



TEACHERS' NOTES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Lower primary
For children 5 and up.

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Health & Physical Education, Society & Culture, Visual Arts
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, SEL, Critical Thinking
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Diversity

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Learn how we use language to understand the relationships we have with the world around us
- Learn about feelings including fears, anxiety, courage and bravery
- To use the text as a springboard for general discussion and exploration of major themes.

THEMES

- Feelings (including fear and anxiety)
- Relationships
- Courage and bravery
- Families (rituals and pets)
- Values
- Belonging and inclusion
- Mindfulness

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia, Jemima Shafei-Ongu and Jade Goodwin

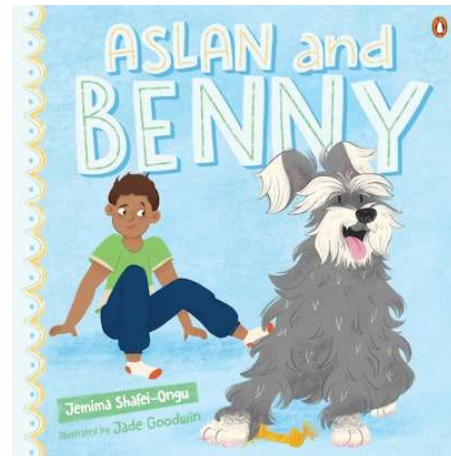
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Aslan and Benny

Jemima Shafei-Ongu
and Jade Goodwin

PLOT SUMMARY

Aslan is fearless! But when his cousins get a new dog, he doesn't feel so brave. A warm and relatable picture book for anyone who's ever felt stuck by their worries and needed help to do what matters most to them.

Aslan has the heart and the name of a lion. He is fearless!

His favourite days are Sundays when the whole family gathers at his yenge's house for a barbecue and he can play with his cousins all day. But when they get a scary dog called Benny, it spoils everything. Will Aslan be able to manage his fears and play with his cousins again?

Written by an experienced psychologist and teacher, this story incorporates practical strategies for overcoming anxiety. Acclaimed First Nations artist Jade Goodwin's vivid illustrations perfectly capture Aslan's emotions.



TEACHERS' NOTES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jemima Shafei-Ongu is a Sydney-based author who worked in schools (teaching then counselling) for many years before becoming an author. She loves picture books and their ability to create connections with readers of all ages through honouring and celebrating diverse cultures and experiences. Combining her professional background, with her lived experience of being an 'in-betweener' (a child of diaspora in Australia shaped by her Lebanese and Turkish families), Jemima's writing explores disrupted connections; driven by a need to cultivate a sense of belonging and inclusion. When she's not writing, Jemima enjoys long walks by her local river, watercolour painting, learning the derbake and having lip-sync battles with her adult daughters. She lives on unceded Dharug country with her partner, their mini schnauzer and whichever of their three daughters is in the country at the time.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

When Jemima was young, about the same age as Aslan (around 9 years old) or maybe younger, she was very scared of dogs. It took her a very long time to become comfortable with dogs, and once she was an adult, she finally agreed to her children's pleas for a pet dog.

So when her nephew, who like Aslan thought of himself as fearless, first met her family's new dog, Jemima completely understood how difficult things were for him.

Questions

1. Are you scared of dogs (or any other animal)?
2. Do you remember a time when you were scared of something?
3. Is there something you used to be scared of that you're no longer scared of?
4. Who are the people in your life that you can go to for help?

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jade Goodwin is a First Nations illustrator from Australia with curly brown hair and a big imagination. When she was a little girl, she loved spending time in her grandparents' screen-printing studio, creating all sorts of fun things with the studio supplies. Since her first book was published in 2022, Jade has illustrated a bunch more, and now loves working from home,

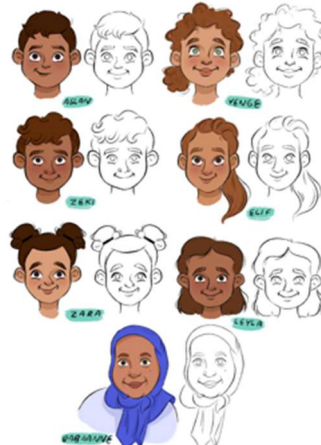
drawing almost every day alongside her three furry assistants – a.k.a. cats. Her sweet and bright illustrations bring imagination to life, and she hopes to inspire both children and adults alike. Jade loves finding magic in everyday moments, dreaming up new worlds and drawing way past her bedtime.

