

The story of Special Kev by Chris Mckimmie a picture story book that is engaging for children of all ages. Special Kev is a normal boy with “*eleventy million cousins*”, curly red hair and freckles. He is loved by his parents and learns to come to terms with himself as an individual and learns to accept the differences of others. He does this in the usual childhood way—through play where he reacts to a friend in an inappropriate way “*I nicked his bike and chucked it in the lake.*” He suffers the consequences for this bad behavior but is able to learn from his mistake. The story moves on to Special Kev’s birthday and an unusual present from his parents. The presentation of this book is fantastic. The childlike illustrations are beautiful with an interesting combination of media and the font is an unusual mixture of bold and normal print in a child like style. This makes the text very clear and easy to read. Each capital letter is in bold type which is a great teaching point for early readers. The overall effect is one of youthful exuberance.

This book will appeal to all children but I believe boys will be able to relate to Special Kev and the problems he experiences. It is a good book to read to young children, ages 4-8 as a discussion starter about individual differences and suitable behaviors. More able readers would be able to read this book independently, ages 8-10.

Anne Lewis, Mountain Creek State School, QLD

This book is a treasure. It is funny and has a good underlying message about the uniqueness of each person as well as the importance and place of family. It’s quintessentially Australian with Uncle Nobby’s reference to ‘blood nuts’ and Nicky Bathgate’s nickname for Kev of ‘Carrot Top’ and Megan the Meanie calling him ‘Ginger Nut’ - all common nicknames for redheads.

Special Kev shows Australian culture with its reference to Australian Football and, of course, pavlova. Lovely to see Kev in what I presume is intended as a representation of a Sydney Swans jersey and Aunt Pav in hers as well, while Fatty Boombah is in what looks like a Geelong jersey, especially given the name of his cat, Gary Junior.

The text is written with a good dose of Aussie humour. There are lots of ‘in’ jokes. The childlike yet detailed and colourful illustrations suit the book. My husband read it, chuckled and suggested it would be ‘A picture book Dads would enjoy reading not necessarily for the kid’s benefit.’

But children would benefit from this engaging and fun book. I can see it being a useful tool for the classroom when doing units on Family in HSIE. It could be also useful in dealing with teasing and bullying. Most of all, it would encourage children to think about what is special about them, as well as other member of their family. I think it’s a winner!

Dale Harcombe, NSW

Are we superstitious enough to believe that the very timing of our birth will determine the path in life we will take and who we are to become? Take Special Kev for instance; born on the very day of practical jokes, yet blessed with the characteristics of red curly hair and freckles. And, of all things, a bloodnut, which, according to Uncle Nobby, is fast becoming an extinct species.

Having had the red carpet rolled out on the day he was born, one would assume that Special Kev has indeed been given special treatment. That appears to be true, until the day of ‘the thing’, which left poor Nicky Bathgate tied to a tree and without a bike.

Consequences left Special Kev, now only referred to as Kev, confined to a room where all he could do to amuse himself was to play join the dots with his freckles. Remorse? Perhaps . . . if it is to be found in blaming one’s favourite cousin, Fatty Boombah. Certainly the derogatory names such Fatty Flathead, Stinky and Podgy used in this story go out on a limb when it comes to being politically correct, however they certainly appeal to the primary age group.

The book openly invites the concept of family. It is refreshing that the extended family continues to be an important element of McKimmie’s picture books. This subject is always relatable to groups of young children, and offers opportunities for discussions about family composition, heritage and tradition.

Other relevant concepts include colour, birthdays, addresses, size and landmarks, all of which can be implemented into the curriculum collectively or as single units. And, regardless of how they are utilised, all open endless possibilities for classroom activities. For instance, the concept of size can be incorporated into a creative writing exercise about big things; addresses open up geographical opportunities for exploring maps; and birthdays may lead into the topics of months and seasons of the year.

The illustrations, compositions of words and font styles reflect a very childlike manner and it is clear that the author has intended, like in many of his stories, to relate to the exploratory and imaginative nature of the reader. And, through what appears to be a disjointed storyline, shines a very clear message of acceptance of oneself and of others.

Aunty Pav believes there is only one Special Kev, just like the one red post in her multicoloured picket fence. Yet, if we take the time to look up to the stars every now and again, we may just find that although we share one sky, we are all just a little bit special despite the fact that some of us take longer to learn to shine.

