

My Friend Ernest

By Emma Allen

Illustrated by Hannah Sommerville

Book Summary:

It's the first day of school and Oscar is trying hard to be brave. Oscar's mum feels sure he will make lots of friends, but Oscar isn't so sure, particularly when Ernest seems so mean and scary.

But is he really?

From talented picture book creators, award-winning Emma Allen and talented new illustrator Hannah Sommerville, comes a book about the joy of making friends.

Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes:

My Friend Ernest suits the following Australian Curriculum content descriptors:

Foundation (Kindergarten/Prep)

English

ACELA1428	ACELT1577	ACELY1646
ACELA1429	ACELT1783	ACELY1650
ACELA1432	ACELT1578	ACELY1654
ACELA1786	ACELT1580	

Year 1

English

ACELA1444	ACELT1581	ACELY1656
ACELA1787	ACELT1582	ACELY1660
ACELA1452	ACELT1584	
ACELA1453	ACELT1586	
ACELA1455		

Year 2

English

ACELA1461	ACELT1591	ACELY1665
ACELA1462	ACELT1593	
ACELA1465		
ACELA1469		

Appropriate Ages: 3+

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Notes by: Christina Wheeler

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- English

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

My Friend Ernest is a realistic and thoughtful story about Oscar's first day of school. He is scared of the boy with freckles, however it soon becomes clear that Ernest wants to make friends with Oscar, he just doesn't know how. It offers scope for several reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks as well as dramatization and play-based activities. The language is tangible and relatable to younger audiences and will allow an interesting angle through which to teach socialisation skills.

THEMES

- Friendship
- Sharing
- Imagination
- Confidence
- First Day of School

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emma Allen's debut book *THE TERRIBLE SUITCASE* (Scholastic) won the 2013 CBCA Book of the Year: Early Childhood and was shortlisted for the WA Premier's Literary Awards. Emma worked as a paediatric speech-language therapist for many years and is now studying for a PhD in Creative Writing. Emma lives in Canberra.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Hannah Sommerville is an emerging children's book illustrator whose first book was *CHASING SHADOWS* by Corinne Fenton (Ford Street Publishing, 2013). Hannah lives in Milton, NSW.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Christina Wheeler is a Teacher-Librarian who works with primary and lower-secondary students. She completed an Arts Degree majoring in English and History, followed by a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education, at the University of Queensland. She later received a Graduate Diploma in Teacher-Librarianship from QUT. One of her favourite aspects of her job is what she calls the 'goose bump effect' – those moments when students share their insights and experiences of texts. The joy of being able to bring non-readers to books is another of her passions.

Pre-reading Questions

- Before reading, look carefully at the front cover of *My Friend Ernest*. Make predictions about the setting of the text using the clues given.
- Discuss the key word 'friend' in the title. What makes a good friend? In what ways are you a good friend?

Reading and Viewing

- The body language of the characters tells us a lot about their feelings. Carefully examine the illustrations on Worksheet 1. In small groups, discuss what the illustrations reveal about the character's thoughts (Worksheet 1).
- View the illustrations of Ernest 'in-role' as the dragon at the start of the story. Is it possible that Oscar misjudges Ernest? Discuss.
- Why do you think Ernest comes into the cubby house crying? Discuss Oscar's and the princess's immediate reaction to share their hiding spot with him. What does this tell us about friendship?
- If you were Ernest, how would you feel about the way Oscar treats you at the start of the book?
- Compare *My Friend Ernest* with other picture books about the first day of school, such as *Louisa May Pickett: the most boring person in class* by Rod Clement, *Sunday Chutney* by Aaron Blabey or *Marshall Armstrong is new to our School* by David Mackintosh. Use the Venn diagram (Worksheet 3) to help with this comparison.
- Discuss the difference between literal and inferred meaning, for example, what does the princess really mean when she says, 'Ooooh!' when she hears the dragon snort? Is she afraid or just pretending to be afraid to make the game more interesting?

Speaking and Listening

In reading groups, take turns reading the text aloud. Ask for help with any of the unfamiliar words. Add these new words to your Word Wall (See **Grammar, Punctuation and Vocabulary**).

