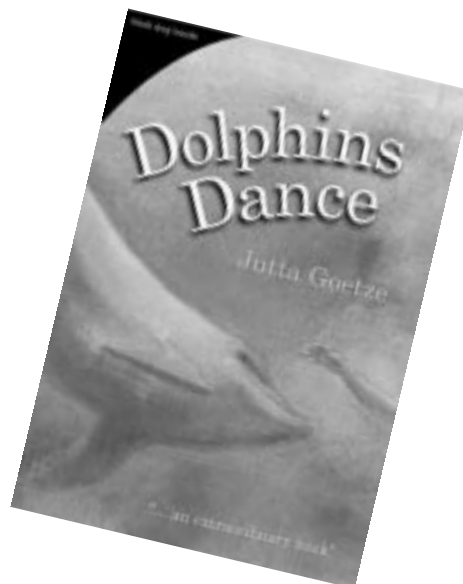


Dolphins Dance

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Dolphins Dance

By Jutta Goetze

Illustrated by Anne Spudvilas

Teachers notes by Garry Chapman

Summary

Dolphins Dance is a powerfully moving story about Ali whose younger brother Max has autism. Max will be coming to Ali's school this year and Ali is not happy. All Ali wants is to fit in — and that's not easy with a brother like Max. *Dolphins Dance* is Ali's story, as she learns to understand her brother Max. It's also the story of how autism utterly and completely changes a family's life.

From the author

I've always written, even when I wasn't called a 'writer', officially. Writing brings me a sense of unity I don't seem to find anywhere else. I love language, learning about things, creating stories, sharing them. I've worked in television for 20 years — writing for shows as varied as *The Flying Doctors*, *Janus*, *Embassy*, *The Man from Snowy River*. And of course kid's books of all shapes and sizes.



**Please contact Black
Dog Books if you
would like to organise
a visit from the author.**

Dolphins Dance offers teachers and students an opportunity to learn about autism and the ways in which it affects autistic children and the people who are closest to them, their families, classmates and teachers.

Learn About The Book

A personal response to the story

Ask the students to keep a journal while reading and discussing *Dolphins Dance*. The journal is a place for each student to record his or her personal responses to the story. These may include:

- Thoughts about what the title means (prior to reading the book).
- Prior experiences or understanding of autism.
- Thoughts about the characters.
- Comparisons of events and characters in the story with personal experiences of the reader.
- Alternative ways of dealing with Ali's frustration.
- Suggestions of how to make life easier for Max.
- Responses to events in the story, including resolution of Ali's problems.
- Ideas about the way the story has changed the reader's understanding and attitudes.
- Questions the reader would like to ask the author.
- Actions (if any) the reader intends to take after reading.
- How you would help an autistic child settle into your own class.



black dog books

71 gertrude st fitzroy vic 3065
abn 74 007 322 465

(03) 9419 9406

fax (03) 9419 1214

dog@bdb.com.au

Publishers



The journal is a personal document — it doesn't need to be shared with others or corrected. The student may, however, wish to refer to it in discussion groups or other activities related to the book. The student may also wish to share some entries with the teacher or classmates.

Communicating the message from the story to others

Ask groups or individuals to prepare a report on autism to be presented to the school community via a newsletter or to an assembly. Students use the knowledge gained from reading *Dolphins Dance*, as well as from the research activities. The report should help the audience learn how an autistic person perceives the world. It might conclude with suggestions of ways in which we can support autistic children and their families.

Reflecting on the realism in the story

Discuss the notes included at the back of *Dolphins Dance* that provide us with additional information about Max, his family and the condition of autism. Ask for opinions on:

- How the appendices enhance the story.
- The openness and honesty of Max's parents and his teacher.
- How Max's family might hope to benefit by telling his story.
- The value of using realism to tell a narrative.
- The forms of research the author must have undertaken when writing the story.
- The artistic licence an author may use when writing someone else's story.

