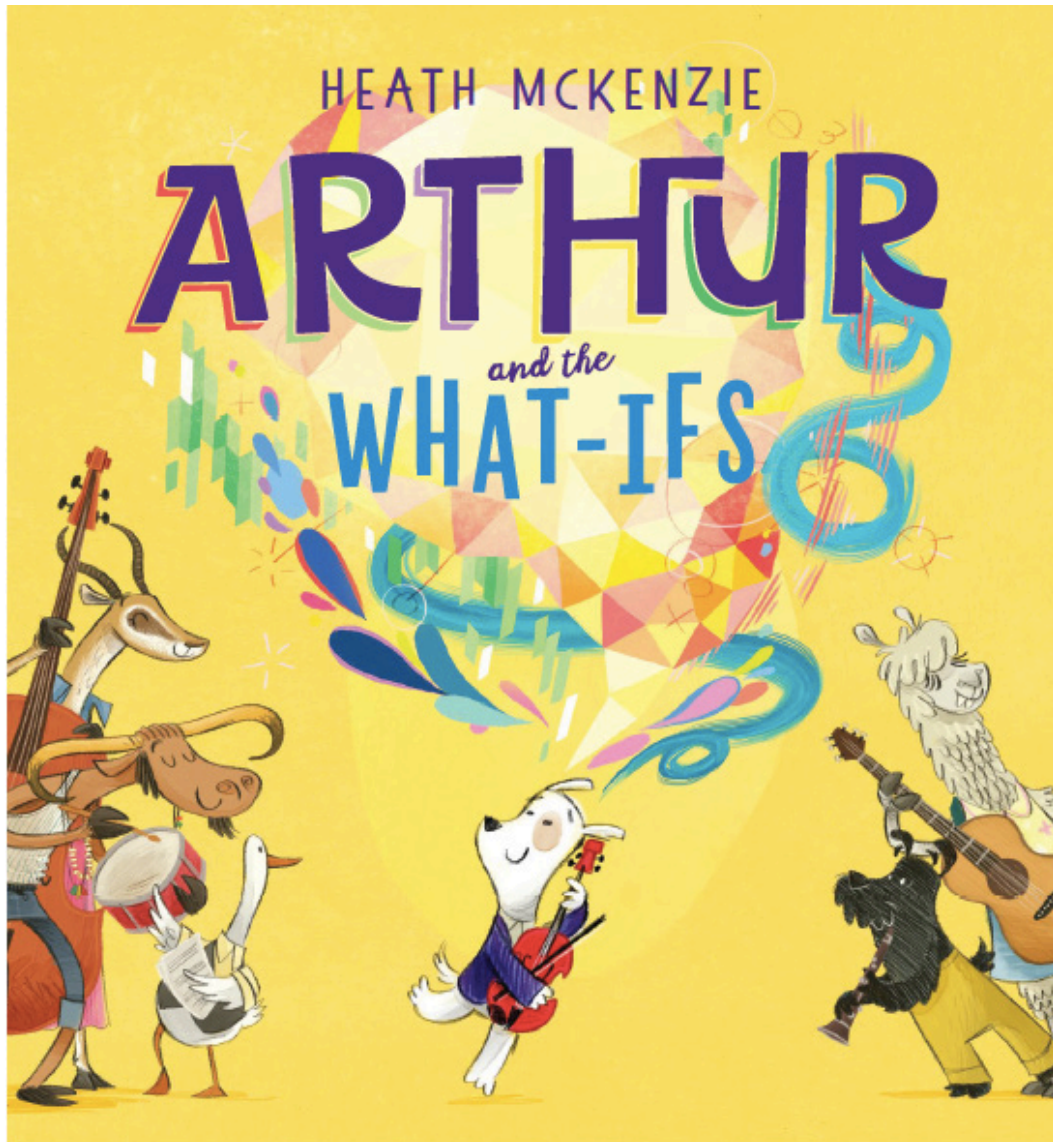


TEACHERS NOTES

ARTHUR AND THE WHAT-IFS



Written and Illustrated by Heath McKenzie

THEMES

- Taking Chances
- Creativity
- Believing in Yourself
- City Life

SUITABLE FOR

Ages 2-6 (Prep to Grade 1)

DESCRIPTION

Arthur is a dog with a secret. More than anything in the world he loves to play his violin, but he's too scared to do it in public because, well, what if he's bad? What if people laugh? What if he makes a fool of himself?! WHAT IF?

But the song in his head and the dream in his heart just won't stay quiet. So, when he's invited to take part in a jam session, he creates the ultimate disguise - a post box costume! And when it falls apart, Arthur doesn't.

