

Hearty tales

From Nickelodeon to writing children's books, Mick Elliott goes from slime to Squidge.

HEATHER ZUBEK

Children's author and illustrator Mick Elliott has three simple words he applies to all his stories: heart, fart and smart.

"Each story has to have 'heart' and characters that kids can relate to," Mick says on the phone from his home in Sydney.

"As for 'fart', I don't mean every story has to have farts, but there must be opportunities for humour.

"For the story to be 'smart' means you can't talk down to kids, you can't preach to them."

The author of the series The Turners is gearing up for the release of the second book of his hilarious Squidge Dibley series, Squidge Dibley Destroys the Galaxy. The first book, Squidge Dibley Destroys the School, was released a few months ago and the response has been amazing.

"You know you're onto a good thing when you do a school visit and the next day you get an email from a teacher saying there was one boy who wouldn't go near a book but after my session they can't get him out of Squidge Dibley," Mick says.

"That's a very powerful thing." Readers are introduced to the kids of Year 6PU at Craglands South Primary School in the first book. These kids are known as the "bad" class, like "pepperoni and banana pizza".

Individually they're good kids, but together, they are bad news.



THE BUZZ

Author
Mick
Elliott.

But in comes Squidge Dibley.

Squidge is a young lad who is a bit different and suffers from a few rare "medical" problems. Any loud noise and Squidge has "nervous belly belchus", an embarrassing digestive problem.

He can't swim because of his "bloatus maximus" and when he comes into contact with a hard surface, he gets "bungee bones".

In the first book, Squidge destroys the school, but in the latest release not even outer space is safe! The book begins with half a duck and a very naughty python, but then there is an excursion to space camp where things go very "Squidge-like"!

Working as a producer for Nickelodeon provided Mick with a great apprenticeship for writing children's stories.

"When I worked with Nickelodeon they had a very clear and admirable approach to making kids' entertainment. It was about putting kids first, it was about finding opportunities to make kids laugh but also ensuring there was real heart in the stories as well," he says.

It has been a very busy year for

Mick with the release of his two new books and his travels as ambassador for the Australian Reading Hour, talking to kids and adults about the importance of reading.

"Even in this age of tablets and iPhones, it's more important than ever for kids and parents to engage with books," says Mick.

"There is nothing more powerful for kids than reading time and the ability of books to increase their vocabulary and help them see the world."

"We should never be thrusting books onto kids as if they were medicine. We should let them read anything they like, as that book will be a gateway to something else, which will have them reading more challenging books." Perth fans of Squidge Dibley will be able to meet Mick when the author visits Perth next year for the Scribblers Festival.

"I'll be doing a whole variety of sessions about Squidge and taking part in an illustrator battle, which I must admit I'm a bit nervous about, but I cannot wait," he says.

THE BUZZ

Circus scientists on fire at tech display

See science at its most heart-stopping at this week's Resources Technology Showcase.

You'll see the elemental magic of water, air and fire in a fun, colourful and action-packed performance designed to give you a first-hand experience in engineering and innovation.

The Shell Questacon Science Circus, which is based in Canberra, will present the Sci-Fire show, a free demonstration revealing the fascinating science of fire, from jet engines to explosions and everything in between. You will even see young circus scientists holding fire SAFELY in their hands!

Visitors can make paper prototypes that float, fly and fall in a wind tunnel. And look for the bed of nails and levitating beach balls.

The Shell Questacon Science Circus aims to engage young people in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), in the hope that it leads to more possibilities and varied career opportunities.



Visit the Shell Questacon Science Circus at Shell's display at the Resources Technology Showcase between 9am and 6pm tomorrow and Thursday at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre. Details: rtsperth.com.

NEWS FLASH

LAST WEEK'S STORIES INCLUDED:



Lifelike hi-tech mannequin NENA has been donated to Perth Children's Hospital.

Picture: Stephen Heath



PCH PRACTICE DOLL

Doctors and nurses at Perth Children's Hospital now have a lifelike baby mannequin to practise how to save a child in a life-threatening emergency in an Australian first. The \$125,000

NENA Sim looks and moves like a real baby. His chest rises when he's breathing. His legs and arms move and can simulate a seizure. His skin colour changes. He cries and coughs and you can hear his heartbeat. General paediatrics consultant Ellen Taylor said the mannequin made training for real life-threatening medical situations as realistic as possible.



AUSSIE KIDS UNFIT

Australian children are among the least physically active in the world, with nine out of 10 boys and girls failing to be active for at least an hour a day. That's the worrying result in the first global

study of children's activity, which ranked Australia 140th out of 146 countries. The World Health Organisation-led research, which involved academics at the University of WA, found that 11 to 17-year-olds in Australia had become even more physically inactive since 2001. It also showed more than 91 per cent of Australian girls did not get the daily recommended hour of moderate or vigorous activity, compared with just under 87 per cent of boys.



DINO FEATHERS IN OZ

Fossil feathers found in Australia are the first solid evidence that feathered dinosaurs lived at Earth's poles, according to palaeontologists reporting in an upcoming study in the journal, Gondwana Research. The feathers date back 118 million years, when Australia was much farther south and joined with Antarctica to form Earth's southern polar landmass. Although the environment would have been warmer than Antarctica today, the dinosaurs that sported this plumage probably endured many months of darkness and perhaps freezing temperatures in winter. Source: nationalgeographic.com.

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