

ET Books

Ethics 101

Conversations to have with your kids

Michael Parker

Jane Curry Publishing

ISBN: 9780987227515

RR \$24.95

Available 1st September 2012 through New South Books

Michael Parker is Deputy Headmaster and Head of the Senior School at Cranbrook School in Sydney. He has a Masters Degree in teaching philosophy to children and has written six textbooks and two young adult novels.

If you do as this reviewer did, pick the book up and turn it over to read the publisher's blurb on the back, you will be slightly taken aback to find that there is another front cover... and it's on upside down. The title now reads as *Ethics 101 Conversations to have with your parents* and there's an introduction headed "Not to be read by anyone over the age of 18 years."

The kids' intro suggests that the book is actually a plot to get parents thinking about ethics because they think they have got right and wrong all neatly sorted out, which of course, they haven't. So it's up to siblings to set mum and dad straight by posing hard to answer questions, thereby provoking debate, head scratching and gasps for air. It's nicely subversive.

The introduction at the parents' end of the book asks "Would you rather your child was smart or good?" Parker poses the big questions:



"Where do children get their values?" and "What values are worthwhile?" He explores the value of family discussion at home and includes a useful paragraph about the present religion vs. ethics class controversy in NSW state schools (he would like both ethics and religion classes). However, 100,000 children currently take the ethics option so a significant number of families don't want their offspring to be exposed to religious teaching at school.

There are several pages of suggestions and tips on how to start the conversations going, and keep them on track. Of the 101 topics, 81

are ethical dilemmas; there are 10 thinking-skills questions; and in the third category "what famous ethicists and philosophers have thought in the past" – another 10.

Parker urges parents to ask more questions; to play Devil's advocate; to present opposite positions; to create a 'shades of grey' category; and so on. It's all good stuff... particularly the advice in the 'Conversations with the ethically challenged child.'

Conversations that many parents will find worth having include the first one: "Music downloads and stealing." There would be few parents that have not been confronted with this one. "Is stealing ever OK?" outlines a Robin Hood scenario about stealing from Mercedes Benz and BMWs parked in the forest and giving the proceeds to the Red Cross. And so it goes on – one challenge after another... Cheating at school; Should we eat meat? Euthanasia; Medical ethics – testing drugs on prisoners; and there are still another 95 to talk through.

Obsessive parents might decide to start with the first conversation and work doggedly through to the last – by which time many fairly sane teens will be ready to run away from home, or simply not turn up at dinnertime. Other more relaxed parents will find it useful to have close to hand when a controversy erupts over dinner. Either way, this is an excellent work and well worth an investment of \$24.95; and by the way, all royalties and profits on book sales will go the Cranbrook School Indigenous Scholarship Fund. **ET**

Primary Children's Book Week fundraiser

The 2012 National Children's Book Week, will run from 18th to 24th August. School wear supplier Stubbies School Wear and not-for-profit Room To Read have backed the fundraiser this year with the objective of raising \$20,000 to build a school library in Cambodia. Stubbies has pledged \$10,000 towards the project.

The theme is 'Champions Read'. For a charitable twist, students can bring in a gold coin and put a local language book in a Cambodian student's hands and help build a library.

Since 2002, Room to Read has made an enormous impact on improving literacy in Cambodia, setting up 1397 libraries and publishing 121 local language books. Cambodia is one of 10 developing countries in Asia and Africa where the



organisation is promoting literacy and gender equality through education. Founded in 2000, it has established more than 13,000 libraries and donated over 11 million books.

Tristan Bancks, Children's Author and Room to Read Ambassador said: "For inspiration, I encourage students and teachers to watch the 3-minute World Change Challenge video that

I filmed with kids at Ocean Shores Public School. It's at www.stubbieschoolwear.com.au. I have seen schools do 'Book Busking' or 'Embarrass Your Teacher' or 'Lattes for Literacy' or 'Sponsored Silence' or 'Drop Everything and Read'. There are lots of fun, bookish ways to get involved."

The school and students that raise the most money will win a reading and writing workshop with Tristan Bancks. Every student in the winning class will receive a copy of his latest book *My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up* and a 40 per cent discount voucher to use for Stubbies Schoolwear online purchases.

The fundraiser closes on 31st August 2012. Winners will be announced on Monday, 10th September. Primary school classes and individual students can register at: www.stubbieschoolwear.com.au