

Teachers' Notes

Can Bears Ski?

Raymond Antrobus Polly Dunbar



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Can Bears Ski?

By Raymond Antrobus • Illustrated by Polly Dunbar

These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

Before Reading:

- As you share and explore this story, there will be opportunities to explore the experiences of both hearing and Deaf characters as well as the professionals that support each. You will need to introduce subject specific vocabulary to support this discussion – such as ‘hearing’, ‘Deaf’, ‘British Sign Language’, ‘fingerspelling’, ‘lipreading’, ‘hearing aid’ – as well as modelling appropriate language and promoting positive representation, as advocated by the Deaf community. You can support both hearing and Deaf children to understand the importance of Deaf identity; the culture, heritage; the right to be bilingual and choose which language is preferred; and the positive role models that can be explored within a thriving Deaf community. The following would be useful to visit for information, guidance and resources to support you to explore this in more depth with the children:
 - British Deaf Association <https://bda.org.uk/history/what-we-stand-for/>
 - Royal Association for Deaf People: <https://royaldeaf.org.uk/>
 - British Sign Language: <https://www.britishsignlanguage.com/british-sign-language-3/>
 - Hearing Link on lipreading: <https://www.hearinglink.org/living/lipreading-communicating/what-is-lipreading/>

Reading aloud and key talking points:

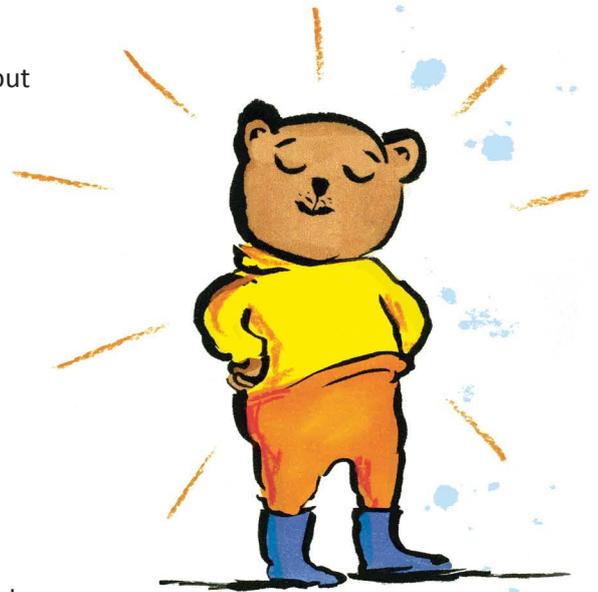
- Share the front cover of the book with the children, and encourage them to focus on the illustration of the bear (Boy Bear), before looking at the title. *How is this character feeling? What might this character be thinking? What tells you this? What do you know or think you know about this bear? Is there anything you notice about him? What is happening in the background around him? What do all these things make you think about the character? Do you have any questions you would like to ask the bear?* You could make a note of the children’s ideas around a copy of the cover, to capture their initial thoughts and ideas.
- You will notice that Boy Bear is wearing hearing aids which some children may recognise or wear themselves. At this stage, gather the children’s initial responses, drawing on their real world knowledge and experience. This will inform how soon the children make the connection between this and Boy Bear’s experiences in the first part of the story. Allow this understanding to unfold naturally as you progress through the book.

