

Book review

First Week Blues

Category: Book Reviews / Children & Youth

Author: Jesse Greenslade

Year: 2015

Publisher: Self-published, NZ

ISBN: 9780473302207

Audience: For Youth



Summary: A story about a little penguin who is starting his first week at school, which teaches children about diversity and acceptance

First Week Blues is a perfect book to review for Pink Shirt Day as it teaches children about diversity and acceptance. In *First Week Blues* Jesse Greenslade tells a story of a time in our lives when we are most likely to be excluded because we go to a new place where we do not know anyone and feel different from others. The story reminds us that everyone has fears to overcome and sometimes needs support to do so. This book has been reviewed from three perspectives: parent, child and a primary school teacher.

Mother and child – Kim Higginson and her son

As a mother whose son has not long been at primary school, I was interested in this book as I can see how classroom and playground dynamics really can impact on a young person's self-esteem and sense of belonging. Its distinctive New Zealand flavour with native birds as main characters helps children instantly relate to the familiar setting. When the main character is teased, as in real life I felt the urge to micromanage and protect my son, and was tempted to dissect the story and offer advice on what the main character should do. Instead I allowed my son time to absorb the story, which naturally progresses to encourage the reader to reflect on the actions of the characters, and in turn themselves, allowing them to come away with some tangible learning.

My son has heard this story three times, which I think is a good sign as he normally only likes to hear a book once. He was focussed and interested in the story, and he particularly liked the main character Blue. He thought it would be a good book for a bully to read. After reading the story he could highlight what made him special (a prominent mole on his forehead) and what made him feel vulnerable (not liking water).

I think both mother and son were able to glean some wisdom from this book, it particularly made us reflect on our personal reactions to the scenario the main character encounters, and it prompted some heartfelt dialogue.

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Primary school teacher – Victoria Stevenson

I shared this picture book with my Year 2 class at Titirangi Primary, and we loved it! The children were impressed straight away by the bright and vibrant illustrations. They were quickly captivated by the story because it was easy for them to connect events with their own experiences. The children showed a lot of empathy for Blue when the other birds were laughing at and excluding him, and they were relieved when Blue was included by Pukeko.

From a teacher's perspective, I enjoyed the rich use of descriptive language and the clear social message. It was very relatable for the children and they responded positively to the story.

The example of Pukeko thinking of a way to include Blue helped promote discussion about how to stand up for others. I also liked the dream sequences, where the children got to see that everyone has their own fears and vulnerabilities. I would definitely use this book again as a fun and effective way to promote important social messages in the classroom.

Reviewed by Information Officer at the Mental Health Foundation Kim Higginson and Titirangi Primary School Teacher Victoria Stevenson

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