

Teacher's Notes



A Different Dragon

Written by Nick Gill

Illustrated by Luma Wildish

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

2+ aged readers (grades Prep - 1)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - AC9EFLA07
 - AC9EFLE02
 - AC9E1LA04
 - AC9E1LE02

THEMES

- Anxiety
- Strength
- Difference
- Specialness
- Friendship

SYNOPSIS

Donny the dragon is so excited about the first day of school, but when the rest of class starts practising their fire-breathing, he discovers that he's a little bit different. The only thing Donny can breathe is water! At first, his friends tell him it's fine and encourage him to keep practising, but when it becomes clear that Donny just can't breathe fire, their encouragement turns to laughter and name-calling, and poor Donny is miserable.

But one day the weather is windy and warm, and a fire breaks out, trapping a small dragon inside a store. Even though the dragons are so strong, none of them have what it takes to help save the young dragon – they need water! Donny realises he's the only one who can help, so he opens his mouth wide and whoosh! With great gust of water-breath, Donny puts the fire out and saves the young dragon from the burning building. Suddenly all the dragons can see how special Donny really is.

A Different Dragon celebrates differences of all sorts, and encourages children to be strong in their own way.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Nick Gill is a father of four-year-old twins, songwriter, and host of the breakfast radio show on Hit 106.9. He writes parody songs, serious songs, and even kids' songs for his band The Quokkas, which has released over 30 singles in under two years and has co-written multiple sold-out comedy sketch shows over the years. As a writer/producer, Nick started out by producing critically acclaimed comedian Sammy J's first album and has penned songs performed by artists such as Guy Sebastian, Wes Car and Komiti Levai.

Luma Wildish was born in a small village in Spain surrounded by nature, animals and her beloved family. She grew up climbing trees, inventing fantasy stories and playing with squirrels. These sorts of experiences marked her forever, and nowadays, they have become her main source of inspiration. Soon after she graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from University of Granada, she travelled all around Europe, where she could discover herself as an artist. She is now back in Spain, giving her the opportunity to reconnect with her roots and the joy of living in nature, where all her inspiration comes from, her little wild world.

THEMES

Being Special

A Different Dragon explores the way that 'being special' can be a wonderful thing, but it can also make people feel bad about their own abilities or left out. The writer uses repetition to invite readers to consider the way that 'special' can mean different things and can make people feel differently. When Donny first says, 'I only wish I was special like that', it's because he feels lonely and left out, his difference making him feel as if he doesn't fit in with the other dragons. And we know that it bothers him because he repeats it twice (so here the writer uses the repeated phrase for emphasis). But at the end of the story, the other dragons turn to Donny and say, 'We only wish we were special like that!' How is the meaning different here? How does it change the way that Donny thinks of himself?

Strength

From the illustrations (which are warm and gentle) to the story, *A Different Dragon* looks at different ways to be strong. For the dragons, being strong has always looked like being able to breathe fire. But when Donny comes along, they learn that sometimes different kinds of strength are needed, and that none are better or worse than others. Ask students to give examples of 'strength' and use this to start a discussion about the different ways that we can show strength (including by being brave, or being kind when someone is sad).

WRITING STYLE

Nick Gill uses a simple end rhyme that allows new readers to make predictions about what might come next in the story. Go through the text and underline the rhyming words and discuss this basic rhyming structure with students. Invite them to come up with a verse of their own, or a list of words that rhyme with some of the words from the text – can they find any other words that fit the rhyme **and** make sense in the story?

COMPREHENSION



- How does Donny feel on his first day of school? What's he so excited about?
- What happens when Donny huffs and puffs?
- What do Donny's classmates say to make him feel better?
- How does Donny feel when his fire still doesn't come?
- What is Donny's greatest wish?
- What do you think it means to be 'special like that'?
- Why isn't the dragon's fire enough to save the small dragon trapped in the building?
- How does Donny help?
- How do you think Donny feels at the end of the book? What do you think will happen at school the next day?

WRITING EXERCISE

Write about a time that you've felt proud of something that makes you different. Write about a time that your difference has made you feel lonely or sad. Compare the two and reflect on these memories in class.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

The illustrations in the book are warm and comforting. Illustrator Luma Wildish uses colour and light to bring a warmth to the pictures that reflects the fire and warmth coming from the dragons themselves, but that also amplifies the emotions of each page. When the blizzard kicks in, and the fire starts, Donny is feeling sad and lonely; these pages use very dark, shadowed colours in contrast to the muted warmth at the beginning of the book. Use this as a way to invite students to think about what colours reflect particular emotions for them, and how we can use visual clues like this to show what a character is feeling.

Discuss the other visual elements that help us understand Donny's emotions in the story (his expression, for example).

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. If our strength is like a superpower, what is Donny's superpower? What's yours? Draw a picture of you saving the day by doing the thing you do best.
2. Now that Donny has found his difference school might be a lot more fun! What do you think happens the day after he's rescued the young dragon from the fire? Draw a picture or write a short story that captures what you've imagined.
3. Make a list of all of the things about yourself that make you special. Now pass your lists around the class and invite everyone to add something that *they* think makes you special.
4. Even though Donny's friends are supportive at first, when he continues to breathe water rather than fire they start to make fun of him. Now that you've read Donny's story, and seen how this makes him feel, what do you think his friends could have done or said instead? Draw a cartoon that shows an alternative to teasing or name-calling.



RELATED READING

All the Ways to Be Smart by Davina Bell
The Kindness Club by Kate Bullen-Casanova
The Very First You by Scott Stuart
Wide Big World by Maxine Beneba Clarke

