

Teachers' Notes on *Check on Me* by Andrew Daddo and Jonathan Bentley

SYNOPSIS

A small child describes his bedtime rituals with Dad: a ride to bed, favourite stories to be told, cuddles, kisses, conversation, a drink, a visit to the toilet, but most of all reassurance that even when he is asleep, his parents will check on him. Another night passes safely and happily before a new day dawns.

THEMES

- The comfort and security of rituals
- Trust in parents to ensure safety and happiness
- Relationship between fathers and sons

WRITING STYLE

- The first person voice of the text is a welcoming invitation into the book
- It is conversational — the child is talking to the father — so is very supportive of early readers, who are making the transition from oral to written language
- It is a recount of the bedtime scenario, rather than a story with a complication
- The tone celebrates children's love of closeness, playfulness and routine
- The visual narrative heightens and exaggerates the written text and adds comments through the animals.

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR MOTIVATION

Andrew Daddo: 'I'd been looking for a story like *Check On Me* since one of our kids, in an ultra-tired Sunday-night state, told me that I'd written a story for the other two kids, but not for her. It wasn't true, of course. Every book I've written has bits inspired by all the kids, as well as my own childhood, things I see and things that are made up. I'm sure most children's books are written in much the same way.

'Having said that, there was probably a bit of truth in my daughter's words, so I started thinking and listening and trying to see something in that particular child that might inspire a story of its own.

‘For a long time there was nothing — which is not to say she was not inspirational, it’s just that I couldn’t see the story. I tried. I watched and listened and really tried. And maybe it was a case of trying too hard, because I really couldn’t find a thing. And then one evening, after saying good night, she said what she always said, every night: “Goodnight, Daddy. Don’t forget to check on me.”

‘Why I “heard” it that night, and not a week or a month or a year before, is anyone’s guess. But there it was. “Check on me.” It was the last thing, always. And before the last thing were always the others. A ride to bed. A drink. A story. One last trip to the toilet. A whole world of other excuses not to go to sleep. And, “don’t forget to check on me.”

‘I’m sure all kids have their stalling techniques — I know we did as kids — and I enjoy the ones our kids have dreamt up. So like the other picture books I have written, this one contains bits of all the kids, but it was the words or actions of one that inspired the idea.’

Jonathan Bentley: ‘Getting my children to go to sleep was often a long drawn-out affair, which usually resulted in me falling asleep before them.

‘My daughter liked me to read lots and lots of books to her, and she still likes her light to be left on a bit. My son always liked a drink of water before he went to sleep, and he used to wear a white singlet and pyjama bottoms that looked two sizes too big for him. They loved to wrestle and they always wanted lots of hugs and kisses.

‘Because I could relate to Andrew’s story so easily, it made illustrating this book a real pleasure and I had a lot of fun, which is always a good sign.’

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Andrew Daddo is one of Australia’s most popular television personalities. He started writing for children in 2001, when his first collection of stories, *Sprung!* was published. Since then, Andrew has written eighteen bestselling books, including the hugely successful picture book collaboration with Emma Quay, *Good Night, Me*. Andrew lives on Sydney’s northern beaches with his wife and three children.

As a little boy **Jonathan Bentley** liked football and drawing. When he was about eight years old he realised he wasn’t going to be good enough to play football for Leeds United, so he concentrated on drawing instead.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

'When we received this text from Andrew Daddo, we could immediately see the potential for a classic bedtime storybook. The text has the same immediate and universal appeal as one of Andrew's earlier bedtime stories, *Good Night, Me* (illustrated by Emma Quay). Every parent — and every child — is familiar with the variety of stalling techniques used by children before they go to bed. The gentle text promotes the idea of reading and sharing, and shows a warm, loving relationship between a father and son. Jonathan's colourful, whimsical illustrations are a perfect match for the text.'

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

ABC has produced posters and a dump bin and there will be major advertising in *Reading Time* and *Magpies*. Andrew will be touring extensively to talk about the book.

STUDY NOTES

This book can be discussed with different focuses, according to the age of the readers.

Younger readers

- Invite children to discuss why they think the boy doesn't have a name. Ask them to suggest names they like and to explain why they think these names would suit him.
- Using the illustrations for clues, have the children describe the boy's personality.
- Get the children to imagine a sleepover at the little boy's house. What would they do? What games would they play?
- Have children share their favourite bedtime stories and rituals and draw pictures of them in the bright colours used in the story. These could be made into a class book.
- The boy wears stripy pyjama pants. Ask the children to describe and draw their own pyjamas. Outline children on large paper so that these illustrations can be life-size. Size and close-ups are important in the book.
- Talk about the ways in which the illustrator shows that it is night-time and that the light is off.

- Ask the children to describe the best parts of the boy and his dad's days. Why are they the best parts? Invite the children to draw the best parts of their day in a similar style to those in the book.

Older readers

- Discuss with older readers that this is the genre of a recount, which is different from a narrative.
- They could then brainstorm a problem in the events to create a story scenario. For example, the dog and cat get on the bed and won't get off, or the boy has a nightmare.
- Invite them to solve this problem successfully (if you want to challenge them, have two unsuccessful attempts before the third one solves it). This could become a written/visual task, where the students add pages to the book.
- More mature students could write/act out events from the father's point of view, showing what he is thinking and feeling. The father could be 'hot-seated' for his perspective.
- Ask students to tell/write the story that the boy asks to hear — a happily-ever-after story about a kid, a dog and a cat. The illustrations can be used to support ideas of the character of the dog, cat and boy.
- Invite the children to discuss the illustrations (for example, the purpose of the use of white space, coloured backgrounds, and the pauses in the text such as the last page).
- Ask the children to draw the next page after the story finishes. Think about the decisions children will need to make about the reactions of the parents.
- Discuss the visual/verbal pun in the title.