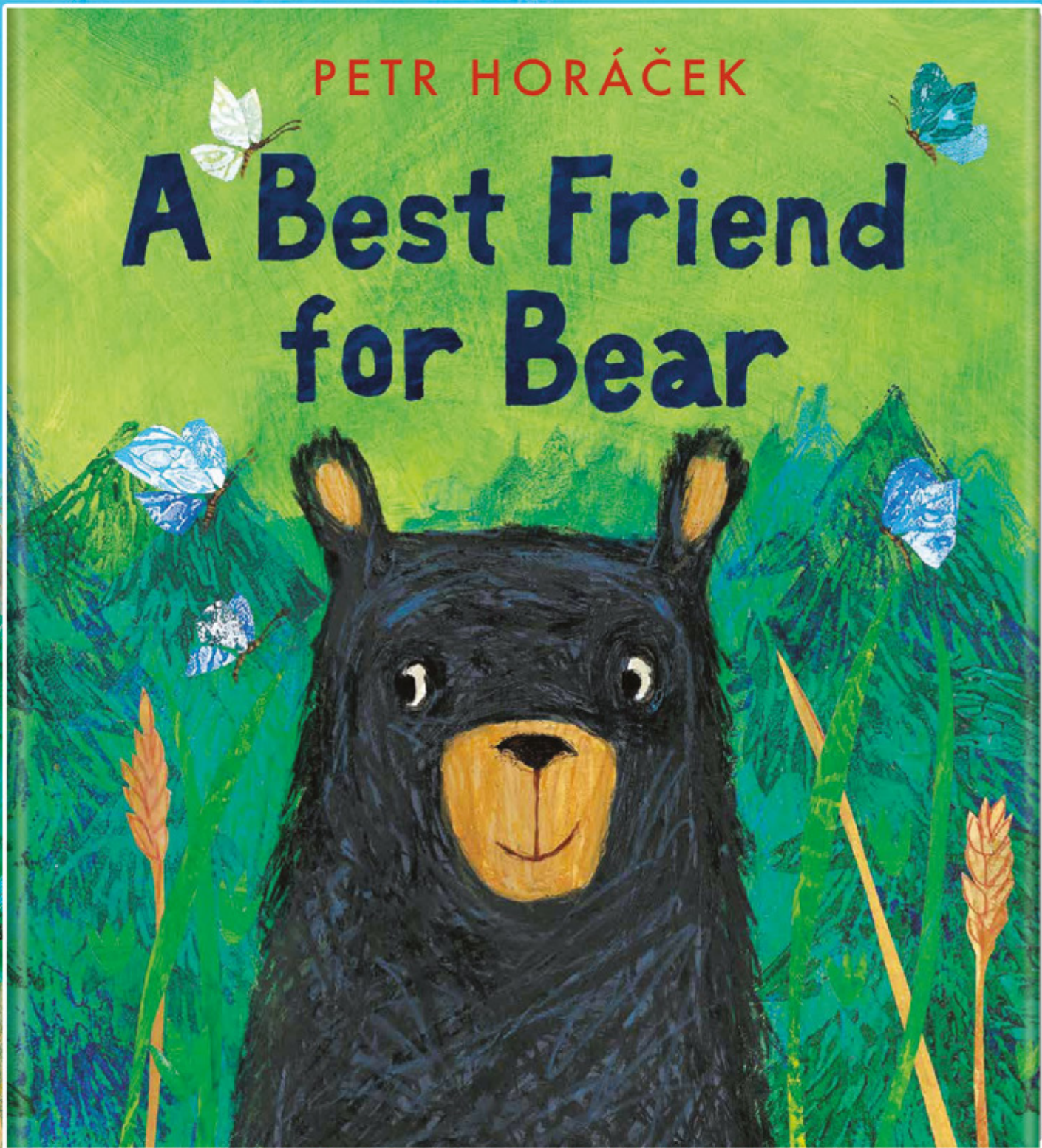


TEACHERS' NOTES

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A Best Friend for Bear



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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.

These teaching notes have been written with children in Nursery and Reception in mind but you will need to differentiate them as appropriate to the needs and experience of your own children.