- Now share the title of the text: **Can Bears Ski?** What do you think a story with this title and featuring this character might be about? What do you think might happen?
- Open the book and look at the front endpapers and then the title page. Spend some time talking about the children's experiences of snow. *What does this illustration show us? What time of day is this? What do you think about when you see snowfall like this? How does it make you feel? What words come to mind?* Encourage the children to make wider sensory connections with snowfall as well as describing what it looks like. *How does it feel to touch? What would you hear? Can the children emulate the rhythm of this gentle snowfall with their fingers in the air?*
- Now turn to the publication pages, where you can see a snowy setting and discuss this together. *How does this scene relate to the endpaper images of snowfall at night-time? What time of day do you think this is? What can you see in the scene? What are the features of the landscape? What do you think it feels like to be there? Why do you think this?* Encourage the children to share any prior knowledge or personal connections with the setting. *Have any of them been to a place like this before? Where was it? What was it like? What would you like to do here? What connections can we make with the character we have met on the cover? What does the landscape make you think about the story that lies ahead?*
- Now turn the page to reveal the next spread. Invite the children to share their initial impressions of what they see before reading aloud any of the text. They may spot Boy Bear asleep in bed and the big bear entering the room and relate it to their own experiences of morning time. They may notice the way the font increases in size down the page and have some ideas about this or recognise immediately that these words are numbers and infer meaning from this. The children might comment on the fact that Boy Bear is fast asleep despite the big bear appearing to call him.
- Now encourage the children to look really closely at the details in the illustration. Putting the book under a visualiser might help the children to see more clearly, or you could hand round the book for the children to look in greater detail. *What can they tell about Boy Bear from his bedroom and the things he has in it? How would they describe the way the big bear is behaving? How is it moving? How has it opened the door? How do you know? How has the illustrator shown this? Draw attention to the movement lines as well as the cracks in the ceiling. How does this relate to what big bear is doing? How would you feel if you were woken up like this?*
- Now read the text aloud, emulating Dad Bear's increasing volume. Discuss the children's responses to what they have heard. *How does this confirm what they already knew? What else have they found out?* Draw attention to the words used to describe the effect Dad Bear is having on the room and how this matches what they have noticed in the illustration: **radiator shakes, bed rumbles, windows tremble, ceiling cracks**. This could be the start of an interesting word collection in which children investigate the way sound can be described.
- Invite the children to stand up and ask them to join in with you by taking the part of the dad. The children could take turns to pretend to remain 'fast asleep' while the rest of the class counted to five with increasing volume as you read aloud. You can repeat this a few



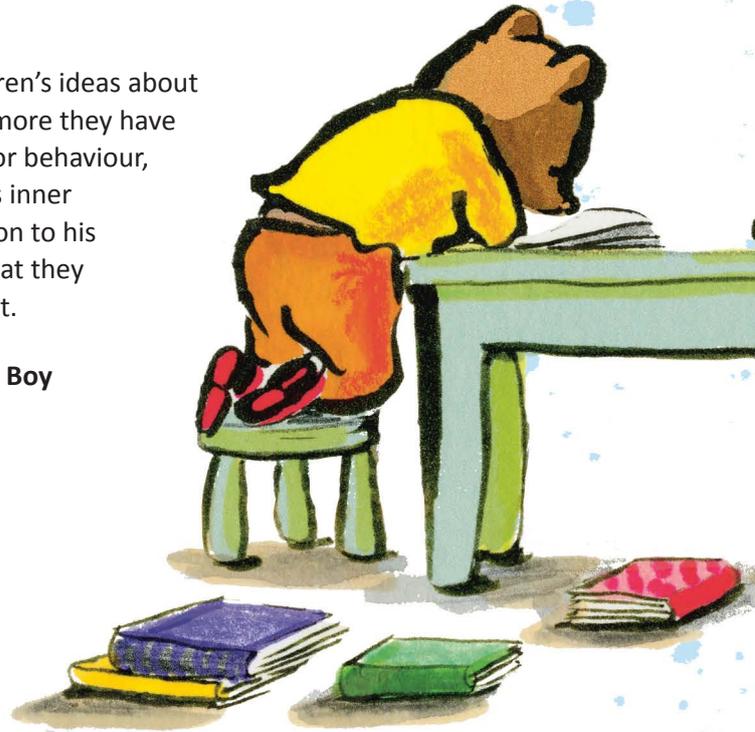
times. and begin to include increasingly dramatic actions or sound effects to match the font design, word meaning and punctuation. Look at the 'sleeping bear' who still hasn't been woken by the din and discuss: *why do you think Boy Bear remains fast asleep despite all this noise Dad Bear is making? How does this relate to what we know of him so far?* As well as looking for evidence in part of the story they have read so far, encourage the children to draw on their personal experiences and their knowledge of the world to make these inferences.