ILLUSTRATION PROCESS

Jade says:

My illustration style is a blend of traditional and digital mediums. I start by sketching characters in pencil. These initial sketches are crucial as they help me understand the characters deeply and visualise how they will interact with each other and their environment. Once I am happy with the pencil sketches, I take photos of them and transition to working digitally on my iPad, using Procreate. This digital phase allows me to refine the sketches, add intricate details, and experiment with colours and textures to bring the illustrations to life.

Character concepts:



Rough illustration, pages 4/5:



Final illustration, pages 4/5:



Rough illustration, page 32:



Final illustration, page 32:



The illustration process for *Aslan and Benny* involved several steps, each requiring careful attention to detail. I focused on incorporating specific cultural elements provided by the author, Jemima. For instance, the custom of not wearing shoes inside the house, instead illustrating characters in socks or house slippers. I also ensured that the traditional Turkish tea/coffee and foods like baklava were accurately represented. These details were essential in creating an authentic and respectful portrayal of the culture. Procreate was my primary tool, allowing me to experiment with different brushes and textures to achieve the desired effects.

One of the significant challenges I faced was the need to research and accurately represent a culture that is not my own. This required a deep understanding of the cultural nuances and traditions depicted in the story. Fortunately, Jemima was incredibly helpful, providing numerous reference photos of her family and detailed descriptions of cultural practices. This collaboration was invaluable, as it ensured that the illustrations were not only accurate but also deeply respectful of the culture. This experience was both educational and enriching, allowing me to gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural elements that make the story unique.

The character design was inspired by real-life people and cultural elements. Aslan is based on a real person from Jemima's family. Although his appearance in the

book is unique, I drew inspiration from the personality and characteristics of this real-life person. This helped me create a character that feels authentic and relatable. Yenge is modelled after Jemima herself, reflected in her beautiful curly hair and warm, nurturing presence. Benny was designed to reflect the dual aspects of fear and friendliness. His appearance changes throughout the book, symbolising Aslan's evolving perception of him. When Aslan is fearful, Benny appears more intimidating and scruffy, reflecting Aslan's anxiety. As the story progresses and Aslan learns to manage his fear, Benny's appearance becomes friendlier and less threatening. This visual transformation helps convey the story's message about facing and overcoming fears.

I enjoyed the opportunity to include subtle, playful elements. For instance, I enjoyed hiding a cat in several pages of the book, only revealing it fully on the final page. This element added a fun, interactive layer to the illustrations, encouraging readers to look closely and engage with the visual narrative. Additionally, I loved illustrating the family gatherings and cultural details, which brought warmth and authenticity to the story.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the book's title with students and what it might reveal about the book.
2. Look at the front cover of the book. Read the title together. What do you think the story is about? What do you suppose Aslan might be thinking? Do you think Aslan and Benny get along? Why/why not?
3. Read the blurb on the back of the book. What do you feel about it? What kind of things are you now expecting to see inside the book? What questions do you have?



KEY STUDY TOPICS

Social & Emotional Learning

Questions

1. How does Aslan feel at the start of the story? How do you know?
2. What's your favourite day of the week? What do you like about it?
3. What games do you like to play with your family and friends?
4. How did you feel when you saw Benny on pages 10/11? How do you think Aslan felt? How do you know?
5. Look at what's happening to Aslan on page 13. Do you think this is really happening to Aslan?
6. How do you think Aslan feels when he's on the stairs on pages 16/17? How do you know?
7. How do you think Aslan feels making up the song with Yenge on page 21? Try singing their song to the tune of 'If You're Happy and You Know It'.
8. What does brave mean? How do you know Aslan was brave (see pages 24/25)?
9. What did Aslan do about his scary thoughts and feelings when he went to touch Benny (see pages 28/29)?
10. Do you think that Benny is a scary dog? Why/why not?
11. How does Aslan feel on the last page? Who else feels this way? How do you know?

Literacy

Use the text to explore the following concepts.

- Verbs (e.g. whizzed, wild, bolted, glared, inhaled)
- Opposites (e.g. whimpered and roared, lion and mouse, fearless and brave).
- Metaphors (e.g. pounding heart, racing thoughts)
- Ellipses (and other grammatical features to structure reading pace)

Questions

1. What type of writing is the song on page 20? (Poetry)

Activities

1. Write a verb (an action word) to look like the information it is referring to. For example, look at 'whizzed' on page 2 of the book. You can choose your own action word (like jump or shout) or use one from the story.
2. Share whole-class ideas of difficult thoughts that stop us (including as a teacher) from doing something we care about, or try to care about, e.g. going on stage at school or in front of the class. Using some of these ideas, create a silly or funny poem with a similar structure to the one that Yenge and Aslan make up on page 21.
3. Draw (or write) what happens next. Remember that it takes time for people to learn new things, so Aslan might need to remember these things for him to do what happens next.

