

# Archie and the Bear

## Teachers Notes

Written by Zanni Louise and illustrated by David Mackintosh

Published by Little Hare in May 2017

### SYNOPSIS

Archie has something to say, but no one is listening. So Archie leaves home ... and discovers someone else with something to say. And because they both know how *that* feels, they both listen.

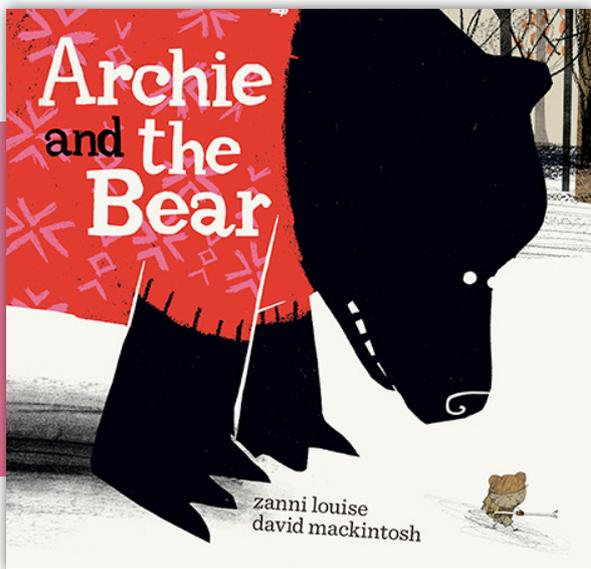
This is a weird and wonderful story about being who you are (even when you're not), by emerging author Zanni Louise and with illustrations by the inimitable David Mackintosh.

### THEMES

This is the story of a meeting between a boy, Archie, who insists he is a bear, and a bear who insists he is a boy. It describes their acceptance of each other's make-believe identities and the quirky ways in which they negotiate their new friendship. The key themes of acceptance and imagination lie hidden beneath the surface of the story, so that the themes percolate unobtrusively through text and images, rather than being overtly articulated. The reader is invited to understand the theme through their own experience of the narrative.

### WRITING STYLE

Zanni Louise takes a minimal, no-nonsense approach to telling *Archie and the Bear*. She has predicated the story on dramatic irony – Archie is clearly not a bear, and the bear is clearly not a boy. The reader is expected both to engage with Archie and the bear's conviction regarding their fantasy selves, and to understand the humour of this immersion in make-believe. The situation is both real and not-real, a reflection of the way young people themselves engage in play.



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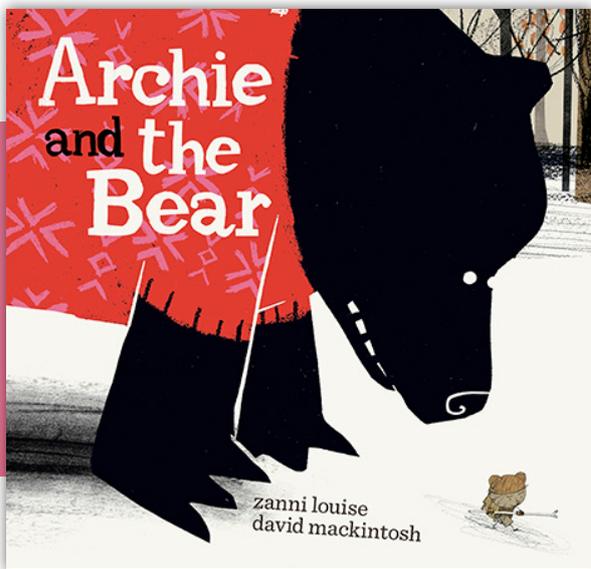
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The tone of the text is pragmatic, indicating a degree of authorial complicity with Archie, the bear and the quirky reality they have constructed for themselves. The actions, dialogue and opinions of both characters are stated matter-of-factly, with little to explain, excuse or describe their motives or states of mind. This guides readers to draw on their own experiences of being misunderstood and accepted, allowing them to engage more intimately with the narrative, even while enjoying the knowledge of its absurd nature.

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Sensitive to the author's tone, voice, mood and intentions, David Mackintosh deepens the sense of matter-of-factness, absurdity and dramatic irony in the text. His illustrations are classic 'visual hyperbole', or an extravagant exaggeration of the story. Both Archie and the bear's physical size – in comparison to the world around them and to each other – is amplified and over-the-top. Archie is dwarfed by almost everything in the story – the forest, the fish that the bear catches and the adults who pat him on the head – while the bear towers over everything and often only his head or feet appear on the page. The illustrations bring another layer of humour to the story: Archie's 'bear suit' is a brown cap with ears; the bear's 'boy suit' is a red woollen jumper. The reader can see that neither are who they think and say they are, but it's a mutual and happy delusion.

David uses a range of multimedia and illustration techniques throughout the story that deserve special attention; close analysis of each page offers a satisfying aesthetic experience. Paper cut-outs, collage, pencils, watercolour, crayon, reversed-out images and silhouettes are all used to give the story a layered feel. The bear and Archie are shown using contrasting media: for the bear, David uses flat, heavy black collage cut-outs; and for Archie, he uses light pencil lines. This is purposefully used as a kind of irony about Archie's apparent fragility but actual bravery, and the bear's apparent dangerousness but actual friendliness and docility.



