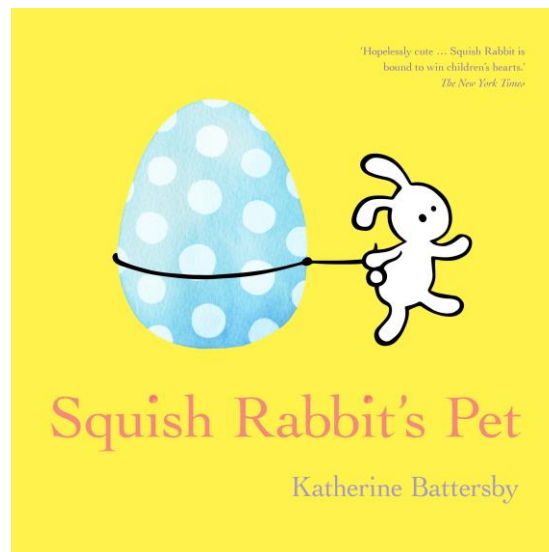


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SQUISH RABBIT'S PET

Katherine Battersby



Teachers' Notes

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

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SYNOPSIS

Squish is a little rabbit who dreams of owning a puppy. When he comes across an egg, Squish takes on the responsibility of caring for it. Soon, his unconditional love for his new pet knows no bounds.

Squish Rabbit's Pet is an endearing, simple story about love, acceptance and the joy that comes from owning a pet.

THEMES

- Love
- Acceptance
- Belonging
- Responsibility
- Patience
- Pets
- Eggs

WRITING STYLE

Squish Rabbit's Pet is written in third person, past tense. The seamless interaction between the written text and illustrations creates a meaningful, effective and tangible narrative. It would appeal to an early childhood audience.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the text, use the front cover, title and end covers to make predictions about the story.
- Squish has big dreams. What are these dreams? What dreams do you have? Like Squish, write a list and share with a friend.
- Do you own a pet? If so, how do you look after it? What do you love about your pet? Share your responses through a series of drawings or written reflections.
- If you could choose any pet, what would it be and why? Write a reflection to share your thoughts.
- The title page includes a series of drawings including various pets. Choose one of these drawings on which to base a story about Squish and that pet, for example, 'Squish and his pet kangaroo'.
- Design a range of matching outfits for Squish and Twitch to wear. Using upcycled materials, create one of your designs for you and a friend to wear.
- Create a brochure that offers advice about caring for pets.

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- In what ways is Twitch a supportive friend to Squish? What makes a good friend?
- Twitch makes a pet puppy for Squish. Using paper, make your own toy pet and give it to a friend.
- What makes Squish decide to look after the egg? How does he look after the egg? What does this tell us about Squish's character?
- Brainstorm types of animals that hatch from eggs. In addition:
 - Read books such as *An Egg Is Quiet* by Dianna Hutts Aston or *Guess What is Growing Inside This Egg* by Mia Posada to help explore this subject.
 - Compare your prior knowledge about animals that hatch from eggs with those Twitch tells Squish about.
 - Choose one of these animals to research. Create a report or poster sharing information about this animal.
- How does Squish find out more about the egg?
- Select various page openings and discuss how the illustrations work seamlessly with the text to add meaning to the narrative.
- Create a classroom display of creative and colourful eggs. On each egg, write a key concept that Squish learns in the story.
- Squish plays a range of games with his egg. What other games could he play with it?
- Squish reads bedtime books to the egg. With a friend, take turns reading some of your favourite bedtime books to one another.
- In what ways is *Squish Rabbit's Pet* a book about patience and responsibility?
- Squish has to make a big decision when he discovers that there is no puppy inside the egg. Why does he decide to love whatever comes out, regardless of what it is? What can we learn about love and acceptance from Squish?
- Why does Squish's new pet make him feel 'much bigger'?
- Retell *Squish Rabbit's Pet* through storytelling or performance.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Young writers are often told to 'write what you know'. I believe a more useful phrase is to 'write to your emotional truths'. 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's Pet* certainly captures my emotional truths. I recall vividly what it was like to feel small in a big world. I had

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so many big wants and dreams – I especially loved to daydream about what my life would be like and how the world could be.

In *Squish Rabbit's Pet*, little Squish has one particular dream that is bigger than all the rest – he longs for a puppy. As a child, I adored animals and had many pets, but never a dog. This was one of my great dreams, too. In Squish's attempts to fulfil his dream, like many of us, he kind of loses track of his real motivation along the way – it's not ultimately a puppy he wants, but a little someone to share his days with. But Squish has a big heart, and ultimately it guides him to find his perfect pet.

In case you're wondering, I did eventually find my perfect pet, too. His name is Frank and he's a rather delightful (and ridiculous) poodle–cavalier cross that is sitting on my lap as I type. This book is dedicated to him.

ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION

I have a bit of an obsession with textures – my illustrations are full of recycled papers I make, fabrics collected from all over the world, old brown paper from parcels and real objects like leaves and feathers. I love creating layered images that jump off the page, and I 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 for kids to come to 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, as I'd much prefer they come up with their own ideas about how my 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

Katherine Battersby is the critically acclaimed children's author and illustrator of nine picture books, including *Squish Rabbit*, *Brave Squish Rabbit* and *Little Wing*, which have been published around the world. Her books have been shortlisted for the Crichton Award and named Notable Books in the Early Childhood category of the CBCA Book of the Year Awards. In another life Katherine worked for many years as a paediatric occupational therapist, specialising as a children's counsellor, and she has also studied graphic design.

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She grew up by the beach in North Queensland and currently lives in Canada with her poet husband and their rather ridiculous dog.

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