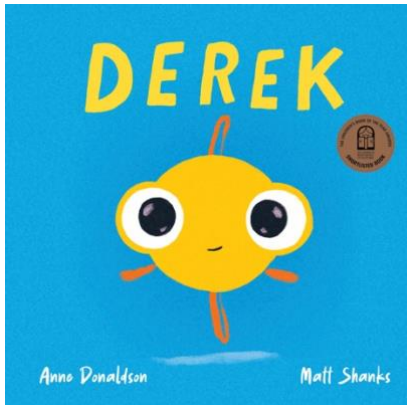


Teacher's Notes



Derek

Written by Anne Donaldson

Illustrated by Matt Shanks

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

primary-aged readers (ages 3-6, grades prep +)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English, HASS
- General capabilities:
 - Empathy (level 1)
 - Community awareness (level 1)
 - Creating texts (level 1)

THEMES

- Curiosity
- Courage
- Connection
- Loneliness
- Community
- Friendship

SYNOPSIS

Derek is a fish with many questions.

Why is the universe round? Where do bubbles come from? Why does food rain down from above?

But the question Derek asks himself more than any other is: 'Why am I alone?'

From new talent Anne Donaldson and bestselling illustrator Matt Shanks comes an adorable adventure about curiosity, courage and connection.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

If a writer, a lawyer and a scientist walked into a children's bookshop, that would be **Anne Donaldson**. Two not-so-small boys and one chocolate brown cat also claim Anne as their mother. When she's not creating children's stories, Anne gets to work at a university, where she helps inventors to bring cool, new technologies into the world. Anne has lived on four continents, in a stable, a chocolate factory and a church, and on a road named after the original 'nosey Parker'.

Matt Shanks is an internationally published and critically acclaimed author/illustrator of over twenty picture books, several of which have been awarded CBCA Notable Books. Simplicity, humour and the art of the unseen are strong themes in his illustration work, and he works primarily in watercolour. Matt has collaborated with some of Australia's most loved writers including Jackie French, Peter Helliard and Jimmy Barnes. He is a two-time fellow of the May Gibbs' Children's Literature Trust and an Australian Literary and Numeracy Foundation ambassador. Matt lives on Boon Wurrung land with his partner and cat.

THEMES

Loneliness:

But the question Derek asked himself more than any other was: 'Why am I alone?'

Loneliness is a theme that everyone can relate to. For some people, loneliness might be fleeting, but for others, loneliness can be ongoing and have a significant impact on their sense of self and general wellbeing. Anyone can be lonely, and loneliness is increasing in Australia (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/topic-areas/health-wellbeing/social-isolation-and-loneliness>).

- Invite students to reflect on a time they've felt lonely. What other words would they use to describe the experience? What caused the feeling? What (if anything) made it go away?

Often, **loneliness** is connected to **social isolation**. This is when people don't feel connected to their communities (or don't have access to communities in the first place). Invite students to reflect on some of the communities they're a part of (eg. school, families, friends, sports groups, religious groups, clubs). Use the following questions to explore the way that communities can help us to feel less alone, and to reflect on how we can ensure that our communities are open to or **inclusive** to those experiencing loneliness or social isolation.

- What do the people in your community have in common? How are they different?
- What brings them together?
- If your community comes together around a particular activity (eg. sport), does this lead to doing other things together (eg. sharing a meal)?
- How does it feel to be a part of this community?
- Which of your communities can anyone be a part of?
- What are some of the reasons that people might not reach out to a community they want to be a part of (eg. shyness, lack of experience/skills, fear of being disliked or ridiculed)?



- What would you say to someone who wanted to be a part of your community, but who felt worried that they wouldn't be welcome?
- What could your community do to make sure that people know they *are* welcome?

WRITING STYLE

How do writers keep a reader interested in the story?

Derek is a fish who asks a lot of questions, and writers ask a lot of questions too! Writers ask questions to help them understand characters in a story and to find interesting details to add to it. Some of the questions writers ask include:

- *What* happened?
- *Why* did it happen?
- *Who* did it happen to?
- *Where* did it happen?
- *When* did it happen?
- *How* did it happen?
- *What* will happen because of it?
- *How* did it make people feel?

If they can get you, the reader, interested in any of these questions, then you'll want to keep reading to discover the answer! What questions did you have about Derek that you wanted to know the answer to? Did you get an answer to your questions? Were you satisfied with the answer that you got?

COMPREHENSION

- What is Derek curious about?
- What is the one question Derek asks himself more than anything? Why do you think this question is so important to him?
- Why can't Derek be friends with the shell, plant or rock?
- Who does Derek decide to be friends with?
- How does Derek try to communicate?
- What are some of the reasons he's unable to communicate with people?
- What adjectives would you use to describe Derek? (eg. curious)
- What does Derek find in the other aquarium? What do they all have in common?
- How did you feel at the beginning of the story? How did you feel at the end? What happened to make your feelings change?



WRITING EXERCISE

Derek does everything he can to make the humans in the story notice him, but it doesn't work. Why not? Rewrite a scene from the story from the human's perspective. How do you think they experience or see the same events?

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Use the questions listed above (under 'writing style') to write a story in response to the following prompt: you walk into school one morning and there, on the teacher's desk, is a big, blue egg.
- Derek has a lot of questions about the world – do you? On separate slips of paper, write down three questions you have about the world. They can be anything! Everyone should then put all their questions into a bucket or hat. In groups, draw **one** question out of the bucket and work together to see if you can find out the answer. Share your findings with the class.
- In a way, Derek solves the problem of his own loneliness by jumping into another tank. But wouldn't it be nice, if you're feeling lonely, not to have to solve the problem on your own? As a whole class, come up with an event or activity that you can put on for your school or year level to make everyone feel as if they are welcome. Work in groups to plan and put on your event (it could be a morning tea, or a talent show, a book swap or a games morning – think big!) Try to work in groups that include people you haven't worked with before – you never know who's been feeling lonely!
- Derek must be **brave** in order to jump out of his tank to see what he can discover. Write about a time that you had to be brave. What did you discover or achieve because of your bravery?

RELATED READING

I Wonder

By Philip Bunting

The Girl With the Big, Big Questions

By Britney Winn Lee and Jacob Souva

Jelly-Boy

By Nicole Godwin and Christopher Nielsen

Tilda Tries Again

By Tom Percival

Alone

By Scott Stuart

The Perfect Fit

By Naomi Jones and James Jones

