



Red: A Crayon's Story

TEACHERS' NOTES

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Introduction

Red is a crayon. He has a bright red label but he is, in fact, blue. Red's teacher tries to help him be red (let's draw strawberries!), his mother tries to help him be red by sending him out on a playdate with a yellow classmate (go draw a nice orange!), and the scissors try to help him be red by snipping his label so that he has room to breathe. But Red is miserable. He just can't be red, no matter how hard he tries! Finally, a brand-new friend (in the form of a berry crayon) offers a brand-new perspective, and Red discovers what readers have known all along. He's blue!

This story is appropriate for pre-school aged groups but could also be used in Primary School rooms and the activities have been designed with this in mind. You may wish to modify them for your own group.

About the Author/Illustrator

Michael Hall is the creator of the nationally best-selling picture book *My Heart Is Like a Zoo*, the acclaimed *Perfect Square*, *Cat Tale* and *It's An Orange Aardvark!* Michael is also an award winning graphic designer whose work has been widely recognised for its simple and engaging approach. Michael lives in Minnesota with his wife, two daughters, and a pig named Petunia. He loves art supplies, especially pencils, crayons, scissors, and tape.

Students and teachers can visit Michael's website for website for examples of his work and read more about his other books: www.michaelhallstudios.com .

Teachers can also access a fantastic interview with Michael here:

<http://www.mackinvia-connex.com/2014/07/09/michael-hall/>

Australian Curriculum

ACELY1668, ACELY1670, ACELY1650 Literacy - Interpreting, analysing, evaluating

ACELT1594, ACELT1608, ACELT1613 Literature and context

Study notes on themes and curriculum topics

1. Themes and key discussion points

a) Being true to yourself

Red is a crayon. He is labelled 'red' but he is actually blue inside. He can't draw a red line no matter how hard he tries, and he tries VERY hard. Trying to be red is making him miserable, until one day a new friend suggests that maybe he could draw something blue; the ocean. Being blue comes naturally to Red and he celebrates by drawing everything blue; bluebells, a blue whale, a blue sky... he is so happy to finally just be himself!

This story is about being true to your inner-self and following your own path.

Key discussion points

- Red tries to practice drawing the red strawberries with his teacher Scarlet (p4).
*It's good to practice doing things but can **everything** be practiced? Can we practice being something that we are not? What are some things we can practice? (e.g. a sports game, a language, mathematics) What are some things we can't practice? (e.g. being taller, having green eyes).*
- Red has been 'labelled' as red but he is actually blue inside. People can be given labels too. Labelling someone means describing them in a single word (e.g.

greedy, lazy, a thief, a clown). *What is the problem with giving someone a 'label'? Would you like to be given a label?*

- *Have you ever felt like you needed to pretend to be something that you are not? Or pretended to feel a certain way about something when you didn't? If you did, why did you do it and how did it make you feel afterwards?*

b) Appreciating difference.

There are lots of different coloured crayons in this story and they are each able to draw different things; they all have something to offer. Being different can be hard sometimes but it is important to be brave and celebrate yourself for who you are and what you have to offer. Also, success in today's world (and tomorrow's) depends on being able to understand, appreciate, and work with others who are different from us.

This story reminds us to appreciate difference.

Key discussion points

- Red's mother suggests that he 'mix' with the other colours. She asks him to mix with the colour yellow to draw 'a big orange' (p 5). *Why is it important to mix with other kinds of people? Would you learn as much about the world if you only mixed with people like yourself?*
- When Red draws the blue sea (p 16) he is surprised and happy because 'it was easy!' It is important to remember that different people are good at different things. You might be good at something that a friend needs more practice at, or vice versa. *What comes naturally to you without even trying? Can you think of a time when your special skill was particularly useful?*

c) Friendship

When Red makes a new friend (Berry) everything changes. Berry helps Red discover his special skill; he can draw perfect blue lines!

This story reminds us that sometimes a special friend might see something in us that no-one else knew was there.

Key discussion points

- When Berry asks Red to try and draw the blue ocean he sees Red for who he really is – a blue crayon. *Do you have a special friend who you feel comfortable just 'being yourself' around? What are some of the things you like to do together? How do you feel when you spend time together?*

Key learning outcomes:

- Identification with key ideas in the novel.
- Ability to discuss and argue key concepts.

2. Classroom questions and activities (linked with themes)

a) During reading: questions for discussion

These questions can be discussed after the story has been read through once, or upon a second reading. They are designed to support students' engagement with the text and develop their visual literacy and comprehension skills.

