

Mozzie and Midgie
Doug Macleod / Sandy Okalyi

TEACHERS' NOTES
By Janet McLean

Synopsis Mozzie and Midgie are black and white spoonbills. They live happily on the shores of a tropical Queensland island. One day they meet a boastful parrot who brags about being the most beautiful bird on the island. Mozzie and Midgie believe that they need to make themselves more beautiful and special, and they set off to find a way to make this happen. They try out lots of ideas but in the end none of them work. Finally, their Mum reminds them that they are special – no other birds on the island have a spoon for a bill. And the parrot gets his comeuppance!

Author Doug MacLeod is a Melbourne writer of books and TV. He has worked as a writer on shows such as Fast Forward and Sea Change, and as script editor on three seasons of Kath and Kim. He left his full-time TV job in 2002 to focus on writing books for children and young adults. He's since written six novels for Penguin, but his best-known title is probably Sister Madge's Book of Nuns, published by Omnibus Books. Doug Macleod says that the story came about when he saw Sandy Okalyi's paintings of the black and white spoonbills, and he wondered how they would feel living in one of the most colourful places on earth.

Illustrator Sandy Okalyi was born and raised in Melbourne. She has travelled around Australia and overseas, and she lived in Fremantle where she trained as a sculptural muralist and brought up her family. When she moved to Stradbroke Island she focused on

painting, with a special interest in the birds and wildlife of the area. The two spoonbill characters of Mozzie and Midgie were created by Sandy from a series of sketches and paintings for an exhibition and were later written into their first picture story by Doug MacLeod. As Sandy says, *'I thoroughly enjoyed the process of creating a picture book and always get a chuckle out of the characters. Spoonbills are such beautiful and bizarre birds!'* Sandy now lives in Brisbane with her family.

Themes The story is built around the theme of self-awareness, and developing a belief in your own worth. Mozzie and Midgie are happy living with their family on their tropical island, until the day they meet the boastful parrot. They believe what the parrot

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says about them: *'There's nothing beautiful or special about you,'* and they set off to find a way to change themselves. They try many different ways to become beautiful, but none of these feel right. When they finally go home it is their Mum who shows them how they are special, and even beautiful, in their own way – they have a spoon for a bill. Will the parrot learn that there's no need to show off - that we are all beautiful and special in our own way.

Activities

1. How do Mozzie and Midgie feel when the parrot says there is nothing beautiful or special about them? Why do they believe what the parrot says?
2. Talk about how we are all special in our own way. Look at the pictures of each of the characters in the story. Talk about what is special or beautiful about each of them.
3. Why is the parrot being so boastful? Talk about why the parrot feels the need to show off. Does the parrot look happy? Do Mozzie and Midgie have something that the parrot would like to have?
4. Mozzie and Midgie try many different ways to make themselves more beautiful. Why is Midgie is never happy with how they look? Talk about how *everyone* in the world is unique, and should be valued for who they are. Talk about how *everything* in nature is unique. Make collections of leaves, stones, shells, etc. to demonstrate this idea.
5. How do Mozzie and Midgie feel when they finally run out of ideas? They were so determined to change how they looked that they couldn't see that they were special in their own particular way. How does their mum help them?
6. Mozzie and Midgie are Royal Spoonbills. Find out more about these birds, and the other birds and creatures that are in the story.
7. Illustrations

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Talk about the stylized illustrative and design elements that Sally Okalyi has used to create the pictures. Talk about how she uses line, colour, and composition, to depict different elements of the story.

How is distance in the landscape represented through the use of an horizon line that delineates the sky, the land, the sea, plants, rocks, etc?

What colours are used? How are different tones of colour used to show different elements of the landscape, e.g. the use of different yellow and blue tones – note the small squares of darker blue around the feet of the spoonbills in the water, and straight and wavy lines.

Colour is an important element in this story. List the different colours named in the story, and those that are not named – find them on a colour wheel.

Talk about how the composition changes from single pages focusing on the characters, to more sweeping views across a double page spread.

Talk about how the characters' personalities are depicted through particular illustrative techniques. For example: Mozzie's crab crown is perky, whereas Midgie's is droopy.

Paint or draw you own pictures using the different features used by Sally Okalyi.