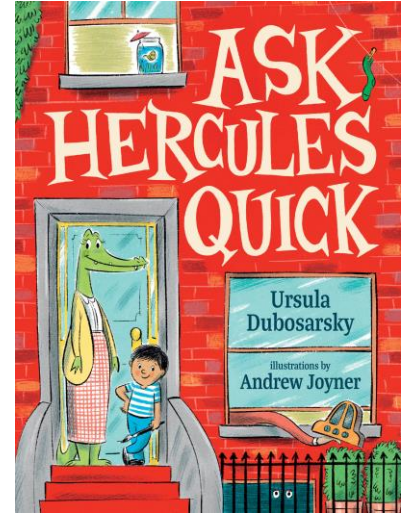


Ask Hercules Quick

By Ursula Dubosarsky,
illustrated by Andrew Joyner



October 2019 ISBN 9781760296827
Hardcover
Recommended for 6-9-year-olds

Summary

Hercules Quick is an ordinary boy who lives in an ordinary red apartment block with his Aunt Alligator and the usual run-of-the-mill neighbours including: an octopus called Professor Calamari; a large extended family of hairy elks; the mysterious and tiny Queen Claude, who lives silently in the dark cellar; and the turtle brothers, Mike and Herbert, who live on the roof.

When Hercules falls in love with a magic box he sees in a shop window, he decides to do some odd jobs to earn the money he needs to afford his heart's desire. What follows is a series of unusual tasks with a most unexpected outcome.



Ursula Dubosarsky uses simple, declarative sentences in the third person past tense to tell what at first seems like a conventional story about a boy doing odd jobs to save money. But there is absolutely nothing conventional about this story or the truly surreal cast of neighbours whose list of tasks to be undertaken are bizarre and often hilarious. From the family of card-playing elks in the apartment above who need a spot of babysitting done to the pancake-eating radio-loving octopus below who asks Hercules to shower passers-by with rose petals, this story is full of surprises that will delight readers of all ages.

Andrew Joyner's madcap, Dr Seuss-style characters perfectly complement and extend the story.

Use in the curriculum

Sharing or projecting the illustrated pages of *Ask Hercules Quick* makes for an enjoyable class read-aloud. In private reading, the heavily illustrated text and large font size assist developing readers. Design elements of chapter books are Contents page and chapter headings all occurring on RHS pages with an illustration that covers the LHS and RHS double-page spread. There is also some endmatter in the form of biographies of the author and illustrator.

Links can be made to the role of leisure and work in our lives; living in a community; the nature of families; and animals. The central plot device is around pocket money and links to counting, saving, patience, initiative and kindness. Another theme is around magic – Hercules decides that Sylvie's development from tadpole to frog is 'real magic'. What other 'magic moments' occur in nature?

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Themes

- humour
- animals
- family
- work
- pocket money
- community
- hobbies

Discussion questions

1) Before reading *Ask Hercules Quick*, read to your class the back-cover blurb, then examine the front cover.

- What sort of stories do you think these are going to be? Happy or sad? Funny or serious? Realistic or fantasy stories?
- Which of the characters on the cover do you think is Hercules Quick, and why do you think that?
- Who do you think is the character standing next to him?
- Can you find some clues to who or what Hercules' neighbours might be?

2) Comprehension Questions:

1. Hercules Quick lives in a house, along with lots of animals. What sort of animals live in the apartment above Hercules? What sort of animal lives in the apartment below him? What sort of animal lives with Hercules?
2. Why does Hercules want to earn money?
3. Name one of the jobs that Hercules does to earn money.
4. Other than money, what does Professor Calamari give him?
5. Where does Hercules take Baby Elk when he is looking after him?
6. Which of Hercules' neighbours is mysterious and a little unfriendly?
7. What happened to the green sock that Mike left in the park?
8. How much money has Hercules earned by the end of the story?
9. What sort of creature does Sylvie become at the end of the story? [*Hint: she is a tadpole at the start.*]
10. Why does Hercules think Sylvie's transformation is 'real' magic?

3) Look at the illustration of Hercules Quick on page 29.

- Describe how you think he is feeling from what you can see in the picture.
- What happened in the story to make him feel this way?

4a) Sometimes the way words are shown on a page help tell the story. Turn to page 26 and explain how the words *bounce*, and *up* and *down* are presented on the page to reflect what is happening on the seesaw.

b) Now turn to page 32 and explain how the way the words *UNBELIEVABLY URGENT* stand out as different on the page, and why.

5) Have you heard of the saying 'a picture tells a thousand words'? That is a way of saying that one picture can tell us what lots and lots of words would take. Look at the last double-page spread in the story and explain, in your own words, what is going on here.

6) Retell the story as if you were Hercules Quick.

- Explain which job you found the strangest and why?

- Now explain which neighbour is your favourite and why?
- 7) If Hercules Quick came to your door what is the weirdest task you can think of to give him?
 - 8) Do you think that Aunt Alligator should have bought Hercules Quick the magic box as soon as he saw it? Why/Why not?
 - 9) What things, other than earning money, did Hercules get from working with his neighbours?
 - 10) What sort of jobs do you think you could do to earn money?

The author's motivation

'I wanted to write a story about a child living in an apartment block and I was inspired by a song by French singer Renaud, "Dans mon HLM", set in a big apartment block.

'I was also inspired by an interview I heard with the American actress Lily Tomlin about her childhood in an apartment block and the characters she befriended in all the different apartments.

'Then I met a little boy at a writers' festival whose surname was "Quick". It made me laugh and Hercules Quick was born. I don't know why I made everyone in the apartment block animals – perhaps it's that sense of uniqueness that a child has inside, of being surrounded by strange creatures, mainly adults.

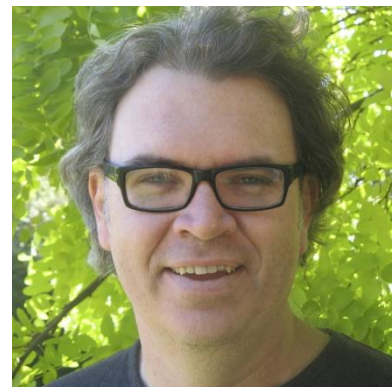
'I was always saving money for things when I was a child, but never had the patience to save up enough for anything – short-term desires always got in the way! But it didn't matter. I started a little business when I was eleven. I put a notice in the newsagent window saying I would look after people's pets in their homes when they went away on holidays. I got quite a few jobs out of it – feeding five German Shepherds and giving them their daily medicine; looking after three very needy Siamese cats who followed me home after I fed them; and walking a horse called Noble.'

— Ursula Dubosarsky

About the creators



Ursula Dubosarsky was born and grew up in Sydney in a family of writers and wanted to be a writer from the age of six. She is now the author of 50 books for children and young adults and her work is published all over the world. She has won several national literary awards, including the Victorian, Queensland and South Australian state awards for literature, and has also won the NSW Premier's Literary Award a record five times. Internationally she has been nominated for both the Hans Christian Andersen and Astrid Lindgren awards. She has a PhD in English literature and currently lives in Sydney.



Andrew Joyner is a highly acclaimed picture book creator who has illustrated many of Ursula's picture book texts with great success. Together they have been shortlisted and won many awards, including CBCA awards and children's choice awards.