

Road Trip Teachers Notes

Written by Danny Parker and Illustrated by
Nathaniel Eckstrom

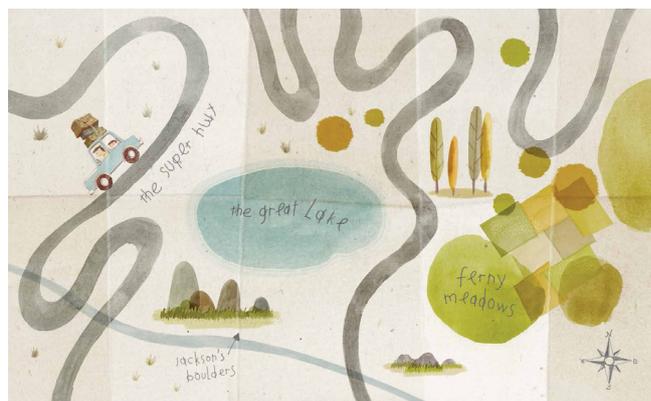
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SYNOPSIS

The only thing worse than a long and boring road trip is driving with someone who loves long and boring road trips. Even when that someone is your dad.

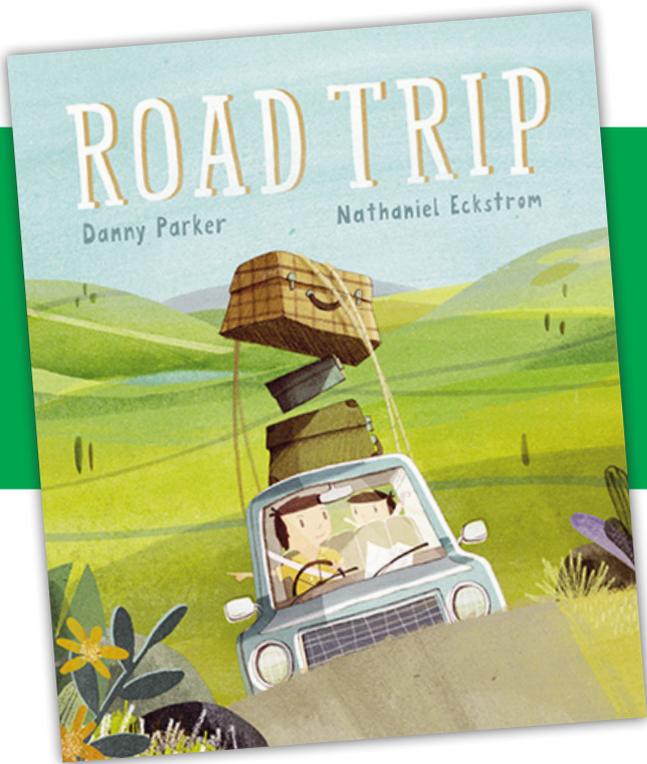
*But when will we get there?
It's just a disaster ...
Couldn't we go just a little bit faster?*

A hilarious story about a child who becomes increasingly exasperated by his father's inclination to take it slow.



THEMES

This narrative describes a scenario familiar to most readers: the dilemma of how to endure long road-trips, and the different degrees of travel-endurance experienced by different generations. It follows a theme that has been explored many times before, from *The Simpsons* to Alison Lester to Jack Kerouac, but Danny Parker and Nathaniel Eckstrom highlight a fresh aspect of the theme: the concept of **time** and **space**, and the more difficult concept of the size, length and duration of specific segments of time. The child wants to know how long an hour will last, presumably because he has been told the car trip will take an hour, and the dad sets out to try and explain the duration of an hour by listing the kinds of events that might normally fill an hour. The child remains unconvinced, assuming that an hour could feasibly take all day, indicative of a child's conflation of time and space, and that the concepts of 'an hour', 'far away' and 'forever' amount to the same thing.



