

Commissioner's Book Club

A Boy Called Bat

By Elana K. Arnold

Discussion guide

Introduction

B.C.'s Human Rights Commissioner's Book Club offers monthly book selections that use stories to help readers connect with human rights issues and build connection with the characters they encounter. We hope to bring together a province-wide community of readers and deepen their understanding of human rights and of those who are most affected by human rights issues. This guide has been prepared to assist parents, teachers, librarians and other trusted adults explore themes in Elena K. Arnold's book, *A Boy Called Bat*.

A Boy Called Bat introduces us to a boy, his family and his friends including his newest friend, a baby skunk named Thor. The main character, Bat, who is on the autism spectrum, has experiences that many readers will see reflected in their own lives—conflict with siblings, feeling overwhelmed and anxious about new experiences, the ups and downs of making friends and the strong desire to have their parents agree to something they want! Readers may also encounter everyday challenges they may not have in their own lives, showing the tension between how Bat feels on the inside, and how others sometimes misunderstand him on the outside. By following Bat's efforts to communicate, connect and be himself, readers can learn about neurodiversity and reflect on the rights we all share—the right to belong, the right to be treated with dignity and the right to have our unique ways of thinking and feeling respected and celebrated.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you think of the story? Did you have a favourite moment or part of the book?
2. Do you think skunks would make good pets? Why or why not?
3. If you could have any baby animal as a pet, which one would you choose? What do you think the adults in your life would think about you having this pet? Would they think it was a good idea?
4. In the book we learned a lot about Bat and what makes him who he is. What are some of the things that we learned that Bat likes and maybe even loves? What are the things that we learned that Bat doesn't like or that upset him?
5. Did you notice anything in Bat's experience in the book that reminds you of your life? Did you notice anything that is different from yours?
6. Everyone feels overwhelmed sometimes. In the book, Bat feels overwhelmed by some tastes, sounds and smells. Have you ever felt overwhelmed by any of your senses? Describe what happened and how you felt in your body. How did you react? Did you find a way to feel calmer?
7. Bat thinks Mr. Grayson is a good teacher. Do you agree? What do you think makes someone a good teacher?
8. Bat thinks that most people misunderstand him. Things that make perfect sense to him don't make sense to other people in his life. For example, his mom thinks his dresser drawers are a messy disaster when, in fact, Bat has carefully thought out where he puts his clothes in a way that makes perfect sense to him. Have you ever had a very different understanding of something or a different point of view that other people misunderstood? How did you explain your point of view? How might you listen to someone with a different point of view, to understand them better?
9. In the book, we learn about an unspoken rule (p. 56). What does that mean? Can you think of some unspoken rules in your class or school? How are we supposed to know about them if they are "unspoken"? Why is it hard for Bat to understand these unspoken rules?
 - a. You can learn more about unspoken or unwritten rules in BCOHRC's [#RewriteTheRules](#) campaign. This campaign explores how spaces, systems and attitudes can create barriers for people with disabilities and encourages more conversations about ableism.



Activity prompts

Bat's favourite place in his house is his bedroom. He feels safe and comfortable. Draw a picture of your favourite place in your home, at school or in your community, but instead of marking objects, mark where you feel certain senses:

1. Where does it smell the strongest?
2. Where is it brightest or dimmest?
3. Where is it loud, or quiet?
4. Do some objects feel soft, or fluffy?
5. Do others feel hard, or coarse?

What would you do if you found an injured or orphaned baby wild animal? Research the safest and best things to do (for you and for the animal) in this situation. Create a short slide show for your class about how to be safe and caring to animals in these situations.

