

# TEACHERS' NOTES

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## The Boy on the Page

Written and illustrated by Peter Carnavas

### Synopsis

*The Boy on the Page* is the story of a boy who lands on the page. At first, there is nothing else on the page but gradually, things begin to grow and a world slowly appears around him. But one question troubles him: why is he there? Before he has time to think, he is suddenly thrust into the living of life, as he rolls down hills, paddles canoes, saves animals, plays music, falls in love, builds a house and puts out a fire. Finally, after some deep thought and an attempt to jump off the page, he stumbles upon the reason for him being on the page – to love and be loved (which he was doing all along, of course!).

### Author/illustrator style and medium

Peter has used watercolour paints and black pencil for the illustrations in the book. The white space is a very important storytelling technique used in this story. It represents the blank world around the boy when he first appears and dominates one of the final spreads, when it appears he has jumped off the page and removed himself from his own story. As the world grows at the beginning of the story, Peter has left the edges of the illustration slightly uncoloured, to show that the creation is still in progress. This technique is also used on the opening page, as we see the boy fall upon the page in a sequence, beginning as an uncoloured character and only filling with colour once he has fully landed.

### Author/illustrator motivation

A few years ago, Peter was trying to think of a story idea. He stared and stared at a blank page for hours, waiting for something to hit him, for something to fall upon the page and inspire a story. This frustrating moment of trying to think of an idea is what led to the concept of a character landing on the page, then wondering why he/she was there. The story then developed into a light and whimsical meaning-of-life story,



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with some shades of *It's A Wonderful Life*, one of Peter's favourite films. It's an unconventional story structure with a nameless hero and a middle section that is basically an illustrated list of episodes in somebody's life, however the ending ties it all together with purpose. One of the most appealing aspects of the story for Peter was to have his character attempt to exit his own story, leaving an almost completely blank double spread towards the end of the book.

### Author/illustration Background Information

Peter grew up as the youngest of four kids with two parents that somehow allowed and encouraged him to pursue his interests without him realising. He learnt the violin and guitar and was pretty certain he would one day become one of the world's greatest songwriters, sitting somewhere alongside Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Brian Wilson.

This didn't happen, so it was lucky he could draw little pictures of people.

Peter has always written stories and scribbled pictures. After making little books for family and then teaching for a few years, he began immersing himself in picture books. He immediately fell in love with the work of the great picture book creators: Quentin Blake, Stephen Michael King, Peter H. Reynolds, Freya Blackwood, Libby Gleeson, Shaun Tan, Armin Greder, Bob Graham and more.

Peter's first book, *Jessica's Box*, was published by New Frontier in 2008. His tale of a little girl's attempt to find friendship was shortlisted for the 2008 Queensland Premier's Literary Award, the Children's Book Council of Australia's 2009 Crichton Award for Emerging Illustrators and was listed as a CBCA Notable Book for 2009.

Many books have followed: *Sarah's Heavy Heart*, *The Important Things*, *Last Tree in the City*, *The Great Expedition* and *The Children Who Loved Books*. Peter has also illustrated Alex Field's *Mr Darcy* series and Pat Flynn's *My Totally Awesome Story*.

*The Boy on the Page* is Peter's seventh author/illustrator work.

### Educational Applicability

The key theme in this book is that the most important things in our lives are the people close to us (as well as the pigs and penguins and giraffes).

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### Before Reading the Book

1. Introduce the book – read the title and ask students to comment on the cover
2. Illustration. Ask students to think carefully about the title and to suggest what it may mean... *The Boy on the Page*? What might the boy do in the story?
3. As you read the opening pages, you can ask students to comment on the way in which the boy gradually fills with colour as he lands on the page.
4. Continue reading, pausing occasionally to allow students to comment on key points in the story. For example, do they notice the character age throughout the pages? Do they recognise any characters recurring throughout the story?



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## After Reading the book

1. Ask children what they think the ending means. The final page reads: *At last, he knew. He knew why he was here.* What does this mean?
2. Return to the final double-page spread, in which the character tumbles back onto the page. Can the children remember where each of these characters and things appeared in the story? For example, there's a penguin – what did the penguin do in the story?
3. There is a line that reads: *He saw the whole world in somebody's eyes.* What does this mean?
4. Ask the students to think about the way colour has been used, particularly in the opening pages as the world grows around the boy. Why are the edges of these illustrations uncoloured, as if they look a little unfinished?
5. What is the author trying tell us with the end papers?

## ACTIVITIES

### Landing on a Page

In this story, a small boy landed on a blank page. If you landed on a blank page, what would you hope might appear around you. What would you like an illustrator to add to your page?

Have a go at drawing yourself on a page, then draw the sort of world and characters you would like to meet. Would you meet a hippo in space? Would you meet a scuba-diving turkey under the sea?

### Land in Another Book

Do you have a favourite book? Can you imagine landing in your favourite book? Design a new front cover for one of your favourite books but this time, add yourself as one of the main characters.

### My Life on the Page

In *The Boy on the Page*, the middle part of the story is a bit like a list of the wonderful things this character did in his life (there are eighteen items on this list – riding a horse, standing in the rain, training a dog, etc.). Think of five wonderful things that have happened in your life, and turn them into your own illustrated story. For example...

*One quite morning, a small girl called Emily landed on the page.*

*She wondered why she was there, but before she knew it...*

*she was doing all sorts of things.*

*She went camping with her family.*

*She played soccer.*

*She shook a tambourine.*

*She fell off her chair laughing.*

*She fell asleep listening to waves crash on a nearby beach.*

*And so on...*



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## Further research

### Author Study

Find some other Peter Carnavas books in the school library. What is common throughout all of the books? Are the illustrations similar? Has he used the same materials for the illustrations? Do all of his books have a message of some sort?

## MARKETING & SELLING POINTS

- There aren't many books that can tackle the meaning of life in a joyful, purposeful and whimsical way for kids – this book does all of that!
- *The Boy on the Page* encourages readers to value their families and close friends.
- Are you telling me the character tries to jump out of his own story? Amazing!



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