- Using the images in Worksheet 1, re-order the illustrations into the correct sequence as they occur in the text. Use this sequence to retell the story of *My Friend Ernest* in your own words. Swap and listen to your friend's version.
- Reflect on your own first day of school. In small groups, share your memories, taking turns to speak and listen.
- What is your favourite page in *My Friend Ernest*? Why is this your favourite? Share with a friend.
- Practise ways to make friends with a new person. What words would you use? What body language would you use?
- Discuss ways to resolve disputes in the playground, for instance if someone was using something that you wanted to use.
- What is admirable about the little girl who plays the princess? How is she a good friend?
- How important is it to include others in your games? Discuss inclusion vs exclusion.
- Imagination plays an important part in *My Friend Ernest*? How important is imagination to your games?
- With a group of friends, invent your own imaginative game.

Writing and Representing

- Use role-play to retell the story of *My Friend Ernest*.
- Take digital photos of yourself and friends in freeze-frame poses to help create a photo-story of *My Friend Ernest*.
- How have Oscar and Ernest changed from the beginning to the end of the text? Write your ideas in a few sentences.
- What have you learnt about friendship from *My Friend Ernest*? List five 'take-aways' you can use from this text.
- Reflect on a time that you have felt like Oscar. Share this in a journal. What made you feel this way? What made you feel better?
- Create your own dress-ups using recyclable materials brought in from home. Allow time to play imaginative games and role-play using these dress-ups.

- As a class, create a list of 'Rules' for sharing toys and dress-ups in your classroom. Discuss the importance of rules such as these.
- Discuss the narrative features of *My Friend Ernest* in terms of plot, characters and setting. How do these features help tell Oscar's story and convey the themes of friendship and sharing?
- Discuss the way in which the illustrations help to create the characters. What can we tell about main characters such as Ernest and Oscar from the illustrations? Likewise, what can we tell about the minor characters, such as the crocodile, the teacher and Oscar's mum?
- Discuss what you like about *My Friend Ernest* using appropriate language to discuss literature, for example:
 - I enjoyed the story because...
 - The illustrations helped add to the story by...
 - My favourite part of the story was when...
 - The author did a good job of...
 - The story reminded me of...
- Differentiation: Choose one of the minor characters in *My Friend Ernest* (perhaps one of the students whose backpacks feature on the cover) and create a story about their day at school.