Diversity

Questions

1. Aslan calls his aunt 'Yenge' and his grandmother 'Babaanne'. What language do think these come from? Can you speak any other language(s)? Can you say or learn to say aunt and grandmother in another language?
2. Aslan means lion in the same language as the words yenge and babaanne. Does your name have a meaning? If so, what is it? Do you know how your name was chosen for you?
3. Aslan enjoys eating watermelon and baklava with his family. Have you eaten these? What are some of the foods you enjoy eating with your family?

Activities

1. There are many cultural traditions in Aslan's family that are shown in this story. You may have some in common with Aslan. List all the various traditions shown in this story. E.g. drinking tea in small glasses, a caydanlik (pronounced chai-danlek) / Turkish double tea pot, eating fruit after or baklava after a meal, removing shoes before entering the house, regularly spending time with extended family.
2. One of Aslan's family member wears a headscarf (başörtü - pronounced bah-shur-too) as part of their cultural/ religious tradition (as a Turk or Muslim). Which family member wears it? Do you



know anyone who wears this? (Is it also referred to as 'hijab' in Arabic).

air. Then hold like this for the count of three. Repeat this process three times.

5. Draw yourself doing the thing you're scared of.

Critical Thinking

Questions

1. There are some similarities and some differences between Aslan and his brother Zeki. Can you recall them? What are the similarities and differences with you and one of your family members?
2. Zeki is holding a cat on the last page. What else is happening? Have you seen the cat before? Go back through the story to notice if it's anywhere else (hint: if you look carefully, you may find all five appearances!)
3. Aslan feels like two main animals. What are they? How do these two different animals represent how he feels during the different visits to Yenge's house? List all of these. Now take a closer look at the pages where these words appear. Is there anything else you can see on the page related to these words?

Visual Art

Activities

1. *Illustration Analysis:* Discuss how the illustrations change throughout the book and what they signify about Aslan's emotions. Encourage students to identify and analyse the subtle visual cues that represent fear and bravery.
2. *Emotion Art:* Have students create art pieces that express different emotions, such as fear, bravery, happiness, and curiosity. They can use colours, shapes, and textures to depict how these emotions feel to them. Display the artwork in the classroom and discuss how different students represented the same emotions.

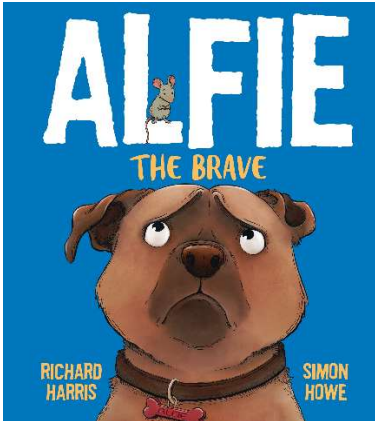
Health and Personal Development

Activities

1. Write about a happy memory you have with your family. Does it include a pet?
2. What is something you're scared of, and would like not to be scared of? Does it exclude you from doing something that matters to you (or being with people that matter to you?) What are some things that your mind says to you when you're scared of this thing? Sing the most unhelpful thought to the tune of 'If you're happy and you know it'. How scary does that thought feel now?
3. Mindfulness activity: Let's use our senses. Go for a walk outside your classroom. Take your time to pay attention to five things you can hear. Now pay attention to four green things you can see. Now pay attention to three things you can feel on your skin. Now pay attention to two things you can smell. Lastly, pay attention to one thing you can taste in your mouth.
4. Practice 'hot soup-bowl breathing' like Aslan and Yenge. Remember to start by blowing out slowly first. After you breathe out, hold for the count of three, then relax and gently let your body fill with



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



Alfie the Brave
by Richard Harris & Simon Howe

Why this story? A delightful picture book about a dog called Alfie who longs to be bold and brave like other dogs. From Australian of the Year Dr Richard 'Harry' Harris, a key member of the team that rescued the Wild Boar soccer team in Thailand. Illustrator Simon Howe perfectly captures the emotional ups and downs of the adorable and expressive Alfie.

Alfie was a fine-looking dog. His coat was sleek and shiny like an otter. He was the son of champions.

