



This month, we've been talking to . . . Nikki Slade Robinson

A graduate of Wellington Polytech's Diploma of Visual Communication Design (Illustration) course, Nikki Slade Robinson has illustrated a number of children's books, as well as having written some of her own. Nikki lives in Opotiki with her husband and their two young daughters.

We asked Nikki some questions about herself and her work, and here's what she said ...

Where were you born? Where do you live now?
Te Puke – though I only lived there until I was one month old. Now I live in paradise, near Opotiki.

Where did you go to school?
Woodlands School and then Opotiki College.

Did you have a nickname?
Well, Nikola is my real name, so Nikki is my nickname!

What were you like in school?
I drew heaps. I have a maths report that says I should try not to draw quite so much in my maths book. (Don't get me wrong, maths IS important, it's just I understand it better when I turn it into pictures!)

What is the naughtiest thing you did?
Not a lot! I did hide in the library to avoid netball practice. And had a jolly good time mixing lots of paints into gorgeous swirly colours behind the blackboard ...

What was your favourite book growing up?
Tons! Miffy was the first book I remember getting hooked on. Some of our books at home had been in a school fire and they had smoke marks on the pages, and smelt smoky but I loved them just the same. Dr Seuss was utterly awesome. Then I got into Cricket magazine, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Tolkien, Harriet the Spy ... there are just too many to name.

Who is your favourite children's author?
Wah! How do I choose? There are wonderful NZ authors that would have to top the list – Margaret Mahy of course, Jack Lasenby, David Hill, Des Hunt, Joanna Orwin ... there are so many writing fantastic

young adult books – hunt out kiwi authors next time you go to the library or bookshop!

What is your favourite food/colour/movie?
Food: Well, food! Cheese is rather yummy.
Colour: I like yellow, blue and green.
Movie: I do like *Labyrinth* ... *The Bog of Eternal Stench* is pretty funny. I also love the character design in that movie. And the songs!

Who inspired you to write and illustrate?
My parents are both very creative and let me be me. It's just something I've always wanted to do utterly, completely, totally, so I don't think I had much choice but to be stubborn and follow my dream!

How did you get started?
I drew as soon as I could hold a crayon. I used to draw with sticks in dirt or make creations out of leaves, moss, sand, driftwood – just whatever there was, wherever I was. At College I took Art and Technical Drawing (I know, I know, they've changed the names of the subjects now), then I went on to do three years of commercial illustration at Wellington Polytechnic, which was fabulous.

How old were you?
Tiny to start with! I graduated at 20 and illustrated my first book at 21.

How do you think up ideas?
1. Don't grow up properly, ever.
2. Let your imagination run riot. It's like having an entire universe inside your head – at times I just wish I could plug a USB from my imagination to a printer because I can't keep up with it!

Do you have a special place where you write and illustrate?

I have a studio that looks towards the bush. Kereru sit in a cabbage tree just outside my window only a few metres away. Sometimes the cats come and stand on my art or help me type. Lovely!

What is the best thing about being an author and illustrator?

It's so FUUUUNNNN! It's not like work really. It gives me greater flexibility to be a mum and do all those school thingees that mums do, like build bits of playgrounds and stuff.

Have you had a funny or embarrassing moment as an author and illustrator?

Not really. Thank goodness I've never split my pants or anything, that would be really embarrassing! Mind you, if that had happened I don't think I'd go telling everyone!

What do you do when you are not writing and illustrating?

Most importantly, being a mum. Hunting and gathering in the vege garden and then bottling siege-like amounts of food. Enjoying life! Patting the goat. Retrieving rats from the cats. Recycling! Going bush when I get a chance.

What would you have chosen to be if you were not an author and illustrator?

Um, maybe an architect (but I found physics a bit hard). Maybe something educational? Working for the Department of Conservation? I don't know. But I think whatever it was, I'd still be doodling away in my spare time.

Which famous person from the past would you like to talk to?

Dr Seuss! And my ancestor who was a children's author in England a loooong time ago. But it would also be neat to meet some illustrators that aren't in the past yet, like Quentin Blake, Trina Schwartz-Hyman, Tony Ross ...

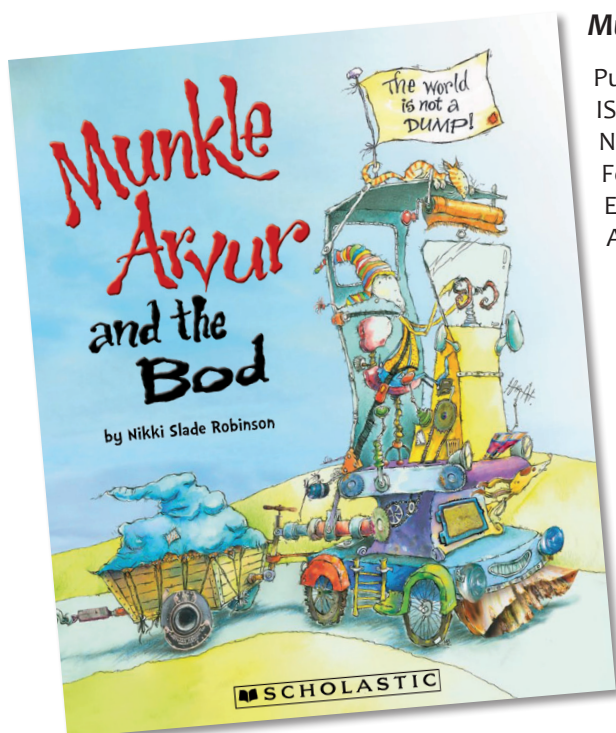
Is there anything else you would like to say?

Look after the world like Munkle Arvur! We're doing our best so join in! Get all greenie! Aim for world peace! Look after dolphins etc.! (Seriously!)

Website/blog details: www.penandink.co.nz

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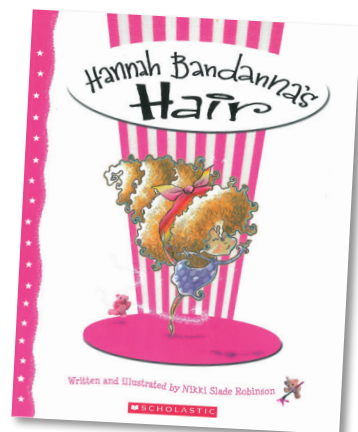


Munkle Arvur and the Bod

Publication	May 2012
ISBN	978-1-77543-069-8
NZ RRP	\$19.50
Format	265 x 215 mm
Extent	32 pp
Age	3-7 years

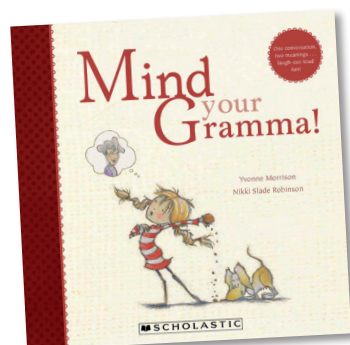
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Illustrated by Nikki Slade Robinson
ISBN 978-1-77543-041-4



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