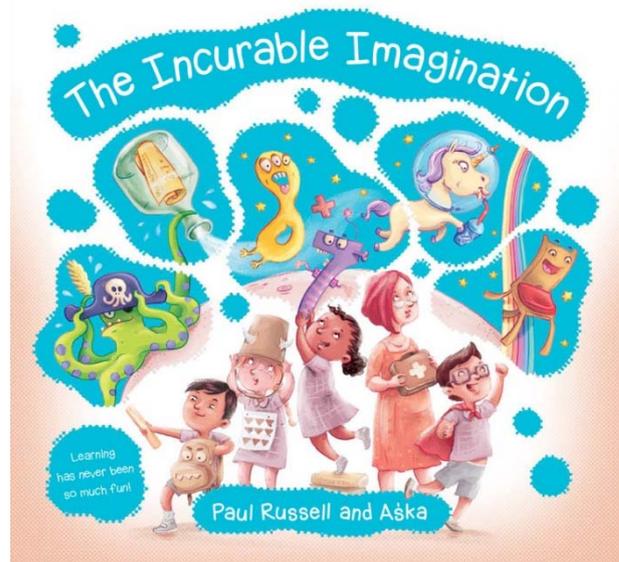


The Incurable Imagination

Subtitle:	Learning has never been so much fun.
Author:	Paul Russell
Illustrator:	Aška
Publisher:	EK Books
Price:	\$24.99
ISBN:	978-1-925335-97-2
Publication date:	April 2019
Audience age:	4-8
Key Curriculum Areas:	English – Writing / Reading



Notes prepared by
Paul Russell and Aška

SYNOPSIS:

Audrey has the worst case of imagination her teachers have ever seen. While other children paint their families, Audrey paints the ogre who lives under her bed, drinking tea. Instead of singing about black sheep, she writes her own songs about desks that run away. It is clear to everyone that her imagination is out of control and totally incurable. What's worse, her condition is contagious and soon the other kids in her class start showing symptoms of an equally incurable imagination. When the imagination spreads to the teachers, the parents begin to protest. But, perhaps imagination isn't such a bad disease after all ... especially when it makes learning so much fun!

THEMES:

Imagination and play
Beginning school
Creativity
Education

SELLING POINTS:

- Value of imagination in developing a learning environment for children.
- The importance of quality teachers in education and the need to inspire learners.
- Starting school and embracing different personalities and other children

ILLUSTRATION STYLE:

I created the illustrations digitally, which means I made them using the computer. I drew using a Wacom pen and tablet, which is very similar to drawing with a pencil on a piece of paper, except the lines I made were captured on the computer screen.

I depicted the two worlds in the book: the reality and the imagination, using complementary colour schemes. The real world is slightly duller, has a rosy tint to it and is coloured using a halftone pattern, like the dots you would see in a newspaper print. This suggests less detail and resolution in the everyday world. On the other hand, the imaginary world exists inside brightly coloured thought bubbles, which contrast with the background and pop out from the pages. Audrey's imagination is blue, which is a colour that complements the rosy tint of the background.

As the book progresses, the colour scheme of the real world becomes brighter, eventually finishing with the full range of vivid colour as the world around Audrey partakes in the joys of her imagination.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

The Incurable Imagination is the story of my daughter starting school. Before my daughter started school she would spend one day as a princess, the next a dragon and another as a lion tamer. Her imagination was vivid and wrapped around everything she did.

I was terrified as a parent that a teacher was going to take my little girl and teach her to read, instead of loving the story or teach her to see the world exactly how it was, instead of how it could be.

We were both blessed, my daughter and I, with incredible teachers who embraced her imagination and still had imagination themselves — scaffolding the importance of play and embracing her to use her home skills to enhance her learning.

I wish every child, and adult, had this start to their schooling, and for those who did, I hope they see a part of themselves in this character. For those who didn't, please enjoy Audrey.

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

Paul has been a teacher longer than he has been anything else, except maybe a storyteller, which is probably why teachers always seem to be present in his stories. Paul claims that a book is never real until it is read aloud to a group of children as they sit cross-legged on the floor pointing at the pictures.

Find out more about Paul at: www.facebook.com/paulrussellauthor
or www.amazon.com/author/paul-russell

Aśka loves to draw, just as much as she loves adventures and science explosions. She has a passion for telling stories with pictures, and apart from books she has also worked on comics, animations and designing children's products. For Aśka, every story is a chance to try something new and show the reader that illustrations can be 'read' just as words are.

Find out more about Aśka at: www.askaillustration.com

INTERVIEW:

AUTHOR

What is the inspiration for this story?

This is the story of my daughter starting school but in the real version the teachers were as incurable as she was before she started.

I think teachers are an amazing thing and I think when you find a good one they should be given mansions and treated like pop-stars. Paparazzi should be standing outside school playgrounds to catch them as they sneak home just before dark with a sticker still stuck to their forehead that they forgot about from the start of the day.

