

Davina Bell

Sarah Zweck

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18"

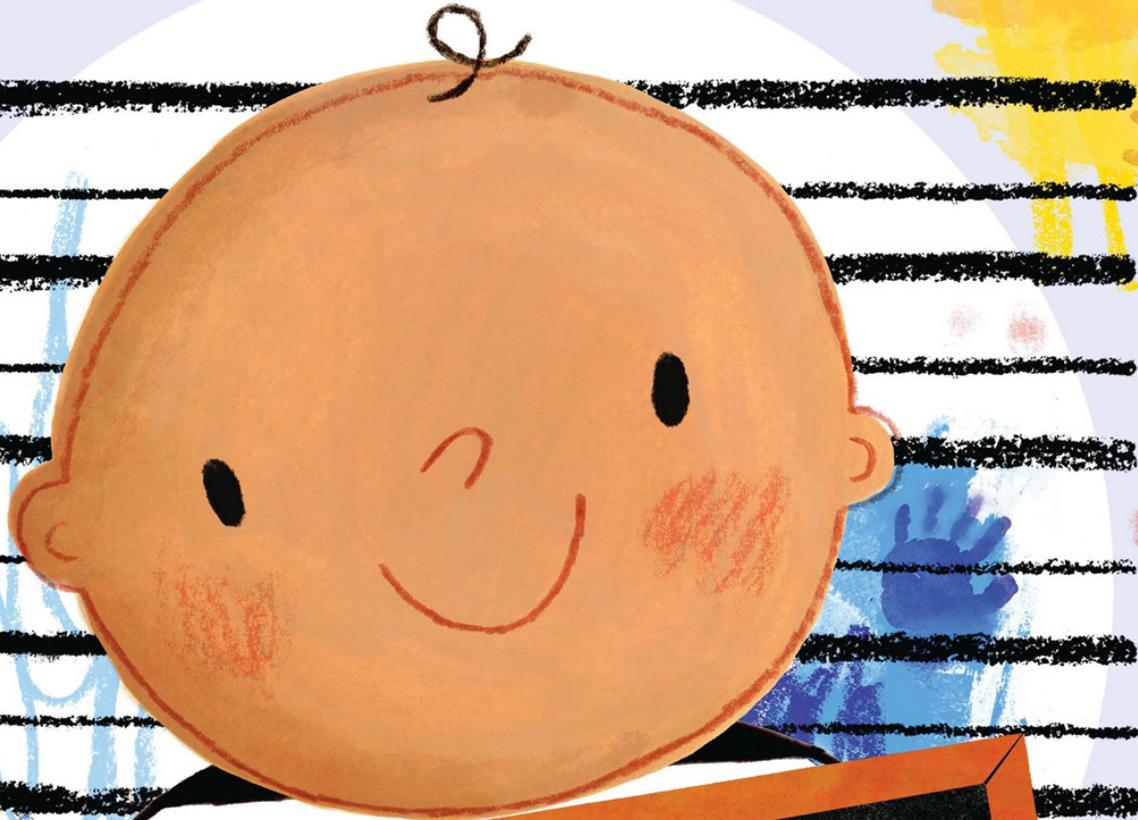
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thames
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Blurb

From bestselling author Davina Bell and award-winning illustrator Sarah Zweck comes a delightfully mischievous book for children who were once the cutest baby in the world – and for new babies who are about to be.

Late one evening, a detective knocks on the door of two exhausted parents. She's on the hunt for the world's most devious master criminal: The Cutest Baby in the World...

Should you find yourself in this rogue's clutches, your entire world will be turned upside-down! But the most villainous bit? You wouldn't have it any other way.

Synopsis

It's past bedtime when there's an unexpected knock at the door. Standing outside is a determined detective, ready to solve her most puzzling case yet. She's hot on the trail of a notorious troublemaker – someone known to leave a trail of chaos, laughter and very strange smells in their wake. This 'criminal' can make ordinary, sensible people talk in silly voices, dance the chicken dance, wear ridiculous costumes – and you might even lose all your friends.

