

Bernie Thinks in Boxes

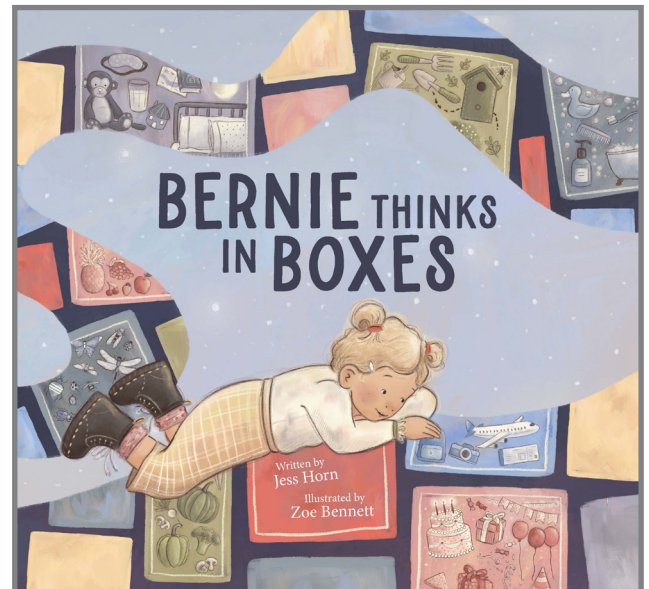
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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

Bernie thinks in boxes. She has boxes for everything: for home, for school and even for the park. Bernie likes boxes. When things fit into boxes, they make sense. But one day, Bernie's boxes collide, and she must find a way to make sense of her world again.

A beautiful story about thinking differently and navigating change in a neurotypical world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jess Horn is a Sydney-based children's author, passionate about empowering kids and sparking imagination. Her stories are full of humour and heart, often exploring the world from a neurodivergent perspective. With a background in speech pathology and disability services, she now pursues her love of words by weaving stories with a subtle message of inclusivity, encouraging readers to think outside the box.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Zoe Bennett is an illustrator based in Sydney. Her work aims to capture the playfulness, curiosity and candidness of childhood, family and ordinary moments. She especially loves to capture quintessentially Australian scenes, colour palettes and characters. With a background in biological sciences, Zoe enjoys the unique experience of having a biologist brain and following her creative aspirations.

THEMES

- Neurodivergence
- Identity
- Acceptance
- Friendship

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- What do you think the title of the book means? What kind of boxes do you think Bernie thinks in?
- Who is the book about?
- Explore the cover of the book. What do you see? Does this tell you anything about what the story will be about?
- Discuss the meaning of neurodivergence and consider some of the ways that neurodivergent people are excluded by a neurotypical world.

WHILE READING**Literacy**

- Make a list of any new words you encounter in the story. Look them up and write down the meaning in your own words. Try to practise using them at least three times throughout the week.
- Bernie finds that boxes help her to organise the world so that she can understand it. Why is it useful to organise our ideas, observations and experiences?
 - What are some of the ways that your life is organised?

Comprehension

- What kind of boxes does Bernie think in?
- What are some of the boxes that Bernie has—what goes in them?
- How does Bernie feel when she's able to group things into boxes?
- How does she feel when she can't put things in boxes? What does she do when this happens?
- Why is Toby's party such a problem?
 - How does Bernie feel about missing Toby's party? What does she do to celebrate his birthday instead?
- How does Bernie prepare herself for cake at school?
- Why do you think some of the illustrations are coloured, and others are left as outlines?
- How could Bernie's friends have helped to make the party more inclusive?

Discussion Questions and Activities

- Imagine that you are Bernie, and draw a series of boxes that show a day (or a week) in your life. What boxes would you have? What would go in them? Is there anything that wouldn't fit?
- Visual stories, or schedules, can help to make events more inclusive for people by representing the steps of a particular event or activity. Choose an event that's coming up at your school, and work in groups to create a visual story for it to help kids like Bernie get ready for the event.
- Accessibility means making sure that everyone has the same opportunity to participate and feel included. Why is accessibility so important? Go around your school and take a photo of all the ways that the space is made accessible for people. Are there any ways that it's inaccessible? Draw a picture of what you could change to improve this.
- Write about a time that you felt left out or unsure about something. How did you deal with this? What helped, or would have helped?

AFTER READING

- Look at the last page of the book and write a line that describes how you think Bernie is feeling.
- What did you think the book was about? How would you describe it to someone else?
- In the book, Bernie does a lot of work to fit in, but how could her classmates help to make this easier for her?

AUTHOR OF NOTES

BEC KAVANAGH