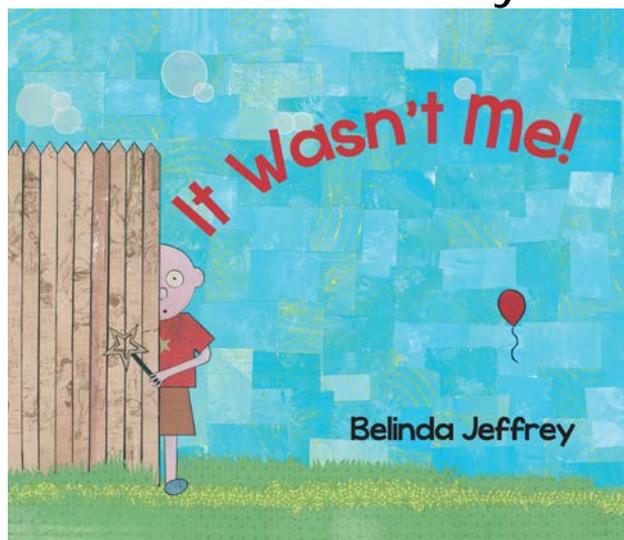


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IT WASN'T ME!

Belinda Jeffrey



Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising primary school teacher librarian in context with the Australian Curriculum

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SYNOPSIS

Finnigan's mum keeps blaming him for a range of mishaps that are happening throughout the house, to which Finnigan replies, 'But Mum ... it wasn't me!'. Whether it is an overflowing bathtub, a drawing on the wall, an overturned flowerpot or a messy bedroom, Finnigan continues to protest his innocence. But if it wasn't Finnigan, who was it?

The simple narrative of *It Wasn't Me!* coupled with beautifully detailed collages provide insight into Finnigan's world and tell a detailed story with minimal phrases and words.

THEMES

Family and Relationships:

- Mum sometimes loses her patience with Finnigan.

Imagination:

- The text explores Finnigan's imagination as he is inspired by the ordinary, everyday objects around him.

Adventure:

- Finnigan has imaginary 'monster mates' with whom he shares his many adventures.

Art:

- The detailed illustrations allow for visual literacy and interpretation.

WRITING STYLE

It Wasn't Me! is written in first person. The sparsely written text is complemented by the extremely detailed collage illustrations that deliver many levels of meaning. Younger readers will easily identify with Finnigan, the imaginative, adventure-loving, if somewhat mischievous, protagonist.

STUDY NOTES

- The cover of *It Wasn't Me!* gives some clues about the main character, Finnigan. Discuss elements of plot, character and theme that can be inferred from the cover alone.
- What clues are we given that it is Finnigan's birthday? Discuss the calendar on the wall. Why is Finnigan's birthday unusual? Discuss leap years.
- After reading, examine the end covers. How and why do they differ? How do these end covers contribute to the narrative?
- Introduce aspects of visual literacy such as salience, colour, angle, gaze and shot length. How is the reader positioned on various pages? How do these visual elements add meaning to the text?
- Discuss the monsters included throughout *It Wasn't Me!*. How do they fit into the story? What do they encourage Finnigan to do?
- Why does Finnigan have imaginary friends? Does he also have human friends? Discuss, using the illustrations to support your response.

- Carefully examine the textless page openings. Share with a partner what is happening in these pages. Why has the author chosen to leave these pages textless? Choose one of these pages as a stimulus in which to write a story about Finnigan in that particular part of the narrative.
- Many pages show a little red balloon or duck. What does this balloon or duck represent?
- Why does the bird take Finnigan to her nest? How has Belinda Jeffrey helped the reader to connect meaning to this sequence of events?
- During *It Wasn't Me!* what role does Finnigan's mum play? Why is it important that she chastises Finnigan?
- How is the mother bird sequence related to the relationship between Finnigan and his mother?
- Write a narrative using the ideas in *It Wasn't Me!* as the basis for your story. Include appropriate dialogue and description.
- What does the surprise party at the end of the text show about Finnigan's relationship with his mum?
- Create your own illustrated page in a collage style similar to *It Wasn't Me!*.
- Many of Finnigan's imaginary games are inspired by everyday objects around the house. Re-examine the illustrations to see where the ideas for his adventures come from, such as the fish bowl, the balloons and the cereal box. Using everyday objects from the classroom, invent your own adventures. Share these with your class. Create collages based on these ideas to display around the classroom.
- Invent some party games that Finnigan could play at his birthday party.
- Are you at all like Finnigan? Write a reflection to compare yourself with Finnigan.
- Create a book trailer to promote *It Wasn't Me!* or write a radio or television ad to promote this book.
- Choose a scene from *It Wasn't Me!* to re-enact.
- Visit Belinda Jeffrey's website to discover more about the author and her books. <http://belindajeffrey.wordpress.com/about/>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Jeffrey is the author of the much-acclaimed novels *Brown Skin Blue*, *One Long Thread* and *Big River*, *Little Fish*. Her short story 'The Hallelujah Roof' was also published in the *One Book, Many Brisbanes* anthology. She has been shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Award, the Queensland Premier's Award and the Western Australian Premier's Award. *It Wasn't Me!* is her first picture book.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

The character of Finnigan himself is inspired by my own wildly-creative, inventive boys. One day they were playing at the creek near our house and brought home a huge, old, white helmet. There was a note attached to it saying, "I dreamed of being a famous racer and something happened that meant I had to give it up. I hope whoever finds this helmet remembers to follow their dreams no matter what."

That helmet was old and beaten up, and the foam was peeling away from the inside, but my oldest boy insisted on wearing it. He also used to climb up on the silver roof of our house and watch the world go by. My boys would often find things around the house to use for props in their games: towel rails became swords, lampshades made great hats, my art easel was re-screwed into guns. These experiences really fascinated me because their inventiveness had nothing to do with being mischievous or naughty. They were so focused on their play and looking for creative solutions that they did not see the objects of their world as having fixed, external and adult purposes. Caught up in the beauty of their imagination and the energy of their creativeness, those objects were just resources to bring into their play. Finnigan is just like that.

I have always loved art and have always created pieces of art and crafts all my life. I first dreamed of creating a picture book that I would illustrate long before dreaming of writing novels. However, I had not yet developed the skills and style that I wanted. For years I would go to libraries and flip through the picture book sections and assemble piles of books, chosen quickly and instinctively, based on their art. My favourite illustrators use mixed media and collage. When I came up with the idea for the story, I briefly toyed with doing canvasses in oils or acrylics, but knew that it would work best in collage. I sketched the pictures first and then created the collages, which were all A2 or A3 in size. I rarely knew what would happen next in the story, or what the next spread would be until I'd completed the one before. For me the process of illustration is as creatively fluid as the process of writing a novel. In the process of actually creating a piece of art, of arranging the colour and character, of feeling the movement and subtle meaning in the story take shape on the page, the wider story evolves and new ideas open up.