



Mrs Armitage and THE BIG WAVE; Mr Nodd's Ark

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Media type:

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BfK Rating:

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If you have been waiting for a sequel to **Mrs Armitage on Wheels**, it has been a long wait: it is ten years since she created the ultimate customised bike. But she is a svelte as ever, as she and Breakspear, her dog, carry their surfboard down the crowded beach to catch the big wave. And, while they are treading water, why not make themselves more comfortable with an inflatable desert island, a parasol and a sun shade, a selection of light snacks, and (much, much) more?

This is a charming, sunny, seaside variation on the original theme: a wry, joyous celebration of triumphant eccentricity. Blake can create the swell, the colours, even the very feel of salt water, apparently as effortlessly as he sketches every expression flickering across the faces of his characters, and depicts the glorious absurdity of Mrs Armitage's growing flotilla of possessions.

There is no greater praise than to say it is as good, if not better, than **Mrs Armitage on Wheels**. It will be loved by everyone under 8 years old and anyone else who loves gentle humour and watching a great illustrator work his magic.

Blake's most famous collaboration is with Roald Dahl. He has an even longer standing partnership with John Yeoman. **Mr Nodd's Ark** is one of Yeoman's best tales. Mr Nodd is a d-i-y enthusiast in wood who realises his greatest project in the creation of a boat so large that he cannot get it out of his garden. Yeoman and Blake deliver this bizarre story in such a deadpan fashion that we are ready to accept Mr Nodd's belief that he is a second Noah.

There is no flood, of course: and the duck sent out to find an olive branch comes back with a pair of damp tights blown off next door's washing line. Still, everyone has so much fun locked up in the ark that they decide to use it for a weekly children's disco.

Words and pictures complement each other perfectly. Blake picks up jokes from the text and runs on with them - the poor unfortunate toddler has to stagger about in his wooden romper suit for the length of the book. A lot of fun for infant and lower juniors, who already may be aware of Noah.

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