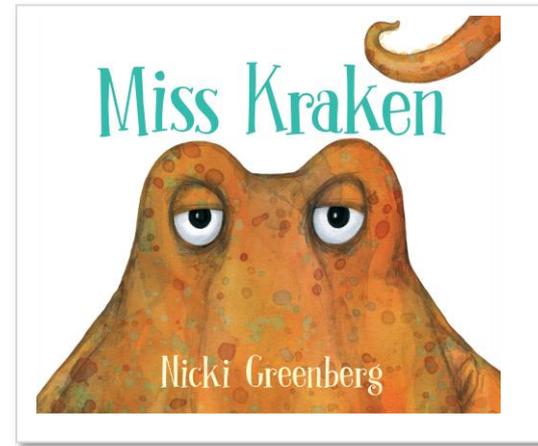


Miss Kraken

By Nicki Greenberg

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Hardback
Recommended for 4-7-year-olds



Summary

The minute we saw Miss Kraken, we all knew it was going to be a bad year.

Miss Kraken is a long-suffering octopus who has the misfortune of teaching an unruly class of (human) children. From the kids' point of view, Miss Kraken is grumpy and strict. But, as the illustrations show, her naughty class is more than any octopus can reasonably bear.

When the class goes on an excursion to the aquarium, Miss Kraken mysteriously disappears. She's had enough: Miss Kraken is staying put. She isn't coming back to school ever again. Although, in the end, everyone wishes she had...because their new teacher is far more fierce...and his name is Mr Carnivore.



Miss Kraken is a wacky, absurd story that makes the impossible feel plausible. The contrast between the narrator's point of view ('poor us, our teacher is so mean') and the truth shown by the illustrations (the kids' wild antics and the weary, long-suffering octopus, Miss Kraken) is both funny and a spur to thinking about empathy and differing points of view. There is no preachy moral to this story, but it does have a touch of 'be careful what you wish for'!

Use in the curriculum

Miss Kraken is a bold, fun story about an unusual teacher. The school theme makes it suitable for 'aspirational' kinder and pre-school children as well as children in the early years of school.

The sample discussion points and activities below demonstrate that the book can be used in the classroom in a number of ways:

- fun reading;
- exploring themes about school and behaviour and the differences between adults and children;
- putting yourself in 'someone else's shoes';
- expanding visual literacy;
- delving into the world of cephalopods and other sea creatures;
- taking an excursion to an aquarium.

Themes

- humour
- empathy
- behaviour
- teaching
- school setting

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Discussion questions

1. Before opening *Miss Kraken*, look at the front and back covers, being careful to read out loud the blurb on the back. Discuss what children think the story might be about and the clues in the picture that make them think that. Ask questions such as:
 - Can you tell what sort of creature Miss Kraken might be?
 - Name one of her features on the front and back illustrations that helped you work out what she was?
 - What do you know about octopuses?
 - The words on the back tell us she is cranky, strict and weird...but what does Miss Kraken do for a job?
 - Do you think this story is going to be funny or sad? Why?
 - Why does the blurb say, '...she might have a surprise or two up her sleeves'?
2. Read the story through once and ask children the following questions to help them explore the story's main themes:
 - Do you think Miss Kraken's students behave well in class?
 - Do you think the students are right when they describe Miss Kraken as cranky and strict?
 - What rules do the class break when they go on their excursion to the aquarium?
 - Is their behaviour making the aquarium fun for other visitors?
 - Why do you think Miss Kraken decided to hide in one of the aquarium displays?
 - What would you do if you were Miss Kraken?
 - Why do the students wish Miss Kraken would come back to their class at the end of the story?
 - Why are the students scared of Miss Kraken's replacement, Mr Carnivore?
 - Who do you think the 'hero' of this story is? The students or the teacher? Explain.
3. Colours: why do you think the humans are always shown in black and white in the story while Miss Kraken, the fish in the tanks and Mr Carnivore are always shown in bright colours? [*Hint: the animals stand out as unique and more interesting than the humans.*]
4. Why are the students rolling around laughing at the 'Dive Into The Past' poster? Why is the aquarium manager so angry with them? How do his facial expression and the way his words are presented on the page emphasise that he is very angry?
5. Ask students to compare the first image of Miss Kraken when she is in her classroom with the last image of her alone and reading a book. What is her mood in each image and what it is about each image that helped you realise how she was feeling? What happened in the story to make her change mood so drastically?
6. Ask students to come up with ideas about what might happen next in the story if it continued past the last page. How might Mr Carnivore keep control of his class and how might the children behave in the future?
7. Ask students to come up with creatures they would really LIKE to have as a teacher and creatures they would really DISLIKE to have as a teacher.

8. Ask students to find three interesting facts about octopuses. Collect all facts and put them on a cardboard poster as a display for the classroom. A good starting point for research is <https://www.natgeokids.com/au/discover/animals/sea-life/octopus-facts/>

Nicki Greenberg

Nicki Greenberg is a writer and illustrator based in Melbourne. Her first picture books, The Digits series, were published when she was fifteen years old. She later spent ten years disguised as a lawyer, while maintaining a not-so-secret Other Life as a comics artist and children's book author. Nicki is the creator of the award-winning 'staged-on-the-page' adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and of the graphic novel adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Inspired by her own young children, Nicki has written and illustrated many delightful picture books for younger readers including the Naughtiest Reindeer series, *Meerkat Choir*, *Morris the Mole* and *Teddy Took the Train*. In her Zelda Stitch novels, Nicki has come a step closer to realising her childhood dream of being a witch.

Nicki is a frequent presenter at schools, festivals and conferences, where her speaking style is described as passionate, engaging, entertaining and full of energy



Author's inspiration and working methods

'The idea for *Miss Kraken* crystallised from a couple of things coming together. I've had a long-time fascination with octopuses and other cephalopods and was on a jag of making extravagant crochet sculptures of squids, octos and cuttlefish. I loved the idea of a book featuring a big, heavy, world-weary octopus, and thought she'd be funniest outside of her usual element, out in the everyday world, having to contend with all the drama and annoyance of dealing with humans.

'Miss Kraken's situation – as a misunderstood teacher burdened with a very rambunctious class of children – was inspired by a real-life situation. When three teachers were announced for the Grade 3 classes at my daughter's school, there was high consternation among the kids. One of those teachers was rumoured to be the strictest, scariest teacher in the school. Everyone was afraid: would they be in her class? Would it be awful? What would this terrifying teacher do?

'My daughter ended up with the dreaded Ms G. who, of course, is a great teacher, and not at all the tyrant of schoolyard rumour. But the drama got me thinking about how differently kids and their teachers view their classroom dynamic. From the kids' point of view, Miss Kraken is grumpy and strict. But as we see from the illustrations, Miss Kraken's naughty class is more than any octopus can reasonably bear. And who can blame her when she finally snaps?

'In terms of how I made the book, I used a combination of techniques, brought together as digital collage. Miss Kraken's rich colouring is made with watercolour and ink, enhanced and elaborated with digital drawing. The children and backgrounds are made with digital painting and pencil drawing, and the aquarium exhibits are composed of colour photos that I took at the Sea Life Aquarium in Melbourne, who kindly allowed me to use the images in the book...When I began work on the first aquarium scene in the book, I dropped one of the photos into the illustration while experimenting with the composition. And it looked fabulous! The contrast between the photo and the surrounding drawing really served to separate the two worlds of inside and outside the tanks. So instead of drawing the fish, corals, jellyfish and so on, I made digital collages from my very spontaneous collection of photos. I love the serendipity of making things out of the oddments at hand, and it was exciting to have those elements come together so happily for *Miss Kraken*.'