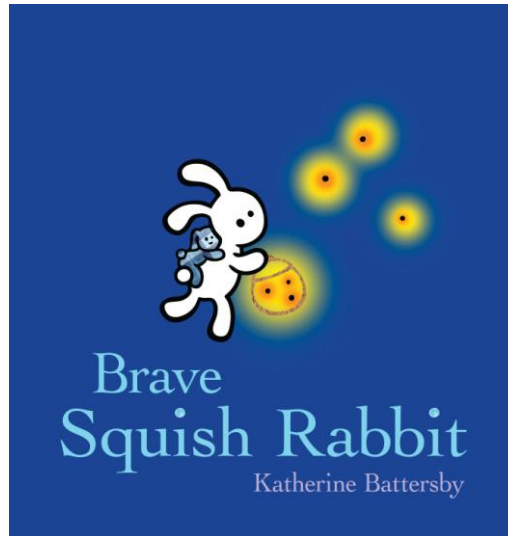


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BRAVE SQUISH RABBIT

Katherine Battersby



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian
in context with the Australian curriculum
(English)

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Synopsis	2
Themes	2
Friendship	2
Fear and Anxiety	2
Courage	2
Self-belief	2
Writing Style	2
Study Notes	3
Author Motivation	5
Illustrator Motivation	5
About the Author	6

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SYNOPSIS

Squish is just a little rabbit, but being little can lead to some big fears – of storms, chickens and the dark. When Squish can't find his friend one dark and stormy night, Squish realises that by being brave, he can find wonder amidst his fears.

Brave Squish Rabbit is an endearing yet simple story of courage, friendship and facing one's fears. No matter how little you are or how big your fears, finding the courage to face those fears can lead to amazing outcomes.

THEMES

Friendship:

- Squish plays with friends to help overcome his fears.
- Squish is worried about his friend and so faces some of his fears to find Twitch.
- Friends can help you to find your strengths and realise your potential.
- Friends accept one another's differences, including their fears.

Fear and Anxiety:

- Most people have fears and anxieties – it's how these are overcome that's important.
- Some fears are irrational but are still very real to that person.
- Squish needs to find the inner strength to fight his own fears and anxieties.
- Some fears can lead to catastrophic thoughts and worries.

Courage:

- Squish finds the courage to head out into a dark, stormy night to find his friend Twitch.
- Finding the courage to face his fears leads to a great discovery.

Self-belief:

- Just because he is little, doesn't mean that Squish can't do amazing things.

WRITING STYLE

Brave Squish Rabbit is written in third person, past tense. Much of the narrative is told through the beautiful illustrations. The written text is uncluttered and

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shows Squish's naïve and adorable character. He may be little, but he has an enormous heart.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the text, compare the end papers at the front and end of the book. Make predictions about the story using its title and these end paper illustrations as a guide.
- Squish is a little rabbit which leads to some big fears. Would Squish still have these fears if he weren't so little? Discuss.
- Squish is afraid of storms, chickens and the dark. Are you afraid of anything? Write a reflection sharing your fears. These may be some fears you have overcome. What do you do to help overcome your fears?
- Apart from storms, chickens and the dark, what else is Squish afraid of? Discuss how illustrations add more meaning to the text, for instance, is Squish also afraid of the ladybug? His own shadow? Look at his body language.
- Look carefully at the page of Squish in his bed sock. How does his toy help him cope with his fears? Why does he have one eye covered and one eye open?
- Squish tries to hide from the dark, but that doesn't help him very much. Does hiding from fears help you overcome them? Discuss.
- Katherine Battersby describes the dark as being 'so big it was everywhere'. Are you afraid of the dark? What is it about the dark that is scary? Discuss the author's way of describing the dark.
- What strategies does Squish use to help him when he's scared?
- What role can friends play in helping you to overcome your fears?
- Squish notices that he's 'goosebumpy' when he's scared. Do you notice any physical signs when you get scared? How can recognising these signs help to challenge unhelpful thoughts?
- Squish catastrophises that Twitch is 'trapped...in the dark...in a storm...with a chicken'. Discuss how fears can lead to irrational thoughts. What can we do to challenge such thoughts?

