

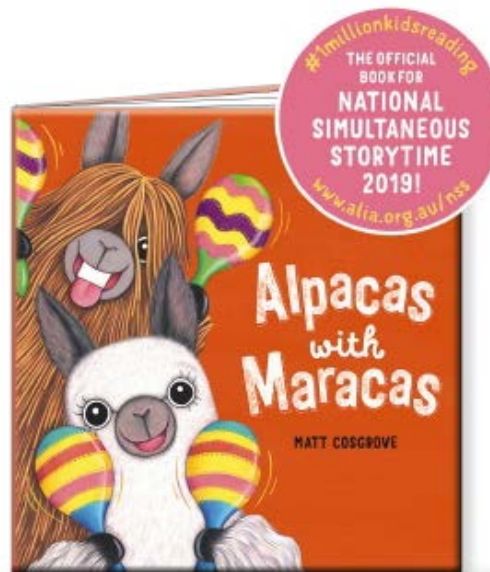
Alpacas with Maracas

Author/Illustrator:

Matt Cosgrove

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Macca the Alpaca returns in this delightfully rhyming romp with his best friend Al. The two Alpacas are determined to enter the talent show, and have no intention of letting their lack of talent get in the way. But what act can such an ungifted pair possibly perform, and how can they entertain everyone when everything they try looks and sounds just awful? The answer, in the end, is that the one thing the Alpacas are not lacking is a sense of fun and the ability to just keep trying until they find something that works - and when Macca realises that even though they can't sing or play an instrument, they can still shake, their *Alpacas with Maracas* act is born. Macca and Al take to the stage with enthusiasm and energy, and show us that the important thing is not whether you win a competition, but how much fun you have entering in the first place.

About the Author/Illustrator:

Matt Cosgrove is an author and illustrator who lives in Sydney, Australia with his wife and two children. He spends his days writing and drawing and loves making kids laugh.

Themes

Key Themes:

Themes include: Friendship; persistence; humour; performing arts; self-confidence; finding success in participation rather than in winning; playing to your strengths.

Writing Style

Written throughout in the third person, Cosgrove relates the story of Macca and Al using vigorously energetic rhyme that is eminently suited for reading aloud. The narrative structure is simple and linear, and fits the target readership well. The varied rhythm and pace helps maintain reader interest and creates anticipation, while the language choices are challenging yet easily comprehensible. The vocabulary will stretch, intrigue, and entertain the intended audience of the very young, and Cosgrove has made good use of such literary devices as onomatopoeia throughout.

Illustration Style

Cosgrove's style incorporates clear bold linework with bright and jewel-toned hues to create single and double page spreads that show the antics of Macca and Al with delightful clarity. The format of the illustrations varies from page to page, and includes: single page spreads with solid colour backgrounds showing a single scene or character; double page spreads with the characters appearing multiple times in various poses; white-space backgrounds; and vignettes. The illustrations in *Alpacas with Maracas* are essential to establishing the setting, and to introducing and further developing the characters of both Macca and Al. The visual narrative conscientiously parallels the textual narrative, while adding depth and detail to the story as a whole.

Study Notes, Discussion Points, and Activities

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class discuss the title and cover. Some things to include in your discussion are:
 - What do you think this story might be about?
 - How can we tell what some of the things that might happen in the story are?
 - What is an Alpaca?
 - What is a Maraca?
 - Why might an Alpaca use a Maraca?
 - Has anyone read *Macca the Alpaca*?
 - What can we tell about the characters in the story from the pictures on the cover?
 - What are the Alpaca's facial expressions?
 - Do the Alpacas look happy or sad? Why do you think this?
- 2) There are many different rhymes in *Alpacas with Maracas* - even the title rhymes! As a class discuss the rhymes you can find in *Alpacas with Maracas*. Some things to consider in your discussion are:
 - Which words rhyme with each other?
 - What makes two words rhyme with each other?
 - Are there any patterns to which words rhyme?
 - Which is your favourite rhyme in the book, and why?
 - Do you think the rhymes make the book better? Why/why not?
 - Are there any rhyming words in the story where you don't know their meaning? If so, try and work out what they might mean and then check your hypothesis with a dictionary.
- 3) In the story, *Alpacas* rhymes with *Maracas*, and *Yaks* rhymes with *Sax*. As a class brainstorm and think of as many different rhyming animal and instrument pairs as you can.

