

TEACHER'S NOTES FOR *DONALD LOVES DRUMMING*

By Nick Bland

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NICK BLAND was born in Victoria in 1973 and lived on a farm until he was five. He spent his early days climbing haystacks and sneaking into his father's painting studio. When Nick's family moved to the bush he found a whole new world to draw and explore. He wanted to be a cartoonist or a storyteller. After he finished school, he moved to the city and eventually got a job in a bookshop. The picture books in the shop inspired him and he realised he 'wanted all my words and all my pictures out of my head and onto the shelf.'

Today Nick lives in Darwin. He had a job as a four-wheel drive tour guide in Kakadu National Park while he worked on his first book, *A Monster Wrote Me a Letter*, which was named as a Children's Book Council of Australia Notable Book. He has since illustrated Colin Buchanan's *Aussie Jingle Bells* and Trudie Trewin's *I've Lost My Kisses* and in 2008 published *When Henry Caught Imaginitis* and *The Very Cranky Bear*. Several of Nick's books have been published overseas and he is now a fulltime writer and illustrator, working on the weekends as a guardian for aboriginal boys who board in Darwin.

SYNOPSIS

Donald loves to drum, but Dad, Mum and sister Molly tell him it's too loud. So Donald takes his drums to the top of a hill where he won't disturb anyone. But that doesn't work out – it rains and his hat blows off.

Then Donald tries doing other things besides drumming. He walks the dog, paints and rides a tricycle. Everyone still complains so he tries doing nothing. That's no good either, although sitting under a tree he does get an idea.

Dad, Mum and Molly help Donald make a tree house. It's the perfect place to drum.

THEMES

Donald is a child with a big urge to drum. This is great, except it is so loud that it drives his family mad. When he tries other things, he creates just as much disturbance. He has lots of energy. Like lots of kids, sitting down is something Donald just can't seem to do. But there is

nothing wrong with Donald's need to drum. With some help from others, he finds a space to do what he needs to do.

WRITING AND ILLUSTRATING *DONALD LOVES DRUMMING*

The story *Donald Loves Drumming* came to Nick Bland when he was rattling along a track between Pine Creek and Adelaide River on his way to meet another four-wheel-driver to take some passengers back to Darwin. He thinks the idea of drums might well have been sparked by the BOOM, BOOM of the potholes under his wheels. While waiting for the other car, he wrote the first draft.

In the story, Donald's love of drumming and boundless energy drives his family crazy, but instead of rousing on him, they help him do something constructive and satisfying. Nick feels strongly that parents shouldn't give kids a flat 'no' when they are busy, even if they are being annoying, or their creativity can be driven underground. He was pretty adventurous as a kid and his parents 'were great at giving me broad boundaries. If I was blowing things up or disappearing into the bush they didn't tell me to do something less dangerous or annoying.' Nick says because his parents didn't just say no he experienced the good and bad consequences of his actions and learned his own lessons. He feels the freedom they gave him to explore has allowed him to make informed decisions in his life as an adult.

When Nick's editor Ana Vivas first heard the story, she commented that she thought the drummer needed to be 'chunky'. Nick agreed. He experimented with a number of anthropomorphised animals, including a gorilla, elephant and hippo, and when he drew Donald as a rhino he knew he had the right one. For Nick, basing characters on animals allows him to 'pursue the ridiculous without seeming extreme' while allowing the message he's writing about to get through. For instance, when Donald launches himself off the shed roof on a tricycle, Nick thinks because the character isn't an actual child, parents might be able to more easily explain to their 'own little adventurer' that this is whimsy and not something they should try.

Using a rhino led to an African theme in Donald's suburban world. His home has zebra-striped lounges, his dad trims bushes into the shapes of African animals, and the family dog is a hyena. The idea for this last image came from a photo Nick saw of a hyena being walked on a lead down a street in Africa. It was about the size of a Great Dane, but was more

robust. It was also much cleaner than wild hyenas. In the final picture, Donald looks as if he's drumming out a message across the African plains. This image underlines the deep satisfaction he feels now he's able to do his own thing.

Illustrating *Donald Loves Drumming*, Nick decided to use white backgrounds and soft colours and tones to make the action and movement the focus of the images. As he created the illustrations he began to streamline the text, stripping it back to the bare essentials. He feels that having the illustrations show so much of the story means words that describe the same thing are 'just clutter.' The key words for Nick in the story are the repeated admonishments of the sort kids hear all the time: 'Too loud,' 'Too dangerous,' or 'Too fast.'

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Look at the covers. What might this book be about? What might happen to Donald?
2. Read the story out aloud without going too fast, so the children can hear all the words and see the pictures. Can they spot the different drums and percussion instruments?
3. As the story is read aloud, pause and consider these points to stimulate discussion:
 - Spread 4: What problem might Donald have? How might he solve it?
 - Spread 5: How has Donald tried to solve his problem? Has his solution worked?
 - Spread 8: Has Donald solved his problem? If not, why not?
 - Spread 9: Does Donald like to sit quietly? What might his new idea be?
 - Spread 13: What has Donald done with the help of his family?
 - Spread 15: How has Donald solved his problem?
4. Talk about some things that kids do that adults don't like. Discuss ways they can do them without getting into trouble.
5. Discuss why authors sometimes create animal characters that are a bit like people. Is a rhino a good choice for a boy who likes drumming?
6. Find out about different percussion instruments. Choose one and draw a picture of it, noting things about it, such as what it is made of, who plays it, and so on.
7. Make drums from the odds-and-ends box. Have a drumming session, creating rhythms and soft and loud sounds.