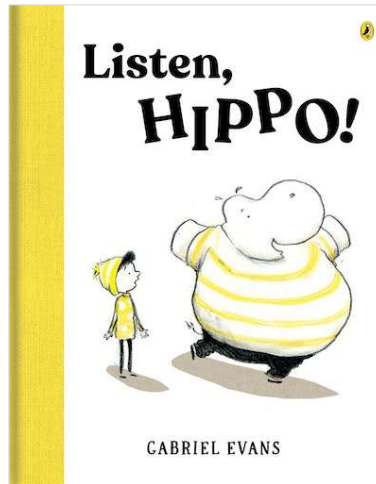
But Alfie didn't feel like a champion.

Alfie was scared of . . . everything!

Could Alfie ever be bold and brave like other dogs?

A charming picture book about how bravery doesn't always come naturally.

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



Listen, Hippo!
by Gabriel Evans

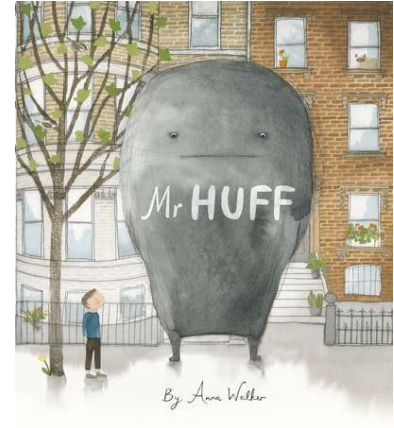
Why this story? A wise and beautiful picture book that explores with gentle warmth and humour the nature of feelings and the importance of being heard.

When Billy is feeling sad, he wishes he had someone to talk to. He thinks what he needs is someone to listen. But his best friend, Hippo, believes he knows exactly what Billy needs!

Playing dress-ups will cheer Billy up, and dancing in the cherry blossoms, or maybe a pirate adventure? No? Then how about a magic carpet race? What fun! Ready, set, GO!

Hippo just wants to make Billy happy, but it's only when he finally listens to what Billy wants that he can help his friend.

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



Mr Huff
by Anna Walker

Why this story? Award-winning and much-loved author and illustrator Anna Walker gives us a gentle, poignant, affirming and wise picture book sure to delight all ages. Mr Huff is a story about the clouds and the sunshine in each of our lives.

Bill is having a bad day. Mr Huff is following him around and making everything seem difficult.

Bill tries to get rid of him, but Mr Huff just gets bigger and bigger! Then they both stop, and a surprising thing happens ...

Winner of the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year: Early Childhood, 2016

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



WORKSHEET: Turkish Find-a-Word

Aslan and his family have Turkish heritage, so there are some Turkish names and words in the story. Can you find all these words? Words can go in any direction. Some words cross over each other and share letters.

- ASLAN
- BABAANNE
- BAKLAVA
- ELIF
- LEYLA
- YENGE
- ZARA
- ZEKI

O	K	J	I	L	I	G	U	A	F	V	P	C	K	G
Z	B	Z	Q	D	L	A	H	K	S	C	O	L	N	H
B	S	K	U	H	U	D	W	O	L	L	O	R	L	O
B	G	K	Y	T	R	A	B	A	K	L	A	V	A	Q
C	A	I	B	S	L	V	D	H	M	D	P	N	F	J
O	H	C	V	Y	W	W	S	G	S	D	J	A	T	H
E	G	N	E	Y	X	X	D	N	P	G	W	O	Y	P
V	N	L	J	F	O	R	Z	U	E	K	K	U	W	I
V	Z	N	Y	O	H	G	S	W	Z	Q	X	T	U	V
Q	U	W	A	I	U	T	F	W	Z	Z	E	E	Z	E
T	H	L	D	A	S	X	I	T	E	N	N	A	Y	Z
U	V	M	L	P	B	Z	L	L	K	F	R	W	P	Z
X	M	N	I	M	R	A	E	C	I	A	M	T	W	Z
N	U	K	D	V	E	O	B	X	O	D	V	F	X	Y
I	Z	M	Q	G	V	S	S	M	N	N	I	C	C	K



WORKSHEET: Story Map

Use the boxes below to create a story map of *Aslan and Benny* in pictures or words (or both). A story map helps us remember the important parts of a story. You can use words, pictures, or both to create your map. Don't forget to include the main characters, as well as the key events from the beginning, middle and ending of the story.

