



Teachers' notes

Note from the author

The story of Smeck finds its roots in a popular quote I have stuck on my studio wall, which reads: "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone". It also came out of my own feelings of restlessness and stagnation in the creative bubble I'd made for myself. Smeck is in part about creativity — those things that nurture it, and those that obstruct it. It also harks back to a childhood hindered somewhat by social anxieties, but more importantly, overcoming these fears.

The image of a happy-go-lucky flea playing ukulele on a tiny desert island is one that came to mind when listening to vintage Hawaiian music and uke-based jazz (in particular the music of Roy Smeck [1900-1994], from whom the name is derived). The world of Smeck grew from this vivid mental picture.

My approach to doing the final artwork for Smeck was unlike anything I'd tried up until this point. I had limited experience with creating posable models, elaborate props and sets, lighting, photography, photoshop, etc, and through a three year process of trial and error I had well and truly, and rather appropriately, stepped out of my comfort zone as an illustrator.

Before Reading:

What does the cover make you think this book is about?

After Reading:

What do you think was the most important lesson Smeck learnt after his adventure?

Why do you think the Sea Thingy rescued him?

Written and illustrated by Ben Redlich
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Why was Minnie an important character?

What do you think happens next?

Writing

Can you retell the story for the Pirates' perspective?

Can you write a new adventure for Smeck and Minnie?

Write a story about the Sea Thingy.

Write a zooming in piece about what life on board a pirate ship is like?

Write postcards to your class from different characters in the story.

Art

Make a class model of Smeck's island and the Pirate ship .

Make treasure maps

Redraw your favourite scene from the book as a cartoon strip.

Music

Find examples of sea shanties to perform.

Can you write sea shanties of your own?

Find and listen to music by Roy Smeck