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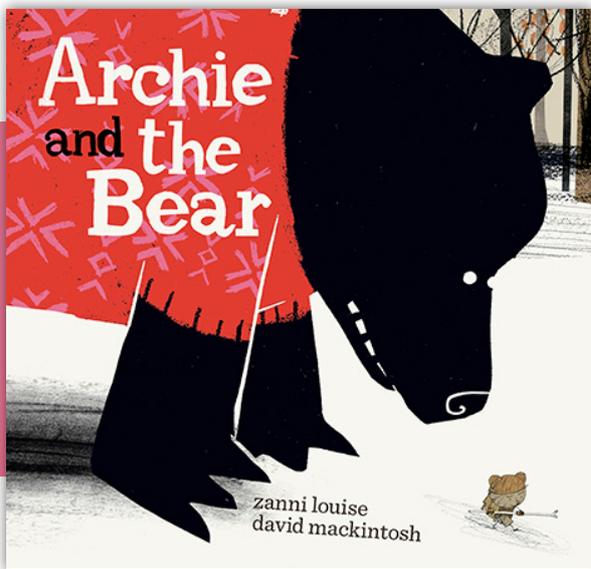
## AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND

Zanni Louise's first book for children, *Too Busy Sleeping*, is illustrated by award-winning illustrator Anna Pignataro and was a CBCA Notable Book in 2016. When not writing children's stories, Zanni hosts storytelling and bookmaking activities for children and creative workshops for adults. Recently, she ran Blogging for Writers at the Byron Bay Writers Festival and Blogging for Business for Bumbuku Creatives in Amsterdam. Zanni blogs at My Little Sunshine House, and has been named as a finalist in the Kidspot Voices Awards. She lives in NSW with her husband and two children.

## ILLUSTRATOR'S BACKGROUND

David Mackintosh has been writing and illustrating picture books since leaving university, where he received the Macmillan Picture Book Prize. He has gone on to work in publishing, advertising and TV production, and has worked with some of the most celebrated names in children's publishing. His debut, *Marshall Armstrong is New to Our School*, was shortlisted for the Roald Dahl Funny Prize in 2011. *The Frank Show* was a USBBY Outstanding International Book in 2013 and was also longlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal. He followed these with *Standing In for Lincoln Green*, which was shortlisted for the Western Writers of America Spur Awards. He lives in London, and loves books with pictures in them, flying, visiting cities and being read to. *Archie and the Bear* is David's first book with Little Hare.





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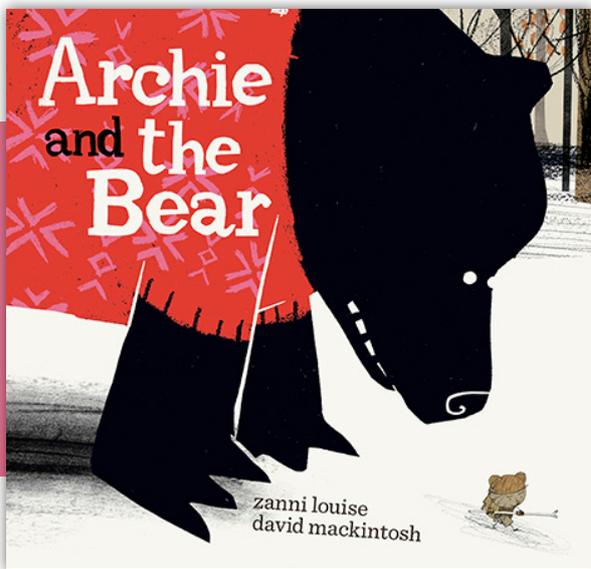
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## STUDY NOTES

1. Zanni Louise has written a delightful, quirky story about a boy who insists he is a bear and a bear who insists he is a boy. Discuss how the story is both real and un-real.
2. When depicting Archie and the bear's friendship, David Mackintosh uses a range of multimedia and illustration techniques. Can you see and name them all? Why do you think the illustrator has done this?
3. Illustrations in picture books often tell us more about the story than the words do. Choose a page from *Archie and the Bear* and describe what the picture is telling us about Archie and the bear's friendship and their journey together. What are your favourite activities to do with friends?
4. On a deeper level, *Archie and the Bear* is about children's feelings of frustration when they feel no-one is taking them seriously. Why is Archie so upset at the beginning of the story? Why is his friendship with the bear so important?
5. The story ends with Archie and the bear realising they both like warm quilts and a warm fire. Discuss the theme of acceptance that runs throughout the story.





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## ACTIVITIES

1. Read *Archie and the Bear* closely and find all the ways, both explicit and implied, where Archie is shown to be a 'bear' and the bear is shown to be a 'boy'. What techniques have the author and illustrator used to do this?
2. Archie and the bear accept each other's make-believe identities. Have your class use their imaginations to come up with their own different identities. Encourage your students to share their different identities with classmates and to 'wear' them all day.
3. David Mackintosh skillfully contrasts Archie and the bear through his illustrations. Following on from the activity above, have your class draw two self-portraits: the first as they are when they look in the mirror, and the second as their make-believe identity. How are the two portraits different, and why?



Archie and the bear walked along the river.



The bear showed Archie how to skim stones across the water.

Archie was very good at skimming stones.