Linda Zammit, Trinity Grammar School, VIC

Special Kev, the April Fools' Day baby, a 'bloodnut', with curly red hair and all those cousins, is in disgrace after the 'thing' with Nicky Bathgate and is now just 'Kevin' to his Mum and Dad who 'got the glums up' with him. He is not allowed out by himself anymore, has no one to talk to and is so bored he plays dot-to-dot with his freckles. Ingenious and amusing, this youngster certainly is and he will capture the hearts of beginning readers aged 4-8, no doubt identifying with him as he seeks to blame someone else (in this case, favourite cousin, Fatty Boombah) for the 'thing', themselves curious about just what actually has happened. Also sure to appeal are his parents, who planted red roses and rolled out the red carpet on the day Special Kev was born, having had a star named after him as well and the endearing Aunty Pav, with her pretend name, pretend red hair, multicoloured picket fence and constant kindness to Special Kev.

Chris McKimmie's original design format, including bright, eye-catching cover, complete with the scrub turkey his Dad made for Special Kev's birthday present, large font size and Special Kev-like scrawls and doodles incorporates simple yet effective, bold illustrations in acrylic, ink, pencil, pastels and collage to engage and delight young readers. Her fun with words is infectious, as we read of the 'eleventy million cousins' and the alliteration and rhyme of their unusual names - Harry Highpants, Tommy The Zombie, Uncle Nobby Nutso, Megan the Meanie, Tumby the Gump, Wobbly Frank and the like – and of Fatty's new home town, Tumblegum, all designed to amuse and to spark the reader's imagination.

As a wonderful celebration of individuality and uniqueness, *Special Kev* is itself a unique book, an enjoyable, fun teacher read-aloud and a recommended addition to the primary school library collection for Teacher Librarian-directed story telling sessions and for individual borrowing. Special Kev is an inventive, lovable rascal who rises above his 'Ginger Nut' and 'Carrot Top' nicknames and the message of the story is a valuable life lesson: 'Mum said we are all made of stars. We are all special' . . . even notorious Nicky Bathgate of the nasty Ned Kelly game fame.

Alison Cassell, QLD

Special Kev by Chris McKimmie is a picture book featuring a charming story about a kid who is unique. Kev is special as he has red curly hair and freckles. He is loved by his parents and learns to come to terms with himself as an individual and learns to accept the differences of others. This book is suitable for 4–8 year olds and will be of particular interest to boys as I'm sure they will relate to everything that Kev experiences in the story. Older children will enjoy reading this book independently.

This book can be used as a wonderful opener when implementing the topic 'family' with discussions about family composition, heritage and traditions. It can be used as a stimulus to assist children in investigating their world from different angles, and recognise that everyone is different. Feelings of insecurity and loneliness that often go with being different can also be explored. During literacy children could write a poem or story about why they are 'a one-off', how they are 'different' and 'special'. I was initially uneasy at seeing some of Kev's family's names – Stinky, Fatty, Podgy then I realised that the inclusion of these family members in the book provided another teaching opportunity – a discussion on teasing and bullying and of course appropriate behaviour. From an Australian history point of view, this book introduces the children to the historical figure of Ned Kelly and this topic can be further investigated. The children can act out the scenes from Ned Kelly's story. [Teachers notes](#) are available to assist early years teachers in incorporating this resource into the classroom.

Melanie Honeycombe, Kindercare Learning Centre, Auckland, New Zealand

I guess Chris McKimmie, the wonderful author of *Special Kev*, was aiming for this book to be a children's book. However, it is so cleverly written and illustrated, it will appeal to anyone from 4 years old to 104 years old! It certainly had me chuckling.

It is full of cheekiness and humour, telling the story of *Special Kev* who was born on April Fool's Day when his "mum planted roses and rolled out the red carpet."

With his red curly hair and a face full of freckles, he tells us about his "eleventy million cousins", his fondness for Aunt Pav with her red hair that is pretend and her pretend name. This tale talks a lot about extended family, consequences and how we are all special and unique. It has a strong Australian theme with Ned Kelly, Tumblegum and The Big Avocado getting a mention.

It's eye-catching cover with a childlike picture and writing will draw even the most reluctant of readers.

Inside the book, the pictures are big, bold and colourful with 2 or 3 sentences per page in different fonts, making for interesting reading.

This is a great read aloud story for the classroom or at home. Teachers could utilise this book in the classroom to talk about families, consequences or how we should celebrate our uniqueness and individuality. After all, *Special Kev's* parents named a star after him! A fabulously humorous book that will be enjoyed over and over again.

Mark Draga, West Harbour School, New Zealand

Special Kev is a funny and poignant book written and illustrated by Chris McKimmie. On the day little Kev was born, his mum 'planted red roses and rolled out the red carpet'. She called him *Special Kev* . . . he's the only one of his 'eleventy million cousins' who has red hair.

