



My friend the idea



Teachers' notes

Written and illustrated by Cheryl Johns
Published by Windy Hollow Books

My Friend the Idea is a book about inspiration and ideas. It's about letting them take you on an unexpected adventure.

People often ask me where I get my own ideas from. My reply usually is 'I don't know, they just come to me'. The truth is, I have a whole head full of them! They're like my little friends buzzing around in there. Some stay with me briefly like a bright spark and make themselves very well known for the shortest of moments. Others are like a quiet whisper and live with me for years in the cobwebs. I have to search for them and coax them out of the very back of my mind.

The most beautiful thing about an idea is that 'my idea' is not 'your idea'. Everyone has their own take on the world. It's exciting to see how differently everyone thinks. We need to encourage every idea and their own particular personality. We should celebrate their uniqueness and give them a space to come alive.

It just takes some of your time, instead of being a screen zombie. What does a zillion hours in front of the X-box or the TV get you? It might level you up, or defeat your friend, pass some time without blinking, but it doesn't add anything to you, or anyone else's life.

Go and take your imagination for a walk. 'Your idea' could make people smile, make people cry or even make them laugh. That's the power of a great idea.

The Illustration

Inspiration for the illustrations in a book usually comes easy to me, but with this book they didn't. I loved writing the script so much; it just seemed to appear out of thin air. I really had trouble coming up with the pictures for it. I didn't get writers block, I got illustrators block! So how did I overcome it? I drew; I drew some more, then screwed my pictures into a ball and threw them across the room and then just kept drawing.

When first approaching an illustrated book, the first step is the character drawings. You have to think about what their personality traits are and what they are trying to say to the audience.

Originally I settled on a completely different idea character and realised (after putting the sketches aside for a few weeks) that it wasn't working. I then came up with a sketch out of the blue that was exactly what I had been waiting for - but it took me months to settle on a colour. I just couldn't get it. I went to an exhibition of John Brack's work with a fellow illustrator and we both stood in front of a painting called 'The Green light man', we looked at each other and said 'that's it, that's the colour of the idea - bright green.' It's funny how solutions come when you are least expecting them!

Next are the page breakdown sketches. These are quite difficult, as you have to consider how each illustration fits within the page and how the text interacts



with it. You really have to focus on the text and what you want to portray with the image. Sometimes it's a matter of deciding how much you hold back and how much detail you go into. It's a case of letting the script speak to you.

Finally comes the painting, my favourite part! I used oil paint on flat sheets of canvas. Oil paint has a vibrant quality that you just can't beat. The only drawback is it's messy and stinky. I had to tack down the canvas onto boards, enlarge my sketches onto the canvas (leaving some breathing room around the outside), only then could I start painting.

Before reading

What does the cover illustration tell you about the book?

Have a look at the end papers. They tell a little story of their own. What do they tell you about the "idea" character?

After Reading

Read to class the author's notes on how she came to represent her idea in the way she did.

What other ways may the concept of an idea be illustrated?

Writing

Can you retell in your own words the story told in the endpapers?

Can you write a short story about an adventure that the main character and the idea have.

Language

Focus on some of the language used by the author and discuss what she is trying to say.

For example:

'When I feed my idea it grows bigger and stronger and better.'

What do you think the author is trying to say here?
How might you feed an idea?

Or

Today my idea grew legs.

It took off running and I could barely keep up.

What might she mean here? What does the expression "grew legs" mean?

Creative ideas

If your ideas were a character, how might it look?

Create your own idea character, draw or paint it up making sure you focus on it's own unique character traits.

What would your idea look like?

Would it be giant, tiny or just your average jo?

Would it be colourful, or textured or furry?

Would it have glowing eyes, laser eyes or kind cutesy eyes?

How would it get around?

What adventure would your idea bring to your life?

Here are some other ways you could represent your ideas.

Write down some of you ideas on light bulb shapes and hang them around the classroom

Have an ideas tree, where you can pin ideas for stories or games or activities.

Write down an idea on a label and stick it on a small pot. Plant a seed in the pot and as you water it and feed it you can watch your idea grow.

