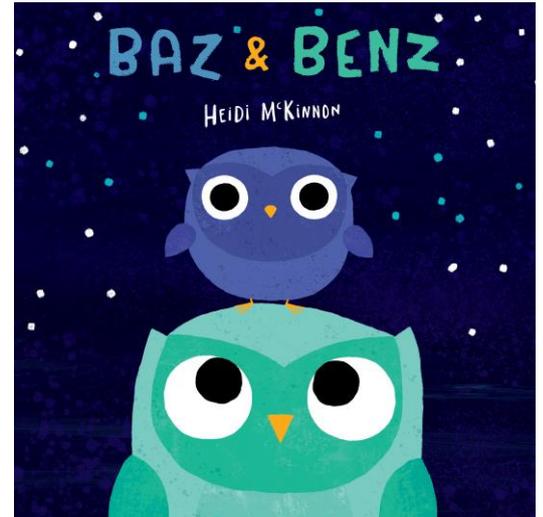


Baz & Benz

By Heidi McKinnon

March 2019 ISBN 9781760523688
 Hardcover picture book
 Recommended for 3-6-year-olds



Summary

'Benz, are we friends?'
 'Yes, Baz, we are best friends'
 'For how long?'
 'For ever and ever.'

But what do you do when your best friend is... kind of annoying?

A delightfully funny and warm-hearted story about a little owl exploring the boundaries of love and friendship from the creator of *I Just Ate My Friend*.

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The idea of testing the limits of love and friendship from within a safe space is a perennially popular theme in children's literature – think *Guess How Much I Love You* and Margaret Wise Brown's *The Runaway Bunny*.

Here Heidi McKinnon takes this classic theme and makes it her own with her wicked sense of humour and her gorgeously vibrant colours and design style.

Use in the curriculum

Baz & Benz is a highly engaging book, with a humorous and then cute ("Awww!") payoff at the end. Young children will relate easily to its theme of friendship. Its deceptively simple graphics can help teachers demonstrate how character, emotion, humour and even time can be conveyed through images.

It is suitable for addressing many of the Language, Literature and Literacy concept descriptions of the Australian Curriculum for Foundation Year and Year 1 as well as being a great asset in pre-schools and childcare for teaching basic book literacy.

Themes

- friendship
- testing boundaries
- unconditional love

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Discussion questions

1. Before opening Baz and Benz look at the title and cover design and ask questions such as:
 - Can you name the sort of bird that Baz and Benz are?
 - Do you know the noise they usually make?
 - Where do they usually live?
 - Do you think they are awake during the day or night? What helped you guess on the cover?
 - Do Baz and Benz look friendly? What is it in the picture that makes you think that?
 - Do you think this will be a funny or sad story? Why?
2. Read the story through once and then put the book down and ask students if they think Benz is a good friend to Baz and why. Try to expand the discussion by asking:
 - What sort of things do good friends do for one another?
 - What sort of things don't good friends do?
 - Is it nice to have good friends? Why?
 - Is it nice to be a good friend? Why?
3. Turn to the first double-page spread, 'Benz, are we friends?' 'Yes, Baz, we are bestest friends.' Ask the children which bird is Benz and which bird is Baz and how they know this. Or point out to them how the writing tells us which owl is which. [*The colour of the text matches the colour of the bird speaking that text.*]
4. On the next double-page spread, what additional design feature helps us know who is speaking? [*The text is printed below the picture of the bird who is speaking.*]
5. Look at the page where Benz says, 'That would be funny!' and compare it with the page where he says, 'That would be REALLY funny!'.
 - What is different in the second image to show Benz finds Baz's second idea even funnier?
 - What is different about the words shown on the page?
6. Now try the same exercise with the pages featuring Benz saying, 'That would be annoying.' and 'That would be REALLY ANNOYING!'.
 - How do his body and eyes change to show he is really annoyed?
 - How does the font and its size change to emphasise just how annoyed Benz would be?
 - Did these things change the way the words were read out by your teacher?
7. Now compare the first image of Baz as a bat with the next, scarier image.
 - How does his body change to convey the idea of something scary?
 - Do the words on the page change?
 - The second image of Baz is a close-up, meaning he seems much bigger. Why do you think Heidi McKinnon chose to present him like that?

8. If owls are awake all night and sleep during the day, why do you think the colour in the background changes from orange/pink to dark blue to black and then back to orange/pink?
9. Did you think that the ending was funny? Explain what you found funny about it.
10. Look at the front and back endpapers before closing the book.
 - How do they differ and why do you think the story closes with an image of Baz and Benz hugging on the same side of the tree?
11. Retell this story in your own words.
12. What did you like about the book? What didn't you like? Would you want to read it with your best friend?

The author

Heidi McKinnon was born and grew up in Tamworth NSW. After a childhood spent trying to avoid country music she moved to Melbourne and studied art and design at RMIT. After graduating, she worked lots of weird jobs until she began a career as a Graphic Designer. This is Heidi's second picture book. Her first, *I Just Ate My Friend*, was shortlisted for numerous awards, including the Children's Book Council Crichton Award and has been published around the world, including in the USA, France, Japan and Korea.



Author's inspiration

My childhood was spent hanging out at my parents' watchmaking shop and running around my grandparents' farm. Growing up in the country with only two TV channels was an excellent environment to develop imagination but mostly I dreamed of one day moving to the city.

My grandfather was an incredible storyteller and bush poet. He had endless stories about creatures that lived in the mountains who stole children and magic fish that lived in water tanks. I have great memories of swimming in dams, catching yabbies, befriending chickens and listening to my Pop's colourful (and sometimes nightmare-inducing) stories while toasting bread by an open fire.

I have always made things and knew from early on that I wanted a creative job when I grew up. As a kid I was obsessed with writing funny stories and drawing pictures.

In the early 90's I moved to Melbourne and studied art & design at RMIT. After art school I worked a million weird jobs until I began a career in Graphic Design. After having my daughter Ava, I began to reflect on my own childhood and how important stories are. I think *Baz & Benz* is about friendship and tolerance—and we all know someone like Baz!