



## ***Marshall Armstrong is New to Our School***

**by David Mackintosh**

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### **About the book**

*'Marshall Armstrong is new to our school. He looks different to me. His laces are straight, not criss-crossed like mine, And his eyes are always looking at the blackboard. Marshall Armstrong doesn't fit into our school. Not one bit...'*

...but it doesn't take long for Marshall to prove that you don't have to follow the crowd to be the most popular kid in the playground.

A quirky and witty 'first day at school' story from a brilliant new talent.

Ages 3+

### **About the author/illustrator**

David Mackintosh was born in Belfast and grew up in Australia. He is a graphic designer, art director and illustrator. His innovative book designs have won him numerous awards in Britain and internationally, and he has collaborated with some of the most celebrated names in children's publishing.

<http://www.davidmackintosh.co.uk/>

David says, of writing *Marshall Armstrong is New to Our School*:

'The outsider theme to the book is important to me, and *Marshall Armstrong* was inspired by the expectations people had of the first men on the moon who had experienced something few others ever would. Suddenly, (in the course of eight days or so, the time it takes to go to the moon and back) they were irrevocably different to the rest of the world's population by virtue of visiting another heavenly body; they were ordinary people who had an extraordinary experience. Returning to Earth it was difficult not to be what they were before they left, but people expected more. I like the idea of Marshall Armstrong being accepted for who he is, but being admired for being different.'

## **Using Marshall Armstrong in the classroom**

### **To begin**

- Start by looking through the book quietly with the children, without reading the text. Then ask for the children's impressions.
- What can we tell about the story from the pictures alone?
- How is the book illustrated and in what medium?
- Why do you think the author chose this style and what makes it engaging for the audience?

### **Reading together**

- Read the story out loud to the children once, without stopping for questions.
- Then ask the children to keep their thoughts and feelings about the book to themselves before another reading and discussion the following day.
- Over the following days read the story a number of times and then choose work questions and activities from those provided below.

### **Themes for exploration**

- tolerance/ being similar and different
- starting school/ being new
- making friends
- helping others feel as though they belong/inclusion

- first impressions

**Also discuss the following concepts:**

- looks can deceive/ people not being what they seem
- being true to yourself despite others' judgments
- preconceived ideas/ prejudice
- feeling scared, awkward, embarrassed
- helping others feel comfortable
- being different
- finding similarities and things in common
- looking for the positives in everyone
- home life – similarities and differences, restrictions and freedoms, rules
- birthday parties

**Visual literacy**

As a fun activity to accompany the study of this story, give students a small sketchbook and give them time to doodle each day. Have them discuss their doodling and what inspired it.

Discuss the use of colour and the size of different objects in the book; consider how this impacts the mood and tone of the story. Test observation skills by posing the following questions:

1. What colour is Marshall Armstrong's jacket?
2. What class are the children in and how do you know?
3. What brand are Marshall Armstrong's glasses?
4. What did the narrator have on his arm?
5. What sort of bar did Marshall Armstrong have in his lunch?
6. Name two of the sports the children were doing?
7. During the sport activities, what was Marshall Armstrong doing and why?
8. Describe Marshall Armstrong's umbrella?
9. Name four of the different shaped windows in Marshall Armstrong's house?
10. What kind of animal was the Mexican piñata?
11. From what was the lid of Marshall Armstrong's grand piano made and where had the piano come from?
12. How many kids were on the fireman's pole at one time?
13. Who collected the narrator from the birthday party and what did s/he have in each hand?
14. The new girl, Elizabeth Bell, came to school holding a soft toy. What animal was it? What colour is it?

Ask the students to create an illustration such as one of Marshall Armstrong, his house or a new front cover for the story using a medium of their choice.

**Questions about the story**

1. Why do you think Miss Wright thought Marshall Armstrong should sit at the front of the class for the first few days?
2. What were the narrator's first impressions of Marshall Armstrong?
3. How were Marshall Armstrong's things different to the narrator's?
4. When Marshall Armstrong sat next to the narrator, what other observations and judgments did he make about the new boy?
5. How was Marshall Armstrong's school lunch different from that of the other kids? What did you think of it? How does it differ from the lunch you and your friends have?
6. Which other types of foods did some of the other kids in the class have?
7. Why couldn't Marshall Armstrong participate in the Sports Day?
8. Marshall Armstrong didn't have a TV at home. Who in the class has a TV and what are the rules about TV watching at your house? What do you do when you're not watching TV? (**Refer to Worksheets 4 & 5.**) What did Marshall Armstrong do instead and why?
9. Which other factors made the narrator believe that Marshall Armstrong didn't fit in at his new school? Why do you think the words 'NOT ONE BIT' are highlighted and in larger font than the rest of the typeface?
10. What did the narrator say about Marshall Armstrong's planned birthday and which reasons did he give for not wanting to go?
11. Compare the look on the narrator's face before he arrived at the party with his appearance as he is leaving? Discuss.
12. Describe your first impressions of Marshall Armstrong's house?
13. During the party, what sorts of things could the kids do, both inside and out?
14. Did the kids seem to be having fun at the party? How can you tell?
15. What did the narrator think of the contents of his party bag?
16. After the party, what were the narrator's impressions of the party and of Marshall Armstrong himself?
17. How did the narrator react to the new girl at the end of the story and why do you think his reaction was different from his first impressions of Marshall Armstrong?

