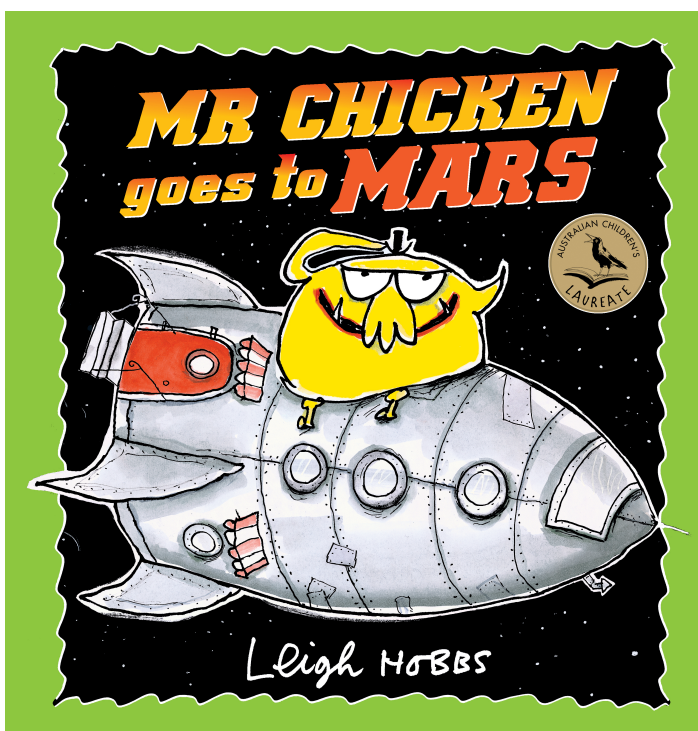


Mr Chicken Goes to Mars

By Leigh Hobbs



Mr Chicken's most ambitious journey yet will take him to the outer reaches of the known universe! From picture book maestro and former Australian Children's Laureate Leigh Hobbs.

RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 4–8 (Lower Primary)

THEMES

Humour, space travel, Mars

ISBN (AUS)

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SYNOPSIS

Mr Chicken is very curious. He loves meeting new people and travelling to new places. He's been to Paris, London, Rome and all over Australia, but one day, he realises that he has never been to outer space.

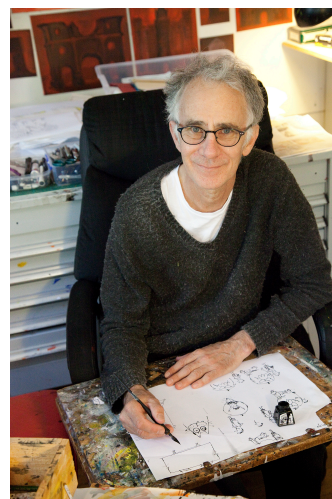
Mr Chicken is on his way to Mars and you, the adventurous reader, are invited to join him!

Q&A WITH LEIGH HOBBS

Where did the idea of Mr Chicken come from?

I don't remember how Mr Chicken came about, as in the exact moment he was born and took shape inside my head.

However, I had the initial idea and did sketches for the first Mr Chicken book *Mr Chicken Goes To Paris* while I was in the Louvre Museum bookshop in Paris. Where, I might add, the book has been on sale ever since.



Why do you think children respond so well to him?

I suspect it's because he's a grotesque, ridiculous looking monster who has many of the positive attributes which kids relate to. For instance, he's adventurous, curious, loves making friends, is polite and, perhaps most importantly, he's funny. Also, I think children have an innate sense of fun when given the opportunity... just like Mr Chicken. Oh, and he loves eating. Especially cakes and gelato.

What inspired you to send him into space this time?

The very idea of Mr Chicken squeezed into a rocket leaving Earth enroute to Mars was irresistible. And, of course, he'd be thrilled to be leaving Earth and all those tedious domestic chores – not to mention the opportunity to make some new Martian friends.

Where is Mr Chicken considering visiting next?

Post Mars, I'm not sure where or when Mr Chicken will set off on another adventure. I do know that an adventurous spirit such as his won't sit around doing nothing for long. I will have my pen and ink at the ready.

IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- **Pre-reading activity:** If your class is familiar with Mr Chicken, tell them that his next adventure sees him travelling to Mars. Ask them who and what he might meet and see along the way. Compile a list of their suggestions.
If your class has never seen a Mr Chicken book before, tell them that a giant yellow chicken travels a lot to find out about different countries and their cuisines, but that this time he is going somewhere very different – Mars! Again, ask them how he might get there, what he might see in space and who might greet him on Mars. Compile a list of their suggestions.
- Study the front cover of the book and focus on three main aspects: the font and colours used in the title; the illustration of Mr Chicken and his spaceship; and the framing device of crinkled lines. Explore each aspect in depth.
 - Font and colours used in the title: Explain to students that the way words 'look' can sometimes help us better understand the meaning behind them. Using a font called Vivaldi, show them the title 'Mr Chicken goes to Mars' and ask if this font would look better or worse on the front cover. Encourage them to look closely at the font that is used on the cover and talk about why it communicates space travel better. Now talk about why the colours used in the title complement the idea of Mars. You may need to mention that Mars is also known as 'the red planet'.

- Now look at the illustration of Mr Chicken on the spaceship and ask them why the image is funny. You may find they mention the rickety nature of the ship, the fact that Mr Chicken is almost as big as his spaceship or the fact that he is sitting on top of it holding his hat so it doesn't blow away.
 - Show examples of postage stamps on your whiteboard and point out the similar crinkled edges. Point out that postage stamps can symbolise travel and are issued to commemorate important people and major events. Ask them what they think the link here with Mr Chicken going to Mars might be? Encourage students to create their own image for a brand-new stamp commemorating Mr Chicken's latest adventure.
- Read the story to your class *without* showing them the images. Ask what kind of book they think this is. Now show the images with the text and see if the combination changes their idea about the kind of book it is. Explore, in a whole class discussion, reasons for why the text and illustrations sometimes tell two very different stories, making the story very funny. An example is when the text tells us Mr Chicken's rocket is the 'very latest in rocket design', but the image shows us a rocket with a front door, canopy and a metal patchwork design that looks anything but 'the very latest'.
- Mr Chicken spots a space station and decides he'd like to call in, say hello and stay for lunch. Show students the [Behind the News \(ABC TV\)](#) video looking at life on board the International Space Station (ISS) and ask them to answer the following questions:
 - Why do you need to zip yourself into bed when you sleep on the ISS?
 - Why do you need to swallow the toothpaste when you clean your teeth?
 - Why can't you have a shower on board?
 - What sort of food would you expect to eat in space?
 - Why can everyone and everything fly around inside the ISS?

- Talk about the concept of zero gravity and examine the image of Mr Chicken having lunch with the space explorers. What foods and cooking/eating implements do students think would definitely *not* be allowed on board the ISS?
- Using the sentence starters: 'I see', 'I hear', 'I feel', 'I smell', 'I taste', ask students to share what they think Mr Chicken experienced when he had dinner with his new Martian friends. Students can add an 'I wonder' query to show what Mr Chicken might be thinking about during the dinner.
- 'In a watery sort of way, Mr Chicken was home.' Ask students how else his crash into the sea might be described and to turn the page and find another example where the text says something quite understated and the image shows something much more dramatic happening to Mr Chicken.
- Look closely at the image of Mr Chicken tucked up in bed back on Earth on the last page. What do the posters on the wall above his bed tell us about where else he has travelled? What images on the wall show he has been to Mars?
- **Ideas for After Reading Activities:**
 - Ask students to write their own lyrics to a Martian explorer song.
 - Write a story about what the Martian saw when they visited Earth.
 - Write a piece about where Mr Chicken decides to travel next and who or what he might meet along the way.
- Open the book to the front endpapers and name all the 'household chores' that Mr Chicken doesn't have to do when he is in space. Ask students if they can find anything different about Mr Chicken's outfit when he is cooking at his stove and watering plants in his garden.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Hobbs was Australian Children's Laureate in 2016–17 and works across a wide range of artistic mediums. He is best known for his children's books featuring Old Tom, Horrible Harriet, Fiona the Pig, the Freaks of 4F, Mr Badger and Mr Chicken. *Old Tom* is also a popular TV series, and Leigh has won every major Australian children's choice award. *Mr Chicken Goes to Paris* was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, is a bestseller at Paris's Louvre Bookshop, was adapted for the stage by NIDA, and was shortlisted for the CBCA Awards – as were *Horrible Harriet* and *Old Tom's Holiday*. In 2019, Leigh received one of five Australian Legends of Children's Literature awards from Australia Post and was featured on a stamp. For a glimpse into Leigh's studio and creative process – and some tips on how to draw his most famous characters – view his 'That's Me' mini-film series at vimeo.com/leighhobbs