Grammar, Punctuation and Vocabulary

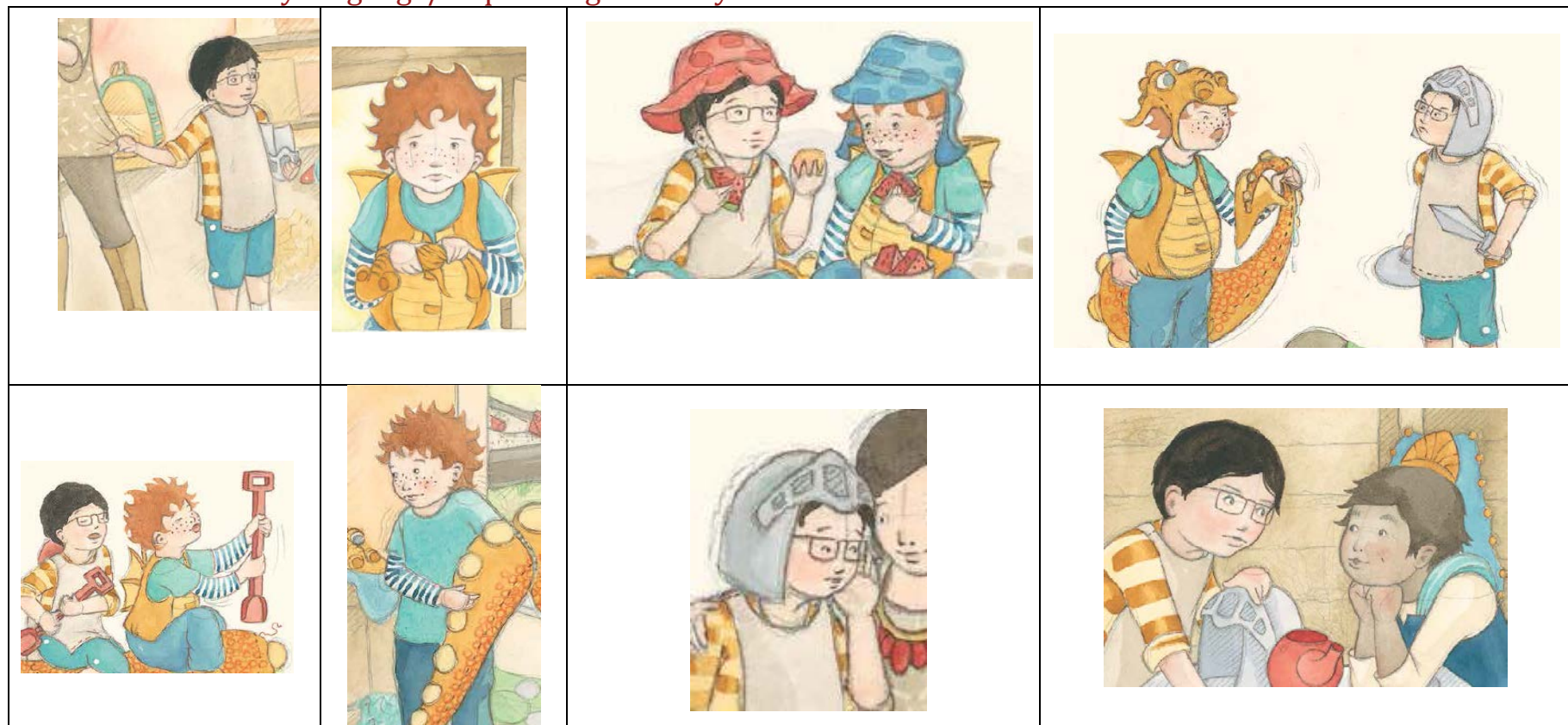
tail	kiss	build	water	over	head
teeth	shake	share	dark	roars	sandpit
Differentiation: Extension Vocabulary (Level 1) ↓					
helmet	tunnel	dragon	brave	pour	friends
hideout	lair	moat	teach	pretend	cubby
Differentiation: Extension Vocabulary (Level 2) ↓					
knight	scrunch	horrible	squashed	whisper	scary
castle	snatches	fruit	paddle	freckles	shield

- Use the vocabulary above to:
 - Create a Word Wall for classroom display
 - Create sight word cards (Worksheet 2)

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- Complete the Cloze activity (Worksheet 4)
- Break down these words into syllables and phonemes
- Categorise these words into parts of speech such as nouns, verbs and adjectives
- Write sentences using some of these words
- Discuss the use of capital letters for proper nouns and at the beginning of sentences.
- Use sentences from the text to help teach the structure of simple sentences.

