



Mr Chicken All Over
AUSTRALIA
Leigh **HOBBS**

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Recommended for: 4 to 8 year olds

Themes: letter-writing, landmarks, travel, friendship, Australia

Applicable to learning areas: English language, literacy and literature

Summary

Australia is big, but so is Mr Chicken. He can't wait to go everywhere, see everything and meet everyone. Luckily, a helpful marsupial from Tourist Information helps Mr Chicken organise his hectic itinerary.

This book is dedicated to the many children, teachers and librarians Leigh Hobbs met as the 2016–2017 Australian Children's Laureate.

Style

Leigh Hobbs takes the reader (and Mr Chicken) on a tour of some of the best-known landmarks of Australia and, along the way, plays with and subverts the traditional travel-guide format.

Written in a simple and very understated style, the text contrasts sharply with the hilarious pictures of fearsome-looking, oversized Mr Chicken visiting some of the more eccentric sights of Australia – picture a big chicken visiting the Big Banana and you'll get the picture.

Leigh himself says of his body of work: 'Perhaps what kids love about my characters is that they are funny, but more likely I think they respond to the fact that there are two voices. There is the voice of the text and the voice of the pictures. The text is the adult's voice and the pictures are the child's voice.'



Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Reading for enjoyment

The first and foremost thing to be done with this book in class is to ENJOY it and laugh your heads off!

Literacy

Young people readily engage with Leigh Hobbs' book characters and may already know Old Tom, Fiona the Pig and Horrible Harriet.

The style of the humour in these books largely derives from the contrast between the words and the pictures. Students who can express this contrast are exhibiting high-order literacy skills.

There is also a particular tone of voice suggested by the words – slightly arch but largely deadpan.

Older students need to learn the vocabulary used to describe writing and art and Hobbs' work evokes sophisticated vocab.: arch, deadpan, droll, dry wit, wry, idiosyncratic, anarchic, classic and timeless, juxtaposition (of words and images; expectations and reality), madcap comedy. (This list culled from reviews of Hobbs' work over the years.)

Art and visual literacy

The style of the illustrations is also a feature, reflecting the 'designed chaos' of the book as a whole. Leigh Hobbs cites the illustrations of Ronald Searle and Ludwig Bemelmans as strong influences: students can compare their work in the *St Trinians* and the *Madeleine* books with Hobbs' illustration style. All three illustrators capture a lot in a few lines and, in its use of line and colour, their work goes beyond illustration towards art. To justify this judgement, compare their work with that of cartoonists.

Students could also learn how to articulate the relationship between words and pictures in *Mr Chicken*.

- Whose point of view is represented by the words?
- Whose by the pictures?
- What third point of view might be found *between* the words and pictures?

Pre-reading activity

- If your class is familiar with Mr Chicken's previous adventures, tell them that Mr Chicken is coming to Australia and ask them what places they think he should visit while here and what uniquely Australian food he should eat. Compile a list of their suggestions.
- If your class has never seen a Mr Chicken book before, tell them that a giant yellow chicken travels the world to find out about different countries and their cuisines, and that in this book he has chosen to visit Australia. Again, ask them where he should go, what he should see, and what he should eat while here. Compile a list of their suggestions.

Words and pictures

- Read the story to your class without showing them the images. Ask them what kind of book they think this is.
- Now read the book with the images and ask them if the images change their idea about the kind of book it is.
- Explore, in a whole class discussion, reasons for why the text and illustrations support each other to make the combination very funny. Example: look at the image of Mr Chicken's planned

itinerary on the map of Australia and compare that with the very calm response of the marsupial tourist information officer.

Cover

- Study the front cover of the book and ask students why they think the image has crinkly lines around it. Hand examples of stamps around the classroom with images of people and places on them. Encourage students to create their own image for a brand-new stamp commemorating Mr Chicken's visit to Australia.
- Ask them to name the Australian animals that feature on the cover.
- Read the book and then read the blurb on the back. Explain that the purpose of a blurb is to encourage people to open the book and ask students to write their own blurb.