Who could be capable of such deeds? The detective reveals her prime suspect: The Cutest Baby in the World!

As she follows the evidence, readers discover that the baby's 'crimes' have nothing to do with mischief or malice at all. The baby is guilty of something much more serious – stealing hearts. The Cutest Baby in the World captures everyone's affection and turns the world upside down in the best possible way.

WANTED: The Cutest Baby in the World is a playful, laugh-out-loud story that celebrates the joy and delightful chaos of having a baby in your life.

Writing style

WANTED: The Cutest Baby in the World is written in a playful, mock-suspenseful tone that echoes a classic detective story. The author uses familiar detective tropes – a late-night knock at the door, a mysterious case, a dangerous criminal on the loose – to build tension and excitement. The humour lies in the contrast between the detective's serious language and the harmless, everyday chaos caused by a baby.

The deliberate mismatch between tone and subject matter makes the story funny and engaging. The detective's warnings about 'dastardly deeds' and 'tyrannical reigns' parody the dramatic language of crime fiction while describing the ordinary realities of life with a baby. (Mess! Poo! Smells!) Direct speech gives each character a distinct voice and creates a lively back-and-forth between the detective and the parents while repetition of key phrases such as 'he will ...' and 'you will ...' builds anticipation and humour.

Readers are invited to share in the joke of the detective's exaggerations about the master criminal. The interplay between text and illustrations deepens the humour – what the detective describes as danger and destruction is revealed visually as everyday baby mischief.

Themes



FAMILY LIFE WITH A NEW BABY
FAMILY ROUTINES



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS



DETECTIVE STORY
MYSTERY CONVENTIONS



LOVE AND ATTACHMENT



EMOTIONS AND CHANGE



IMAGINATION AND PLAY



HUMOUR

Author motivation

I was a writer of books for children for many years before I had a child and I always found it irritating when people implied that to write for kids in an authentic and meaningful way you had to have a child. So when I eventually had my son, I was curious to see if it would change me as a writer at the same time it changed me as a person. Spoiler alert – it did not! But it did make me realise the gap between the soft and idealised way babyhood and childhood are often portrayed in the picture books that I love and the reality of everyday life with a small person.

There are, of course, the picturesque, swoony moments of parenthood when the light is slanting through the trees at just the right angle, and your child is laughing on a swing, and everything feels so perfect and precious that you could cry with joy and gratitude and nostalgia for the moment, even as it is unfolding. But so much of having a child is sticky, unpredictable, ruled by their moods and whims and genuinely baffling! You lose control, perspective and occasionally your mind. It is completely absurd – hilariously so – and I found myself wanting to capture the comedy and total chaos of those early months and years as a parent. So I wrote *WANTED: The Cutest Baby in the World* to say to parents, 'I see you! I know how hard this journey is, and how wild, and the ridiculous fact that, in spite of this all, you wouldn't change a thing.' And I wanted to give children a springboard to spark conversations about the memories and stories of their own lives as babies and toddlers as a way to shape the narratives of their lives and their family lore. It's a tricky text to illustrate, and I couldn't have imagined the pathos and humour and heart-melting love that Sarah somehow infused into this book. I feel so grateful and lucky for her intelligent work and I hope it brings families joy.



Davina Bell is an Australian author of books for young people of all ages, from babies to teens. Her work is published worldwide and has been translated into over twenty languages. She is a two-time winner of the Australian Book Industry's Picture Book of the Year, and has been awarded the Children's Book Council Book of the Year for Older Readers as well as the New South Wales Premiers Literary Award for Young People's Literature. Davina has worked as an editor and publisher in the world of children's books, and now writes full-time in Melbourne.

Illustrator motivation

As a mum of two boys, this was such a joyous book to work on as I could easily relate to all the funny scenes! Drawing from memory and looking back at photographs of my children as babies helped inspire me. The fabulous thing about babies is everything is new and exciting because they are experiencing the world for the first time. Even the way they move is special. It was important for me to convey this wonder and warmth on every page. I did this by keeping my lines loose and I used a range of mix media and collage so the illustrations felt tactile and lived-in, like a home. I enjoy using my hands when I work, which teaches me that art doesn't have to be perfect – like life itself, it's even lovelier with a few unexpected wobbles.