Debating the issues raised by the story

Provide opportunities for teams of students to prepare for and participate in formal debates on some of the issues raised by *Dolphins Dance*. Topics may include:

- That autistic children are well suited to regular classrooms.
- That siblings of autistic children must be tough to survive.

Students may prefer to prepare and deliver an oration to their peers, also based on issues raised by the book. Topics may include:

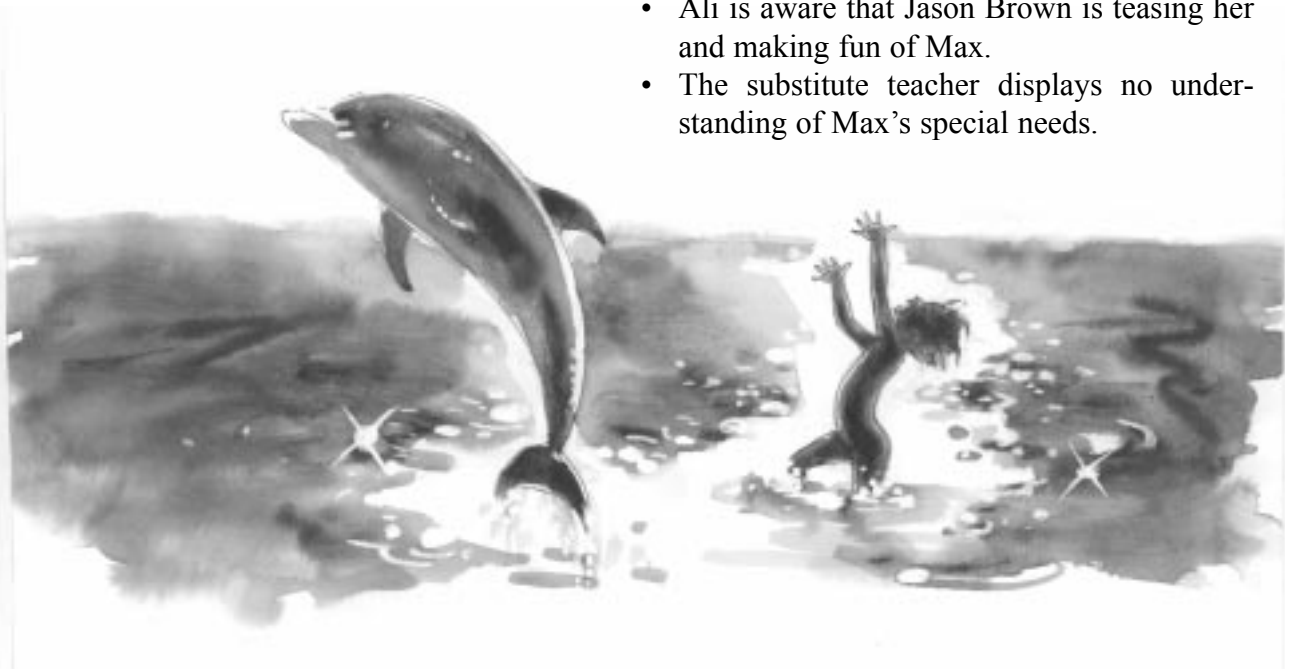
- Integration aides perform a vital role.
- Autism is not a life-sentence.

Preliminary work may need to take place to prepare the students for debating and public speaking before an audience, but when they are ready, many students relish the chance to perform for their parents or another class.

Role play some of the situations from the story

Present groups with dilemmas faced by Ali and her parents. Ask groups to discuss alternative ways of dealing with the situations. Ask the students to role play their scenarios for the rest of the class and be prepared to answer questions about their reasoning. Scenarios may include:

- Ali arrives home to find Max has gone into her room and destroyed her favourite things.
- Max seems to be getting all the attention and Ali is feeling sad.
- Ali is aware that Jason Brown is teasing her and making fun of Max.
- The substitute teacher displays no understanding of Max's special needs.