Before you start:

- As you read through the book, it would be helpful to use a group journal to organize and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal can be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as how the writer uses language for effect.
- As you read, you may also want to encourage the group to pause to consider words and phrases that may or may not be familiar to them and to discuss and clarify their meanings. These might include but will not be limited to words around emotions and some of the more complex vocabulary in the book such as “coincidence” or “expect”. Add these to a glossary, following up on new and unfamiliar vocabulary by using photographs and video sources to bring these words to life and support the pupils in understanding them in the context of these stories. Concepts such as friendship can also be introduced through songs and rhymes prior to sharing the book.
- Ensure the children have had plenty of experience with hiding and searching for things. Good examples could be playing games like hide-and-seek, or variations on this such as searching the classroom for a hidden toy, with the class giving clues about its location by using words like “Warmer... Cooler... Cold... HOTTER!” or louder/quieter, higher/lower voice sounds or faster/slower renditions of a familiar rhyme or song.
- Include games where you encourage children to find, collect and organize similar objects, sorting by size, colour or shape. Increase the difficulty of these games so that children can begin to feel first-hand the more challenging feelings related to a difficult search, such as frustration or anticipation. The gradual increase in challenge will also provide children with the opportunity to explore strategies to overcome the difficulties, maybe by asking a friend to help them, or searching a space systematically from one side to another. Model naming the emotions the children might be feeling as this will help the children relate to and empathize with the main character later in the story.

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, 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? Does the bear remind you of any characters you have come across in other stories?*
- Now draw the children’s attention to the background of the illustration. *What is happening around the bear? Where might the bear be? What do all these things make you think about the character? Do you have any questions*



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you would like to ask the bear? The children may notice the mountains in the background. Depending on the children's prior knowledge of bears in the wild, you can introduce the idea of different habitats and where in the world bears live and why this might be. Make a note of the children's ideas around a copy of the cover, to capture their initial thoughts and ideas, adding these to the group journal.

- Open the book and explore the endpapers with the children, then turn to the publication pages. Draw the children's attention to the two bears sitting back-to-back. *What do you notice? Are there any similarities between the two characters? What might the relationship between the two bears be? What tells you that?*
- Now read the title to the children. Ask the children what they think might happen in a story with the title **A Best Friend for Bear** that features these characters. You can record children's predictions in the group journal.
- Now turn the page to reveal the first spread. Invite the children to share their initial impressions of what they see before reading aloud any of the text. Allow the children time to look closely at the illustration. You could hand round the book for the children to see the details. Draw their eyes around the bear, noticing the possible forest behind the character, looking at the flora and fauna and up to the sky. *What do you think about the place you can see? What does the landscape make you think about the story that lies ahead?* Encourage the children to share any prior knowledge or personal connections they may have with the setting. *Have any of you been to a place like this before? Where was it? What was it like?*
- Focus their attention back on the bear, looking in particular at the bear's eyes and mouth. *How might the bear be feeling? What tells you that he might be feeling that way?*
- Read the first line of the story: **Black Bear was feeling lonely.** Spend a little time defining loneliness, being sensitive to the children's circumstances and the personal experiences that they may bring to this discussion. You could add this word to your class glossary to refer back to later.
- Continue reading to: **I wish I had a friend, he thought.** Pause here and allow the children to explore how they think Black Bear would sound if he were saying, "I wish I had a friend" aloud. Encourage the children to explore changing their pitch, tone and volume as they say the phrase repeatedly until they find a voice that they think expresses Black Bear's current emotions. You could allow the children to do this in pairs, listening to each other's expressive voices, or as a whole group guided by a modelling adult reading or reciting this sentence in a variety of contrasting ways to show the effect of how speaking in a different tone or volume can emphasize the feelings of sadness, loneliness and despair. Remember that the bear might feel lots of other feelings connected to his loneliness, and name and explore these with the children as they use their voices to perform.
- Read on to: **"But where will I find one?"** Pause here to allow the children to consider where Black Bear could find a friend. Draw on the children's prior experiences by reflecting together on how they have found friends in their own lives. Perhaps this is at school, at other people's birthday parties, at any clubs or groups they are involved in outside of school, or perhaps at a local park.
- Turn to the next page of Black Bear walking through the thick forest. Before reading the text, encourage the children to look at the bear's whole body: the hands, the slumped back and how he is looking at the ground. *How might Black Bear be feeling now? Look around Black Bear – is there anyone around? What could be in*