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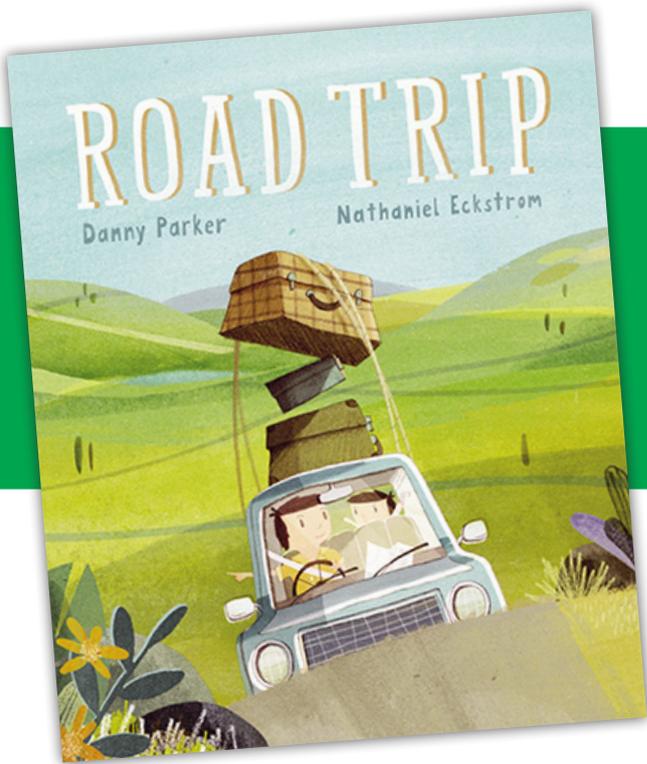
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WRITING STYLE

Road Trip is a deceptively simple text. It is in the form of a rhyming verse **dialogue** between a father and child who are trying to agree on how long it takes for an hour to pass. It is written in **direct speech**, without **dialogue tags** or **literary description**, but within the dialogue there is description, commentary and review, with both characters employing language to persuade, instruct, argue and inform. The dialogue begins in *media res*, with the reader is expected to fill in missing preliminary questions. This allows the narrative to begin with a powerful statement of the theme. *Road Trip* is an unusual text in that nothing actually happens in terms of a sequence of actions and reactions. Rather, the dialogue is a series of descriptions (stories within stories) intended to inform, interposed by arguments intended to persuade. Although there is no distinct sequence of events, there is a distinct arc of emotional **orientation**, emotional **complication** and emotional **resolution**.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

The illustrator of *Road Trip* is faced with an immediate conundrum: the text provides no setting, no character description and no action. The text is furthermore largely comprised of imaginary scenarios that have no direct link to the main action (which is principally two characters sitting in a car). This means the illustrator must start from scratch to create the world in which the dialogue between these two characters takes place. Nathaniel Eckstrom combines a series of visual flashbacks with the narrative present, and that reflects the back-and-forth interchange of the dialogue. The narrative present is dominated by double-page representations of extreme landscapes through which the characters travel, and that exaggerate the sense of time and distance with which the child is grappling. The flashbacks, conversely, are reassuring single-page or half-page tableaux showing happy everyday scenarios that contrast with the increasing frustration of the road trip itself.



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AUTHOR BACKGROUND

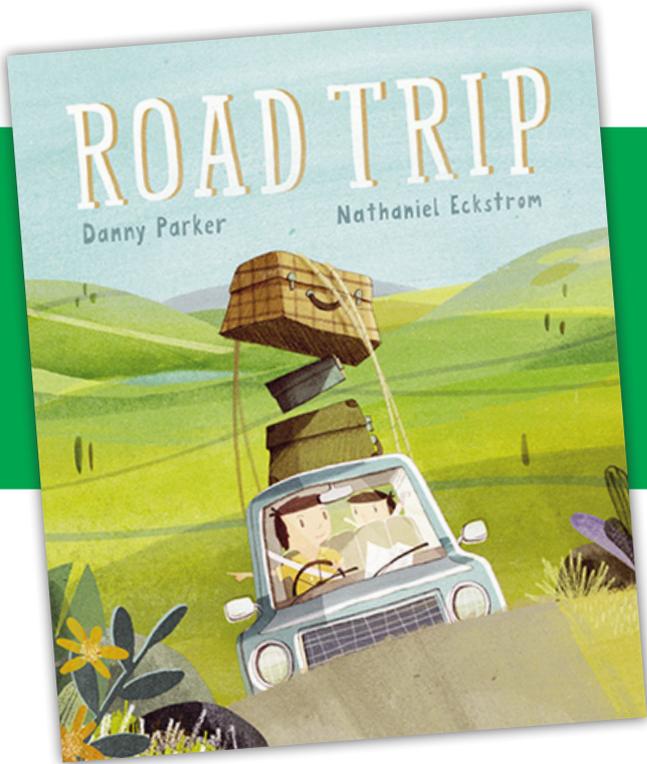
In another life Danny Parker worked as a nurse, an actor and an undertaker before settling into work as a drama teacher. He is currently the Drama Director at Perth College, in WA. A chance meeting with fellow WA-based illustrator and author, Matt Ottley, led to Danny's first picture book *Tree* in 2012. Their second collaboration, *Parachute*, was shortlisted for CBCA's 2014 Picture Book of the Year award.

