



# Waiting for Hugo



## Teachers' notes

Written by Amanda Niland  
illustrated by Claire Richards  
Published by Windy Hollow Books

Waiting for Hugo by Amanda Niland is a book that explores notions of diversity and difference through a story suitable for 3 to 7 year olds. The central character is a young boy who has an obsessive interest which dominates his life and that of his family. This is a trait often present in children who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The story is narrated by Hugo's older sibling, who grapples with acceptance of her brother's eccentricity. Hugo's obsession and consequent skill with numbers brings rewards for him and his sister, so that the story ends positively, celebrating Hugo's unique abilities.

Amanda Niland, as well as being a children's author, is an early childhood teacher, lecturer and researcher with wide experience in working with young children with disabilities. She currently works part-time as an early childhood and music educator at an early intervention centre. Her work includes running family music and playgroups, and conducting research into inclusive practices in early childhood education. She believes very strongly in the power of children's literature to build understanding of difference and disability.

Claire Richards shares a studio with four other painters near the beach at Brighton in South Australia. Her favourite technique is layering watercolour over crayon, pencil and ink. Her recipe for making picture book

illustrations involves acting out the poses, drawing on the computer and mountains of storyboards. She used preparing for illustrating the Eleventh Sheep as an excuse to hang out with lambs and for Waiting for Hugo she found herself counting lots of things. Since finishing her art studies in 2004 Claire has illustrated half a dozen books and created a range of quirky greeting cards.

### Author's note

The characters and narrative in Waiting for Hugo were inspired by children and families I have known in my work as an Early Childhood Educator in inclusive and Early Intervention settings. Many young children have periods of passionate interest in one particular activity or item. These may last weeks or months, but only occasionally years. For some children with Autism Spectrum Disorders passionate interests may not change much over time, and may consume a large proportion of their thoughts, actions and conversations. These interests can lead to the development of great talent or skill, but can also be baffling and at times frustrating for their families, peers and those around them. Waiting for Hugo explores these situations. While the inspiration for Hugo's character was a child who is diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, this is not stated in the book's text for several reasons. Firstly because I believe children should not be defined or characterised by a label. We are all first



and foremost people. Secondly because there are many young children who do not have any diagnosed condition but who do have passionate interests. This book can be a resource for discussing children's individual interests and talents, as well as for exploring issues of respect for diverse ways of being.

### Illustrators note

The artworks were first drawn on the computer, traced with pencil from the screen onto watercolour paper and then thin wobbly ink outlines were drawn. With every project I try and use a slightly different style that matches the story. I wanted to create a light and colourful look for *Waiting for Hugo*. Most of the colours were created on the page rather than the palette, I used thin translucent layers of primary colours to create the different colours. It is always tempting to over work images so I tried to limit the amount of coloured pencil and use a playful scribbly technique.

This is a story about Hugo a boy who loves to count so I wanted to create a book he would like to read. I made sure that there are the correct number of items he counting shown in his thought bubble. There are exactly 392 dots in his thought bubble when he is counting the bricks in Mrs Lim's front wall. The thought bubble was a chance to show how Hugo thinks, reveal the way he sorts numbers into groups and patterns.

This isn't just Hugo's story, it is also about his big sister who has to wait. I liked drawing her racing around on her scooter.

### BEFORE READING

Looking at the title and the illustration on the front cover, who do you think the children are?

Do you like balloons? Do you have a favourite colour?

### AFTER READING

#### Conversations

Do you like to count things? What sorts of things do you enjoy counting?

Do you have a favourite activity like Hugo does?

Are there times in your life when you have to wait?

How long did you have to wait for? What do you think about this?

Does anyone sometimes have to wait for you? When does this happen?

For teachers: You could document these discussions, for example by making lists of the different counting interests or activities which children enjoy. Children's drawings, writing or photos could be used to make books or classroom displays about the diverse range of interests or hobbies the children have. These can then be the focus of further discussion about ways in which we are all different and can learn about a range of things from each other.

You may use 'show and tell' or 'news' time for children to share information or items that relate to their favourite activities. If some children have an interest which is unfamiliar to other children, you may be able to search for information or resources to focus some classroom explorations on a particular interest, so that children can share some of their favourite pastimes with their peers. Families' help can be useful with this.

Children may like to draw pictures or write stories about their experiences of waiting. It may be relevant to find points of comparison in children's experiences. It may also be possible to look at the perspectives of others in those waiting situations (such as those who children have to wait for).

### Links to curriculum

#### EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK:

Principle: "Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships" (Educators listen to children, share in their interests, and encourage children to listen to each other).

Principle: "Respect for diversity" (Educators acknowledge children's different ways of being and celebrate their diverse interests).

Outcome 2: "Children are connected with and contribute to their world" (Children share their diverse interests and life experiences, and respect their differences, as well as their similarities, in relation to their peers).



Outcome 5: “Children are effective communicators” (Children engage in conversation about their interests).

## NATIONAL CURRICULUM

English foundation stage

Understand that language can be used to explore ways of expressing needs, likes and dislikes” (ACELA1429)

Mathematics foundation stage

“Compare and order the duration of events using the everyday language of time” (ACMMG007)

### Hands-on explorations

Counting, which is Hugo’s favourite activity, is one way of organising objects and exploring their mathematical relationships. Other mathematical explorations include sorting, classifying, sequencing and pattern making. Through these processes children can explore properties such as shape, colour, size and composition. In *Waiting for Hugo* Claire Richards’ illustrations show many examples of Hugo counting things he encounters in his daily life, as well as examples of how Hugo likes to organise items, both in his mind and in his actions.

While reading *Waiting for Hugo* there are many opportunities for children to count the things that Hugo counts. To encourage children’s interest in counting and other mathematical explorations after reading the book, you can extend on the materials you may already have by collecting a variety of natural and recycled materials: bottle tops, cotton reels, seed pods, pebbles, shells, buttons or leaves. The range will be limited only by your imagination. You can also involve families in contributing materials, perhaps by setting up an area of marked containers for families to fill. Clear signs about what materials are needed and how many, can help to avoid accumulating more than you can use.

Along with materials for sorting, classifying and counting, it is valuable to have containers such as trays, mats, boxes, baskets or containers with compartments. Children can use these to organise the materials in many different ways, to explore their properties and mathematical possibilities.

Dramatic play also presents opportunities for counting and other mathematical explorations. Setting up a shop or restaurant are two possibilities. Some of the recycled or natural materials you collect could become coins. Children may also enjoy making their own money by drawing and cutting to make currency notes.

Children may be interested in Hugo’s ability to successfully estimate the number of lollies in a jar. Perhaps some small counting items could be placed in different containers for the children to estimate. There are interesting possibilities for mathematical discoveries in using a range of different dimensions in clear containers and filling some with small items and others with bigger ones. Children can be encouraged to consider the similarities or differences in how many items fill a container when the items or the containers vary in size.

### Links to curriculum

#### EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK:

Principle: “Partnerships” (Educators involve families in contributing materials to the learning environment).

Outcome 2: “Children are connected with and contribute to their world” (Children become aware of sustainability by using re-using everyday materials in their learning).

Outcome 4: “Children are confident and involved learners” (Children explore and practice the mathematical processes of counting, sorting and classifying).

#### AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Mathematics Foundation Stage

“Establish understanding of the language and processes of counting by naming numbers in sequences, initially to and from 20, moving from any starting point” (ACMNA001).

“Compare, order and make correspondences between collections, initially to 20, and explain reasoning” (ACMNA289).

“Sort and classify familiar objects and explain the basis for these classifications. Copy, continue and create patterns with objects and drawings” (ACMNA005).