As the story unfolds, you'll notice the baby hides from the detective, but the reader can clearly spot him getting-up all kinds of mischievous antics! Keeping the detective in the dark was intentional, as it adds to the humour to the story. The detective's cat and the family's dog reinforce this message as they, too, get up to all kinds of fun! With each read you will spot something new.

Sarah Zweck is a self-taught, Melbourne-based author and illustrator who enjoys making a glorious mess in her studio using traditional media. She graduated from the University of Leeds in the UK with a BA (Hons) in Fashion Design and had the privilege of working as a childrenswear designer in London, prior to studying illustration. In 2022, Sarah's family moved to Melbourne, which she now calls home, and she is delighted to be a part of the Australian kid lit community.





Curriculum

This book supports:

Inference (how words and image work together)
Tone and humour comprehension
Emotional literacy and empathy
Oral storytelling and role-play
Creative writing voice
Understanding family and change.

Foundation–Year 2

Engage with a range of picture books
Explore characters and events in stories
Make inferences using text and illustrations
Identify how language choices shape meaning
Create short imaginative texts
Participate in discussions

Years 3–4 (Extension)

Examine narrative structure, character perspectives
Experiment with language for humour and impact

Curriculum links

Health and Physical Education (HPE) (Personal and Social Capabilities)

Identify and express emotions
Describe ways families change over time
Recognise how actions can affect relationships

The Arts (Drama and Visual Arts)

Use voice and movement to role-play characters
Respond to and interpret images and visual storytelling
Create visual artworks

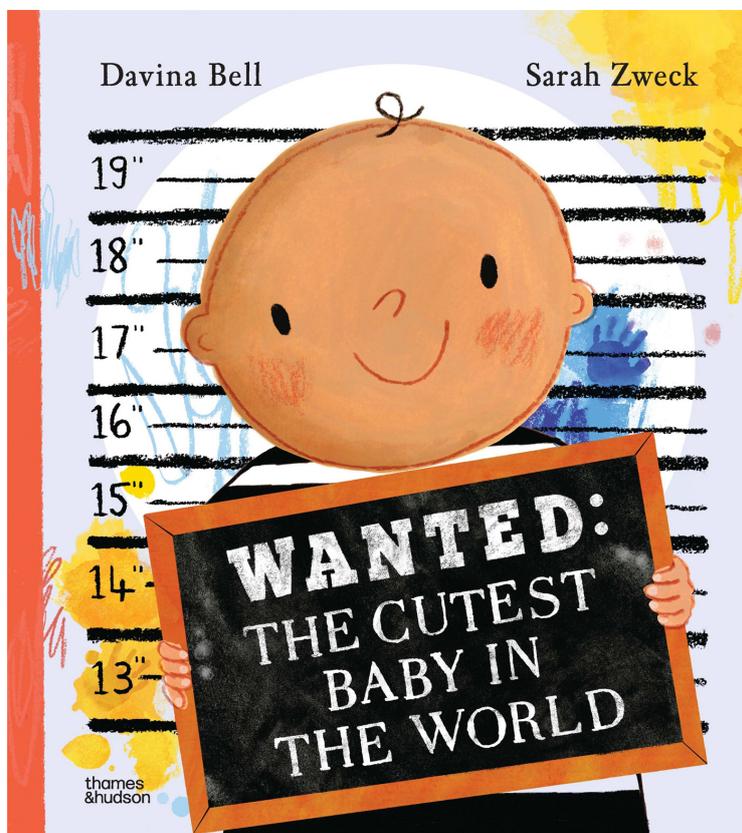
Mathematics

Measuring height
Comparing lengths/heights
Recording and representing data
Understanding growth over time



Cover illustration

- What do you notice first when you look at the cover (the baby's smile, the height chart, the 'Wanted' sign)?
- What do you think 'wanted' means in this context? Does this look like a scary 'wanted' poster or a funny one? How can you tell?
- Why might someone be 'wanted'?
- What do you think this baby might have done?
- What does the height chart behind the baby tell us?
- Why do you think someone would search for 'the cutest baby in the world'?
- What do you think this story might be about?
- What colours can you see? How do these colours make you feel?
- How do we know this baby isn't really dangerous?
- Does the baby look proud? Happy? Curious? Why do you think that?
- Why might the illustrator have drawn paint splashes and scribbles in the background?



