

Louie The Pirate Chef  
Simon Mitchell / Ben wood  
TEACHERS' NOTES  
By Janet McLean

**Title:** Louie the Pirate Chef  
**Author:** Simon Mitchell  
**Illustrator:** Ben Wood

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**Author:** **Simon Mitchell** spent five years working as a computer programmer before deciding to follow his dream of writing for people, rather than machines. In 2007 he turned his back on the world of software and enrolled in a Diploma of Professional Writing and Editing at RMIT, where he wrote drafts of his first two books for children: *Louie the Pirate Chef* and *The Baked Bean Bandit*. In 2008 Simon was chosen for a May Gibbs Literature Trust mentorship, and in 2010 he was awarded an ArtStart grant by the Australia Council. His latest book is *Kung Phew!* Penguin his next junior novel will be published by in February 2013. Some of Simon's all-time favourite children's authors are Roald Dahl, Raymond Briggs and Paul Jennings. Like them, he aims to write stories for young people that are fast-paced, funny and a little bit quirky.

**Illustrator:** **Ben Wood** is a freelance illustrator who lives in Sydney. He grew up in country Victoria and studied graphic design at La Trobe University in Bendigo. In 2006 he was accepted into the May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust Mentorship Program and introduced to members of the Australian children's book industry. His first picture book, *Give Me a Home Among the Gum Trees* written by Wally Johnson and Bob Brown, was published in 2008 as part of the Aussie Gems series. His second book, *Big Bad Bushranger*, also written by Bob Brown, was released in 2009. For many years Ben has illustrated for design companies and publishing firms, creating enjoyable characters and stories. He uses both traditional mediums and also digital tools. When not drawing in his studio, Ben also visits schools to teach students about the world of publishing, and the joys of creating stories. He *says* he has a Tyrannosaurus Rex living in his studio!

**SYNOPSIS** **Louie the Pirate Chef** is a funny, light-hearted picture book that combines two basic story elements – food and pirates. When Louie's parents decide it is time for him to get a job they sign him up as a member of Captain Blackheart's fearsome pirate crew. But all Louie wants is to be a chef. When Captain Blackheart and the rest of the crew are raiding, plundering and bragging about their amazing exploits, all Louie can do is to dream about the fabulous meals he would create - if

only he could be a chef. One day, when the crew become marooned on an island, Louie's gets his chance to cook some amazingly delicious meals - and at the same time turn Captain Blackheart and the other pirates, into food-loving stay-at-homes.

**WRITING STYLE** Simon Mitchell has written a delightful story reminiscent of other "cabin boy-saves-the-day" stories (the *Little Tim* series by Edward Ardizzone, and the *Pugwash* series by John Ryan). In the first two pages Simon establishes that his hero, Louie, has a problem. His parents want him to follow in their footsteps and become a pirate, but all Louie wants to be is a chef (note how the illustrations - Louie's dismay, his parents' pride, and the pirates' fearsome expressions - deepen the meaning of the simple text). Following the introduction of the characters, Simon further sets up the plot with three incidents beginning with the word "*While...*" emphasising that Louie is a dreamer, not a fearsome, plundering pirate. Simon uses dialogue to show what the pirates think of Louie, '*Blast it Louie... Yer thinking of wearing a frilly apron and baking little cakes and sweeties and other fancy-pantsy things, aren't ye?*' Louie's opportunity to prove his worth happens when the crew become stranded on an island. Using an abundance of fresh food he finds in the jungle (and despite the insulting comments of the pirates - '*That looks like bilge water...*' '*We're not eating that jungle junk...*') he cooks up an amazing feast in jewel-encrusted pots. The story has a happy ending. The pirates decide not to be rescued but to stay on the island forever "with Louie the finest chef in all the seven seas".

