

Crusts Teacher Notes

Written by Danny Parker
Illustrated by Matt Ottley

Published by Little Hare, August 2016

SYNOPSIS

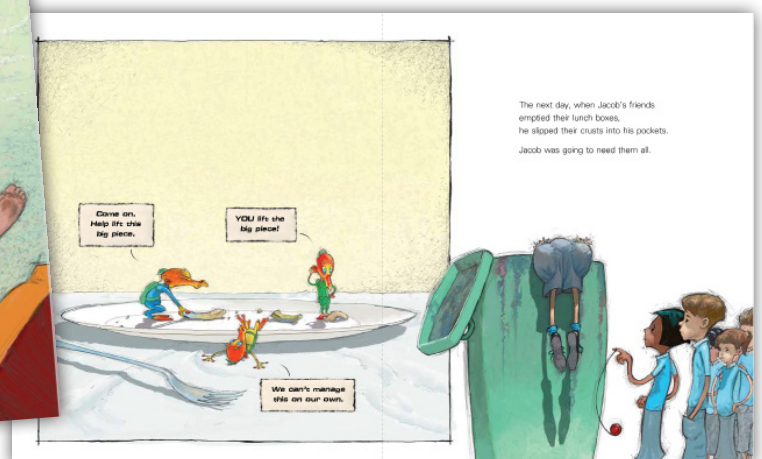
Jacob is just one of millions who won't eat their crusts. But he is one in a million when it comes to bright ideas.

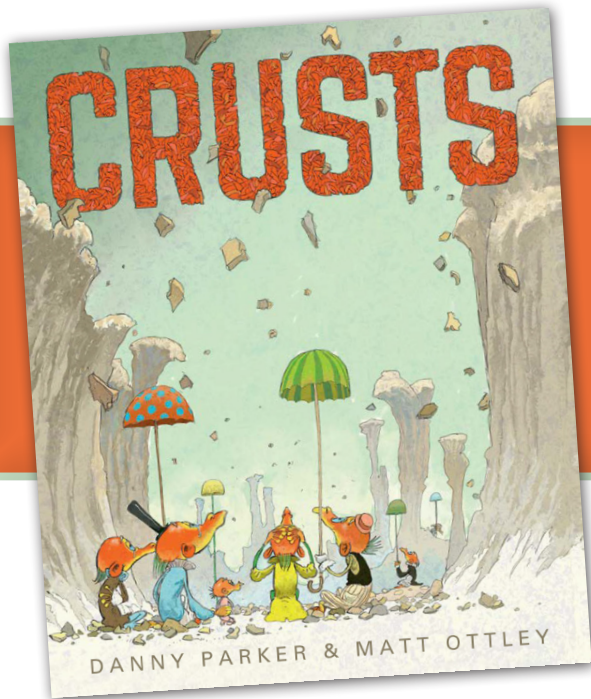
When tiny creatures from a distant crumbling planet seek Jacob's help, he sets out to do what he can with his big box of uneaten crusts.

A story about crusts and intergalactic travel by powerhouse Australian creative duo Danny Parker and Matt Ottley.

THEMES

At first glance, this deceptively simple text is a quirky tale about a geeky and mildly defiant boy who disobeys his mother and ends up saving an entire planet. It has many themes, however, that touch on altruism, recycling, lateral thinking and creative solutions, as well as hoarding, disobedience, cultural differences, fine art and pure fantasy. The overall plot can be summed up by two well-known proverbs. 'Large streams from little fountains flow, tall oaks from little acorns grow' is exemplified by Jacob's small act of rebellion (refusing to eat his crusts) transforming into a creative act of intrepidity (using his hoarded crusts to patch up a crumbling planet). The proverb 'one man's trash is another man's treasure' is exemplified by the transformation of unwanted crusts into an indispensable resource.