Ooh, baby, baby

DISCUSS:

- Have you ever met a baby?
- What are babies like?
- What is fun about them?
- What can be tricky?
- Is the baby in the story like the babies you have met? How are they the same or different?
- Is the baby in the story really a villain? Why or why not?



Vocabulary and language

There are some words and phrases in the book that you might not have come across before, especially words introduced by the detective. As a class, discuss what the following might mean:

- hot on the trail
- true agent of chaos
- devious supervillain
- master criminal
- dastardly deeds
- tyrannical reign
- Can you think of any other words or phrases you could use to describe a wanted criminal (eg 'sneaky bandit')?
- How else does the text play with dramatic detective language to describe everyday baby behaviour?

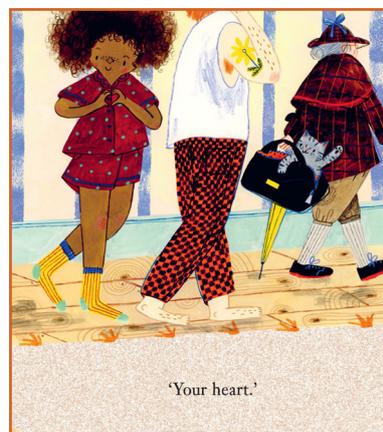


We are family

- Who are the members of the family in this story? (Don't forget the pets!) Who are the members of your family (or family of choice)? Draw pictures of them, write their names under their picture and one or two things about them.
- What is something you love about your family? What is something that frustrates you sometimes?
- How do the parents in the story feel throughout the book? Find clues in the pictures (eyebags, body language, yawns).
- What are 'dastardly deeds'? What other 'dastardly deeds' might Mum and Dad be forced to do?
- What things are the parents of The Cutest Baby doing on spread 10–11? Draw your own sequence of pictures of other activities Mum and Dad could do to make The Cutest Baby smile.



- What symbol is Mum making on page 25? What are some other ways you can show you love somebody? Create a card to give to someone in your family or to a good friend to show that you love them.



- Why might Mum have her hands on her tummy on spread 26–27?



- What does the ending show about how the family really feels about the baby? Is it good or bad that 'life was never the same again'?



Create your own 'villain'

The 'master criminal' in the story is called 'The Cutest Baby in the World'. Create your own playful name for a little 'villain' like The Cutest Baby.

- As a class, brainstorm some adjectives (describing words) that you could use to describe your villain: tiny, sneaky, bouncy, cheeky, messy, cuddly and so on.
- Now brainstorm a list of nouns (words that name a person, animal, place or thing) that you could use to describe your villain: eg, 'bandit', rascal', 'monkey'.
- Use an adjective and a noun to create your silly villain name, for example, 'Tiny Bandit'.
- Draw your character and add a label:

My silly villain name is _____.

They are known for _____.

- Create your own 'Wanted' poster for your little villain.



First on the scene: the detective

- What does a detective do?
- Who do you think 'the detective' in the story might be? Is she really a detective? Are there any clues in the illustrations? Why do you think she might be visiting 'way past bedtime'?
- What clues does the detective use in the story? What leads the detective to think that The Cutest Baby is, in fact, at home?
- Do you think Mum and Dad are actually worried that the detective might find Cutest Baby?
- Why do detectives sometimes wear coats, hats or have magnifying glasses? What other tools might a detective need?
- Is the detective in this story serious or silly? How can you tell?
- What makes this a mystery story?
- Do you know of any other famous detectives from television shows or books? How are they the same or different to the detective in this story?