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amongst those trees? To increase the children's empathy towards the main character, have the children stand up and mirror Black Bear's slumped stance. If space permits, allow them to walk and move around the room the way they think Black Bear is walking through the forest. Ask how it makes them feel walking in that way? How might it feel if they walked through a forest like that all day?

- Read on through to: **"Finding a friend is not easy."** On a large sheet of paper, draw an outline of Black 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 "Black Bear lives in the forest." Or "He is a black bear." Or they may begin to make inferences about Black Bear's internal characteristics, such as "Black Bear is brave because he walks through the forest alone." They might also point out his inner feelings or desires; for example, "Black Bear is lonely and really wants a friend." Record the external observations around the outside of the outline drawing and look at whether these allow us to infer more about the character; we might infer Black Bear is "determined", for instance, because of the way he is looking around and searching through the forest, even though finding a friend is not easy. Write any inferences about internal characteristics on the inside of the drawing.
- Move on to the next page and before reading the text, notice Brown Bear's changed body language and facial expressions: standing upright with raised eyebrows. *What does this tell us about how he feels seeing another bear? Now look at the other bear; how is that bear feeling? How might they feel about each other? What tells us this?*
- Read on through the next spread. You might need to pause at the word "coincidence" to define it and add it to your group glossary. Look at both bears smiling. *Who is smiling more? Ask the children, Why might that be?* Perhaps it is that Brown Bear is a little shy or nervous. Add the children's responses to the outline of Brown Bear, inside or outside the line drawing accordingly.
- Read on through to: **"Finding a friend is not easy."** Notice **Big** Bear's large smile and turn back to the second spread of the book where the same phrase is written. Encourage the children to notice the differences in how Black Bear is standing and in his facial expressions. Speculate why this might be. Perhaps he is feeling more confident now he has someone helping him. Maybe he is having fun in the process even though he finds it a challenge.
- Turn to the next spread showing Brown Bear holding on to Black Bear. Notice the change in the landscape and what the bears are doing. As a group, look back at the outline of Black Bear and invite the children to add new ideas about Black Bear's character from what they have just learnt about him. Ideas could include the fact that he is adventurous or daring because of the way he is leaning over the cliff edge.
- Read all the way to: **"Coming, ready or not."** Pause here to reflect with the children about their own experiences of searching for things. Draw on any of the search-based games the children have played prior to reading the book. *Was their experience of trying to search for things similar to the bears'? What did they find challenging when they searched? What made it easier? How did they feel as they were looking?* You can note down their personal connections to the characters' experiences around an enlarged copy of the bears searching through the forest or joyfully playing hide-and-seek.
- Now on a separate large piece of paper, preferably displayed next to the outline of Black Bear, create an



outline of Brown Bear. Encourage the children to share everything they know about Brown Bear and to begin to make inferences just as you did previously for Black Bear. You can turn back to other pages and read what Brown Bear said to Black Bear to support children to do this. This may include ideas such as: "Brown Bear is friendly because he said 'hello' to Black Bear", or "He is helpful because he decided to help Black Bear find a friend". Some children might make the connection between the characters and infer that Brown Bear is also lonely because he was looking for a friend too. You could extend this further by encouraging the children to think carefully about the similarities and differences between the bears and by supporting the children in identifying the characteristics which might make Brown Bear a great friend for Black Bear; for example, he is friendly, playful, kind and he is adventurous just like Black Bear.