- Turn to the next page and read aloud, giving the children time to respond to what they can see and have heard. *Is this what the children expected? What has made Boy Bear wake up?* Return to Dad Bear's **heavy step** at the count of **FIVE!** and that the **ceiling cracks**. Ask the children to reflect on whether they think Boy Bear has been woken by the **shouting and stamping noise** Dad makes or the **feeling** of the sound Dad has made. *Is this possible? Can you feel sound as well as hear it?* You might explore the way he describes his clothing as **loud** but not the sounds.
- Return to the character and ask the children to think about what they know or like about him. *How would they describe him? Would they like to be his friend?* On a large sheet of paper, draw an outline of Boy Bear and encourage the children to share what they know about the character from what they have read so far. They may look at direct, external observations, such as 'Boy Bear lives with his Dad' or 'He likes brightly coloured clothes.' Or they may begin to make inferences about Boy Bear's internal characteristics such as 'Boy Bear is independent' because he dresses himself or 'Boy Bear is enthusiastic' after reading the line **I explode out of bed**. If children disagree on points such as whether they think Boy Bear is happy with or worried around his dad, model how both viewpoints can be justified and valued. Record the external observations around the outside of the outline drawing and look at whether these allow us to infer more about the character; for example, we might infer Boy Bear is 'thoughtful' because of the way he is shown looking out of the window at the snow. Write any inferences about internal characteristics on the inside of the outline drawing. Later in the book, it is revealed that Boy Bear is deaf but this activity will enable the children to gain a deeper sense of his character, the life he leads and the things that define him as opposed to defining him purely on his hearing.
- Turn the page and – before reading the text aloud – explore the spread and the contrast between the images on each of the two pages. *How do they compare? Which image do you prefer? What do you like or dislike about what you see? How do you think Boy Bear is feeling in each scene?* Now read aloud the spread and talk together more about what this tells you is happening and how Boy Bear feels in each moment. *What does he like about the snow?* Return to the line **Then I feel Dad's voice**. *What do the children think this means? Can they imagine how he felt rather than heard Dad's voice? Which words on the next page tell us Dad's voice is being felt not necessarily heard?* Add **shake**, **wobble** and **flinch** to the children's language collection and explore meanings by enacting the scene as before.
- Now read and explore the next four spreads in which Boy Bear joins dad for breakfast; he walks to school; he is with his teacher in class; and he is at lunch with his classmates. Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to it through book talk with the help



of what Aidan Chambers calls ‘the four basic questions’. These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:

- Tell me ... was there anything you liked about this story?
 - Was there anything that you particularly disliked?
 - Was there anything that puzzled you?
 - Were there any patterns ... any connections that you noticed? Did it remind you of anything else you’ve read or seen?
- The openness of these questions unlike the more interrogative ‘Why?’ question encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view without the fear of the ‘wrong’ answer. Talk together about what is happening in each scene and the picture this is building for us about how Boy Bear is experiencing the world and how he feels about it. Children may want some time to revisit these four spreads and explore their ideas for themselves. They might explore Dad’s viewpoint. *What might he be thinking about? What might he be saying to Teacher Bear?*
 - Use the large outline of Boy Bear to add the children’s ideas about him, this time using a different colour pen; what more they have learned about him in terms of outer appearance or behaviour, facts they know and what they can infer about his inner characteristics, thoughts or feelings. Draw attention to his facial expressions, gaze and body position and what they tell us about his emotional response to each event.
 - Return to the last scene in these spreads in which **Boy Bear** is at lunch and doesn’t know what everyone is laughing at and is then confronted by the same question, “**Can Bears Ski?**” *What do they think will happen next? Turn the page to reveal Boy Bear alone in the library and read the text, demonstrating through vocal effect the intent behind the fading font. Talk together about what kind of place this is and if they have ever been in a room like this before. Why is Boy Bear here? Do you think he likes it here in the library? What makes you think that? What do you think happened between lunch and now? If you could say anything to Boy Bear now, what would you say to him? How would you want him to feel? You could help the children to write a note to comfort or reassure him. What do you think Dad needs to know? What might you want to tell him to help Boy Bear?*
 - Now turn the page in which Dad takes Boy Bear to visit the audiologist. Read aloud and give the children ample time to look carefully at the sequence of illustrations. *How do we think Boy Bear feels about going through the door to the audiologist? What kind of conversation are he and Dad having? How do you know?* You might engage the children in role play in which pairs take on each of the roles to explore the characters’ thoughts and feelings more deeply. You could record their imagined conversation and record this as speech bubbles around photographs of the children or a copy of this illustration.