Special Kev gets himself into trouble for tying Nicky Bathgate to a tree and leaving him there. When he's sent to his room he wonders if he's still special. He learns that even though what he didn't wasn't kind, he knows he's still *Special Kev* when his birthday comes around.

McKimmie makes clever use of the 'red theme' throughout the book...Kev's red hair is special and everything connected with red is special . . . the red roses, the red carpet, Gary Junior his cousin's red cat, Aunt Pav's pretend red hair, the pavlova with red strawberries, the scrub turkey with a red head and aunt Pav's colourful picket fence with only one red one for *Special Kev*.

The language will make adults smile as they read the book with a child; there are some specifically Aussie expressions . . . Uncle Nobby says Kev's 'a bloodnut . . . and he reckons that bloodnuts are nearly extinct like cassowaries'. When Kev's in trouble he feels like 'Nigel No-Mates'. His favourite cousin whose family moves to live near the Big Avocado is called Fatty Boombah. One of the most poignant phrases in the book is Kev's mum's description of Aunt Pav living in 'a house of raindrops'.

The style of the text and illustrations are unusual, intriguing and compelling. The text is placed in a variety of places on different pages, sometimes mirroring the meaning of what it conveys as in the word 'raindrops' . . . the word literally drips down the page. The style and layout of the text makes it look like *Special Kev* has written the story himself. The illustrations, done in the style of a young child's artwork . . . just like Kev would do, are a joy to look at again and again.

Special Kev asks to be read aloud and shared. It is visually appealing, captivating and poignant and captures *Special Kev's* thoughts and feelings in a very special way. The final pages are beautiful, reinforcing the unique and special qualities of every child.

Margaret Warner, casual teacher/writer, NSW

Special Kev is member of an extremely large extended family. In his words, "I am special. I am the only one of all of my eleventy-million cousins who has red hair, curly hair and freckles"

When he was born, his mother planted red roses and rolled out the red carpet, and it was she who called him 'special Kev'.

Special Kev has lots of cousins – Megan the meanie, Barry the rabbit, Tommy the zombie – just to name a few. Then there are his Aunts and Uncles - Uncle Nobby Nutso, Uncle Tom, and Aunt Pav.

Aunt Pav is his favorite Aunt – she makes his birthday cake each year and shows kindness all the time to him. There are negative nicknames throughout the book like fatty, podgy, zombie, meanie and stinky. These nicknames would be fine in a positive way, but they are not.

Kev is portrayed as the typical stereotype of red head – red haired, freckle face and bad temper. He is also called things like, blood-nut, carrot-top etc. creating a stigma to his personality. There doesn't give another alternative to the problem or behavior.

The book is attractively presented and certainly captures typical negative schoolyard behaviour. The underlying fact that each person is unique and special gives a positive message, but doesn't give any feed back as to how

Nicky should respond to Kev. But rather, it gives permission for Kev to behave in this way because he is unhappy.

The truth is that lots of children in our world today have unpleasant issues to deal with. We need to foster positive ways for children to work through disappointments and anger.

The use of nicknames is fine, providing the words are positive. But words like fatty, podgy, zombie, meanie, stinky all have negative connotations attached to them and stereotype people.

Freckle-faced red heads have long been associated with bad temper and we see Kev fitting into such a mould.

I read this book to my own 3 / 4 class, and asked their opinion of it. It was amazing to see how my own children picked up on the negativity used throughout the book.

I am sorry, but I cannot recommend this book for young children.

Helen Rashleigh, Mountain District Christian School, VIC

This book is so uniquely Australian it was impossible not to fall in love with it. The language was honest, humorous and engaging. I loved the story and the characters. I wanted to meet Special Kev's eleventy million red-headed cousins, his other interesting relatives, including Uncle Nobby and his best friend, Fatty Boombah. This delightful story deals with children's uniqueness and recognition of individuality. In a humorous way it also talks about Kev's loneliness when his best mate Fatty went to Tumblegum. This meant no one to play footy with. As Kev so rightly said "you can't play kick to kick with yourself".

Special Kev thought he'd found a friend in Nicky Bathgate. Unfortunately Nicky didn't want to play footy and made the grave mistake of teasing Kev about his red hair. Kev saw "red"! Maybe his actions weren't the best (leaving Nicky tied to a tree!) but I couldn't help but laugh.

His parents reinforced his uniqueness by naming a star after him for his birthday. Special Kev came to realize that everyone was special, even Nicky Bathgate.

The illustrations were excellent, colourful and original. This is a wonderful book to share with primary school children and a great tool to talk about our individual uniqueness.

Julie Huntley, QLD