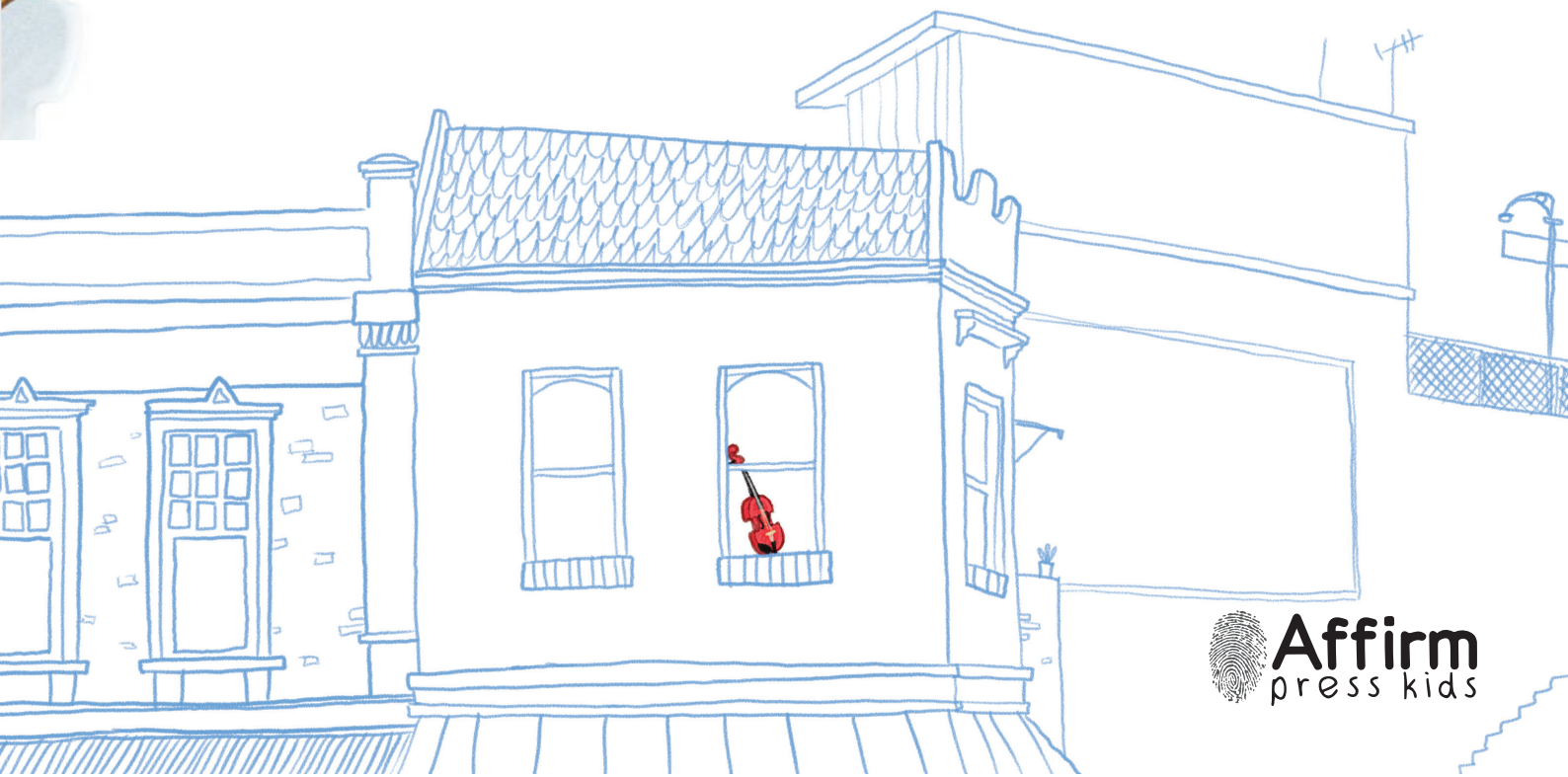
This new book from bestselling author-illustrator Heath McKenzie is a gorgeous reminder to always follow your dreams.

ABOUT THE CREATOR

Heath McKenzie lives and works in Melbourne, and has illustrated many books for children (most recently *Now That's a Hat!* and the Archie series).

When he's not drawing, Heath is busy helping to raise a little family with his lovely wife, collecting unnecessary masses of toys, books and DVDs, indulging in a spot of *Doctor Who* and attempting ambitious culinary feats in the kitchen.

