



**RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA
READING GUIDES**

Black Skin, White Cow by Pablo Bernasconi

Random House Australia, May 2004
RRP \$14.95, Paperback 200 x 200 mm
ISBN 1740519841
Reading Level: Picture book for all ages

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SYNOPSIS

When one proud cow tries to separate herself from the herd by brushing off her spots, a comedy of mistaken identity follows. When 'white as a cloud', the cow is befriended by a sheep. When she paints herself 'the colour of the night', the cow is courted by a pig to join the pigsty. It's only when she returns to the glory of black and white that the cow realises the many hues of her inner-self, reminding the reader that being comfortable in your own hide is what really matters around the farm.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Writing/illustrating style

Pablo's wit and humour is conveyed through very simple, well-balanced sentences making for a poignant lesson on being yourself. His sweet, endearing tone reveals the coquettish cow's beaming pride, bellows of regret and final contentment. This quietly wise tale complements the quirky, original illustrations on the opposing pages. Combining a variety of textures, vivid colours and tiled backgrounds, Pablo's collage-inspired method makes for fascinating viewing. The attention to detail in the expressions of the animals, the surreal proportions and incorporation of human postures add an additional layer of artistry – and hilarity – to the book.

Most importantly, Pablo highlights the importance of finding joy in being yourself and examines the issue from a fresh new perspective with energetic, original illustrations, while refraining from loud moralising.

Author/illustrator background & motivation

Pablo Bernasconi was born in Buenos Aires in August, 1973. He graduated from the Universidad de Buenos Aires as a graphic designer, where he later taught design for over six years. In 1998, he began work at *Clarín Newspaper* as an illustrator and designer, producing covers for over 150 editions. His work has been published in magazines and newspapers around the world, including *The Times* and *Rolling Stone*, and he regularly works for clients in Germany, USA, England, Australia and Spain. Pablo has twice won the Society of News Design award for best individual art and illustration portfolio and cover. He lives in Rio Negro, Argentina.

Pablo wrote the book to reflect his value that believing in yourself, finding the courage to be comfortable with who you are and appreciating the differences in others makes the world a better place. He feels that cows, in particular, are seldom admired for their individuality. 'We see cows, but not A cow, we never talk about ONE cow, because all look the same, metaphorically speaking.' The result of such odd musings is the coquettish cow on a journey of self-discovery.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

The simplicity of the story and the humorous illustrations are perfect for reading aloud in a classroom. The text on one side of the spread against a white background and the vivid illustrations on the other present an uncomplicated narrative that is easy for beginner-readers to follow. Some questions for discussion include:

- Why does the cow want to get rid of her spots? Why would she want to change the way she looks?
- The artist uses many materials to make his collage pictures. Make your own farmyard collage with paper, markers, string, fabrics, etc.
- What things are you good at that make you uniquely special? Can you paint pictures, run fast or are you good at helping Mum and Dad around the house?
- The animals have many funny expressions, like the cow after she brushes off her spots. Go through the book and tell how these faces show what the animals feel on the inside?