

Is Bear Here?

TEACHERS NOTES

Written and illustrated by Jonathan Bentley

Published by Little Hare in June 2017

SYNOPSIS

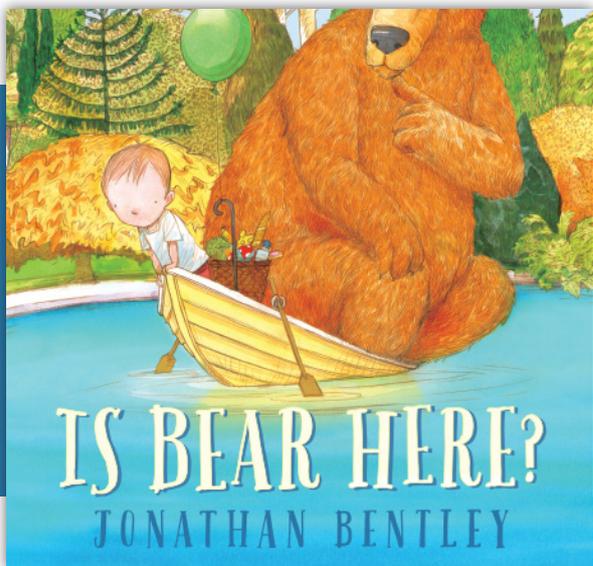
When you search long and hard for a beloved bear, you may be surprised by what turns up.

THEMES

Key theme words: dramatic irony; double dramatic irony; seeing and not-seeing; apparent and actual; seek and find; bears.

Is Bear Here? is a companion title to Jonathan Bentley's earlier book, *Where Is Bear?* (2016), and is also deceptively simple – but perhaps even more deceptive! Once again, the story is predicated on double dramatic irony, teasing the reader into believing the boy is searching for his immensely obvious and large bear-friend, Theodore. Thinking he has left the bear behind in town, the boy retraces his steps through the market, the museum and the park, across the lake and past the shops, before realising the bear has been lost forever. Readers, of course, can see a large bear in each of these places, and would rightly wonder why the boy has not also noticed it.

Once again, the twist to this story is twofold. When the boy finds a toy bear in his shopping cart, we realise the boy was looking for the toy bear, not for Theodore. But then comes a second twist: the toy bear belongs to Theodore. And Theodore had been looking for the red-and-white package the boy tosses out of his shopping cart, which he reaches for joyfully and hands to the boy. Inside the package is yet another toy bear, a gift for the little boy. And now there are three bears!



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WRITING STYLE

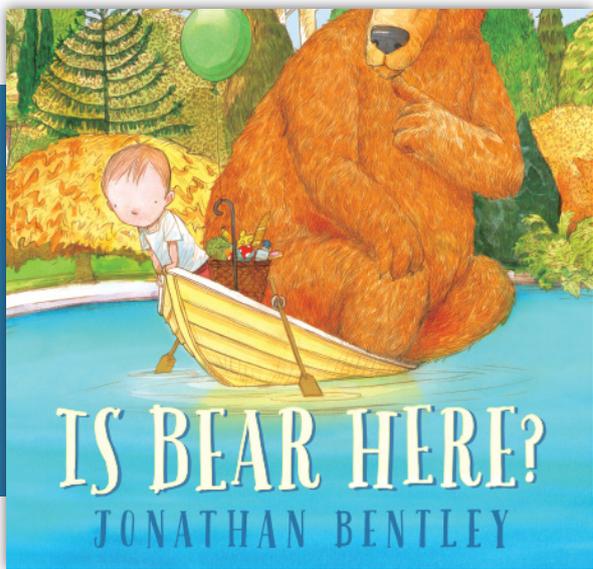
Jonathan Bentley is best known as an illustrator, but sometimes he turns his hand to being both author and illustrator. *Is Bear Here?* is his second book about this adorable pair of characters, and his third title both as author and illustrator.

Jonathan's writing style is simple and brief. It is in the form of a monologue spoken by the boy. For most of the book we are not told whom he is addressing: he could be thinking aloud, talking to himself, or having internal mental chatter. This is left to the reader to decide. Then, from the third-last spread, the boy suddenly addresses Theodore directly and we realise he may have been talking to Theodore all along.