### **Activity & discussion ideas**

#### **Tolerance - Being the same and different**

Being a bit different in appearance or having different interests can be hard for kids but there are some simple ways to help them fit in and feel like they belong. By placing them in small groups with different people for activities and having some a variety of class discussions and activities can all help to ease the transition for someone new.

1. What makes us think that other people are different to us?
2. Apart from our appearance, in what ways are people similar or different?
3. What would it be like if everyone was the same?
4. There are certain things we all want that make us the same such as feeling safe, being loved, having fun with friends. Can you think of other things that make us the same?
5. What did the narrator think of Marshall Armstrong when they first met and what do you think contributed to his assessment?

6. Brainstorm ways kids can be more tolerant and accepting of each other. Write them on the board. Then have the children work in small groups to create posters about accepting others. Display the posters.

### **Refer to Worksheet 1**

**Further information for these discussions can be found at:**

[http://www.kidshelp.com.au/kids/information/hot-topics/being-different\\_1.php](http://www.kidshelp.com.au/kids/information/hot-topics/being-different_1.php)

### **Starting school/being new & making friends**

Things to talk about in this topic include:

Some of the things that might make it hard starting at a new school such as: being in an unfamiliar environment, new routines and rules, feeling sad about not being able to hang out with old school friends, feeling worried about making new friends.

A good way to make new friends is to become involved in activities. This way, children can meet people with whom they have things in common. Children can get involved in sport, music or clubs. Teachers can create situations in the classroom where children are grouped with a wide range of children. Trying some of the following activities may also help:

1. To have good friends you must be a good friend. This could be a brainstorming activity with the children and might include some of the following: Good friends listen to each other, don't put each other down or hurt each other's feeling, help each other solve problems, can disagree without hurting each other, are trustworthy, and care about each other.
2. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Each group's task is to choose one person to play the role of a new kid in class. The new kid's challenge is to try to gain acceptance into the group. After the role-plays, discuss with the class how it felt to be the new kid and how it felt to be part of the 'in-group.' Discuss some of the different ways of 'breaking in' to a new group.
3. Group children differently or change the seating arrangements regularly so that children have the opportunity to get to know different children under varying circumstances.
4. Play the Name Tag match game: Each group member will need a card for a name tag. Then give the following directions:

Put your name in the center of your card.

In the upper left corner, write four things that you like to do.

In the upper right corner, write your four favourite singers or groups.

In the lower left corner, write your four favourite movies.

In the lower right corner, write four adjectives that describe you.

When everyone is finished, have him or her mingle with other children for a few minutes. Without talking, they are to read the upper left corner of the other group members' cards. When time is up, they are to find one or two people who are most like them and spend a few minutes together. When time is up, they are to mingle again reading the upper right corner of the other group members' cards. They then find the one or two people most like them

and visit. Repeat with the lower left corner and lower right corner information.

To make sure everyone spends time with several people, you could implement a rule that no two people can be in the same group more than once.

**References and further information for these discussions and other activities can be found at:**

<http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/starting-at-a-new-school>

<http://www.parentingscience.com/kids-make-friends.html>

**School lunches**

1. Draw and discuss the healthy food pyramid and how it is reflected in children's lunches.
2. Plan a class lunch with food bought from home that reflects each person's culture, like and dislikes, health factors (remembering to consider possible allergies etc). Each person could bring a dish to share or help in the preparation of a shared lunch at school.

**Party, party, party**

1. If you were a guest at Marshall Armstrong's birthday, which of the activities would you like the most and why? As a class, paint a panel each for a large mural to be joined together to look like the double-page spread in the story which shows many of the inside party activities. (Red lines divide each activity in the double-page spread and your class project could have a similar presentation method.)
2. In pairs or groups of three, design your ideal party including the food and games you'd like to play. Include details of the decorations, invitations, cake, costumes and party bags. You could compile all the information and illustrations on a poster or create a book to present your ideas.
3. Plan and hold a class party to celebrate all the things you enjoy doing together. Include indoor and outdoor party games and food.
4. Research the history of the piñata and in small groups design and make paper bag or Papier Mache piñatas.

