

## Olivia's Voice Teachers' Notes

<b>Title:</b>	<i>Olivia's Voice</i>
<b>Author:</b>	Mike Lucas
<b>Illustrator:</b>	Jennifer Harrison
<b>Publisher:</b>	MidnightSun Publishing
<b>Price:</b>	AU \$26.99
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<b>Audience:</b>	4-8

### Synopsis:

*Olivia's Voice* is a day in the life of a young deaf girl. Though Olivia is unable to hear, her life is filled with words and colour, love and friendship. When she wakes to a silent morning, the giant gum tree and the colourful birds help her to see the beauty of the day. The warmth of her mother's embrace fills her with love. And the joy she has walking to school with her friends brings fun to her journey. Olivia fills her school day with numbers, words and pictures and when it is time to go to the music room, she leads her class with her favourite instrument.

*Olivia's Voice* is a story of positivity and acceptance. It deals with issues such as disability, inclusion and perspective and shows that our differences do not always limit our abilities and our achievements.

### Style:

Mike Lucas writes in a highly descriptive style that uses a subtle approach to the delicate subject of deafness in children. Jennifer Harrison's lifelike pencil drawings capture the vividness of the visual world and the warmth of Olivia's home, family and friends.

The opening line of the book focusses the attention of the reader on the sounds around them. Though it often seems that a moment is silent, it rarely is and this pause can help children to think about how a truly silent world would feel. The descriptive language used and the bright, realistic illustrations, allow for a 'mindful' outlook on what could normally be perceived as everyday objects and tasks. It is not until later in the book that the reader can be sure that Olivia is unable to hear and the story focusses on the positive aspects of her life that surround her. Her ability to lead her friends in a musical ensemble by feeling the power of the drum symbolises a life without limits, where boundaries can be crossed, despite obstacles that may exist. Towards the end, the reality of Olivia's deafness is conveyed using simple examples, such as a trickling tap, a blustery wind and a snoring dog. However, the book ends on a positive note where Olivia, in her dreams, is able to hear the sounds that most of us take for granted.

### **Author Motivation:**

Running a bookshop, Mike was aware that there were few books around that dealt with and featured children with disabilities in a positive, motivating manner. The challenge of taking on this subject and writing an ordinary story in a way that would make children stop and think about the everyday beauty of their actions and experiences was something that interested him.

### **Author Background:**

Mike Lucas is the author of several collections of humorous poetry for children and has had work published in anthologies and literary magazines. Originally from the UK, he now lives in Adelaide, where he works as an engineer and runs an independent book store with his wife, Becky. He has a passion for encouraging children to use imagination and creativity to produce original stories and poetry.

[www.mikelucas.com.au](http://www.mikelucas.com.au)

### **Illustrator Background:**

Jennifer Harrison lives in Adelaide with her son Nathaniel. Since leaving university she has worked as a graphic designer, commercial artist and art director. Her illustrations have been commissioned for book covers, magazines and packaging for overseas and local markets and she has exhibited in Adelaide galleries.

[www.harrison-studios.com](http://www.harrison-studios.com)

### **Suggestions for classroom discussion and application:**

- Before opening *Olivia's Voice* take a look at the cover illustration. Discuss what kind of story students think this might be and the things on the cover that make them think that. Ask questions such as:
  - What can you tell me about the girl on the front cover?
  - What else can you tell me about the cover drawings?Ask them what sounds may be present in the scene.
- On the first page, there is a question. *Listen. What do you hear?* Ask the children to be as silent as they can. Wait for a minute. Then ask them each to write down something they heard during the 'silence.' Discuss the findings and ask them if any of them have ever been anywhere where there was complete silence.
- Throughout the book, ask the children to point out visual and written indications that Olivia is deaf. Discuss at the end of the book.

- Discuss how the words in the story are used to represent senses other than hearing. How do the illustrations match the story and what do they tell you that the words do not? Choose three illustrations – what can you tell about how the person feels by looking at their face and body?

*The following exercises are © National Deaf Children's Society*

- Ask students to think about how they communicate. How would they communicate if they could not hear? Break the class into pairs and ask them to communicate the following expressions without talking:
  - Yes.
  - We did well.
  - Go away.
  - That's good.
  - We share a secret.
  - Are you coming with us?
  - That's bad.
  - Come here.
  - I'm bored.
  - I don't know.
- Take some post it notes of different colours and place them on the students' heads without them knowing what colour they are. Then ask the children to organise themselves in groups of the same colour without talking.
- Discuss how deaf people can communicate. How can they be helped to hear?
- Ask some questions about deaf people:
  - Q Can deaf people talk?
    - Deaf people can talk. They are not born without voice boxes. Learning to speak takes a lot of hard work. Every deaf person is different – some talk, some prefer to use sign language and others like to use both.
  - Q Are deaf people different?
    - Being deaf is a physical difference, though it may not be visually apparent. Everyone is different. Just as some people are deaf, others are different because they are tall, or sporty, or wear glasses. Given the right support, deaf children can achieve anything other children can do.
  - Q Can deaf people hear everything with their hearing aids or cochlear implants?
    - Hearing aids help focus sound and make it louder, and cochlear implants carry sound directly to the brain. These devices are very helpful for a lot of deaf people, but this doesn't make them a hearing person. It is useful to remember that a deaf person still needs your help in communicating clearly and effectively. Many deaf children and young people wear hearing aids and/or cochlear implants to help them access sound in different ways. A hearing aid is a device that a deaf person wears behind their ear to capture and amplify sound and carry it

directly into the ear. A cochlear implant is surgically implanted into the skull to transmit sound to the brain. An implant does not require the outer ear in order to work.

- Q Can deaf people enjoy music?
  - There are lots of deaf people who love bopping along to music! Some can hear the music very well with help. Some may not hear the music fully and can enjoy the vibrations. There is special technology for some deaf people to help them enjoy music more, like Bluetooth focusing devices and having lyrics added to iPods.
- Q Can all deaf people lipread?
  - Becoming an expert lipreader takes a lot of work. Only about 30% of lip patterns are recognisable, and a lot of it is guesswork. Try saying the words mat, pat and bat in front of a mirror without your voice!
- Q Can deaf people use the phone?
  - Lots of deaf people can talk on the phone. Some have special amplified phones to help them. Others use text messages, textphones and other devices to communicate.
- Q Can deaf people enjoy the television?
  - Deaf people enjoy the TV just as much as other people. Some like to use subtitles, which are typed words that record what people say. Subtitles are also great for loud rooms or when you want to learn a different language.