

**L533: Library Materials for Children and Young Adults
Fall, 2002
Abbie Anderson**

**Assignment:
Book Talk Script
(5-7-minute presentation)**

**Theme:
The Books of Dick King-Smith**

Intended audience:
Fourth-grade classroom.

Books used:

Babe: The Gallant Pig. Illustrated By Mary Rayner. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1985. Originally published in Great Britain in 1983 as The Sheep-Pig.

Dick King-Smith's Animal Friends: Thirty-one True Life Stories. Illustrated by Anita Jeram. Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1996.

Harry's Mad. Pictures by Jill Bennett. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987. Originally published in Great Britain in 1984.

Script:

Hello! My name is Abbie Anderson, and I'd like to thank your teacher for inviting me to come and tell the fourth-grade class about some great books.

Today I'm going to talk about books by one author, Dick King-Smith. Dick King-Smith is from England, and he has written a *lot* of books. You might have read some of them when you were smaller, like his stories about a very special little girl named Sophie; and you might have seen some of his picture books about animals. What you might not know, though, is that he wrote a book that got turned into one of the very best movies you'll ever see about farm animals, and that's *Babe*—the story of a very brave, very determined, very polite little pig who becomes a champion herder of sheep just by asking them nicely (well, that, and some hard work, and some dangerous adventures). The book is called Babe: The Gallant Pig, and you can find it in your library.

Dick King-Smith was a farmer for twenty years, so he really knows a lot about a lot of different kinds of animals, how clever they are in different ways and how silly they can be, and all the different ways they can get into trouble. Then he was the host of a children's show on TV, where he got to meet even *more* animals, so he knows a lot about what's fun and what's interesting. The combination makes him an expert at writing exciting stories, and makes him really good at talking about all the things he knows in a way that is never boring. He writes for little kids, and he writes for big kids, and you could spend the next several years reading books by Dick King-Smith. Make friends with this author, and you'll never be able to say you can't find anything good to read.

The first book I'd like to talk about is a picture book called Dick King-Smith's Animal Friends: Thirty-one True Life Stories, with illustrations by Anita Jeram. In this book, the author doesn't make anything up: he just tells real stories about animals he really knew, from when he was a little boy all the way up until when he was writing this book. He tells one story about a bull he once owned, by the name of Ben. A bull is a male cow, and Mr. King-Smith called this bull Lazy Ben. Ben was so big and so strong that he just never bothered to go around anything. He never liked to take any extra trouble, any more than he had to. One day in the cowshed, Ben managed to get out of his collar, and instead of walking right through any of the three open doors to the shed—he just pushed his way right through the nearest wall! (open to p. 39 for picture).

Another time, on his TV show, Dick King-Smith met an Indian python named Eric. A python is a snake that likes to squeeze its prey, and it is very strong. Eric was a young python, and not very big yet—he was only ten feet long, and only about as thick around as a grown man's thigh. Mr. King-Smith really enjoyed meeting Eric and stroking his warm, dry skin, with the strong muscles underneath—until Eric got bored while he was wrapped around Mr. King-Smith's neck, and started squeezing! (turn to pp. 80-81) Here you can see Mr. King-Smith hastily handing Eric back to his trainer!

One of the many stories that Dick King-Smith made up is called Harry's Mad. It's not about a boy named Harry who was angry, but about a parrot named Madison—Mad, for short—who was owned by a boy named Harry.

Actually, Harry, who lived in London, inherited Mad from his great-uncle George in America. Harry was a kid with a great imagination, the kind of kid who likes to jump down as many stairs as he can in one jump on his way down to breakfast, and the kind who goes stomping around the house pretending to be a pirate when he finds out he has inherited a parrot (*arr, Matey!*). Madison, though, is not just any parrot: he is an African Gray Parrot, which are some of the smartest birds around, famous for how well they can talk. And Madison—or Mad, as he prefers to be called—is not just any African Gray Parrot, either: he can really, truly talk, and he loves nothing better than the art of conversation (unless, perhaps, it's a game of chess, or helping out in the garden, or teaching Harry's mother to bake American-style fudgy brownies).

Mad is an especially good mimic, and has fun answering the phone in Harry's father's voice—and scaring the family cat with his best movie gangster impression. Mad is smart, no doubt, but he's still just a nine-inch tall bird, small enough to be grabbed and thrown into a bag when he startles a burglar in the house one day. You can only begin to imagine what happens to Mad as he makes his escape and tries to get back to Harry—where yet another surprise awaits him.

Dick King-Smith has written lots more books that are just as exciting and funny as Harry's Mad, and just as interesting as Dick King-Smith's Animal Friends. Some of them are mostly about animals; some of them are about people who love animals; some of them are about kids, and some of them are about grownups; one of them is about a girl who meets a merman, and another

one is about a boy and a very special doll. All of these and more are waiting for you in the library! And just in case you want a handy list, I've got these bookmarks to pass out to you that include the books I talked about today, plus a few others to get you started. Thank you!

Note: Reading this script aloud I found it timed at just about five minutes. However, in performing from memory, and allowing for stammers and paraphrasing, I discovered I needed to omit some details in order to bring it in at around six minutes.