**References for these activities can be found at:**

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/Birthday-Parties-Birthday-party-ideas-Best-birthday-party-games+2094+63+article.htm>

<http://familycrafts.about.com/od/makeapinata/a/makeapinata.htm>

<http://www.mexconnect.com/articles/459-history-of-the-piñata>

<http://www.spanishtown.ca/familystory3.htm>

**Unusual houses**

1. Look at some design magazines or the Internet for some house designs you like or make a list of all the things that would be important if you were building a house for you and your family or friends to live in.
2. Make a list of the sorts of things you'd like to do inside and outside your home and then design the rooms accordingly.

3. Draw your dream home and illustrate all the rooms including colour and detail you'd like. Consider both the indoor and outdoor spaces. Have a look at the links below, which show unusual tree houses for inspiration.
4. Survey your neighbourhood during a class walk and note the different kinds of houses. Classify them into groups according to what they are made of, their colours, shapes and any special or interesting features you notice about their architecture.
5. Find out as much as you can about the house you live in. When was it built? What important things happened about the same time the building was new? What is it made of?

**References for these activities can be found at:**

Tree house designs online that kids can do themselves

<http://www.highlightskids.com/Magazine/August06/h1magazineFlashObjects/h10806AugustArtist.asp>

**Penny-farthing bikes**

1. Read about the history of bikes and illustrate a range of different styles that have come and gone over time.
2. Choose an illustration style such as pen and ink, watercolour, crayon or choose a range of different drawing implements to complete your picture.

**References for these activities can be found at:**

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penny-farthing>

<http://www.pedalinghistory.com/PHhistory.html>

**Other books by the author/illustrator**

- *Same as Me* by David Mackintosh
- *The Emperor's new Clothes* by Hans Christian Andersen & David Mackintosh
- *The Grocer's Daughter* by Nigel Gray & David Mackintosh
- *Prue Theroux the Cool Librarian* by Gillian Rubenstein & David Mackintosh
- *Sharon Keep Your Hair On* by Gillian Rubenstein & David Mackintosh
- *Hooray for the Kafe Karaoke* by Gillian Rubenstein & David Mackintosh
- *The Duck Catcher* by Moses Aaron & David Mackintosh
- *The Midwife's Daughter* by Marion Halligan & David Mackintosh
- *Rex, the Adventures of a Class Pet* by Ursula Dubosarsky & David Mackintosh

**Other books with similar themes**

- *Not Like Georgie* By Scott Hatcher, Illustrated by Heather Potter
- *Where's My Peg? My First Day at School* by Jen Green
- *First Day* by Margaret Wild
- *Just Like Sisters* by Angela McAllister
- *Pocketful of Kisses* by Angela McAllister
- *What will you be?* by Simon French

- *Brave Charlotte* by Anu Stohner
- *Freckleface Strawberry* by Julianne Moore
- *Yellow Bird, Black Spider* by Dosh & Mike Archer

**WORKSHEET 1**  
**Being the same and different**

**Arrange the class into pairs or groups of three and ask them to make two lists:  
one that includes the things that each child in the group has in common and  
another list that outlines their differences.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Similarities</b>	<b>Differences</b>
Sam Pete Jade	We all have short hair We are all in Grade 3	<i>(Suggestions might include)</i> Hair colour Eye colour Nationality Favourite sport

**WORKSHEET 2**  
**What's in your lunch?**

**Brainstorm and discuss the sorts of foods children bring to school and fill in the table below. You may need to print more sheets to include each child's name.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Lunch items</b>	<b>Lunch items</b>	<b>Lunch items</b>	<b>Lunch items</b>	<b>Lunch items</b>	<b>Lunch items</b>	<b>One thing you'd choose if you were making your own lunch</b>

### **WORKSHEET 3**

#### **School lunches**

**Now draw a bar or pie graph to show how many people had each item.  
E.g. 6 people had apples, 9 people had sandwiches, 3 people had salad, 4 had  
a bottle of water, 10 had juice etc.**

**Draw the graph and then discuss:  
Which item was the most common and why?  
Who enjoys their lunch and why?  
Who doesn't enjoy their lunch and why?**

**WORKSHEET 4**  
**Favourite TV programs**

**Make a list of each child's favourite TV program.  
Ask them to write it down at their table *without* discussion first.**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>TV PROGRAM</b>

