



# Dick Bruna

Article Author:

[Tony Bradman](#) [1]

[28](#) [2]

Article Category:

Other Articles

Byline:

'I DO MY BOOKS FOR THE FUN OF CHILDREN'. **Dick Bruna** talks to **Tony Bradman**.

'I DO MY BOOKS FOR THE FUN OF CHILDREN'

**Dick Bruna** talks to **Tony Bradman**

<!--break-->

**I know it's quite irrational but I somehow expected Dick Bruna to look like Miffy - you know, round face, clean lines, bold colours, big smile ... When we met I saw a Dutchman in his mid fifties or thereabouts. He wasn't wearing a triangular skirt, and his tweedy suit wasn't exactly a combination of bold, primary colours. But he's not a big man, and I could see something of his characters in the gentle eyes and the big smile that hid under his greying, handlebar moustache.**

It was easy to see where the Bruna books got their warm, friendly style, because that's exactly what Dick Bruna seems to be. He also appears to be clued in to what children like; since his first book was published in the 1950s, around 15 million copies of his books have been sold and he is now read in 20 languages, including Japanese. The Bruna empire has also expanded from books into calendars, wall friezes, cut-out kits, posters, and now the **Playboxes**, of which there are four - Blue, Green, Brown and Red. These contain educational games and materials, and are bound to prove popular despite a fairly steep price tag of £9.95.

But behind all the commercial activity lies a very simple philosophy, which he explained to me in endearingly Dutch-flavoured English. 'I do my books for the fun of children,' he said. 'They're for children to play with. I'm not a psychologist, so I don't do books as teaching materials. It's good if they can be used in that way, but I see it as nice pictures, first of all. I'm working as an illustrator and my work is there to be enjoyed by children.'

Simplification is also a key concept in Dick Bruna's work. As a young illustrator he was interested in the work of artists like Picasso and Matisse, and his first book (**The Apple**, now out of print) was done as a collage. He admits now that it was too complicated. 'It was also too large for children's small hands. So from then on I aimed at simplicity. I also made the books small for small hands, and made them square because it's the simplest shape of all.' His method of work even now is often to start with quite detailed sketches - perhaps of animals in the zoo, for example - and then to simplify them down until he reaches a point where he's satisfied with them.

'I like it simple because that means there's room for a child's imagination to work. I use simple lines, simple colour, simple words. In the original Dutch, many of the texts to my book are in rhymes, which is good for children. They pick it up more quickly, it belongs to them more. I'm sorry that they can't be in rhymes in English.'

He has three children, and Miffy was in fact a little woollen rabbit that they used to play with, and it was his daughter who asked him to do a book about the family's spaniel, a book which introduced the character of Snuffy. He's not

averse even now to accepting suggestions for new book ideas. The Playboxes were suggested to him by his Japanese publishers, and he's done several books for worthy causes. His most recent is **Blue Boat**, a book specially written to help children come to terms with deafness, an idea which came to him from doctors and staff at The Royal Newcastle Infirmary.

There are still over 40 Bruna titles in print, and he seems set to add two new titles a year or more. Apart from **Blue Boat**, other titles recently from Methuen have been **Miffy's Bicycle**, **Farmer John** and **I Know About Shapes**. In Utrecht where he lives, his life seems to centre round doing books for the very young.

'I'm very glad about it, very happy. I just continue and try to make each new book as good as it can be. It's just as difficult as ever. I sometimes go out to see children at schools and libraries, but most of the time I'm just in my studio, working on my own. All I really want to do is just to continue what I'm doing.'

**Dick Bruna's many books and related materials** are published by Methuen.

**Playboxes** £9.95 each

**Red**

0 416 43960 8

**Brown**

0 416 43970 5

**Blue**

0 416 43980 2

**Green**

0 416 43990 X

**Blue Coat** (with Peter Jones) 0 416 27640 7, £3.50

**Miffy's Bicycle** 0 416 44150 5, £1.50

**Farmer John** 0 416 44140 8, £1.50

**I Know About Shapes** 0 416 44130 0, £1.50

Also, published in July:

**The Lifeboat**

0 416 50630 5, £1.50

**Miffy at School**

0 416 50640 2, £1.50

**I Can Make Music**

0 416 50650 X, £1.50

**Source URL (retrieved on Aug '20):** <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/28/childrens-books/articles/other-articles/dick-bruna>

**Links:**

[1] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/tony-bradman>

[2] <http://mail.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/28>