Detective clue hunt

- Pick a theme (for example, babies, dogs, music) and hide some clues around the room (eg, a bib for babies, a collar for a dog, an instrument for music).
- Find the hidden objects and discuss what they reveal and what the theme might be.
- Create your own mystery and write about it using the following sentence structure:

Someone is looking for _____.

The clues are _____.

The answer is _____.



Discuss your mini mystery with a partner. Don't tell them the answer and see if they can guess what or who the answer is from the clues. If they can't guess, try providing them with even more clues.

Drama and role play

- Interview with the detective: choose one person (a student or the teacher) to play the detective.
The detective will invent a mystery for the class to solve. For example: someone has eaten the birthday cake, a pet toy has gone missing, the shoes have disappeared.
- The rest of the class becomes a team of detectives-in-training. Take turns asking yes/no questions to help solve the mystery and discover who the 'master criminal' might be.

Question starters:

- Where did you see it last?
- What clues have you found?
- Was anyone acting suspiciously?
- What makes you think it was them?

Acting out: dramatic detective language

- In the story, the detective uses big, dramatic words to describe the baby. These words sound serious but they are really being used in a funny and playful way.
- Read each phrase below and decide on a gesture, face, or action that matches it.
(For example, for 'devious supervillain', you might tiptoe and wiggle your eyebrows like you're making a sneaky plan.)
- Phrases to act out:

- Master criminal
- Devious supervillain
- Agent of chaos

You can choose one, two, or all three — or make up your own dramatic phrases inspired by the story.

- Think about:
 - How would someone like this move?
 - What would their face look like?
 - How might their voice sound?



Illustrations

- What colours has the illustrator used? How do they make the pictures feel?
- Look closely at Mum and Dad's faces. What do you think they are feeling? What devices has the illustrator used to show their feelings?
- What do the detective's features tell us about what sort of person she might be?
- What clues in the pictures show us that the baby is loved, even when things get messy?
- How do the illustrations add to the story? How are the illustrations different to the text? For example, the detective says the baby is dangerous, but what do the pictures show us? Find some more examples of how the illustrations tell a different or new story to the words.
- Be a picture detective: choose one spread and find three visual clues that tell us what has just happened.
- Choose a few pages and, using the illustrations as a guide, discuss what the baby might be saying on these pages if he could talk.



Height chart

- Notice the different heights of your classmates. We don't all grow at the same time or in the same way. Some people grow quickly, some grow slowly – and both are wonderful. Our bodies know just what to do. Being different is what makes us all interesting!
- How do we know someone is growing? What clues might help us know? Do all people grow at the same rate?
- Make a class height chart. You will need a long sheet of butcher's paper, a felt-tip marker and a tape measure. Measure everyone in your class and mark and label each student's height. Everyone can add a small drawing of themselves to the chart.
- Repeat measurements near the end of the year to compare growth.
- Bar graph: using everyone's heights from the chart, create a simple bar graph. Discuss which height range has the most children. Are most heights close together or very different?



Further activities

Wanted poster

- Create your own '*WANTED: The Cutest Baby in the World!*' poster.

Include:

- Mugshot-style drawing
- List of 'crimes' (eg, stole all the attention, kept parents awake)
- Reward (eg, one big hug)

Role-play: detective agency

- In pairs or small groups act out a detective interviewing family members about the baby.

Prompts:

- Describe the suspect.
- What happened when the suspect entered the room?
- What is your evidence?

Sound effects and drama reading

- Read the story aloud and add:
 - Footsteps of the detective
 - Crying baby
 - Slamming door
 - Sneaky spy music

Case file

- Imagine another 'criminal baby' causing playful chaos in a different setting:
 - At the supermarket
 - At the zoo
 - At a birthday party
- Write a mini mystery report using detective-style language:
 - suspect
 - evidence
 - witness
 - alibi
 - case closed

Perspective writing

Students write a diary entry:

- From the baby's perspective
- From the dog's perspective