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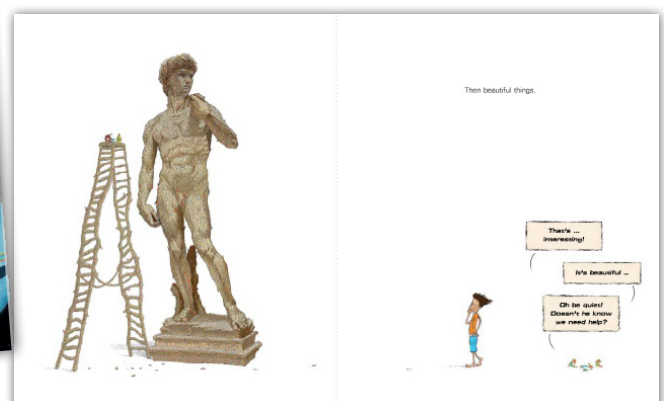
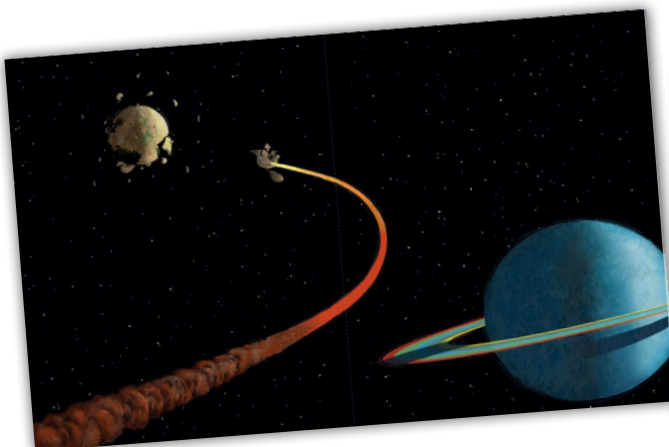
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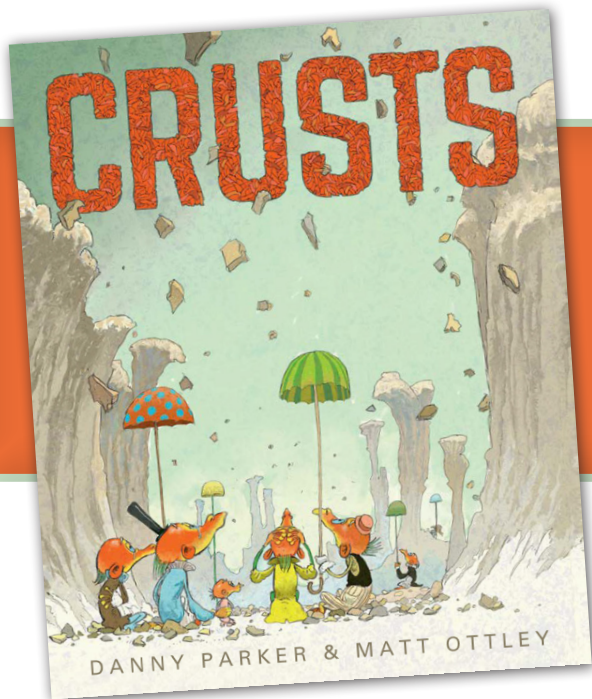
WRITING STYLE

Danny Parker's picture-book writing style is typically understated. It also often has a flow-of-consciousness effect that leaves out detail and focuses on key motivations, actions and their effects. Danny and Matt worked together on the original submission, but the text was so understated that the editorial team asked Danny to work on it some more. Matt Ottley found the revised version difficult to envision in terms of illustration. The original text had none of the speech-bubble dialogue we see throughout the finished book, and Danny had to write these into the text to develop a sense of the characters from Planet Crust, finding ways to develop their problem, their mission, their hope and their despair. Once these dialogues became part of the narrative, Matt was able to envision a completely revised storyboard that incorporated the parallel narrative of what he called 'The Critters'.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Matt Ottley's distinctive illustrative style is based on a rigorous, traditional, academy-style art training, combined with a vivid imagination and the rare capacity to express himself through visual imagery that vividly engages and evokes reader emotions. Matt employs high realism, even when painting fantasy-like images, and his forms can sometimes seem realer than reality. This is in part due to his traditional training in both light and colour, but most particularly due to his thorough understanding of brightness, contrast and perspective. Because Matt has a decreased ability to perceive the full colour spectrum, he learnt to employ techniques that those with full colour vision sometimes neglect. He also learnt how to mix and apply colour by analysing brightness instead of hue, which is the reason for his powerful and evocative work.





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AUTHOR BACKGROUND

In another life Danny Parker worked as a nurse, an actor and an undertaker before settling into work as a drama teacher. In addition to being a prolific children's author, he is currently the Director of Drama at a prestigious WA high school.