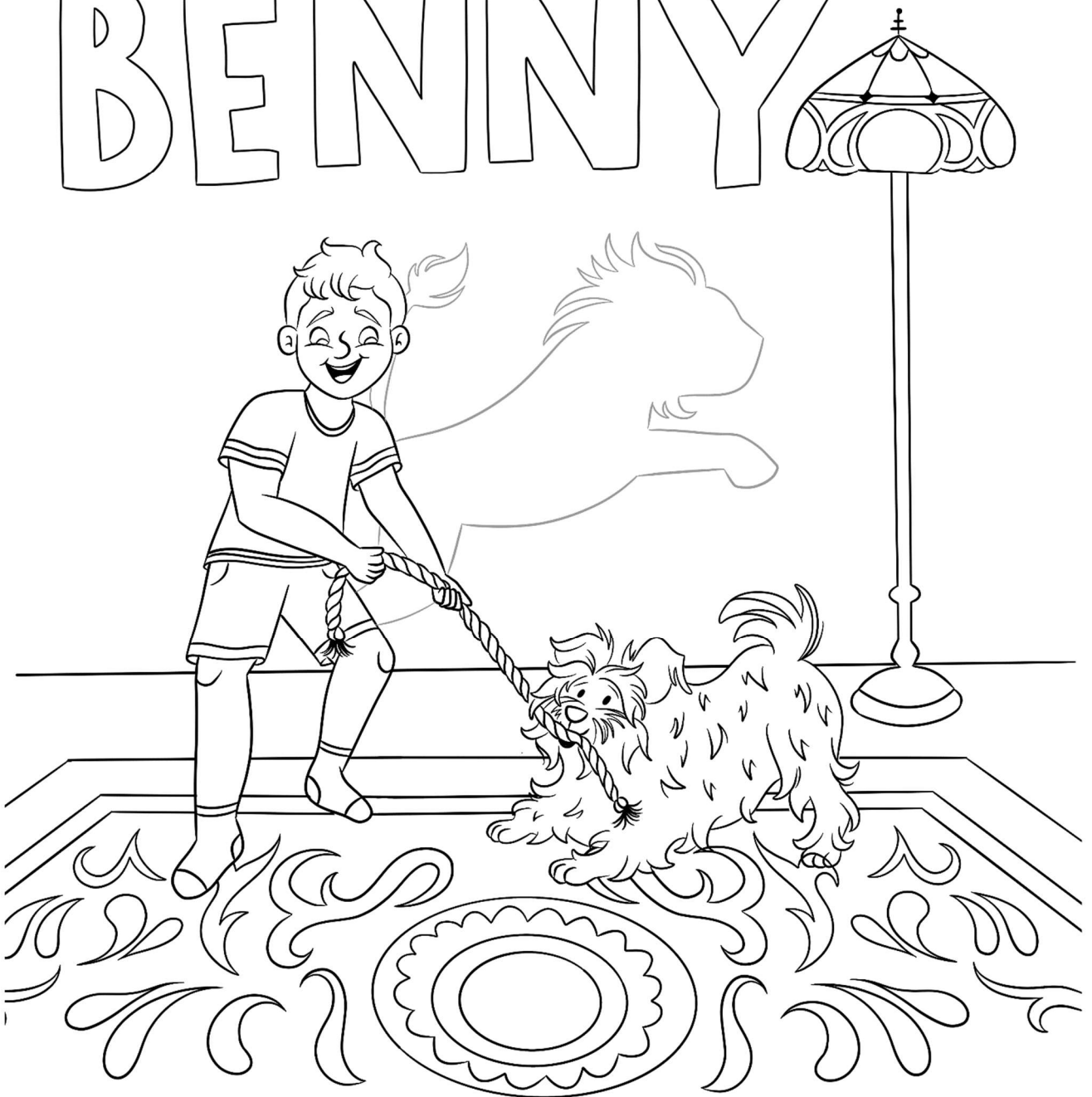
The worksheet features three rows of empty rounded rectangular boxes for creating a story map. The first row contains three boxes, the second row contains three boxes, and the third row contains two boxes. A thick, purple, wavy line runs horizontally across the page, connecting the boxes from left to right in each row, serving as a guide for the flow of the story.



WORKSHEET: Colour and Emotion

Colour in this picture of Aslan and Benny. Choose colours that match the characters' emotions.

ASLAN and BENNY



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Aslan and Benny	Jemima Shafei-Ongu & Jade Goodwin	9781761047060	K-2	\$24.99		
Alfie the Brave	Richard Harris & Simon Howe	9781761041358	Pre-K	\$19.99		
Listen, Hippo!	Gabriel Evans	9781761341700	Pre-1	\$24.99		
Mr Huff	Anna Walker	9780670078042	K-2	\$24.99		
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