You may need to be creative about what you consider to be a musical instrument - for example you might want to include such things as dogs drumming on logs. If you run out of inspiration you can also include any objects that can make interesting percussion noises such things as a spider splashing in some cider. Use the items from your list to help you write a short rhyming poem or verse of your own featuring an animal or animals who are keen to make music.

- 4) Onomatopoeia is when a word makes the sound it describes, like *bang* or *crinkle*. There is lots of Onomatopoeia in *Alpacas with Maracas*. In pairs or small groups, reread the story and make a list of all the onomatopoeic words you can find. As a class discuss the lists you have made. Is everyone's list the same? Why/why not?
- 5) Choose one of the onomatopoeic words in the story, and create an artwork that you feel showcases the word and the sound it represents. You might want to include the word itself within your artwork, draw a picture of someone making the sound, or you can even create a more abstract representation of the sound of the word using shapes, colours, and different types of lines.
- 6) What are the onomatopoeic words that are used in the story to describe the sounds that the Maracas (and the Alpacas shaking them) make? What are some onomatopoeic words that could be used to describe the sounds that other instruments make? Create a class onomatopoeic percussion word-orchestra, where different people get to be the different instruments by saying the onomatopoeic names of the sounds. For example, the people who are representing the maracas might say *chika chika* while the people who are representing the drums could say *boom boom rat-a-tat*.
- 7) Visit an Alpaca farm, or other place where there are Alpacas. When you return to class write a recount of your experience and be sure to include all the things that you learnt about Alpacas while you were there.
- 8) Research Alpacas online or in the library. Create a poster or other presentation to share the results of your research. Some things to include in your research are:
 - Where do Alpacas come from?
 - Why do we keep Alpacas - what are they useful for?
 - What do Alpacas eat?
 - How much space do Alpacas need?
 - Do Alpacas like the company of other Alpacas and people, or are they scared of them?
- 9) Hold a class talent show of your own. In pairs choose one of the acts that the Alpacas tried (and failed to succeed at) when they were thinking of an act to perform, and do your very best to perform it yourself.
- 10) Act out the story of *Alpacas with Maracas*. Practice your act, and perform it for another class or at an assembly.
- 11) Create an Alpaca collage using fabric scraps, yarn scraps, coloured paper, rice, glitter, sand, cellophane and paints. You can use the illustrations in the story for inspiration or try to create a scene featuring Alpacas in their native environment.
- 12) Read *Macca the Alpaca*. As a class discuss the story, and whether knowing more about Macca helps you appreciate *Alpacas with Maracas*.

- 13) Make a set of maracas of your own. Use an empty plastic water or soft-drink bottle, and part fill it with rice before gluing the lid on securely. You can also tape or glue a cardboard tube over the neck of the bottle to make a longer handle if you wish. After filling and gluing shut your bottle-maraca, decorate it with paint, coloured paper and glue, glitter, pipe cleaners, beads, and anything else you think might make it look good.
- 14) Visit a craft store and ask to look at the different types of Alpaca yarn they have for sale. What does the yarn look and feel like? How does Alpaca yarn differ from sheep wool, or from acrylic yarn? Think about how it feels when you touch it, what it smells like, and how heavy it is.
- 15) Knit, crochet, or weave a small item from Alpaca yarn.
- 16) Macca and Al *had a blast* at the talent show - even though they came in last place overall. Look at the picture of them at the end of the book, and as a class discuss how it feels when you enter a competition and come last. Some things to include in your discussion are:
- How does it feel to come last in a competition?
 - How does it feel to win?
 - What was the most important thing for Macca and Al in entering the competition?
 - How do you think it made them feel to perform with the Maracas?
 - What are some things that you can tell yourself before, during, and after a competition to help you enjoy yourself even if you come last?
- 17) On one page of the story, there is a picture of a lightbulb hanging in the air while Al shakes his fist. Why do you think that the author drew a lightbulb on this page? What are some other ways that an artist might indicate that someone is having a good idea? Paint or draw a picture of your own that shows someone having a similar sort of 'a-ha!' moment where they suddenly think of a solution to a problem.
- 18) Look carefully at the illustrations in the story. What other animals can you see? Write a short piece telling the story of Al and Macca from the point of view of one of the other animals there.
- 19) In small groups, create and perform a Maraca dance of your own.