A chance meeting with fellow WA-based illustrator and author Matt Ottley led to Danny discussing his story idea and inspiration for *Tree*, published by Little Hare. This award-winning team have now published three picture books together: *Tree*, *Parachute* and *Crusts*.

In 2015 Danny's debut junior-fiction series *Lola's Toy Box* launched with four titles and ongoing publishing throughout 2016. That same year, Danny's picture book *Perfect* (illustrated by Freya Blackwood) was also released. In addition to ongoing *Lola's Toy Box* publishing, Danny has seven Little Hare picture books releasing over the next few years.

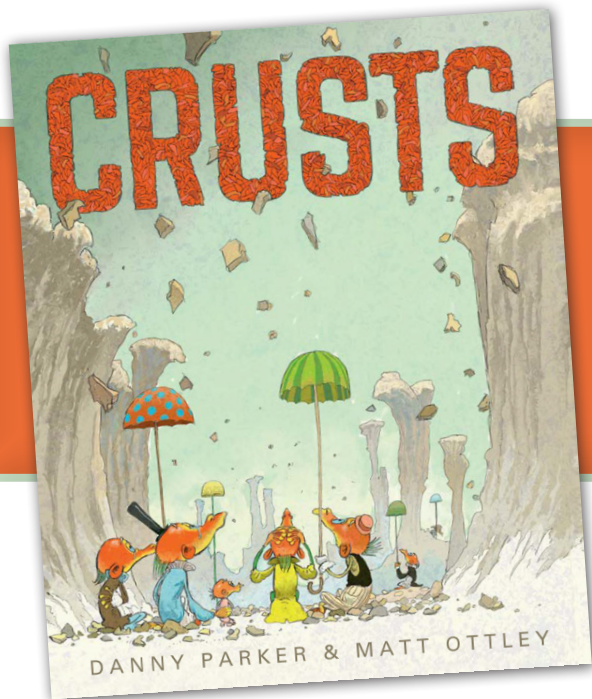
Danny lives in Perth, WA with his wife Judy and their 2 children.

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Matt Ottley was born in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea and spent much of his childhood tramping through the bush on painting excursions with his mother. After almost failing high school in Sydney, he lived the itinerant life of a stockman for some years on cattle stations in Queensland, before returning to Sydney to study fine arts and music.

Now one of Australia's most popular children's author/illustrators, Matt's work has been published in several different languages around the world. He also works as a composer and a flamenco guitarist.

Over his career Matt has contributed artworks to many books, including 14 children's picture books, and produced many paintings intended for private home or art gallery walls. He divides his time between painting, writing and composing music as well conducting workshops.



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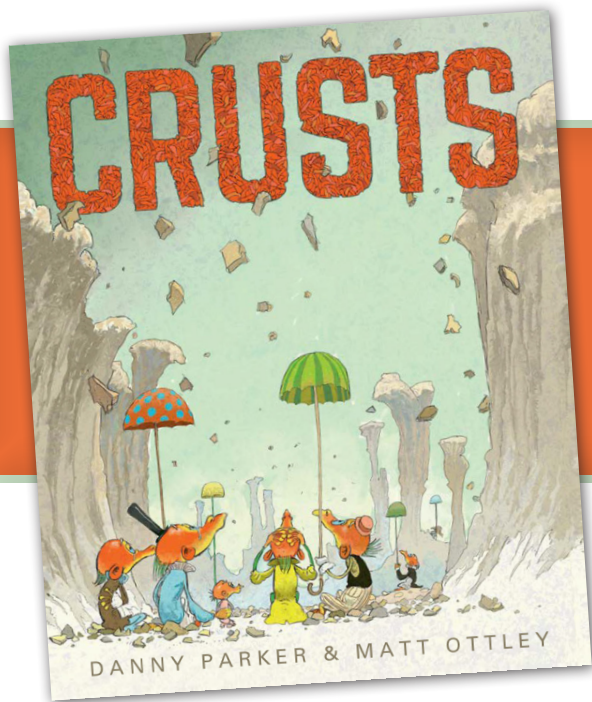
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STUDY NOTES

1. There are a number of proverbs that exemplify the themes of *Crusts*. 'One man's trash is another's treasure' is an example, and similar examples are:
 - a. One man's meat is another man's poison
 - b. One man's ceiling is another man's floor
 - c. One man's pleasure is another's pain
 - d. A thing which is a sin to one is a blessing to another
 - e. One man's loss is another man's profit
 - f. One man's fault is another man's lesson
 - g. Where there's muck, there's brass.