Big things

- Source photographic images of the famous 'big things' Mr Chicken visits in the book, e.g.: the Big Banana, Big Pineapple, Giant Koala, Big Prawn and Boxing Crocodile, and compare them to the illustrations in the book.
- Ask students why they think Australia has so many BIG things to visit, which ones they have seen or would like to see, and why.
- Ask them if they can come up with ideas for other big things they would like to see built around the country.

Respect for Traditional Owners

Older students might like to note that Leigh Hobbs asked the Anangu Traditional Owners and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park to check his pictures of Uluru in the book (see the note on the book's imprint page). In the text, he has used the rock's original Anangu name (not Ayers Rock) – and he has not shown anyone climbing it. Discuss: ask students –

- Why they think the Traditional Owners of Uluru might want to use their own name rather than the name given to the place by European colonisers, and
- Why they think the Traditional Owners might not want people to climb Uluru, something that has been much discussed recently in the media.

Illustrations

- Spend some time looking at the pages where Mr Chicken visits iconic sights such as the Great Barrier Reef, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Uluru and Flinders Street Station. Ask students which illustration they find the funniest and why they chose that image above the others.
- Turn to the page where Mr Chicken is suffering from pavlova-itis and is being stretched to the Royal Flying Doctor Service plane. Point out to students that the words on the page don't tell us how Mr Chicken is feeling but that we have a very good idea from how he looks. Encourage them to discuss how the illustrator has used colour and line to emphasise that he has eaten far too much.

Revisiting predictions from pre-reading activity

Revisit the class's pre-reading predictions (Activity 1) and discuss how many of the places they thought he should visit appear in the book. And did they pick the foods he would try while here? Ask them if they learned any new things about Australia from reading this book.

Extension

- Apart from Paris, London, Rome and now Australia, choose another country or city for Mr Chicken to visit and write a new story following the style of Mr Chicken All Over Australia. Think about what famous landmarks Mr Chicken might see. What foods will he eat? If he's in a non-English-speaking country, what common words or phrases will he need to know?
- Explain to your class that the letters on the front and back endpapers are real. They were written by school children who invited Mr Chicken to visit them so they could show him their hometown or suburb and suggest things they could do together in Australia. Encourage students to write their own letter to Mr Chicken inviting him to RETURN to Australia, continue his adventures and see lots more interesting things.

About the author

Leigh Hobbs works across a wide range of artistic mediums but is best known for his children's books featuring Old Tom, Horrible Harriet, Fiona the Pig, the Freaks of 4F, Mr Badger and Mr Chicken. Old Tom is also a popular TV series, and Leigh has won every major Australian children's choice award. *Mr Chicken Goes to Paris* was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, is a bestseller at Paris's Louvre Bookshop, was adapted for the stage by NIDA, and was shortlisted for the CBCA Awards—as were *Horrible Harriet* and *Old Tom's Holiday*. In 2019, Leigh received one of five 'Australian Legends of Children's Literature' awards from Australia Post and was featured on a stamp.

Since childhood, Leigh has had a passion for art, architecture, classical music and English history, and he loves London, Paris and Rome as much as his beloved character Mr Chicken. His time as the 2016–2017 Australian Children's Laureate meant travel to every corner of Australia, and *Mr Chicken All Over Australia* is a fitting celebration of all the places he's been and the people he's met.

A word from the author and illustrator, Leigh Hobbs

'The three previous Mr Chicken books, which featured Paris, London and Rome, are about my three favourite cities. I have a great interest in history, art and architecture, and those places reflect that interest.

'My home is Australia, and this new book came from the intense travelling I did (34 interstate trips from Melbourne) criss-crossing Australia over the two years I was Australian Children's Laureate.

'Children often wrote to me asking if Mr Chicken could visit them "and stay at their nana's" or "visit their school" etc. The requests were so charming and hilarious that this prompted the book. As a consequence, the front and back endpapers feature lots of real kids' letters. The book is dedicated to the children, teachers and librarians I met whilst laureate.

'Rather than palaces and cathedrals and the other architectural marvels featured in the previous Mr Chicken books, this one focuses primarily on Australia's more idiosyncratic attractions.'