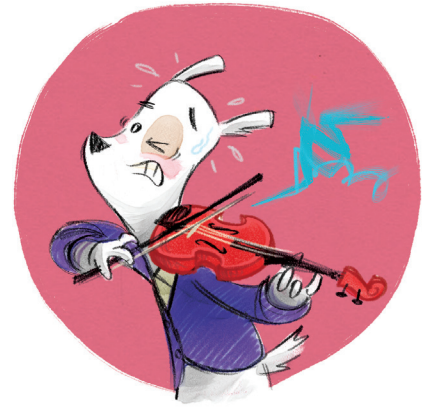
He also enjoys possibly a bit too much tea.



THEMES

Taking Chances

Arthur watches fellow musicians performing in the city and longs to join them, but he's plagued with worries about stepping outside his comfort zone. What if he makes a mistake?



When Arthur is invited to a jam session, he learns to flip his negative thoughts around and embrace the excitement of taking a chance. Instead of dwelling on worst case scenarios, Arthur discovers a world full of new friends and beautiful music. All Arthur needed to do was take a leap of faith and seize a new opportunity!

Creativity

Arthur lives in a clattery, rattly apartment and commutes to a desk job, but music is his creative outlet. As Arthur waits on a grey train platform, a cellist's tune brightens Arthur's day with flourishes of colour. None of the musicians in this story use sheet music – they pour themselves into their instruments and let new tunes flow out. Arthur's successful jam session is a testament to the power of creativity and collaboration.

Believing in Yourself

When Arthur is invited to the jam session, he's so afraid of playing the violin in front of others that he disguises himself as a post box. Self-doubt turns to self-belief when he starts to play and gets swept up in the music. As his post box costume falls apart, Arthur realises that his new friends are thrilled to play alongside him. Arthur's newfound self-belief transforms his life: no longer afraid, he is able to share his music with the city.

City Life

Melbourne is lovingly rendered in this story, and the city's status as a cultural and creative hub shines through on every page. Young readers who have visited the city will recognise landmarks like Flinders Street Station or the Royal Botanical Gardens, and will delight in the diverse cast of animals who roam the city streets.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you start reading, have a look at the cover of this book and read the blurb on the back. Discuss as a class what you think this story might be about.

Arthur doesn't want anyone to see him playing his violin. What does he think will happen if he plays in front of other animals? Why does he feel this way?

There are lots of different animals in this book. How many different animals do you recognise? Which is your favourite?

“What-if” thoughts are very normal. We often get worried in unfamiliar situations, but we don't need to be afraid of taking chances. When you are in scary situations and start to have “what-if” worries, how do you remind yourself to be brave?

Arthur lives in a big city called Melbourne. Can you find all the clues in the book that tell you where it is set? Do you live in a big city, or a small town, or something in between? What special things about the place you live would you like to see in a book? Or, if you live in Melbourne, what other places could have appeared in Arthur's story?

The violin is Arthur's way of expressing his creativity. What are some of the other ways you can be creative?

Think about a time when you were nervous about performing in front of a group of people. It might have been a school concert, a dance recital, or even reading your work out loud to your class. What did you do to stop feeling nervous? How did you feel when it was over?

Take a look at page twelve, where an elk is playing a cello on a train station platform. The bright shapes and swirls coming out of her cello represent the music she's playing. Where else in the book can you see the colourful swirls of music? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen to draw music like this?

What is happening on the last page of the story? Why do you think Arthur's band is called “Arthur and the What-ifs”?

How do you think Arthur feels now that he can play his music in public?



ACTIVITIES



I'm With the Band

Congratulations! You are the newest member of Arthur's band. There's just one small hiccup: all the other band members are animals, and you'll need to bring your own instrument. Which animal will you be? Which instrument will you play?

Draw a picture of yourself as an animal, playing with Arthur's band. Then write a sentence describing what's happening in the picture.

What if...?

In every new situation, we can have positive "what-if" thoughts and negative "what-if" thoughts. Here is an example...

Situation: You're invited to have lunch with an elephant

Negative "what-if" thought: What if the elephant accidentally sits on me?

Positive "what-if" thought: What if the elephant gives me a ride on his back?

Here are three new situations. For each, write one positive "what-if" thought and one negative "what-if" thought:

1. Your first day at a new school
2. Losing your mum at the supermarket
3. Going on stage for your school play



Planes, Trains and Automobiles

Every morning, Arthur goes to the train station and catches a train to work. How did you get to school this morning? Draw a picture of yourself going to school and write a sentence describing what's happening in the picture.

Welcome to Melbourne!

Melbourne is the capital city of Victoria. Use a computer or tablet to look up famous buildings in Melbourne, then draw your favourite one. Don't forget to write the building's name underneath your picture!