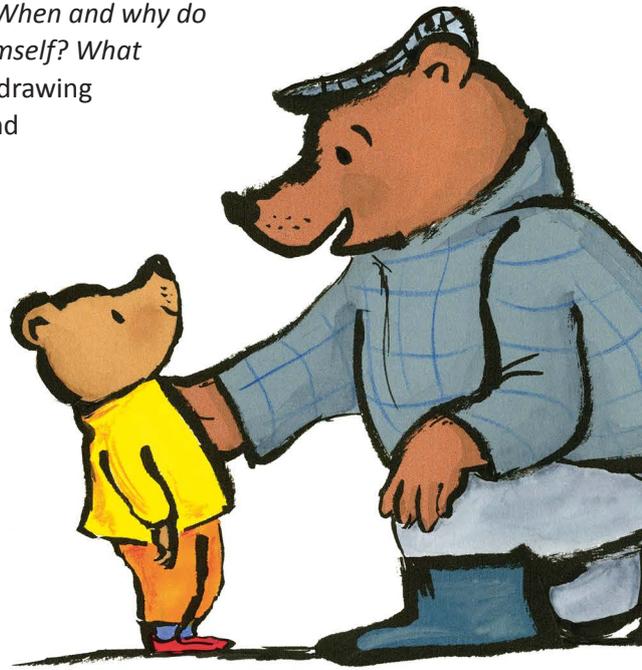
- Continue reading over the next page and further four spreads to explore the experiences with the audiologist over the next few sessions until **“CAN YOU HEAR ME?”**. Discuss the sequence of events with the children and what they have discovered about Boy Bear’s hearing. *What do they think Boy Bear liked and disliked about the experiences? What new things is he learning that he enjoys and what might he feel less sure about? Do you think he is going to enjoy being able to hear everything so loudly now? What do we know about Boy Bear that suggests he might also like the quiet?* Encourage them to ask questions, explore unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts, and make sense of Boy Bear’s experiences. Allow time for the children to share personal experiences that enable them to empathise with Boy Bear. Give them ample time to revisit the spreads to find information in the illustrations or the text that supports their ideas.

- Revisit the pivotal moment in which Boy Bear is taken aback by how loud **“CAN YOU HEAR ME?”** sounds. *How does this relate to the question he and others asked before this “CAN BEARS SKI?”* What do they think has been happening all along now we know he couldn’t hear everything clearly? Draw attention to the similar rhythm and rhyme in the two questions that suggests he has misheard the question, relating it to the snowy context of his surroundings, the television programme at breakfast and the shape of the graph at the audiologist.

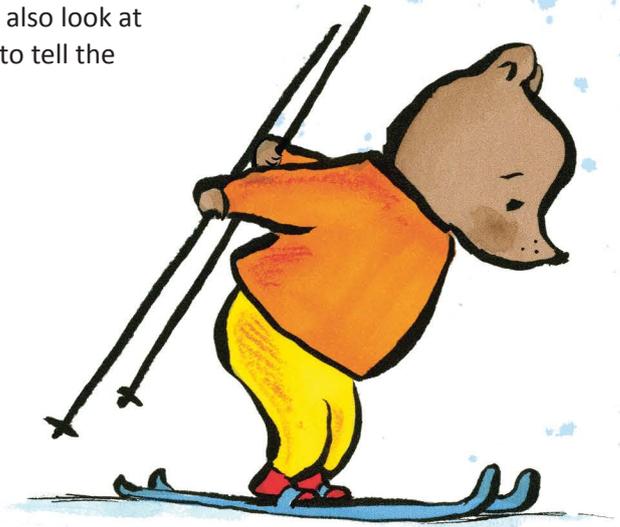
- Now read to the end of the book. *Is this what you expected? How is he adapting to wearing hearing aids and being able to hear every sound? When and why do the sounds stop making sense? What does he do to help himself? What does this tell us about Boy Bear?* Come back to the outline drawing of Boy Bear, and talk about how you would describe him and his life now. Note the external and internal characteristics on a final colour on the outline drawing. Come back to everything you have written on this drawing and talk about how Boy Bear’s life has changed from the start of the story to now. *What made that happen?* This gives you an opportunity to summarise the important stages of the story. Reflect on the different emotions that Boy Bear goes through during the story. *How would you describe Boy Bear at the start of the text? In the middle? At the end?*

- Think about the other characters. *What was Dad Bear’s role in the story? How did he help Boy Bear? What lessons did he learn himself? Do you have someone like this in your own life?* Give the children the opportunity to talk about the special people in their own lives that support them.