Proven as an immensely talented author, and with an imagination to rival any five-year-old, Danny's 2015 early reader series *Lola's Toy Box* sees him delve into the world of imaginative play. Not one to be idle, Danny authored 3 more picture book titles in 2015-2016. *Perfect* (2015, CBCA Honour Book for Early Childhood Book of the Year) and *Molly & Mae* (2016) with award-winning illustrator Freya Blackwood. *Crusts* (2016), was illustrated by the award-winning – and Danny's original collaborator – Matt Ottley.

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Nathaniel Eckstrom is an Illustrator based in Sydney, Australia. He has worked on a number of children's picture books including *The Ugly Duckling*, *Me and Moo* and the *Ricker Racker Club*. Nathaniel has also illustrated for a number of commercial clients including Cadbury, Nestle, ABC, SBS and King Island Dairy.





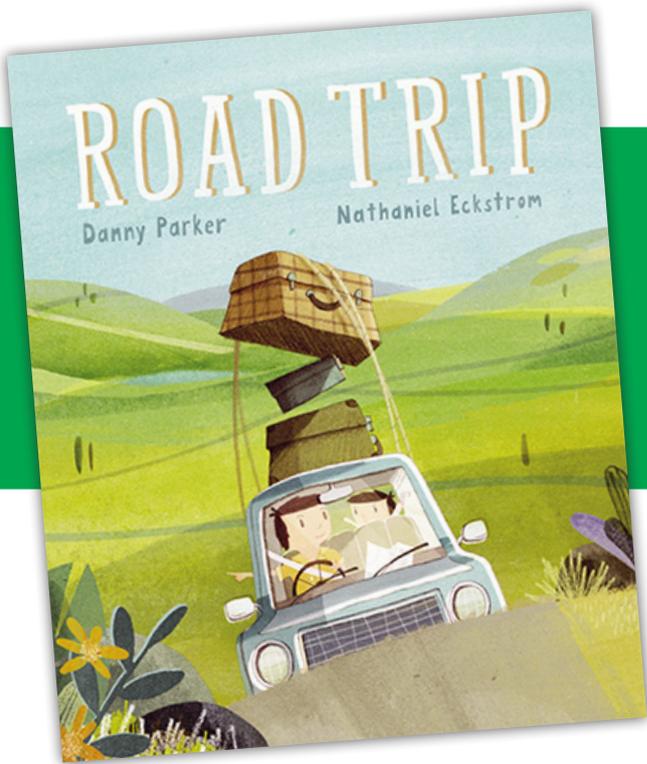
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STUDY NOTES

1. Road Trip is a sophisticated text that employs traditional text-types and plot strategies at the same time as appearing to be a simple dialogue. Analyse the narrative in terms of the child character's emotional arc, demonstrating how **orientation**, a series of **complications** and a **resolution** are portrayed in the text. What is the boy's main goal, and what main complications does the boy face in achieving this goal?
2. How might the emotional narrative-arc be plotted in a line graph? How effectively does this emotional narrative replace the arc usually provided by an action-driven plot?
3. The textual narrative begins at a point in the narrative where it is clear the characters have already covered some conversational ground. What questions does the reader need to assume the boy has already asked? How effectively does the father appear to have answered the child's pre-narrative questions? What does this suggest about the ways that children and adults think about the same things?
4. Describe some of the visual strategies Nathaniel Eckstrom employs to emphasise the time-space conundrum faced by the child character in *Road Trip*. Compare and contrast the landscape pages with the flashback episodes, and consider elements such as proportion, perspective, contrast and point of view.
5. What typesetting strategies are used to differentiate the dialogue of the boy and his father? How effective is this in clarifying the narrative? In what ways do typesetting choices replace grammatical elements in the textual narrative?



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ACTIVITIES

- Talk to your class about the concepts of 'an hour', 'far away' and 'forever' and ask them to name examples of each. What's their favourite way to pass an hour?
- Using those examples, have your class write and perform their own rhyming verse dialogue - the sillier the better!
- *Road Trip* is a timely reminder to parents and children alike to slow down and enjoy the 'ride' of life. With that in mind, have your class play a game or do an activity very quickly, and then very, very slowly, and ask them how they felt during both.



A picnic.

cake making.



'But when will
we get there?'

It's just a
disaster ...

Couldn't we
go just a little
bit faster?'



'It's building sandcastles
with one special friend.



then kicking them over
and starting again.