**ILLUSTRATIONS** Ben Wood used ink, pencil and watercolour for the cartoon-style illustrations in the book. Using traditional cartooning / caricature techniques Ben has created a cast of compelling characters. Using this style the artist can exaggerate or over-simplify the characters' facial features and expressions, body language and movement, emphasising the humour of the story. Ben worked through a number of stages to develop the drawings. First he worked on ideas for the characters, and the page layouts. He says: '*In this rough stage I tend to work quite fast, as I do not want to waste time with too much detail. I use pencils, markers and Photoshop to nut out ideas for page layouts. Working on the computer also allows for fast changes, and is a quicker way for me to block in colours. I tend to look at a picture in simple shapes at this stage, as it helps me to figure out eye movement easily.*' At the next stage, using grey lead pencils, coloured pencils and markers, Ben works on further development of the characters. After talking with the author and editor, he chooses the design and the characters he will use in the final illustrations. The next stage is working on the

final illustrations, completing the detailed line work and the colour. At this stage, when redrawing his illustrations, Ben uses his light box to trace his own drawings. Ben says that this stage is FUN because he finally gets to add some colour to the world! He does all of the colouring with watercolour paints. An interesting point to note is that the hand-drawn lettering (on the last page) was added digitally to the completed illustration. This allows flexibility if the writing needs to change language if the book is published overseas.

## DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Read the story expressively. Emphasise the *Arrs!* and *Arrrrrrrs!* and other pirate talk. Slow down and linger over the descriptions of Louie's thoughts of '*calamari rings with chilli sauce, and hazelnut fudge pie*', and the other delicious meals he dreams about concocting.
- Show the children the title page. What does the illustration tell the reader about what Louie is thinking and feeling? Talk about his body language – how his shoulders are slumped, his pack is dragging along behind, he is looking glum. In his hand he is clutching a book and a spoon. Look out for these later in the book. Talk about how he is hanging back while his parents are eagerly urging him to come on. Talk about why Louie's parents want him to become a pirate.
- We know from the start that Louie doesn't want to be a pirate – his dream is to be a chef. Talk about how Louie never loses sight of his dream to become a chef. What does Louie do while the other pirates are raiding and plundering and telling tall stories? How does he detach himself from the mayhem that is going on around him?
- What do the other pirates think of Louie? What do they say and do? For example, they laugh at him, and say hurtful things, '*Yer thinking about wearing a frilly apron and baking little cakes and sweeties and other fancy-pantsy things, aren't ye?*' Talk about how the caricature drawings so perfectly depict the thoughts and feelings of the pirates.
- Captain Blackheart and his crew is '*the most fearsome band of pirates in the all the Seven Seas*'. Find out more about the Seven Seas, and the pirates who sailed in them. What countries would the pirates visit when they sailed on the Seven Seas?
- Talk about how Louie's dream-foods are influenced by where they are or what they are talking about. Why is Louie thinking about Peking Duck, rice noodles and deep-fried ice cream while Bloodthirsty Pete is firing himself out of a cannon? Note the architecture of the buildings, the lanterns, and the flying ducks.
- When Ben Wood begins a project he goes to libraries, and uses GOOGLE Image Search to look up images on the subject he is going to draw. He fills reference-material folders with examples of

images for him to look at when he is designing a book or creating characters for a story. Make a

class reference folder about pirates.

- In the class make up pirate stories. Create the characters, think about the setting, and the plot for the stories.
- Ben Wood used relatives and friends as models for some of his characters. Louie is based on his younger brother. Louie's parents are based on what his parents look like, and other characters are like different versions of his Grandpa. He even used one of his teachers as a model for the shorter lady pirate with knives!
- Create your own characters using the traditional cartooning / caricature techniques Ben has used. Base your characters on people you know. Look carefully at how Ben has exaggerated or simplified the characters' facial features and expressions, and their body language and movement. When you are happy with the characters you have drawn keep a master copy to trace over as Ben does in case you need to do more than one drawing.
- In the end Louie's dream comes true. He becomes a chef. But not only that – the pirates recognise his special talents, give up pirating, and stay on the island forever with Louie, the finest chef in all the Seven Seas. Look at the final page. Can you find all of the pirates? Are they happy?
- After finding an abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables on the island Louie makes dozens of tasty dishes. Think up names for some other meals that Louie could have made on the island. What other kind of food might be found on the island.
- Have a pirate party with some delicious food
- Create a play based on the story of Louie the Pirate Chef. Make props, sets, and costumes. Learn some pirate songs.
- A seagull accompanies Louie all the time. Find the seagull on each page. Talk about how the bird's interactions with Louie, and its expressions and body language, reflect Louie's moods and other events that happen in the story. For example it's pleasure when eating a meal prepared by Louie; it's dejected look when the pirates laugh at Louie.
- There are many amusing visual jokes in the book. Look through the book to find these. Try to include visual jokes in your own stories.
- Find out more about Simon Mitchell <http://simonmitchell.com.au/> and Ben Wood <http://www.benwoodillustrations.com/> at their websites