- Come back to the book again and re-read the entire story as a whole. Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to it through book talk:
 - Tell me ... was there anything you liked about this story?
 - Was there anything that you particularly disliked?
 - Was there anything that puzzled you?
 - Were there any patterns ... any connections that you noticed? Did it remind you of anything else you’ve read or seen?



- Extend the children’s thinking through a more evaluative question, such as - *Why do you think Raymond Antrobus chose to write this book? Who do you think would like this book? Why?* You could also look at the illustrations and how Polly Dunbar has helped to tell the story.
- Leave multiple copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group.



After reading, you could also:

- Raymond Antrobus draws on his own experience to show how isolating it can be to be a Deaf child in a hearing community. Find out more about inclusion and use the story to increase children’s awareness, including different ways in which Deaf people might prefer to communicate. Boy Bear learned lipreading at his hearing therapy which he seemed to enjoy. Explore other ways Deaf people may prefer to communicate, for example by learning the language, British Sign Language (BSL), or a sign language from another country. Boy Bear has hearing aids fitted but doesn’t always like to have them in when he becomes tired or overwhelmed with the sounds. *What else can we learn about the experience of wearing hearing aids? How can we better enable Deaf children to access spoken language by managing disruptive or excessive environmental sounds, such as the scraping of chairs? How does Dad Bear make sure that Boy Bear can enjoy storytime now? What is he doing differently from at the start of the story? How have his body position, gaze and facial expression changed when he is in communication with Boy Bear?*
- Discuss with the children what they have learnt from reading this story. *How could we share this information with other people?* Raymond Antrobus has written a story for children. *Could we make a poster? A leaflet? An information book?*
- Children could learn some important BSL signs useful in greeting and communicating with friends and classmates, such as:
 - **hello** <https://www.britishsignlanguage.com/bsl-dictionary/hello/>
 - **thank you** <https://www.britishsignlanguage.com/bsl-dictionary/thank-you/>
- Children could learn to fingerspell their name or even adopt a single BSL sign for themselves that they think says something about them: <https://www.britishsignlanguage.com/fingerspelling-alphabet/>
- Children could learn how sentences are structured in British Sign Language, for example in the English language, we would order the words ‘What is your name?’ whereas in BSL we order the signs ‘name what you?’ As with learning all languages, a lovely way for young

children to learn British Sign Language is by learning signed songs and stories. You can access useful resources produced by charitable organisations, such as:

- KAOS Choir which is the first integrated signing choir: https://www.youtube.com/results?sp=mAEB&search_query=kaos+choir
- Royal Association for Deaf People's Signed Stories: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GruZqsNsWGc>
- Children could investigate vibrations created by sound, such as those experienced by Boy Bear in the story. They could explore how music can be enjoyed by both hearing and deaf children because of the rhythm of the vibration felt.
- Provide an opportunity to write another story for Boy Bear – this could be a day in his life now he has been fitted with hearing aids and – crucially – now other people around him have adapted their behaviour to make sure they communicate appropriately. Children could revisit the sequence of events from the moment Dad Bear woke him up to the end of his school day. *What would be different? What would be better? What challenges would he encounter? How could he overcome these?*
- Give an opportunity to write a poem, song or descriptive piece of writing about the snow.
- Encourage the children to write about the special people in their life or make a card or write a letter to thank these people for being there for them.
- Give an opportunity for the children to write a personal narrative about a time they have felt misunderstood, been left out, overcome a fear, felt relieved, or been overwhelmed.

Other suggested titles to further support the exploration of themes arising from the book:

- *Freddie and the Fairy* by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Karen George (Macmillan)
- *What the Jackdaw Saw* by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Nick Sharratt (Macmillan)
- *Fairy Magic* by Cerrie Burnell, illustrated by Laura Ellen Anderson (Scholastic)
- *A Book of Feelings* by Amanda McCardie, illustrated by Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)
- *Happy in Our Skin* by Fran Manushkin, illustrated by Lauren Tobia (Walker)
- *Ruby's Worry* by Tom Percival (Bloomsbury)
- *Between Tick and Tock* by Louise Greig (Egmont)

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