This sudden switch surprises readers and prepares them for the greater surprise on the following spread, where we see the boy unwrapping his gift and discovering a toy bear of his very own.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Jonathan Bentley's illustrations are lightly sketched with pencil and watercolour washes. His favourite subject is animals, and we can see this in the careful detail he lavishes on depicting Theodore and the toy bear. Jonathan's depiction of the little boy, on the other hand, is slightly exaggerated, with a bigger head and smaller hands and feet than would be found on an actual child. The boy's facial features are also stylized: he has a very high forehead, and his eyes are minimally drawn as simple dots. He is often depicted with just eyes and a small nose with no mouth, and only occasionally with raised eyebrows. Even so, the boy shows a broad range of emotional expressions, which Jonathan suggests by slightly altering the position of the eyes in relation to the rest of the boy's face. Despite the realism of the bear, Jonathan has drawn it with emotional facial expressions, that would be more usual on a human than an animal's face.



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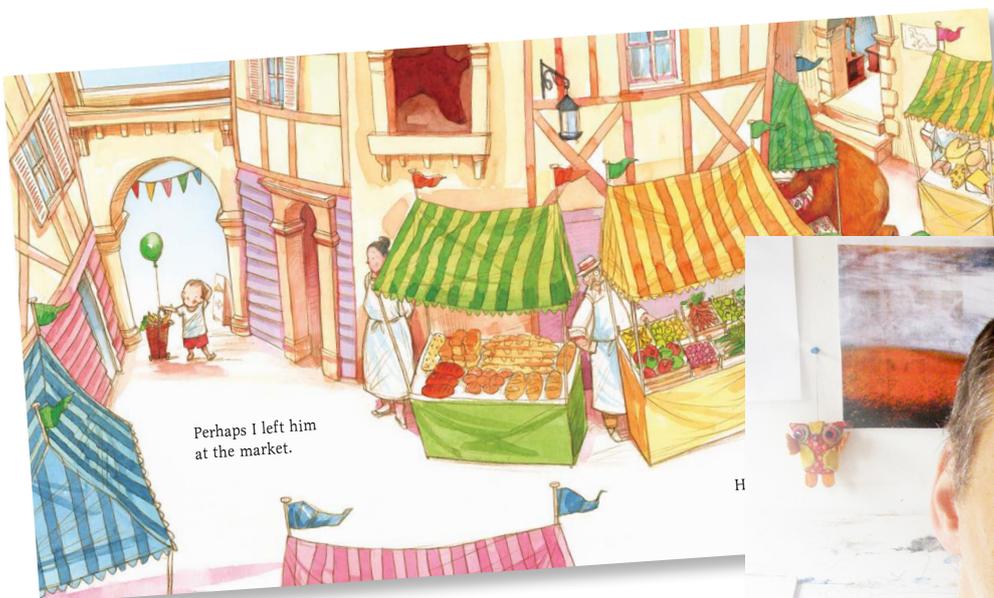
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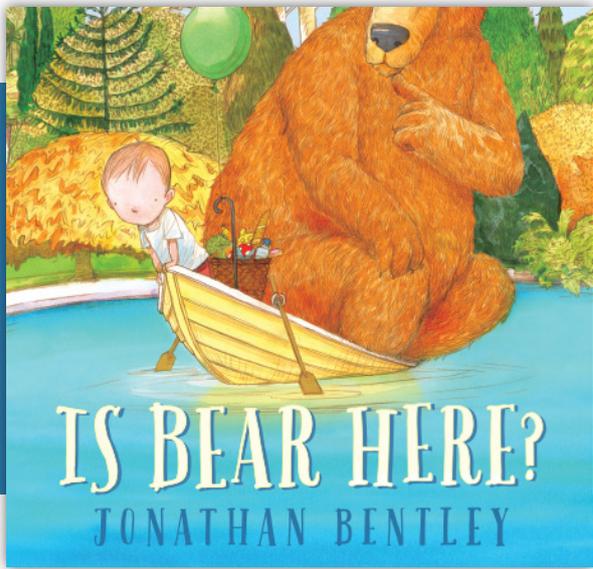
AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR'S BACKGROUND

Jonathan Bentley is one of Australia's most treasured illustrators. He's worked with some of the best Australian authors, including Margaret Wild and Andrew Daddo, and has recently branched out into writing his own stories. His first book, *Where is Bear?*, was a runaway success and sold into 14 languages in its first year.

