

*Pirates Ate Rats* is the latest in the highly successful *It's True!* series of non-fiction texts for primary-aged children. It follows the format utilised in the other books in this series:

- Information presented in a variety of text types
- Witty, conversational writing style
- Text level appropriate to students' age level
- Cartoons and illustrations with high "kid-appeal".

This year I've used these books with my composite Year 3/4 class as key resources in reading lessons. Activities include:

- Sneak Preview – a "before reading" activity where students peruse the cover and skim the text to write prediction and observations: "What I notice about the illustrations, cover, title & headings, author?" "Questions I have about the text."
- Vocabulary Squares – an "after reading" activity where students choose an unknown word from the text, write a definition, build other words from it using prefixes and suffixes and draw a picture to illustrate the word meaning in context.
- Explorers' Circle – Students list layout, features of the text and language used.
- Once Upon A Time – Before reading students list what they know about the topic. After reading the text they list the new facts they've learnt.

I highly recommend the *It's True!* series as books that will inspire kids to read. No sooner had the book hit my desk than my students had spirited it away to read it!

**Debra Bristow, Mooloolaba State School, QLD**

This is the 27<sup>th</sup> title in the *It's True!* series, and like the others is a mixture of fact, illustration and sensationalist hype! A number of famous — or should that be infamous — pirates are introduced and lots of media-inspired caricatures of piracy are debunked and replaced with genuine information.

We learn of pirates in the time of Alexander the Great, with suggestions that they had existed as early as 2500 BC, through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, with uncomfortable reminders of current day pirates operating in various parts of the world. A timely reminder about video piracy concludes what is a fun run through the world of the pirate, and the authors have included a list of websites and books for "Where to find out more". A comprehensive index is included in the book.

The authors have done a great job with their subject matter: I almost felt sorry for Alexander Selkirk on reading his fate (p.19) and the photographs of five pirate heads hanging in crates from a wall in Honan, China (p.52), is chilling.

The book would have been improved by the addition of a glossary and by the omission of some annoying typos (e.g. on p.66).

Our primary students love reading about pirates, so this book will be hardly ever in the library. Maybe next year we'll organise a pirate day on 19<sup>th</sup> September!

**Julie Davies, Sutherland Shire Christian School, NSW**

The book *It's True! Pirates ate rats* by Heather Catchpole & Vanessa Woods is the latest in the *It's True!* series and gives a humorous account of how pirates lived in days gone by. The eye-catching cover, pictures and comical drawings will entice even the most reluctant of readers. There are eight chapters with factual information presented in small snippets, which all children particularly boys, will find interesting and easy to read.

Primary school teachers will find this resource very valuable when teaching history and English and this book could also be used as an introduction to a pirate topic in drama and art. With September 19 being Pirate Day, this would also be an ideal opportunity to incorporate this book in the classroom and discover why we have Pirate Day. This comprehensive resource provides information on how pirating began 2000 years ago when pirates captured the famous emperor

Julius Caesar. The children will particularly enjoy the pirate lingo, which teachers can use as a fun English class activity where the students can make dialogues using sayings such as 'Davey Jones' locker, black spot and gangway.' Chapter two details the life of a pirate, what they ate, fleeing from justice and of course treasure maps and sunken treasure. Pirates clothing and tools of the trade are featured in chapter three and it also gives an interesting account of ear-piercing tales and why pirates only wore one earring.

English teachers could use the Anne Bonny diary portion of chapter five as an example of diary writing. There is also a section on 'Sea-going superstitions' which teachers could use to talk about modern-day superstitions and how they have evolved. Science teachers could find the information regarding the 'Beaufort wind scale' helpful during lessons on weather. Piracy today is mentioned covering topics such as digital pirating. There is an excellent quiz with 12 multi-choice questions at the back of the book and there is also a list of websites and books that teachers can use to find further information on this topic.

**Mark Draga, West Harbour School, New Zealand**

This is a new title in the popular *It's True!* series and ties in well with the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies. The book begins with an historical explanation for the rise of the Golden Age of Pirates from about 1650 to the early 1700s. There is lots of useful information about the reality of pirate life, which seems to be more about being hungry and hunted rather than glamorous. The writers debunk the idea of pirate maps where X marks the treasure. They consider that pirates would have spent most of their money on drinking and gambling in port and wouldn't have much gold left to save and much less bury! There are interesting facts about Sir Francis Drake who was considered a privateer rather than a pirate and was state-registered and condoned. The book ends with a timely reminder that pirates exist today and include "digital" pirates.

I would have enjoyed information about a greater variety of pirates. There is rather a lot [cross referenced] on Captain Bartholomew Roberts [Black Bart] and Blackbeard.

The book is interesting visually with lots of fun cartoons, a variety of page layouts and photos. The imaginary diary entries are well written and could encourage students to write in diary form. *Pirates ate Rats* contains a quiz, a comprehensive index and a variety of website and book sources to acquire further information.

**Pauline Hosking, Mount Lilydale Mercy College, VIC**

This is another excellent book in the *It's True!* series.

The author hooks the reader with the story of Julius Caesar at the time he was captured by pirates. The low ransom demanded for his release insulted Caesar and though the pirates grew quite fond of Caesar he vowed revenge when he got free.

There have been hundreds of plays, movies and books written about pirates that have contributed to many myths surrounding pirates. This book sets out to debunk some of those myths. For example, Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* made prisoners walk the plank but the truth is that there are few records of anyone being made to walk the plank. It was easier to throw prisoners over the side.

There is a wealth of information in this book including the history of piracy, the most lucrative geographical locations to do the plundering and what life was like aboard a pirate ship. There were even government-sponsored pirates called privateers. The monarch of the day would employ seamen to rob ships from other countries. Eventually England, Spain and France decided that they hated pirates more than they hated each other and they worked together to stamp out piracy.

Although the pirates in our imagination have all but gone, the author does mention modern day pirates in their motorboats instead of sailing ships, using guns instead of swords. Another modern day pirate is the digital pirate and the author explains how this is also a crime.

This book is well set out with black and white illustrations and photos. It is easy to read and would appeal to children approximately 7 years up.

I would use this in conjunction with my favourite theme of piracy and pirates.

**Claire Cheeseman, Summerland Primary School, New Zealand**

The latest book in the *It's True* series is *It's True! Pirates ate Rats*. From the cover, appealing in its grossness to a 10 year old, to the cartoon-style illustrations, to the text, presented in a variety of formats, this is a wonderful journey through the history of piracy.

What amazed and delighted me was the amount of detail and the breadth of information presented in such a small volume. The use of pages laid out as scrolls is an imaginative way of presenting detailed information about specific areas of interest, like "Ear-piercing tales" (Did sailors wear earrings?), "Landlubber lingo" (Shiver me timbers!) and "Sea-going superstitions". The end of the book includes a quiz, index and list of resources for further research.

Stage Two students will find this a wonderful edition to our collection of pirate books, to be read and digested (but not the rats, please!) in the term they spend in the world of piracy. The print size and language are very friendly for this age group and challenging enough to stimulate their developing literacy skills.

**Barbara Wilson, St George Christian School, Hurstville NSW**