Although these proverbs exemplify a similar theme, each proverb also conjures up a slightly different scenario and nuance of meaning. Consider how *Crusts* might have to be told differently to exemplify some of these alternative proverbs. Note how a subtle difference in proverbial meaning might require significantly different creative directions.

2. Danny Parker often writes with deliberate understatement. This means illustrators are free to interpret the text creatively, and develop a visual narrative that adds a new dimension of meaning to the original text. It also means readers must read 'between the lines' and extract narrative information from the illustrations. The illustrations for *Crusts* invite an abundance of additional narrative information. Selecting just one of the spreads, explore possibilities for creative writing in terms of a full page of narrative, based on the image alone. Write in narrative form, rather than simply describing the content of the image.
3. Matt Ottley has a condition commonly known as 'colour-blindness', yet his illustrations tend to be more vivid than the work of most illustrators. One way of demonstrating the vividness of a work is to render it into a grey-scale or black-and-white image by photocopying or digital means. Select some images of his work and render them grey-scale, and notice which features of his technique become more conspicuous once colour has been removed. Consider how students might learn about formal qualities of contrast, lighting and composition by analysing.



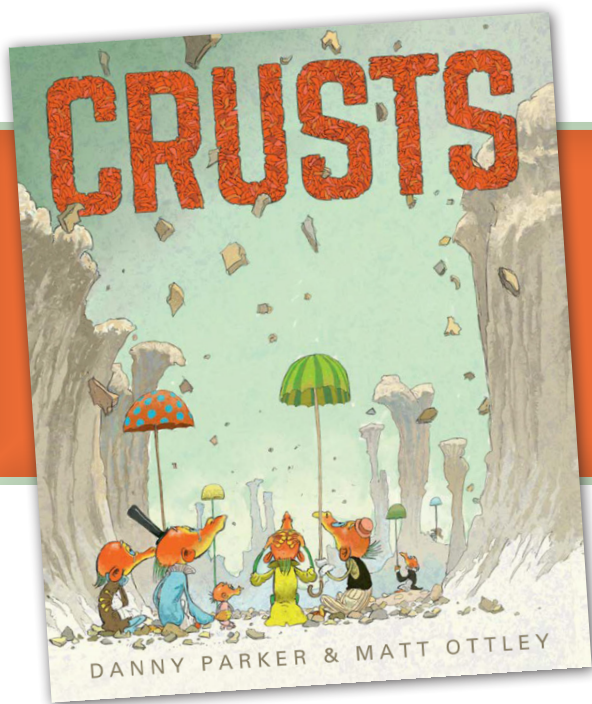
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4. *Crusts* relies on three types or strands of textual narrative. The first text-type is an omniscient voice that acts as a kind of narrative voiceover. It introduces the story and intermittently comments on broader issues. The second text-type is the main narrative, which focuses on Jacob's worldview. The third text-type is dialogue that represents the conversation between the three 'Crittters'.
 - a. Consider how the use of the omniscient narrator helps carry the narrative. What specific role does it play that the other 'voices' could not do? How is it represented on the page as different from the other narrative voices?
 - b. In what way is the main narrative voice effective? What does it 'know' about what is going on, and what does it 'not know'? Consider the use of **dramatic irony**, for example.
 - c. Aside from representing conversation, consider the narrative role of the dialogue between the three 'Crittters' that is presented in speech boxes. What effect would it have on the overall narrative to leave out this textual element? How necessary is it to the understanding of the narrative?





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ACTIVITIES

- Ask your students to research recycling and write their own definition of it. Then discuss what recycling means to them and why it is so important for our planet.
- Ask your students to write their own creative story using the themes of recycling. Ask them to think about environmental issues that effect our planet and come up with solutions. What creative solutions will they come up with?
- In groups, ask your students to act out the story of *Crusts*. Get them to be creative and have fun with their surroundings.
- Get your students to draw their own versions of a 'critter' and their planet. Then ask them to present their critter's profile and the planet they come from. What is their planet called? What are their critter's name, age and interests. What other interesting facts about their critter can they share?