As well as illustrating books, Jonathan has been an Editorial Illustrator at the *Courier Mail* newspaper for ten years.

Jonathan likes to work with a range of materials including acrylics, oils, pencils and watercolours, and he looks forward to the day when he has a big barn-like studio somewhere in the countryside.





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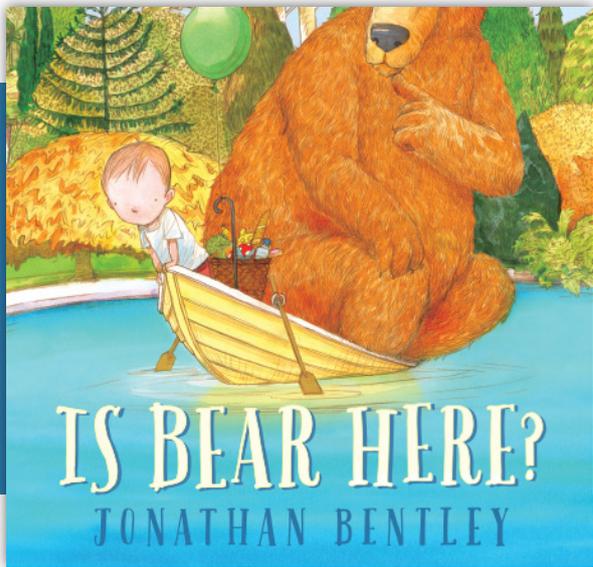
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STUDY NOTES

1. Jonathan Bentley has written this story using very few words, all of them uttered (or thought) by the little boy. Although the sentences are brief, they manage to convey a range of feelings as the narrative progresses. What is this range? How might the feeling of each utterance be described in emotional terms? For instance, we might describe the sentence on the final spread as expressing 'delight'. List the feelings from the first to the final spread and plot them on a graph, where the vertical axis represents the range from negative to positive feelings and the horizontal axis represents time. What shape does the graph reveal? What can this help to tell us about a narrative arc?
2. When drawing people's faces, Jonathan uses very few pencil marks. Even so, he manages to convey a broad range of feelings. These feelings are often quite complex and can require more than a single word to describe them. What moods are visually conveyed as the narrative unfolds? How might naming the layers of emotion contribute to emotional intelligence in young readers?
3. Jonathan is adept at drawing emotional expressions on animal faces while retaining their natural appearance. In *Is Bear Here?*, the emotions displayed by Theodore the bear act both as a mirror of and foil for the boy's feelings. Identify Theodore's feelings, spread by spread, and plot them on the graph described above. How does Theodore's emotional arc differ from or follow the boy's emotional arc? What can this tell us about storytelling? For example, consider parallel plots, conflict, resolution and character.
4. Theory of Mind is cognitive capacity to guess the motives, goals and assumptions of other individuals. (For example, 'I suspect that you believe that she knows what he is planning'.) Choose a spread from *Is Bear Here?* and describe what you believe the picture is telling us about:
 - 1) what the little boy wants;
 - 2) what the little boy thinks he knows; and
 - 3) what the reader knows that the boy does not know.



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ACTIVITIES

1. In *Is Bear Here?*, Jonathan Bentley takes readers on a hide-and-seek adventure through a market, a museum and a park, as the boy retraces his steps to look for his bear. All the while, Theodore looms large in the background. Can you find where Theodore is hiding in every scene? (Hint: he often appears more than once!)
2. When drawing people's faces, Jonathan uses very few pencil marks; even so, he manages to convey a broad range of feelings. Drawing only a stick-figure and face, how would you convey the following emotions: anger, frustration, hunger, joy and enthusiasm?
3. Following on from the above activity, act out those emotions in mime.
4. The story centres on a boy searching for a beloved toy bear. What's your favourite toy? Explain to your class why it's your favourite toy and how you'd feel if it went missing.
5. Go outside with your class and play hide-and-seek.

