

Rufus the Numbat

By David Miller

Outline:

Rufus the Numbat is a glimpse into the life of a little numbat in a big town. As he passes through town, he inadvertently wreaks havoc, disrupting the human inhabitants. Unable to find the termites, songbirds and starlight of his natural habitat among the hustle and bustle of the town, Rufus escapes back to his home in the bush.

The story uses limited language and lush detailed papercraft illustrations to explain the story of the little lost numbat. It gives children an insight into the plight of native species that are often being forced into human habitats on account of losing their own and shows, from a unique perspective, just why it is so important that these species' habitats are conserved for the benefit of both parties.

The key figure in the book, Rufus, is of course a numbat, an endangered native Australian animal found in Western Australia, of which it is also an emblem for. They are insectivores, but they do not eat ants, preferring termites which they can lick up with their long sticky tongues. The termites also provide numbats with enough water in their diet that they do not need to drink. Their habitats comprise of Eucalypt woodlands, where fallen trees and hollowed logs can provide shelter. They are threatened primarily by predation, cats and foxes finding them tasty treats, and habitat clearing which has been forcing them into towns, such as what happens in *Rufus the Numbat*.

Rufus the Numbat is aimed towards children aged 4-6 but can also be used as an excellent interactive tool for discussing endangered species and conservation issues with older age groups.

The author:

David Miller started out writing and illustrating books for his own children, having adopted a love for art from his own father who was a sculptor. Studying advertising and art, David then went on to illustrate his first book *Boo to a Goose* by Mem Fox.

Since then he had been writing and illustrating his own books, such as *Big and Me*, as well as illustrating for many other authors. Using papercrafts and paper sculpture to create the majority of his illustrations, David has also published two 'how to' books for those interested in the craft.

Discussion Questions:

What is a numbat? Where do they live?

Numbats are an endangered species. What does this mean?

What other animals can you think of that are endangered?

What can we do to help animals like Rufus who are endangered species?

Rufus is a native Australian animal. What does this mean?

What other animals can you think of that are native to Australia?

Why is it important to help protect these animals?

Why do you think Rufus caused so much trouble in town?

Do you think you have ever caused trouble in an animal's home like Rufus did in the town?

What are some of the differences between the town and the bush that Rufus escapes to?

How do you think a wild animal might survive in a town? How is this different from surviving in the bush?

What should you do if you ever see or find a bush animal trying to live in town?

Why can't Rufus see the stars when he's in the town? Can you see the stars where you live?

The illustrations in this book are mostly done using papercraft. What is papercraft? How is it made? How is it different from other styles you've seen like drawing and painting?

Did you like that there were more pictures than words in *Rufus the Numbat*? Why do you think the author did this?

Workbook Questions:

For younger students—

Draw a picture of Rufus and write three things you learnt about him in the book.

List any other Australian animals that you know. Are any of these animals endangered too?

Describe your own home and the things you need and like about it that keep you safe.

For older students—

Write a short story about another adventure that Rufus could have.

Research more information about numbats, either online or in the library (Suggestions: Where are their habitats located? What is their life expectancy? How many are left in the wild?)

Arts and craft activities:

Make your own numbat habitat: Collect leaves, twigs, bark etc. from around the playground and construct your own miniature numbat habitat using a shoebox or an ice cream container. Think about what a numbat might need for food and safety, and how you might include those things in your design.

Rufus the Numbat is illustrated using papercraft. Create your own Rufus by cutting a numbat shape out of brown paper. You can give Rufus his textured fur by cutting dark brown and cream coloured paper into strips. Make small cuts all along one edge of each of these strips then glue these strips onto your numbat cut-out, alternating colours for a messy, furry effect.

Rufus the Numbat is told mainly through pictures. Tell your own story using only pictures by dividing a sheet of A3 paper into 8 boxes and drawing a picture in each box. Don't forget to give your story a beginning, middle and an end. When you're finished, swap your story with the person sitting next to you and see if they can read the story you're trying to tell.

Jac and Shannon