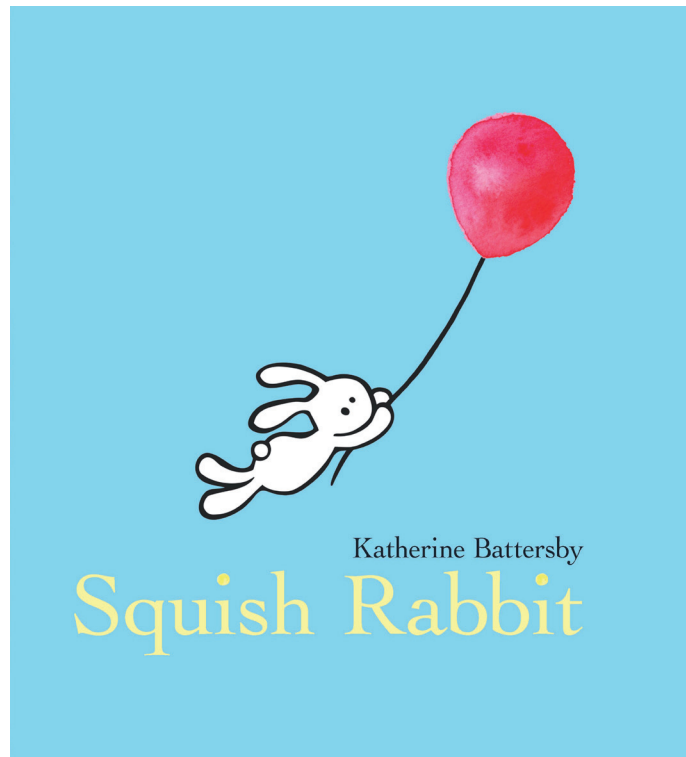


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SQUISH RABBIT

by Katherine Battersby



Teachers' Notes

Written by Christine Wheeler: a practising middle-school teacher
librarian in context with the Australian Curriculum (English)

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SYNOPSIS:

Squish is just a little rabbit. But being little can lead to BIG problems. Sometimes Squish is hard to hear ... and see. And it isn't easy making friends. But no matter how little Squish is, one thing is certain ... he has a very large heart.

Squish Rabbit is a delightful story of friendship and self-confidence. Its simple yet effective text is combined with eclectic, textured artwork. The end result is a beautiful and tangible picture book that is sure to be labelled a 'classic'.

THEMES:

Friendship and Loneliness:

- Squish is lonely. He feels that no one listens to him.
- Squish feels that because of his smallness, no one notices him.
- Squish discovers that he does have a voice – it just takes the right friend for his voice to be heard.
- The value of friendship is priceless.
- Friends can be found when least expected.

Self-Esteem/Confidence:

- Squish doesn't have the confidence to use his voice loudly until the squirrel is in danger.
- Squish's size affects his confidence until he realises that size really doesn't matter.
- Squish feels that no one listens to him, therefore his self-esteem is low. This changes when he finds friendship.
- Friends can improve one's confidence and sense of self-worth.

Problem Solving:

- Squish tries to sew himself a toy friend, but this friend has its limitations.
- Similarly, Squish tries to play with the trees, but they don't follow the rules.
- Squish throws a tantrum when his plans aren't working.
- To prevent the squirrel from danger, Squish uses his voice when it is most needed.

Art and Creativity:

- The author/illustrator has combined the textures of paper and fabrics with the simple, stylistic drawings of Squish and the squirrel to create a visually effective text.

WRITING STYLE:

Squish Rabbit is written in third person, past tense. The narration expresses Squish's loneliness and frustration at being so small. The narrative voice is empathetic and endearing. Squish is small but has big and beautiful things inside to offer. In this story, he gets a chance to show these things.

STUDY NOTES:

- The story begins, 'Squish was just a little rabbit but being little led to big problems.' Before reading further, brainstorm what sorts of problems these might be. Share with a partner. Tell your friend a story about a time you felt 'little'.
- Wonderful things, like the balloon, seem to be out of reach for Squish. This balloon helps the author tell Squish's story. Examine the use of the balloon throughout the text. How does this object show the reader Squish's personal journey? Why would the author/illustrator choose such a simple object to explain Squish's problems?
- Discuss with students how quality picture books have two layers of story – one which is told through the words and the other which is told through the illustrations. Take note of the way in which the illustrations are telling us more of the storyline, rather than just repeating what is said in the text.
 - o Practise visual literacy skills by 'reading the pictures' in *Squish Rabbit* as well as in and other good quality picture books.
- Examine the page opening in which Squish is sitting on the red and yellow flowers. The text reads, 'Being little was lonely.' Why do you think Squish is shown sitting on the flowers?
 - o The facing page is a different colour (green), as is the next page (blue), before going back to white. Why might these pages be different colours? What is happening in these parts of the storyline?
 - o Carefully examine the changes of page colour throughout the text. Compare how such colour changes are reflecting Squish's change in mood and emotion.
- Squish decides to sew his own toy friend. Do you have a special toy that is your friend? Write a journal entry or a recount that explains how this toy has helped you.
 - o With parent help, consider sewing your own toy. This will develop fine motor skills and strengthen muscles in the palm. Include sewing on buttons. Name your new toy.
- What does the author mean when she says, 'pretend friends can only do so much'?
- Squish becomes frustrated when the trees break all the rules. Is it possible that the trees don't know Squish's rules? Do you sometimes get frustrated with your friends when they break the rules or act in ways that are unexpected? Discuss the importance of being patient and explaining rules before playing. Also, discuss ways to handle such frustration.
- Squish throws a tantrum. Is this the best way to handle his emotions? What else could he have done to control his temper?