Learn About The Characters

In small groups, ask students to discuss these questions arising from *Dolphins Dance*. They are based upon a recent revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives.

| | Max | Ali | Max & Ali's Parents |
|----------------------|--|---|---|
| Remembering | Describe what happened whenever anyone said the word "DON'T" to Max. (Chapter 1) | Describe Ali's reaction when she finds Max has wrecked the treasures in her room. (Chapter 4) | What were three things Max and Ali's father told his daughter's class about autism? (Chapter 10) |
| Understanding | How would you explain why Max needs to make a lot of noise whenever he gets confused? (Chapter 2) | Can you explain why Ali wrote the list and took it to Max's teacher? (Chapter 6) | Why didn't Max and Ali's parents take their family on any big holidays? (Chapter 4) |
| Applying | What are some ways a teacher could set up routines in a classroom to help Max feel comfortable at school? (Chapter 6) | Can you suggest a new way that Ali could help Jason Brown understand her brother? (Chapter 8) | Can you think of some ways that Ali's parents could help boost her self-esteem? (Chapter 11) |
| Analysing | Can you explain how the dolphin had such a remarkable effect on Max's emotional state? (Chapter 11) | Can you explain why Ali felt so bad when all the kids were dancing with Max after her father had spoken to her class? (Chapter 10) | Who benefited most from Ali and Max's father's visit to school? Give reasons. (Chapter 10) |
| Evaluating | How would you feel if no one seemed to understand what you were trying to communicate to them? (Chapter 10) | How effective was Ali's idea of showing Max several photos of their mother's varied hairstyles? (Chapter 3) | Did Ali's mother act wisely following the times when Ali got into trouble at school? (Chapters 8 & 9) |
| Creating | Can you think of a way to stop Max getting into difficulties on the school playground equipment? (Chapter 9) | Can you think of three things Ali could teach Max which would make her own life easier? | Can you suggest how Max and Ali's parents could follow up their experience with the dolphins? (Chapter 11) |

When the groups have completed their discussions, ask them to draft and display brief character profiles for Max, Ali and their parents. Share these with the rest of the class.

Learn About Autism

For students to fully comprehend *Dolphins Dance*, it helps if they develop an understanding of autism:

- 1 Autism is a life-long developmental disorder, which affects people in different ways.
- 2 An autistic child may have difficulty relating to others, and may exhibit certain behaviours which are considered unusual.
- 3 Autistic children can be helped to develop routines and make sense of the world around them.
- 4 Autism can change the lives of all who come into contact with it, particularly the immediate family of the autistic child.
- 5 Families often develop strategies to help cope with the strain of living with an autistic child

Use a data chart

Students use a data chart to gather and organise information from different sources, including *Dolphins Dance*.

The data chart has five focus questions. Each relates to one of the above understandings. Students record information in note form in the grid boxes provided.

The prime reference for this exercise is *Dolphins Dance*. After reading the book through, students should return to the text to

seek answers to the focus questions. Other references may include library texts, newspaper and magazine articles, web sites, guest speakers and interviews. Students should record the source of their information on the data chart and include relevant details, such as author's name, web address, publication date, etc. Some students may have autistic siblings, friends or classmates. They should be encouraged to include this prior knowledge. Students use the notes to draft their responses to the focus questions. Students may present their completed research as a written or an oral report, a multimedia presentation or a shared discussion.

Using the knowledge gained from their research, ask the students to explain what they understand about Max's condition and the impact it had on the lives of the members of his family.

Explore Other Ideas

For those students who wish to explore other ideas raised by the book, possible fields of study include:

- Research into the relationship between dolphins and people, including some of the myths and folklore which credit dolphins with saving people's lives at sea.
- Studying dolphins and ways in which they communicate.

| DATA CHART (Turn sideways and enlarge to A4 landscape) | What is autism? | What behaviours do autistic children often exhibit? | How can autistic children be helped to make sense of the world? | How can autism affect other members of the family? | How can families cope with the strain of living with an autistic child? |
|---|-----------------|---|---|--|---|
| What I already know about autism | | | | | |
| <i>Dolphins Dance</i> | | | | | |
| Reference 2 | | | | | |
| Reference 3 | | | | | |