Worksheet 1 – Body language/Sequencing the story



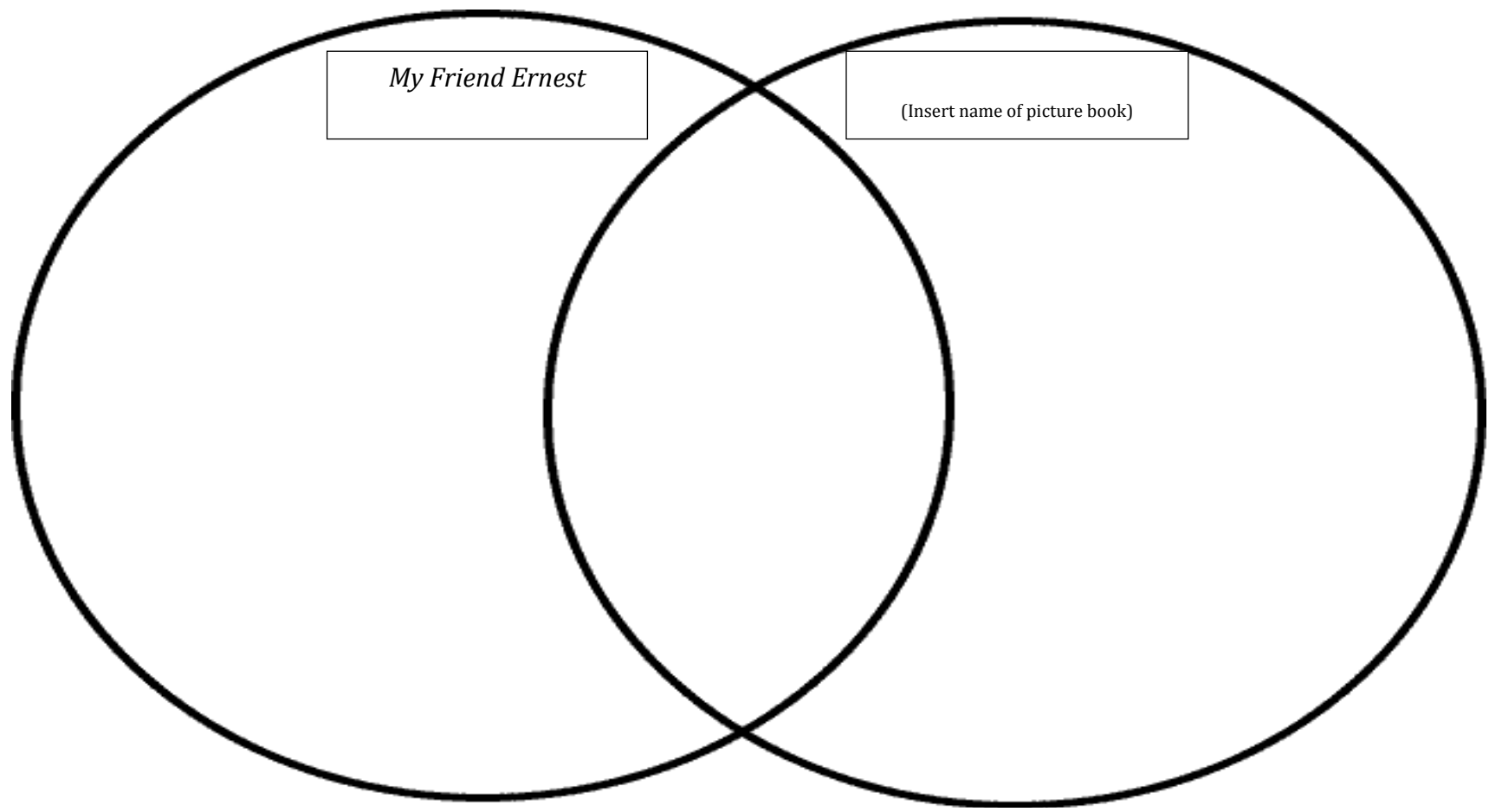
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Worksheet 2 – Sight Word Cards/Vocabulary List

tail	kiss	build	water	over	head
teeth	shake	share	dark	roars	sandpit
Differentiation: Extension Vocabulary (Level 1) ↓					
helmet	tunnel	dragon	brave	pour	friends
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Worksheet 3 – Comparison of texts – How is My Friend Ernest similar to and different from the other text?



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Worksheet 4 – Cloze Activity – Use the words from the vocabulary list to complete the following sentences.

1. Oscar shook his _____ . He did not like the boy with the _____ .
2. Ernest was dressed-up as a _____ . He growled, showing Oscar his sharp _____ .
3. Oscar build a _____ in the sandpit. It had a _____ made of water around it.
4. Oscar did not feel very _____ , even though he was dressed as a knight.
5. Oscar found a princess in the _____ . They hid under the table.
6. Ernest was sad. He wanted to join Oscar and the princess in their _____ .
7. When Oscar and Ernest become friends, they _____ their _____ .
8. It is fun to _____ you're a knight or a dragon.
9. Oscar found starting a new school very _____ .
10. The dragon outside was a _____ growling one.