

Captain Crabclaw's Crew

Teacher Notes

Synopsis

A cheerful pirate captain advertises for a crew for his brand-new pirate ship, the *Speedy Squid*, so he can sail the seven seas and search for treasure. Instead of 'fearsome' pirates, an assortment of animals answers his advertisement - a honking duck as the ship's parrot, a trumpeting elephant as the first mate, a giraffe as the lookout and, instead of a ship's cook, a cow and a chicken to supply milk and eggs. The animals manage to persuade Captain Crabclaw that not only are they fearsome, they are the best crew possible for the Captain and his new ship!

However, when the *Speedy Squid* and its unusual crew come across a real pirate ship, the crew of the *Golden Goose* can only shake with laughter at the sight of Captain Crabclaw's crew. "That's not a crew...that's a zoo!" they jeer. Feeling dejected, Captain Crabclaw retreats to his cabin and takes to bed clutching his teddy bear. His crew try to think of ways to cheer up their beloved captain.

Captain Crabclaw is woken by the sound of treasure. Racing to the deck in his pyjamas, he is amazed to see his ship full of people, all paying to visit the first-ever pirate zoo.

Themes

Kindness: Captain Crabclaw is willing to give a bunch of unlikely recruits the chance to prove themselves as his shipmates.

By giving the animals a chance to prove themselves, Captain Crabclaw is rewarded when they come up with a unique – and money making – idea to solve his problems and reward him for his kindness.

Stereotypes: The book challenges stereotypes. The animals prove more than capable of running the ship efficiently – even though they are not at all 'fearsome' as pirates are meant to be. Captain Crabclaw is not a typical pirate. He's soft-hearted and childlike.

Tolerance/prejudice: It's OK to be different. Don't prejudge someone on how they look – they may surprise you.

The animals cleverly turn what seems a negative situation to everyone's advantage. They are capable of 'thinking outside the box'.

Writing style

The writer uses alliteration and a jaunty rhythm throughout to enhance the pirate and nautical theme of the book.

The words are well chosen and meaningful. There are many unusual and very funny catchphrases.

The text is full of repetition – great for young readers and for those who are read to by their parents or carers.

The writer makes good use of onomatopoeia.

The text is enhanced by the artist's watercolours which have a nautical feel; the colour blue is strong throughout; the animals are very appealing and expressive and there are some nice 'pirate' touches (earring on the elephant, headscarves, etc). Students may like to pick up how the animals appearance changes as they become part of the pirate crew.

The artist uses colour to dramatic effect when illustrating night and day. The strong, primary colours are perfect for the young audience.

Study Notes

Discussion Points

Captain Crabclaw's Crew is suitable for preschool and young children at primary school (ages 2-8)

The following points provide a springboard for discussion.

- Do you think Captain Crabclaw is a good captain and if so, why?
- Do you think Captain Crabclaw is a good pirate?
- Why do you think the animals are suitable for their particular jobs?
- What sort of jobs do you think you would have to do to run a pirate ship?
- Would you like to be a pirate?

- Would you rather work on Captain Crabclaw's ship or the *Golden Goose*? Why?
- Have you ever been on a holiday adventure? Describe how you felt when you were about to set off?
- Who is your favourite pirate character and why?

Drama: Body Language

- Tie a scarf on your head like a pirate and describes how it feels.
- Stand in a circle. Move your face and your body to show happiness, sadness, excitement and worry.
- Ask each child to take it in turns to demonstrate one of these feelings and the class has to guess which one it is.

Music: Animal Soundscape

- Divide each class into five groups for each animal (duck, elephant, giraffe, chicken and cow). Each group can create its own animal sounds. The teacher conducts, bringing in each group at random.
- Use dynamic variation – loud and soft and have children move around the room like their animal.
- Sing a pirate song.

Movement: Pirate Work

- Create three different actions for each – 'swab the deck', 'hoist the mainsail', 'anchors aweigh'.
- Children walk around the room to a beat. The teacher calls out one of the above actions and children perform the appropriate movements.

Art: Friendly Pirate Flag

- The black-and-white skull and crossbones is the traditional pirate's flag. Design a new flag for the *Speedy Squid*. Use primary colours to show that the *Speedy Squid* is no longer a pirate ship but a friendly zoo.

Science: Compass Treasure Hunt

- Pirates use compasses to tell them which direction they are going. Use a compass to discover which way is North.
- Place signs for North, South, East and West in the correct directions (use tape to mark this out).
- When a teacher calls a direction, students point or move this way.
- Put a head scarf on one child. Send the child outside. Hide 'treasure' in the room. Ask the child to enter and direct them to the treasure with directions, ie take three steps North, etc.
- Once the child has found the treasure, select another child and start the game again.

