



## My Storee

Subtitle:	Just because you can't spell doesn't mean you can't write.
Author:	Paul Russell
Illustrator:	Aśka
Publisher:	EK Books
Price:	\$24.99
ISBN:	978-1-925335-77-4
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Audience age:	Children aged 4-8
Key Curriculum Areas:	English – Writing / Reading Health

Notes prepared by  
Paul Russell and Aśka

### SYNOPSIS:

A young boy has a mind full of wonderful stories but when he writes them down, day after day, they come back covered in red pen after his teachers have corrected his spelling. It seems his dyslexia will always hold him back from sharing his creativity the way he longs to. Then a new teacher arrives at school! *My Storee* is an engaging and creatively designed picture book that provides inspiration and support for reluctant writers and dyslexics, and shows the importance and power of good teachers.

### THEMES:

Self-belief	Writing
Dyslexia,	Spelling
Differentiation & learning ability	Writing
Creativity	

## **SELLING POINTS:**

- The importance of imagination and creativity in the art of storytelling over structure and spelling.
- The value of self-belief and the importance of valuing and recognising your own abilities.
- The impact of a good teacher.
- Learning ability is more valued than learning disability.

## **ILLUSTRATION STYLE:**

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

There are a lot of layers in the illustrations, with vivid colours and bold, big shapes. These evoke the power and joy of the protagonist's imagination. At one point in the story, the imaginary world shuts down, and the illustrations become more static, with a de-saturated colour scheme. A lot of red is used in these, to echo the red correction pen.

## **AUTHOR MOTIVATION:**

"Paul has an incredible imagination but needs to work on his spelling" could be a report card quote from almost every one of my teachers growing up.

The exception to this was a teacher who once told me, "You really could be a great writer, if you get good enough you can pay someone to fix your spelling."

Now that is exactly what I do but it was this teacher who looked at my abilities and told me what I could do rather than picking on my disabilities that motivated me in my writing life and motivated this book.

## **AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:**

Paul is still not a strong speller and will probably never be but despite this has gained two university degrees, been an award-winning playwright and a CBCA notable picture book author. He writes every day of his life and is passionate about telling stories and has learned not to worry about how he spells them.

Find out more about Paul on: [www.facebook.com/paulrussellauthor](https://www.facebook.com/paulrussellauthor)  
or [www.amazon.com/author/paul-russell](https://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 on: [www.askaillustration.com](http://www.askaillustration.com)

## **INTERVIEW:**

### **AUTHOR**

#### **What is the inspiration for this story?**

This is my story. Sure in the real version there was no rocket powered sheep but lots of it is true. I have always loved to tell stories and as soon as I learned how to write, started writing them down. My bedroom floor was always covered in scrawled papers, every morning but I always found it tough writing stories at school.

When I went to school dyslexia was not a diagnoses commonly given, my teachers just said I couldn't spell. Some tried to help, most just gave me spelling lists and lots of red crosses.

There was, however, one teacher thought I was a talented writer and told me that I could always just get someone else to fix the spelling. It was this simple statement that gave me the confidence to keep writing and that is not only the story of the book but what allowed this book to happen.

#### **What was the most rewarding part of this project?**

I think the most rewarding part of any picture book is the collaboration. It is always so fun seeing an illustrator interpret my story and make it into ours. The amazing thing about Aśka was that she was also able to create illustrations that shared other people's stories too.

To see all of this come together and produce such a visually stunning book was the most rewarding part.

#### **What was the most challenging part of this project?**

The most challenging part of this book was to know how far to go with the spelling mistakes. When I very first wrote the book, all the words were spelled incorrectly (or almost). It became a fine line between expressing this idea and having a book that could still be easily read. There were a number of drafts and e-mails back and forth to my editors getting just the right amount of errors in the text.

### **ILLUSTRATOR**

#### **What was the most rewarding part of this project?**

The most rewarding part of the project was working with around 70 children on developing the illustrations for the book. With the help of a DLGSCI Creative Development grant, I visited five different schools and learning institutions to discuss my early sketches for the book with students from years 3 and 4. I asked them to help me develop the imaginary world of the protagonist by writing their own stories.

I received around 60 hand written texts from students, all of which were filled with funny and surprising story ideas. I then tried to incorporate these into the backgrounds of the book illustrations, where the characters from the boy's

imagination are having their own adventures. The handwriting found in the illustrations is a sample of some of these contributions.

I loved how my initial picture ideas were enriched by this collaboration, and how the children's imagination shined through, regardless of how well they could write or spell.

### **What was the most challenging part of this project?**

Because the book deals with dyslexia, I wanted to ensure that reluctant readers would find the book easy to navigate. This meant choosing the fonts carefully and making sure the letters and pictures were arranged on each spread in a way that was not confusing or overwhelming to a dyslexic reader. I don't have dyslexia myself, so the challenge was to find people who understand the condition and who could advise me on this.

I was lucky enough to work with year 3 to 9 students from three language learning groups, who were struggling with reading themselves, and who were willing to get involved. We met to read the book, discussed possible improvements and then follow up to see the results.

Through this process I learnt a lot about what it is like to see the world when you have dyslexia, and how to make my future books easier to enjoy for people with reading difficulties.

### **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 Paul's *My Storee* manuscript is a perfect example of how using images and words together can engage and involve more children into literacy. I can only hope that *My Storee* will inspire many future story creators and help to grow lifelong readers.

## **TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:**

### **TEACHING NOTES**

#### **Whole Class Reading**

##### **Before Reading**

- Show the cover illustration to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about. Is there anything odd with the word "Storee?"

- Discuss with the class the idea of 'Story' and 'Storey' and ask them if they can think of another definition that might use the same word.
- Read the subtitle to the class and discuss the idea of spelling mistakes. Do they ever make spelling mistakes? What can they do if they don't know how to spell a word? Why is spelling actually important?
- Read the back cover blurb. Do we often have spelling mistakes in books?

#### During Reading

- Read the book to the class first just as a text. Discuss the ideas raised within the text about the importance of being able to spell. Ask students if they have ever felt like they couldn't use a word they wanted to because they didn't know how to spell it.
- Look through the images in the text. Watch the video <https://youtu.be/h-afixSCTLU> that Aśka made showing the contributions of other children to this book.
- After students have heard the story and studied the illustrations have a look at the actual text within the book. Ask children to identify why some words are written in a different font.

#### After Reading

- Ask the children how the boy felt before the new teacher came.
- What could have the boy done to help himself if there was no new teacher?
- What were some of the things the teacher did that helped the boy?

### Classroom Ideas:

#### ENGLISH

- Use object to inspire creative writing. Get objects that students have not seen before and have them write a story about where they may have come from or who may have owned them.
- There are lots of hidden stories within the illustrations. Have students choose a character or setting from the book and write their own story.
- Correct the spelling. The emphasis of this story is that spelling is not important (at least in the first draft) but editing is important and identifying and correcting spelling errors is a valuable skill. Have students try to identify and correct spelling mistakes.
- Jumble up the internal letters of words (keeping the first and last letters the same) and have children try to read the clues or passages.

#### HEALTH

- Look at self and valuing learning abilities over disabilities. Have students work to identify their strengths and what skills they have.
- Discuss with students how we are all different in what we like doing, what we find easy and how we learn. Discuss the idea of learning disabilities such as dyslexia and what that means but also famous dyslexics (Jamie Oliver, Richard Branson, Albert Einstein) and how sometimes it is important to think differently.