- Look carefully at the page opening in which Squish throws his tantrum. Examine the sequence of illustrations. Discuss the body language of Squish – his arms, ears, eyebrows and legs.
 - o Role play different emotions such as fear, boredom, surprise, happiness, anger etc. using a freeze frame game. Have students think about their body language and facial expressions.
 - o Draw your own sequence of illustrations to show Squish experiencing another emotion. Include body language and facial expression. What might his arms, legs, ears and eyebrows do? What colour background might different emotions have?
- How does such a simple word as ‘Stop’ change Squish’s life? Why did he choose this word? What else could he have said? Why is the word ‘Stop’ written in red?
- After Squish tells the squirrel to stop, there are two page openings that have no words. Discuss with students the importance of slowing down at wordless pages to ‘read the pictures’ and think carefully about what is happening.
 - o What do you think happens on these 2 pages?
 - o Write a possible text to accompany these 2 pages.
- Squish has an idea that he shares with the squirrel. (‘Squish was just a little rabbit...’) Highlight the speech bubble to students. Discuss the language conventions of speech and thought bubbles and how the simple illustration inside the bubble is showing so much.
 - o Have students do a short reflection of Squish and the squirrel’s friendship using this page opening as a stimulus.
- Squish’s new friend comes at an unexpected time. Discuss that friends come in all shapes and sizes and that we sometimes make friends when we least expect to.
- The squirrel watches Squish throw his tantrum but still plays with Squish. Do you think that the squirrel realised that Squish was throwing a tantrum but wanted to be his friend regardless? Or was he unaware? Do real friends let us sometimes lose our temper as long as we don’t treat them badly? Discuss what makes a good friend.
- Why do you think Squish hadn’t used a louder voice before?
- Everyone from time to time feels as though they’re not being heard. Discuss with students how to be an effective listener and the importance of listening to others.
- After reading the story, compare the first page opening (in which Squish is hanging by himself in a sock) with the final page opening (in which Squish and the squirrel are hanging in the socks together).
 - o Compare these 2 page openings. How are they similar and different? How has Squish’s life changed? What clues do we get on the last page to show the reader this change?
 - o Compare the end covers at the start and finish of the book. Again, discuss the changes. Teach younger readers to pay attention to the end covers of books, as they often contain clues about the text.

- o Socks come in pairs. How do the socks symbolise friendship?
- Squish seems the perfect name for this little rabbit. Discuss onomatopoeia and the beauty of words that depict so much meaning through their sound.
 - o Why do you think the author chose the name Squish for the rabbit?
 - o In small groups, think of characters from other story books where the characters' names seem a perfect fit.
 - o Have students bring in a small stuffed toy from home. Allow students to play with words and give these toys suitable names for a story like *Squish Rabbit*. These could become characters in a class story that explores the theme of friendship.
- Even after Squish has met the squirrel, he includes his toy rabbit in their games. Discuss the importance of loyalty and staying friends even when we've made new ones.
- Discuss the elements of line, colour, shape and texture in the illustrations of *Squish Rabbit*.
- Have students bring in a collection of paper towel, wrapping paper, brown paper, textiles and fabrics and so on:
 - o Use food colouring and eye droppers to die paper towel to use in a collage scene suitable for inclusion in *Squish Rabbit*. Display around the room.
 - o Tear pieces of paper into shapes. Have students create objects from these shapes, similar to the how the red oval becomes a balloon in *Squish Rabbit*.
 - o Think of an object and tear paper into its shape. Use a black marker pen to add other parts to this object.
 - o Use cut out colour copies of Squish, the toy rabbit and the squirrel to create scenes that show what other adventures or games these new friends may get up to together.
 - o Create your own piece of artwork about friendship using these materials.
- Make your own paper and use in a collage suitable for inclusion in *Squish Rabbit*.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

Katherine Battersby talks about writing *Squish Rabbit*:

'Young writers are often told: '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, *Squish Rabbit* certainly captures my emotional truths. I recall vividly what it was like to feel small in a big world. I remember having important things to say in a world where big people get listened to first. I recall having thoughts and questions and ideas bubbling up inside of me, and yet having no clue how to say any of it. This is ultimately why I started writing and drawing – to express all those things I had trouble voicing.

This is also where Squish Rabbit comes from. He is that small part of me that was at times unseen and



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unheard. He is that secret part of us all that has ever felt small or different and alone in it all. When I do school visits, I often recognise this feeling in the eyes of particular kids. I want to tell them not to worry, that we have all felt small, and reassure them that they won't disappear. Because, just like little Squish, I know they also have big and wonderful things inside of them.'