Maths: Body Counting

Ask the children to count the number of:

- Eyes
- Ears
- Legs
- Toes (watch the hen and duck!)
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Author motivation

Frances Watts on writing *Captain Crabclaw's Crew*

After *Kisses for Daddy* and *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books* I wanted to write a picture book with a completely different setting and feeling—a big, bold, rollicking story about...pirates. I decided to add an element of absurdity. What, I wondered, was the most unlikely character you could find aboard a pirate ship? An elephant, I thought. What would an elephant be doing aboard a pirate ship? The challenge, then, was to create a story in which it became perfectly logical—even desirable—to have an elephant in the crew.

Two things that were uppermost in my mind as the story began to take shape were structure and language. I loved creating the element of surprise as the animals applied to join the crew,

and as I wrote began to deliberately structure that into the page turn. (Perhaps because I edited children's books for many years, I am always aware of the particular structure of a picture book, and I think in terms of single pages, double-page spreads and page turns as I write.) The other aspect of the story which developed as I wrote was the language. I had a lot of fun with that alliteration!

More than anything, though, I wanted *Captain Crabclaw's Crew* to brim with warmth and humour and a sense of friendship and team spirit. (I particularly love Captain Crabclaw's acceptance—admiration, even—of difference.) And of course David Legge, with his exuberance and wit, is the perfect illustrator to evoke all these things.

About the author

Frances Watts began her career as an editor, and spent nearly ten years working with some of Australia's most talented children's authors and illustrators before writing a book of her own. Her bestselling picture book *Kisses for Daddy* (illustrated by David Legge), was named an Honour Book in the Early Childhood category of the 2006 Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards, and has sold over 100,000 copies worldwide in many different languages. Her second picture book with David Legge, *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books*, won the Eve Pownall Award for Information Books in the 2008 CBCA Book of the Year awards. *Captain Crabclaw's Crew* is the third book by this successful team. As well as continuing to write picture books, Frances has been working on a series of junior novels about two very unlikely superheroes, Extraordinary Ernie and Marvellous Maud, with the heroic illustrator Judy Watson. The third book in the series, *The Greatest Sheep in History*, will be published in April 2009.

Frances lives in Sydney's inner west, and divides her time between writing and editing.

About the illustrator

David Legge was born in England where he worked as an illustrator in London for three years before moving to Australia in 1989. He illustrated many covers of children's books before working on his first picture book *Bamboozled*, which has now sold over 100,000 copies worldwide. *Bamboozled* received the signal honour of being voted an Honour book in the 1995 CBC awards and won the KOALA and YABBA awards the following year.

David published *Rise and Shine* (1997), *Tom Goes to Kindergarten* (with Margaret Wild, 2000), *Baby Boomsticks* (also with Margaret Wild, 2003) and *Kisses For Daddy* (with Frances Watts), which was an Honour Book in the 2006 CBCA Book of the Year awards, Early Childhood category. His most recent book, *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books*, also with Frances Watts, was the winner of the 2008 CBCA Eve Pownall Award.

David lives with his wife and two children in the Sydney suburb of Penshurst.

Editorial Comment

Captain Crabclaw's Crew was the result of one of those lines that publishers often throw at authors: 'Have you thought about writing a book about pirates?' The story of a pirate and his crew of an elephant, duck, giraffe, chicken and cow was not what were expecting! We all fell in love with Frances Watts' witty, rhythmic text and the gentle, funny characters that emerged. The finished book is even better than anything we had imagined. David Legge's illustrations, as always, brought a whole new level of humour and colour to the text. David always introduces elements that give different layers to the text. We love the way he turned the animals into pirates – adding rings to the elephant's ear, a bandanna to the giraffe, a *jabot* to the duck, the cow's eye-patch and the chicken's pirate hat. His colours and characterisations (a pirate captain with a teddy bear!) are charming and perfect for young children. We expect *Captain Crabclaw's Crew* to be as popular and endearing as David's and Frances' last collaboration, *Parsley Rabbit's Book about Books*.

Marketing & promotion

We have produced *Captain Crabclaw* tattoos and a large poster to accompany the publication of the book.

South Australia's Little Big Book Club has organised a national tour featuring Frances and David speaking at Maritime Museums around the country, starting at the Come Out Festival in Adelaide. Pirate Parties will be held with an actor playing *Captain Crabclaw*, activities, storytelling sessions, illustration fun and book signings.