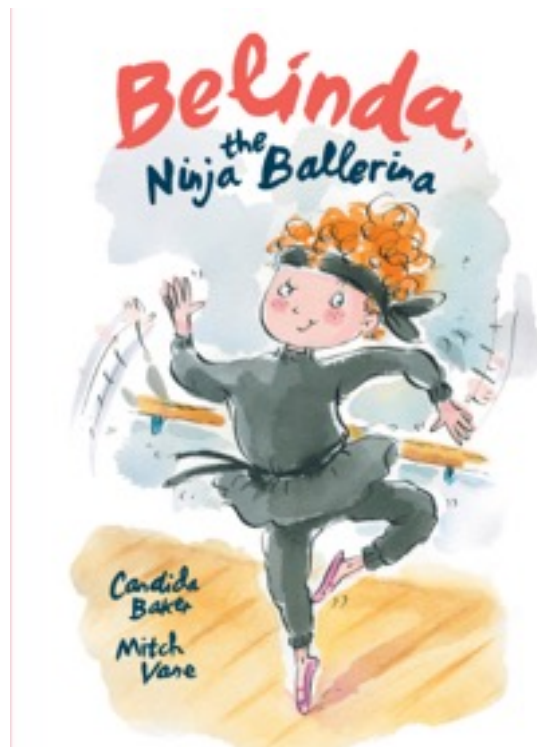


## Belinda, the Ninja Ballerina Teacher's Notes



### Synopsis

It's every little girl's dream to be a ballerina, right? Well, not in the case of Belinda, the Ninja Ballerina. Enrolled in ballet classes against her will, Belinda would take a headstand over a pirouette any day. But nobody will listen to Belinda's protests that she wants to be a ninja, not a ballerina. That is until Belinda stages a one-girl protest and demands her rights. Her teacher has to put her thinking cap on and finally comes up with a solution that will keep *everybody* happy.

### Discussion points and themes:

Being true to oneself is the central theme of *Belinda, the Ninja Ballerina* – at whatever age! Belinda may be little – but she knows what she wants, and she *doesn't* want to be a ballerina.

The book is ideal for older picture book readers, or for younger readers to enjoy the story at a simpler level. The book could be used as an educational resource for teachers, librarians and parents and staff in day care centres.

The book is a wonderfully humorous and lively story about a little girl determined to do things her way. One of the key lessons in the book is also for those caring for children – sometimes children do know best! When children so often feel the pressure to 'fit in', this book allows them to understand the power that is inherent in understanding their own needs.

### **Classroom discussion and activities**

'The Australian Curriculum: English (also) helps students to engage imaginatively and critically with literature to expand the scope of their experience.

### **Post visit/virtual visit English Activities**

Teachers could talk to their classes at several levels about *Belinda, the Ninja Ballerina*. Some simple questions might be:

- 1) What do you immediately think about Belinda's character from the cover illustration?

- 2) Do you think the name of the book and the illustrations go together?
- 3) Have a look at all the illustrations in the book, choose one and explain how it makes you feel
- 4) Why do you think Belinda doesn't want to be a ballerina?
- 5) Do you think it's important to stick up for what you want?
- 6) Girls like ballet. Boys like kick-boxing. Is that always true?

### **The writer's inspiration**

Candida Baker had ballet lessons for several years but was never very good at it – she would much rather have been riding horses. 'Belinda visited me one day when I was on holiday,' she says. 'I was thinking about my daughter and how beautifully she dances when I suddenly got this image of a little girl who really didn't want to dance. The next thing I knew she was doing ninja moves, and that was it – the name Belinda, the Ninja Ballerina popped into my head, and the story just flowed out.' Candida was thrilled when illustrator Mitch Vane perfectly captured the cheeky energy of Belinda.

### **The illustrator's inspiration**

When Mitch Vane first started thinking about the drawings for the manuscript, it seemed to her that one of Belinda's main characteristics is that she is never still, and that proved to be the starting point for the illustrations, which use Belinda's love of ninja moves throughout the book to create a sense of energetic movement.

### **What medium did you use for the Belinda drawings, and why?**

Belinda's character is not what you would call 'quiet', or 'still' – throughout the story she never stops practising her ninja moves – so I

felt the energetic squiggly pen and ink line and splashes of colour wash best reflected her personality and the tone of the story.

**When you first read Belinda how did you see her in your mind?**

I think Candida created a pretty clear picture in my mind of how Belinda should look – the unruly hair that refuses to be told what to do was an absolute must. I still had to tweak a few things to get her just right, but it was most important to portray her determination and passion even more than her particular features. The most difficult thing was deciding on her costume – my initial vision was of her in the traditional ninja outfit, complete with the face scarf – but I had to concede that it could have been a little intimidating for readers, and we didn't want to hide her cheeky face. I love that Belinda has conceded to wearing the required ballet costume but the black scarf around her waist is the symbol of where her true loyalty lies.

**How long did it take to create all the drawings for Belinda?**

The cover took quite a long time to work out, and I think the interior in total it took about six to eight weeks, including the to-ing and fro-ing with initial layouts. For me the character development and page layouts take the longest time – I like to spend a lot of time on how the story progresses over each page and how to keep the visual elements interesting. Once I start the final illustrations, the process is quite fast and the trick is not to labour over them too much. Often I do more than one of the same picture as it stops me from tightening up too much.

## Did you do ballet when you were little?

Poor Mum – she tried. I think I did just under one year of classes before she realised that I was not a natural. I was so tall and clumsy and could never remember any of the dance moves. I think my teacher was secretly relieved when I stopped.



I like it create mood boards and familiarise myself with all the characters in the book by drawing them over and over again  
It's good to see how they all work together as a group and work on individual personalities.



I usually work up each page layout in black and white and in a smaller format which makes it easier to work out where the illustrations will sit in relation to the text and enables the author and the publisher to discuss whether each page is working and what changes might need to be made.



These are very early stage roughs where I am still considering Belinda's look, and what she is wearing. It was also at this stage that we decided that the Ninja outfit shouldn't look too scary or aggressive.