- *What is funny about the very first page of the story (p1)? Why does the pencil assume Red is the colour red?*
- *What is Red drawing on page 2? What clues tell us it is a fire engine?*
- *Red tries hard to draw the strawberries but he just cannot do it. Have you ever felt like you just cannot do something? When? Why?*
- *On page 6 Yellow and Red decide to make a big orange 'orange' but they end up with a big green one. What do you think that big green 'orange' would smell like and/or taste like?*

- Look at the different text types (fonts) that Michael Hall uses for the narrator (the pencil) and the other characters (the crayons) as well as the way the type is arranged on the page. *Why do you think he has made these choices?*
- Look at pages 4 and 7. Older people (like teachers and parents) are usually taller than us. Not always, but **usually**. *Think about the life of a crayon. Why would Michael Hall draw Red's teacher Scarlet as shorter than Red? Why are his grandparents shorter than Scarlet? Could you apply this rule of 'ageing' to pencils and rubbers too?*
- On page 9 all the other crayons 'seemed to have something to say'. *Why isn't it nice to talk about someone behind their back? How might Red feel if he heard that he was 'lazy' or wasn't 'applying' himself? How would you feel if you overheard something like that about yourself? What about when you have said something mean? How did it make you feel afterwards?*
- On page 14 Red is still wearing the masking tape. *What does the tape look like? Does it make you feel a certain way about him?*
- On page 15 Berry convinces Red to try and draw the ocean. *When have you surprised yourself by trying something new and finding it is not so difficult after all?*

b) After reading: oral language activities

- Each student's name needs to be written on a paddle pop stick and collected in a cup. Students are then selected at random to retell the story in sequence, including as much detail as possible and using an expressive speaking voice.
- Ask students to sit in a circle. Show them page 12 (the moment Red realises he is blue inside and creates a series of beautiful blue drawings). Go around the circle and in turn, name a person, place or thing that is blue. Keep going around the circle until all the ideas are exhausted & someone is 'out'. Repeat with the colours yellow, red, purple, brown, orange and green. Anyone who cannot think of something is also 'out' until a winner (or small group of winners) remains.
- On page 19 Red's teacher remarks that he is 'really reaching for the sky'. Explore this expression with the students – explaining that the expression

(idiom) means to 'aim high'. Encourage students to suggest some other conversations/situations where this expression could be used.

c) Visual Arts project: making and exploring a colour wheel

- **Build and explore a colour wheel.** Students should follow step-by-step directions to create their own accurate colour wheel (download the printable template from http://www.artyfactory.com/color_theory/the_color_wheel.htm). This wheel should be made using crayon to strengthen the connections with the book. Connected colour activities are listed below and can be explored over a number of different lessons. (Once the wheel is completed, students should attach it to a larger, white piece of cardboard so the remaining activities can be completed around it.)
 - Explain what 'warm' and 'cool' colours are. Look at a series of landscapes online and practice naming each as 'warm' or 'cool' (a Google image search of 'desert+landscapes' 'antarctic+landscapes' "tropical rainforest' and 'coral reefs' will provide you with some excellent examples. Students should then clearly label the warm and cool colours around the outside of the colour wheel.
 - Explain where the opposite (contrasting) colours are on the wheel. Have students look for contrasting colours in the classroom. Take a repeating colouring pattern (download template from http://www.indigoimage.com/freebies/repeat_pattern_indigo_image.pdf) and choose two contrasting colours to colour it in with. Discuss how the contrasting colours create visual interest.
 - On page 7 Red's grandparents suggest that maybe he has trouble drawing red lines because he isn't 'warm enough'. Ask students to explain why a scarf won't help Red become a 'warm' colour! Have students draw a little red scarf

over the 'warm' colours on the wheel. They might also like to draw them some winter mittens and a log fire! Choose some 'cool' items to draw over the cool colours.

- Red's teacher is named Scarlett (p3). Ask students if they have heard of the colour scarlet, or of 'berry' the colour of Red's new friend? Ask students to decide where all the colours in the book belong on their colour wheel and to draw them in the correct spot. Crayons they should draw are: Amber, Berry, Fuchsia, Grape, Army Green, Steel Grey, Sunshine and Teal (p 9) Olive (p2) Scarlet (p3) Violet and Crimson (p 8). The book should be available for students to reference.
- **Colour palette self-portraits.** On page 8 all the crayons draw self-portraits. Ask students to draw their own self-portrait with oil pastels (which blend beautifully) but explain that they can only choose **one colour** that represents them best. Encourage them to think carefully about the colour wheel and experiment with blending shades of that colour. Once the drawings are finished, place them all on a black display cardboard and (like the story) use pieces of brown masking tape to hold them together. Display these around the classroom.
- **Colour blend lizard.** Students can create the green lizard that Yellow wants to draw with Red (p19). They should begin by using yellow and blue crayons only, before adding small torn up pieces of yellow and blue paper (the smaller the better, like a mosaic). Encourage them to step back to see the effect of these two colours mixing together. Display these around the classroom.

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About the author of the notes

Simone Evans attended Newtown High School of the Performing Arts before completing a Bachelor of Media and Communications at Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. She has helped produce theatre and festivals in Australia and England, taught primary school classes in sunny Byron Bay and is now the Education Coordinator at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney.