

# Not Cute

Author & Illustrator  
**Philip Bunting**



## Not cute.

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### Synopsis

Quokka is cute. Small, fluffy, with chubby cheeks and a rounded body, he is in fact so cute that every single animal he meets can't help but cry 'too cute' when they see him. Quokka however does not want to be cute. In fact, he is downright determined to be seen as 'Not cute', and sets out to somehow convince all the other animals that he is most definitely not cute at all. At first, Quokka has no success, but when driven by frustration to bite Croc on the nose, he finally gets the validation he has been seeking. 'ooooowwww, not cute!' cries poor Croc, and to the stunned amazement of all the other animals he turns tail and flees when Quokka tells him to 'shoo'. Quokka's resounding victory over the terrifying Croc is just what he has been wanting, and so when Snake slithers up and calls him cute, Quokka sets out to repeat his attack. But Snake is most definitely not intimidated by a cutely ferocious Quokka, and while he eventually agrees that Quokka is 'not cute', it is only after he has swallowed the angry Quokka whole. As Quokka finds out the hard way, sometimes it just doesn't pay to try to be something that you are not.

### About the Author/ Illustrator

**Philip Bunting** is a designer, illustrator and creative director. During 10 years in the creative industries, he has seen his work published around the globe; and designed more magazines, websites, identities, books and apps than he could poke a stick at. Within a year, his titles have gained international attention and sales, with his debut title, *Mopoke* (2017) being listed for several upcoming awards, most recently being long listed for the 2018 ABIA's.

### Themes

Key Themes include: Self-identity; self-perception; cuteness; communication; dealing with aggression; anti-social behaviours; humour; and Australian wildlife.

### Writing Style

Written in the third person throughout from the point of view of Quokka, the narrative consists of a mixture of dialogue and authorial narration of events. Statements from the various characters are short and satisfyingly repetitive, while Bunting's descriptions of their manners of speech are innovatively varied

and excellently suited to reading aloud. The language as a whole is colloquial and easily understood by a young audience, while introducing a variety of more challenging descriptors well suited to enhance children's vocabularies and literary understanding. Bunting, as always, also makes excellent use of such literary devices as onomatopoeia, alliteration, and figures of speech.

### Illustration Style

Illustrated throughout in Bunting's distinctive and memorable style, the artwork consists entirely of double page spreads, and utilises a palette of shades and tones found in the Australian natural environment. Figures are rounded with crisp edges that depend on colour rather than line for their clarity, while internal linework is detailed and delicate, picking out the patterning within the coats of the various animals, and the texture of the surrounding landscape. Backgrounds feature subtle variations in shading and tone, with clear contrasts between foreground, midground, and background indicated by both depth of colour and level of detail. The skies have a sandy felted hue, and the animals at times blend into their habitat deceptively well.

## TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn from the artwork and title. Some things you might want to think about in your discussion could be:
  - What does the animal on the cover look like?
  - What does 'cute' mean?
  - Do you think the animal on the cover of the book is cute?
  - Who do you think would be saying 'Not cute' in this story?
  - What is the animal on the cover doing/wearing?
  - Why do you think the animal on the cover might be wearing what it is?
  - What do you think might happen in this story?
  - Read the back cover of the book - what does this tell you about the story?
  - Say the words on the back cover aloud again - how do they sound when you say them, and what do they have in common with each other?
  - What is a marsupial?
- 2) What are all the other things Quokka wants to be instead of cute? Reread the story and make a list of all the other descriptive words like *majestic* and *ferocious* that are used to share how Quokka wants to be seen. Do you know what all these words mean? Look carefully at the illustrations - how does Quokka act differently when he is trying to convince the other animals to see him differently?
- 3) Quokka doesn't like the way the other creatures in his life view him.
  - How do people in your family view you?
  - What about your friends and classmates?
  - Survey your family and/or your classmates, and ask everyone to give you one positive word that they think describes you.
  - Create a pie chart or bar graph to share the results of your survey.
  - Think about how each descriptor makes you feel when people attribute it to you. Does it make you happy? Or does it make you feel annoyed, just like Quokka feels when he is called cute?
  - How would you like other people to see or think of you?

- 4) What does *a little too big for his boots* mean?
- What behaviours of Quokka's could be described as being *too big for his boots*?
  - Why could these behaviours be described with this phrase?
  - Can you think of another example from a different story (book, movie, or tv show) of someone acting 'too big for their boots'?
  - What can happen to people or animals who become *too big for their boots*?
  - Create an artwork showing someone who is being *too big for their boots*.
    - Your artwork might show the literal meaning of the phrase and have a person who does not fit their boots, or your artwork could show the figurative meaning of the phrase and show someone who thinks they are more important than they actually are.
    - For a challenge you could even try to show both the literal and figurative meanings of the phrase in a single artwork!
- 5) What happened to Quokka at the end of the story?
- How can we tell what happened to Quokka?
  - How did the end of the story make you feel when you read it?
  - How do you think all the other animals felt about what happened to Quokka?
  - What do you think Snake was feeling when they slithered away?
  - What do you think might have happened next?
- 6) Research Quokkas online or in the library. Some things to try and discover in your research are:
- What type of animal is a Quokka?
  - What do Quokka look like?
  - Are Quokka cute? (See if you can find some photos of Quokka to look at and then answer this one!)
  - Where do Quokka live?
  - What do Quokka eat?
  - What does a Quokka habitat need for them to thrive?
  - How many Quokka are there in Australia?
  - What animals prey on Quokka?
  - How can we help protect Quokka from predators?
  - What can we do to help preserve Quokka's habitat?
- 7) Do you think Quokka is cute? Why/why not? What makes something or someone cute?
- 8) Write down a list of between six and ten native Australian animals and divide them into two categories: 'cute', and 'not cute'. Are there any animals where you find it hard to decide which category they belong in? Compare your lists with a friend or family member's lists.
- 9) How do people react to animals, babies, or children who they think are cute? Why do you think they do this?
- 10) What is the cutest thing that you have ever seen? Go for a walk through the neighbourhood and see if you can see any animals, birds, or insects that you might describe as either 'cute' or 'not cute'. When you return, write or draw a recount of your walk sharing all the 'cute' and 'not cute' creatures that you have seen.

- 11) What are all the different words that the author has used in the story to describe the way the different animals talk to each other?
- Reread the story and identify all these different words.
  - Experiment with saying the different lines in the story, the way that the author has described them, e.g. whisper the line *I want to be deadly*, and hiss the line *I want to be scary*.
  - Can you think of any other words that can be used to describe the ways that characters in a story say things?
  - What actions do you think might go well with these ways of speaking? Think about how someone who is hissing might move, or how someone who is growling could hold themselves.
  - Try acting out some of the dialogue in the story, and possibly even create a short play based on the book and perform it for an audience.
- 12) When does the snake first appear in the story? Look closely at **all** the illustrations before you answer!
- 13) Look carefully at the way Bunting has drawn the snake in the earlier pages of the story, and think about how even though you can clearly see him you don't know it is Snake until his head appears. What has Bunting done to hide Snake from the reader? Create a two-panel artwork featuring one or more Australian native animals, where at least one animal is hidden in plain sight in the first panel, but is clearly an animal in the second panel.
- 14) Look carefully at the end pages of the book. What pattern has been used for these pages, and where does it appear in the story? Create an artwork of your own that uses patterns from nature and animals as your inspiration. Caption your artwork with the name of the animal, plant, or landscape feature that you choose as inspiration, and write a short paragraph describing why you chose it and what aspects you tried to replicate in your artwork and why.