Teach
ers’ Notes

This is
Captain Cook

by Tania McCartney and Christina Booth

Book Details

Captain James Cook loved to sail. He also loved making maps (he was very good at it, too) and he particularly loved shiny buttons.

Join Miss Batts and her class as they act out the story of Captain Cook in a humorous and whimsical school play. We Cook as a boy watching ships on the horizon, sailing to Canada, then to Tahiti and on to New South Wales (spot the escaping chicken in each of the scenes!).

Parents, carers and teachers will smile at the familiar set-up of the chaotic school play and the inventive props, and enjoy eavesdropping on the audience. At the back of the book, walk through ‘Cook’s Gallery’ and see real life paintings of Cook, his ship and his travels.

This is Captain Cook

These teaching notes are designed for children in Key Stage I to early Key Stage II, and can be adapted for older Key Stage II students by adding more complexity (provided below).

**Book Study**

**Research**
*Ideal for: complementing English, History and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures units, research, book production, appreciation of the National Library’s Digital Collection*

In researching *This is Captain Cook*, the author used many different sources, including the internet, history books, images from the Digital Collection and discussion with teachers, historians, government departments and other people.

Discuss with children ways they could research a biographical history book of this nature. If they were compiling a biography on their own life, who might they approach to research their story?

**Older children** can complete a research project on their own life, complete with pictures.

**Key Moments**
*Ideal for: complementing English, History and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures units, understanding time*

Creating a historical biography for young children meant sourcing and targeting key points of interest for this age group.

Talk with children about the main turning points or events in Captain Cook’s life. Which events were the most important and why?

**Older children** can explore more advanced concepts. What if certain events never occurred in Captain Cook’s life? What if he had managed to break through the wall of ice and reach Antarctica? Have children imagine what he might have discovered there.

**Illustrations and Text**
*Ideal for: complementing English units, technology and media, imagery and text association, layout and design, appreciation of the NLA’s Digital Collection*

The author and illustrator worked closely to merge image with text, with the illustrator creating her own concepts to complement the author’s original ideas. These concepts included the idea of a school play and a subplot with a chicken.
Discuss the relationship between author and illustrator and how the images are created to complement the text and add further nuance and meaning. There is a lot happening on the stage throughout the book. Discuss with children what caught their eye and how it makes the book interesting or fun.

For older children, discuss the importance of subplots and including interesting little details in a book’s illustrations. Discuss the concept of humour in picture books and why it might be important for young children. Have children write a simple line of text and then illustrate it, adding nuance and meaning through their drawing.

**Class Activity**

*Ideal for: complementing English, History, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures and popular and Australian culture units, social interaction, teamwork, understanding chronology and time*

**School Play**

Have the children re-enact the school play featured in the book. Give each child a role. The children can make their own costumes and props.

**Life Moments**

*Older children* can research the end of Captain Cook’s life (this contains graphic content recommended for children in year 6 only, or at your discretion). Discuss his tragic ending, and have children write an alternate, imaginative ending to his life.

**Historical Facts**

*Ideal for: complementing English, History, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures and Australian culture units, general knowledge*

For older children, discuss the following historical facts. Which children have encountered these facts before? Which do they find most fascinating? Children can each pick 2–3 facts to research and report their findings to the class.

- Cook’s ship, the *Endeavour*, was a type of ship called a ‘collier’. What did colliers typically carry?
- Captain Cook was a map-maker. He used what is known as a plain table. What does a plain table do?
- Cook’s map-making ability helped the British dominate in the Seven Years’ War with New France (now Canada). He was so good that he was tasked with charting Northumberland and Nova Scotia. Where are these places found on the globe?
- Captain Cook first named Botany Bay ‘Stingray Bay’. Can you guess why?
• Upon landing in Botany Bay, and knowing the first man to step ashore would be remembered, Captain Cook turned to his wife’s 17-year-old cousin, Isaac Smith, and told him to go first. Why do you think he did this?

• After anchoring the Endeavour at Botany Bay, Captain Cook found the area unsuitable for settlement and decided to head further north to Port Jackson. Why was Botany Bay such a disappointment?

• All of Captain Cook’s five children died without having children of their own. There are therefore no direct surviving descendants. Can you research the children’s names?

• Click here to see an animated version of Captain Cook’s second voyage. List the places he took anchor.

• On his third and final voyage, Captain Cook intended to find a seafaring route across North America to Asia. This is when he found a set of islands called the Sandwich Islands. We now know them as a much more famous name—what are they called?

• The captain circumnavigated the globe twice in his lifetime. What does circumnavigate mean?

• Cook wrote many letters to his wife while he was at sea. Sadly, she buried every single one before she died, and they’ve never been found. What was her name?

• There is a mountain named after Cook. Where can it be found and what’s special about it?

• In 1988, a replica of the Endeavour was built. It’s said to be the most accurate maritime replica ever built and has made two circumnavigations of the world, just like Cook. Where was it built?

• What monuments, schools, universities, buildings, suburbs, streets or other things have been named after Captain Cook? How many can you find?

For more teachers’ resources, see Tania McCartney’s children’s literature website, Kids’ Book Review: www.kids-bookreview.com.