

## *Teacher Notes for 'I am an artist'*

by Nikki Slade Robinson.

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### Synopsis

"I am an anywhere artist. I don't need paint or paper. I can make art anywhere! My imagination is all I need..."

The adorable character moves through her surrounding environment, finding treasures and using them to make a series of fantastical creatures within their natural settings. A prehistoric dinosaur emerges from the native forest. An invented sea-creature evolves from the golden sands. A rather large rodent grows out of a deliciously sloppy mud puddle - much to the consternation of an observing cat hiding in the garden. A marine scene completes the story, whipped up from passing clouds.

This visual journey takes the reader through the environments that are part of children's lives. The native forest, the beach, the muddy rainy days... and the ever-present, ever-changing sky. It encourages the reader to take another look at what lies around them, however large or small. To pick up anything that catches their eye, mix it all up with a goodly dose of imagination, and create wondrous works of art. Inspiring, it shows how limitless imagination and creativity can be.

## **About the book creator.**

Nikki Slade Robinson is a long-time illustrator and author. She has illustrated well over 70 titles, including 2016 Storylines Notable Book 'Muddle & Mo' and NZ Book Awards for Children and Young Adults 2016 Finalist "The little Kiwi's Matariki.. As author-illustrator, 'I am an artist' is her 11<sup>th</sup> children's book.

She has worked with many mainstream and educational publishers as well as providing commercial illustration to a wide range of clients. Some of her titles have been picked up for release to overseas markets such as North America and China. Other titles have been dramatised as live performance in both NZ and Australia.

## **Writing Style**

'I am an artist' is written in a simple, carefully crafted style. Use of adjectives to describe found items gives the opportunity for extended language activities. Individual words are selected and written in a larger size for further emphasis on the flow of the language.

The handlettered text is laid out to flow as one with the stunning illustrations that so accurately capture the feel of New Zealand's outside spaces.

## **Shared learning and Discussion Points**

- Why do you think the girl calls herself an 'anywhere artist'? (pg 2)
- What does the girl find in the forest? How does she use it in her art? (pgs 7 and 11)
- Can you list the items that the girl used to make her imaginary dinosaur? (pg 10 and 11)
- What items has the girl used to make her sand creature? Can you think of other items you could find at the beach to add to this creature? (pg 14 and 15)
- List the environments where this girl makes her art. Can you think of any other places, times or seasons that she might be able to make more 'anywhere art'? (whole book)
- Why do you think the illustrator has played with the size of the girl compared with the items the girl finds? (whole book)
- The girl makes patterns in water with her feet. Can you think of other ways you could make water patterns? (pgs 22 and 23)
- How do you think the cat feels about the mud-rat? (pg 24 and 25)
- How do you think the girl feels when she is making her art? (whole book)

- Looking at the cover, what clues can you find about the story inside? (cover)
- What do you notice about the colours used in the illustrations? Are the background colours similar or different to the character colours?

## **Activities**

### **Different environments**

Write a list of the environments that the girl in 'I am an artist' makes her art in. Can you think of other places, seasons or times that would be good for making art in? You could focus on your schoolgrounds, immediate community surrounds or much broader places that include where children may go during their holidays.

Make a poster with words and/or pictures showing your list, and put it where students can see it.

Where possible, plan a visit to some of the places on your list, and get students to collect found materials to bring back to class.

Decorate a suitable sized box and make compartments inside it. Children can sort the found items by theme/colour/texture etc and place them in the compartmented box to create a big 'environmental art supply' kit for everyone to share.

### **Different Art - Inside.**

Discuss different types of art, such as collage, three-dimensional sculpture, sound art... What defines a piece of art? Does everyone have to like the same type of art? Does art have to only be in a frame in art galleries, or can it be created on a beach and left for others to just enjoy or add to?

Get your Environmental Art Box out and allow the students to explore their own ideas of what makes art. Encourage originality - one student may want to work two-dimensionally on a collage piece, another may prefer to weave three-dimensionally around found sticks.

Find out more about art in the environment. Some suggested links are:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/1/land-art>

[http://www.johndahlsen.com/thumbs/envdrift\\_thumb7.html](http://www.johndahlsen.com/thumbs/envdrift_thumb7.html)

<http://www.npr.org/2015/10/08/446731282/sculptor-turns-rain-ice-and-trees-into-ephemeral-works>

<http://www.livescience.com/17963-image-gallery-extraordinary-environmental-art.html>

but please check their various sections first to make sure they are appropriate for your students.

**Different Art - Outside.**

Following on from the Different Art - Inside discussion and online research, take the students outside. This could be within the school playground, or further afield such as to a nearby river or beach environment.

Get the students to work either in groups or as individuals, to create outside art to be left in place, to surprise and entertain other passers-by.

Artworks can be very tiny - perhaps a drawing scratched on a rock with another rock, or large - such as a driftwood arrangement that casts interesting shadows. Talk about the use of shadows, creating patterns (which can link to maths and science back in the classroom) and the effects of having mobile art, suspended items that are free to move in the breeze.

Ensure that any artwork left is not going to obstruct walkways or cause any other inconvenience or risk to people or wildlife.

Photograph the works when complete. The photographs can then be printed and mounted to create an inside-exhibition of the exercise.

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