If you are really feeling creative make a toy out of felt based on your idea character.

Make a simple template of your ideas shape and cut out two pieces from felt or fabric. Use buttons or felt cut outs to give your idea some features. Sew these on to the front piece before sewing the two pieces together and stuffing.

Or you could make a clay figurine and paint it up.





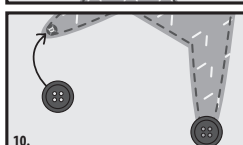
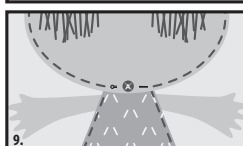
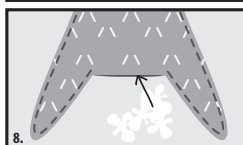
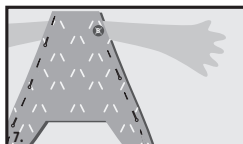
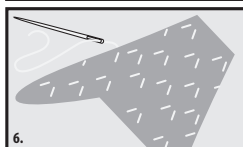
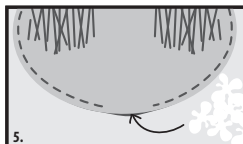
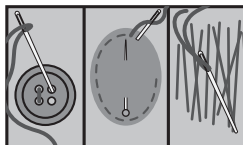
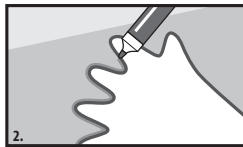
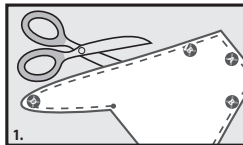
Felt Soft Toy

make your own 'Idea'

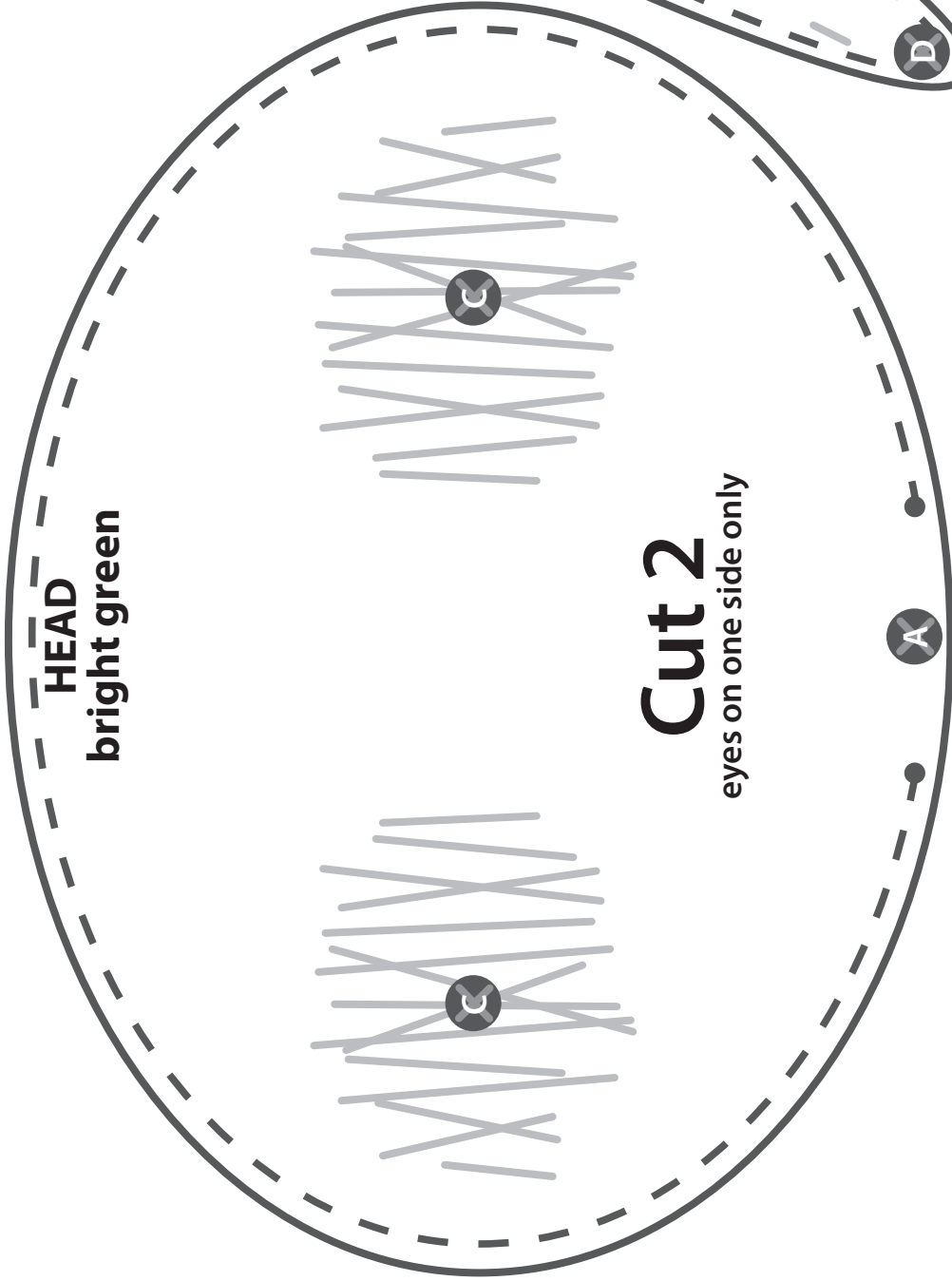
You will need:

scissors to cut the felt, 1 sewing needle, a few pins
Green or grey wool or embroidery thread
Bright green felt and khaki coloured felt
2 big black buttons, cushion stuffing
choose one of : Red felt **or** 2 big, red buttons **or** red wool (for the eyes)
optional : Straw coloured wool or embroidery thread

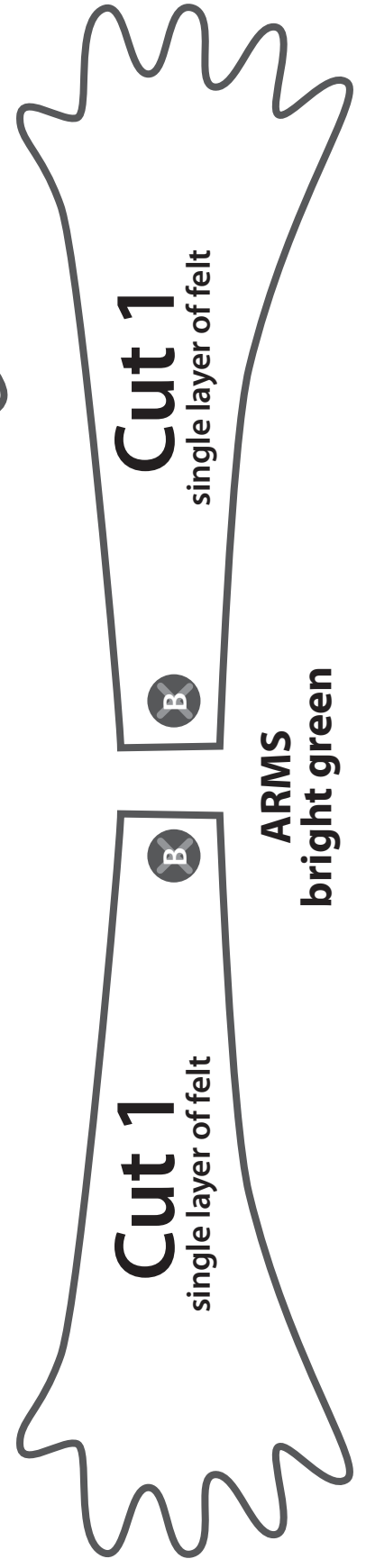
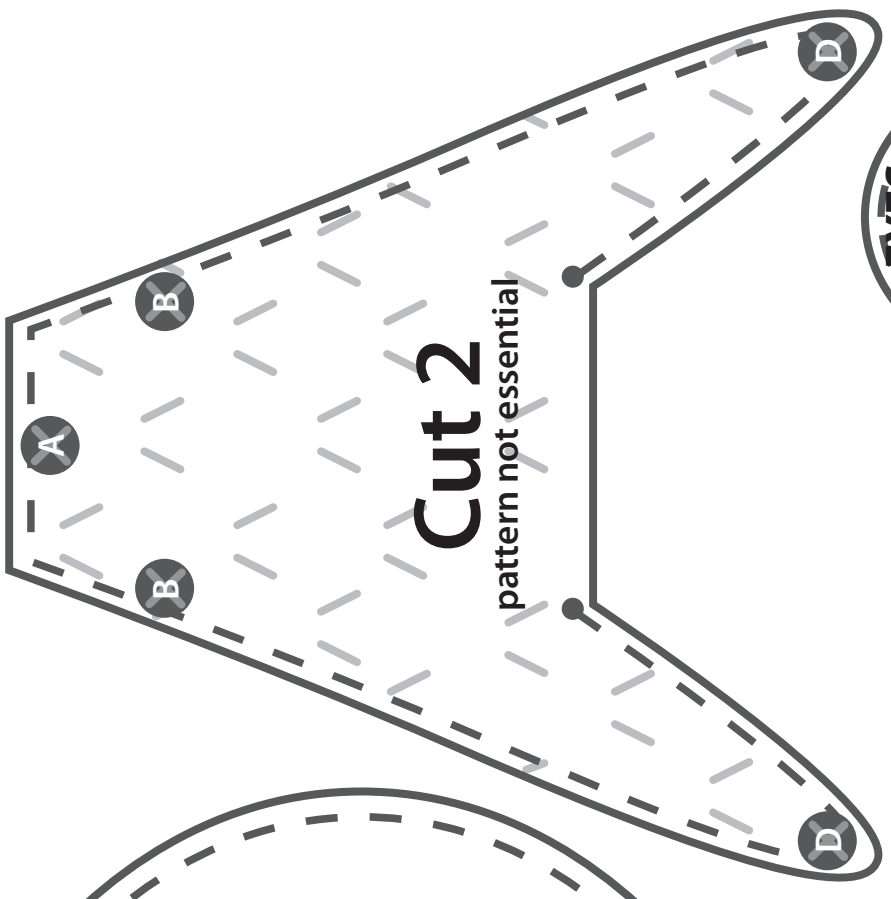
Instructions:



1. Carefully cut out your template pieces.
2. Trace around the template pieces on to some coloured felt.
(Bright green for the arms and body, Kakhi green for the body Red for the eyes.)
3. Carefully cut out all your felt pieces.
4. Sew some eyes in one of 3 ways:
 1. Sew on 2 big, red buttons at point C.
 2. Pin your red felt ovals on point C, sew them neatly onto the head.
 3. Using stiches that criss cross randomly sew on some scribble eyes with red wool. (be careful not to pull the felt too tight or it will buckle)
5. Pin the head sections together, good sides outwards.
Sew around the head with blanket or straight stitch leaving a section at the bottom big enough to fit the top section of the body.
Stuff with filling.
6. If you are sewing the pattern onto the body use a contrasting straw coloured wool or thread to sew on little stitches all over both sides
7. Pin the body together good sides outwards.
Make sure that the arms are pinned so that they are sandwiched between the body pieces from point B.
8. Sew around the body in the same stitch as the head, leaving the middle of the legs open.
Stuff with filling and sew up the gap.
9. Slip the top of the body into the gap in the head at point A.
Secure with a pin and sew together.
10. Sew the black buttons onto the end of the legs at point D.



BODY
Khaki green



HEAD
bright green

Cut 2
eyes on one side only

Cut 2
pattern not essential

EYES
red

Cut 2
or use some
big buttons

Cut 1
single layer of felt

ARMS
bright green

Cut 1
single layer of felt