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

Picture books are always interesting things from an author's point of view. You create a story that you know will only ever really be half of the story that people see. The illustrator jumps in and spends about a million hours crafting a world around your words and brings an entirely new story to life.

This is the second time I have had the pleasure of working with the incredible Aśka, and it is such an amazing journey to watch her craft such detail and vibrancy into each image. Every time you see something new, your heart skips a beat and you keep thinking that's it until suddenly something new comes in and blows your mind.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

The waiting. I wrote this story when my daughter was starting school and now she has just started Year 3. It always makes me think of the Narnia quote by CS Lewis where he dedicates the book to a girl he knows will be too old to read it by the time the book is finished.

Luckily the process isn't quite that slow, but it certainly feels like it sometimes.

ILLUSTRATOR

What was the most rewarding part of this project?

Being an only child who spent a lot of time by myself, I lived in a world filled with make-believe, so Audrey is very close to my heart. Drawing her was lots of fun as she is such a dynamic and energetic character.

I am very happy with the way the book came together and the colour scheme of the illustrations. The sense of the real and the imaginary worlds interacting and overlapping comes across well and gives the reader space for their own interpretation and story making.

What was the most challenging part of this project?

The depiction of the two worlds: imaginary and real, was the trickiest part of the process. It was important to make the two separate at first, so that the reader could pick them easily, but as the book develops, I needed to start overlapping imagination with Audrey's everyday life.

This was done with colour and texture, and is discussed further in the 'Illustration Style' section. Working out how to do this successfully took the longest time in the planning stage of the project.

Why do you illustrate books?

I love to tell stories using images, and this is why comics, animations and picture books are so close to my heart.

I believe that being able to read pictures is just as important as reading words. Together, words and pictures are very powerful and can communicate ideas faster and better than any long essay. Our world is full of images, advertising, signs, logos and emojis. These influence the way we feel, what we buy and what we like. So understanding how visual communication works and what impact it can have on the reader should be part of our learning journey.

Working on *The Incurable Imagination* is a perfect example of how using images and words together can engage our minds in a new way, creating two worlds that interact together, overlap and enhance one another. And in the same way that imagination can make everyday life more exciting and enjoyable, pictures make words sing, give them new meaning and help us connect emotionally with the text.

TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:

TEACHING NOTES

Whole Class Reading

Before Reading

- Show the cover illustration to the class and discuss with the students what this story might be about.
 - Who is the woman with the bag with the cross on it?
 - What is in the bag?
 - What are the children wearing?
 - Where might this story be set?
 - What other characters can you see?
 - What might happen in this story?
- Ask the class what the word 'incurable' means? Do they think this is linked to the first aid kit?
- Read the subtitle to the class: 'Learning has never been so much fun' and talk to the class about how the children look on the cover. What could make learning more fun?
- Read the back cover blurb.

During Reading

- Look at the endpapers, discuss with students that often endpapers are the same at the front and back of the book, but look at this book they are different. After looking at the endpapers, can you decide who the story is going to be about?
- Discuss after reading the first spread the idea of seeing things in clouds. Discuss with students what shapes they may see in clouds and why they see shapes in clouds when obviously they are just clouds.
- Discuss with students the idea of the thought bubbles in the book. What are the blue bubbles showing us? Compare the children's speech bubble with the sheep in it to Audrey's thought bubble with the tent. How is it different?

After Reading

- How do you think Audrey felt starting school? Do you think she was worried she was different to everyone else?
- What happened when all the children started to use their imagination?
- How is colour used in this book to show thinking, imagination and Audrey?
- Why do you think the parents were complaining?
- In real life Mrs Whitfield didn't actually go on a broomstick — it was her imagination — how do you think her daughter convinced her to use her imagination when she was ready to complain?
- Do you think that imagination is important?

Classroom Ideas:

ENGLISH

- Take photographs of clouds (or look at online versions) and use them to inspire stories. What can you see in the clouds? How did it get there? If a student can't see anything in the clouds maybe something has taken all the shapes from their clouds and this might be the story they can write.
- Have a look at the town spread in the book, the scene where the entire town starts to embrace their imagination. Have students pick a pair of characters and either tell or write the story about these characters using their imagination.
- Write a weekend journal entry of 'What didn't happen on my weekend'. Have students embrace their imagination and tell the story of what they wished happened or what they are very glad didn't happen on their weekend.
- Look at Aśka's dedication in the back of the book about her imagination-based TV program. Have children try to develop their own television program and present it to the class. The program needs to have at least one imaginary friend and a character using their own language.

ART/ VISUAL LITERACY

- What are complementary colours? Can you see the complementary colour for Audrey's imagination in the book? Why do you think the illustrator used colours in this way?
- What are differences between the imagination colours and real world colours in the book?
- How do the real world colours change as the book develops? How do the last two pages differ in colour to the earlier pages?
- What is a halftone pattern? Where else can you find it?
- Where has the illustrator used the halftone pattern in the book? Why do you think she has used it?