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- Invite a counsellor to speak to the class about fears and anxieties, giving helpful strategies to help deal with such emotions. Students should be encouraged to think through what is the most likely thing to happen in any given situation and to have an action plan. Self-talk is another important tool.
- Using a range of materials, create your own collage suitable for inclusion in *Brave Squish Rabbit*.
- Discuss the choices of background page colours and how these reflect the various stages and moods of the narrative. The pages are dark, for instance, when Squish's fears are at their worst. The colours change to lighter colours when he is being courageous or spending time with his friends.
- How does Squish prepare for his quest to find Twitch?
- Examine the sequence of pictures in which Squish ventures outside in the dark. The text reads '...and stepped into the dark'. What is happening in each of these pictures? Discuss the silhouette of the tree and rock that appears to be a giant chicken. How does Squish's body language help the reader to understand what is happening in these wordless picture frames?
- When Squish finally sees the silhouette of Twitch sitting in the moonlight, the text reads, 'it was a bit dark...but not a bit scary'. Make predictions about the story at this juncture.
- How does being brave make Squish feel bigger?
- What does Squish learn about himself in *Brave Squish Rabbit*?
- Create a display of *Brave Squish Rabbit* by hanging an evening sky on the back wall of the classroom. Have each student make a star, writing on it what they could do to feel better when they are scared.
- Create a simple stick puppet show of *Brave Squish Rabbit* using outlines of the characters from the book.
- Look at the end covers again at the end of the book. What do the three fireflies represent?

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- Write a recount of a time a friend helped you to overcome a problem.
- Using *Brave Squish Rabbit* as stimulus, write some poetry based on the theme of friendship.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Young writers are often told to ‘write what you know’. I have learnt over time that what is actually meant is ‘write to your emotional truths’: write to the feelings that you understand. If you write about emotions you have sat inside of, then your characters and stories will be that much more alive.

Looking back on my childhood, *Brave Squish Rabbit* certainly captures my emotional truths. I recall vividly what it was like to feel small in a big world, and I remember fearing things that seemed so much bigger than me. When you’re little, negative emotions like fear and uncertainty can fill you up and become quite overwhelming.

In *Brave Squish Rabbit*, little Squish experiences many fears familiar to my childhood self. I was afraid of storms, as I spent the first few years of my life in Saudi Arabia where it didn’t rain, and on moving to Australia the sound of droplets on our tin roof terrified me. I also had a great fear of chickens – I spent most of my life in Mackay, a small town in North Queensland, and while I grew up by the beach, many of my friends lived on properties with chickens running wildly around the yard.

Like many children with active imaginations, I was also afraid of the dark and all the things it could hide within it. But just like Squish, I found ways to conquer my fears. Ultimately we are all bigger than our fears, it just takes a bit of bravery for kids to believe in themselves enough to figure this out.

ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION

My favourite art is that which invites the viewer to interact with it. I believe this is why I have developed an obsession with textures – my images are full of recycled papers I make myself, fabric collected from all over the world, old brown paper from parcels, scraps of my paintings and real objects like leaves and feathers. I love creating layered images that jump off the page, and hope they will lure kids closer, making them want to touch them. I also hope to inspire kids to look at the world around them differently, in seeing all the amazing real objects we can include in our art.

My illustration style also uses lots of white space and limited character facial expressions. I do this because I like to leave room in my art for kids to come to

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their own conclusions. Kids have such amazing visual literacy – they learn to read faces and body language and the images around them from the moment they're born, long before they learn to read. I don't want to 'tell' kids too much with my images, as I'd much prefer they come up with their own ideas about how characters are feeling and what is happening in the story. During school visits I'm often in awe of the layers of meaning even very young kids can draw from a seemingly simple image.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

Katherine Battersby grew up by the beach in Mackay, Australia, and has always scribbled words and images. She has an irrational fear of chickens, but loves starry nights and creating stories for children. She now lives in Brisbane with a poet, a dreamer and their slightly mad puppy. *Squish Rabbit*, her first book, has been shortlisted for the 2012 Crichton Award and was also named a Notable Book in the Early Childhood category of the CBCA Book of the Year Awards.

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