- Read on to: **"OK!" said Black Bear.** Pause at the illustration where both bears are smiling at each other and Brown Bear is sitting on the ground. Draw the children's eyes to the background, with the bright blue sky and colourful trees and bushes around them. Pause here. Invite the children to close their eyes and visualize themselves in that setting. Ask them to draw on each of their senses in turn to help guide their ideas. For example, ask them what they can feel, such as the grass beneath them or the sun on their faces. Ask them what they can hear. This might be the little pink bird from the illustration chirping or the bears laughing. Also help them consider the fresh smells in the forest. Ask the children how this scene makes them feel.
- Now turn to the next page. Before reading any text, pause to reflect on how the mood has changed. Do this just from looking at the illustration. *How do the dark trees make you feel? Look at Black Bear with his furrowed brow. How do you think Black Bear is feeling now? What makes you think that?*
- Read on to: **"What if I have lost him for ever ... and ever?"** Allow the children to predict what they think might happen next. They can use key clues from the illustration such as the bear silhouette in the tree.
- Read on to the end of the story. *When Black Bear says you can find friends on branches, did he really mean, only on branches? What else could he have meant?* Allow the children to unpick and understand the humour in what Black Bear has said and the hidden meaning behind it. Guide them in thinking about how Black Bear found a best friend through the many things the bears did together throughout the story. You can use all the children's responses in and around the outlines of the bears to support this. Ideas could include: they found friendship through helping each other, trusting each other on the cliff edge, enjoying playing hide-and-seek together, taking turns and having shared interests like going on adventures.
- Come back to the book again and reread the entire story as a whole. 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?



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- 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 giving the “wrong” answer. Record the children’s book talk in your group journal.
- Extend the children’s thinking through more evaluative questions, such as: Why do you think Petr Horáček chose to write this book? What can we learn from it? Who do you think would like this book? Why?
- Leave multiple copies of the book in the book corner, along with your group journal, for the children to revisit and reread in independent learning time, by themselves or socially in a group. You could use two soft toy bears or puppets alongside the books to encourage the children to take on the different roles and use voices for the two characters.

After reading, you could also:

- Provide an opportunity for children to write or draw a new adventure for the bears to go on together. Perhaps they begin a hunt to find another friend to play with. Or maybe they go on an adventure together in a contrasting setting, such as by a lake. These could be in simple handmade books and displayed in your reading area for children to read to each other.
- Create, through shared writing, instructions on “How to find a friend”. These could be instructions written to other bears in the forest who might be lonely, or instructions, drawn from children’s real experiences, on how children can make friends with other children.
- Encourage the children to write about their own friends they have made and what they love to do together. You can collect photographs of friends playing together and collate these into a celebration book. Families can be invited to contribute by sharing photos or stories of the friendships the children have made outside of the setting; these can be added to the celebration book.
- Discover more about the author and illustrator Petr Horáček through: <https://www.walker.co.uk/contributors/Petr-Horacek-4457.aspx>.
- Share other books by Petr Horáček with the children and add these to your reading area. A comprehensive list and descriptions can be found through the CLPE author focus book list for Petr Horáček: https://clpe.org.uk/system/files/Petr%20Hor%C3%A1%C4%8Dek%20Booklist_0.pdf.
- Make multimedia artwork in the style of Petr Horáček’s illustrations. Possible media and materials could include poster paint, wax crayons, oil pastels and colouring pencils.
- Find out more about bears and their habitats. You could use age-appropriate information books or websites to research them, such as: <https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/bear/352836>. Consider how to present the new information found through posters, leaflets or fact books. Allow the children to choose how they present their findings.



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Other titles by Petr Horáček and books with similar themes from Walker Books

- **Choo Choo** by Petr Horáček
- **Flutter By, Butterfly** by Petr Horáček
- **Creepy Crawly** by Petr Horáček
- **Honk Honk! Baa Baa!** by Petr Horáček
- **A New House for Mouse** by Petr Horáček
- **The Mouse Who Ate the Moon** by Petr Horáček
- **The Mouse Who Reached the Sky** by Petr Horáček
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- **The Fly** by Petr Horáček
- **A Bit Lost** by Chris Haughton
- **A Book of Feelings** by Amanda McCardie, illustrated by Salvatore Rubbino
- **A Brave Bear** by Sean Taylor, illustrated by Emily Hughes
- **We're Going on a Bear Hunt** by Michael Rosen, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury



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