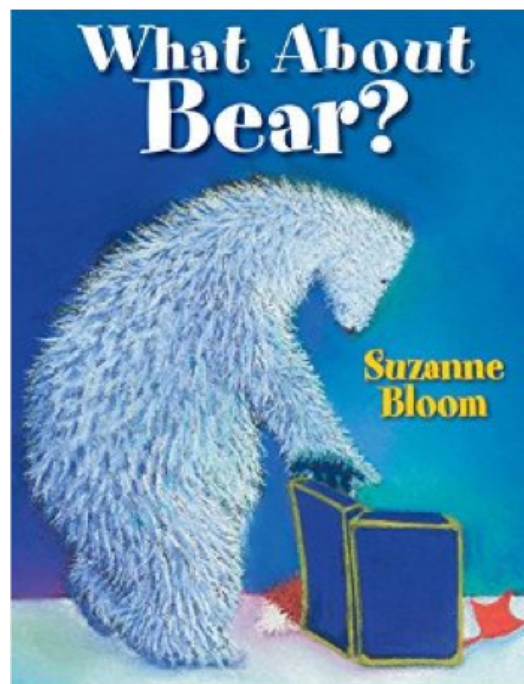


# What About Bear?

Suzanne Bloom



<b>Ages</b>	2-7	<b>Category</b>	Picture Book
<b>ISBN</b>	978-1-74276-173-2	<b>Size</b>	280 x 215 mm
<b>Binding</b>	Paperback	<b>Pages</b>	36

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## BACKGROUND

### Synopsis

Soft, textured artwork in pastels perfectly complements this gentle yet highly relatable story of friends learning to play together.

Bear and Goose are happily engaged in hand-puppet play together when Fox appears and asks to join in. This is no problem for Bear: 'Sure. Jump right in.' But Fox doesn't want to throw the ball with the others – Fox wants to play a different game, drawing small hopscotch squares on the ground. Goose asks, 'What about Bear?' and Fox replies, 'Bear is too big'. Next Fox wants to play a new game, checkers. Goose asks again, 'What about Bear?' and Fox says blithely, 'Bear is too grumpy.' Bear looks decidedly annoyed as Fox declares, 'I want to play another new game', and even Goose seems put-upon. Trying to mend fences, Goose again asks, 'What about Bear' – Fox is watching Bear walk away through binoculars held the wrong way around, and declares, 'Bear is too far away.' Goose has had enough: 'But Bear is my friend. Wait, Bear! Come back!' Fox is left alone, tail-clutching for comfort, and plaintively asking 'What about me?' Goose reappears, towing Bear, and says, 'Bear is my big, old, sometimes grumpy friend. You can be our new friend ... So, do you want to play with us?' Fox does, and Bear invites Fox to 'Jump right in!' to their skipping game. The final, wordless page shows Bear holding a sleepy Fox and Goose, who is reading aloud.

The short, simple text is conveyed entirely via the characters' dialogue, without punctuation marks or dialogue tags. To make it clear who is talking, each character's speech is rendered in a different colour – blue for Goose, black for Bear and yellow for Fox.

The colour palette is dominated by whites, blues and shades of yellowy-green, contrasting sharply with Fox, the brick-red intruder into Bear and Goose's playtime. However, when the characters learn how to play together at the end of the story, Fox takes on some of the other characters' blue and white tones, symbolising their compromise. Fox's red also bleeds into the other characters' cool blue-purple shadows during their scenes of conflict, but resolves into a satisfying, warm red-purple glow over the final image of all three characters contentedly reading together.

### Themes

Friendship, play, exclusion, sharing, negotiation, feelings/emotions, toys and games, comparisons, size.

## Suzanne Bloom's background and process

Suzanne Bloom was born mid-century in Portland, Oregon, which accounts for her love of overcast days. She moved to Queens, New York in time to finish kindergarten. Her first book, *We Keep a Pig in the Parlor*, was published in 1988. She has authored and illustrated many more books since then, including *The Bus for Us* (2000) and the popular Goose & Bear series, which includes *A Splendid Friend Indeed*, *Treasure*, *What About Bear?*, *Oh! What A Surprise!*, *Fox Forgets*, and her latest, *Alone Together*. She has won a Theodor Seuss Geisel Honor Award. She currently lives in upstate New York with her husband in the house they built more than thirty years ago, down a dirt road and on a hillside. She has two grown sons, one cat, and one dog. To learn more about Suzanne, visit [www.suzannebloom.com](http://www.suzannebloom.com).

Suzanne says:

I still use pencil and pastels and paint on paper because I like the way it feels to pull a brush across the paper, or to pull a small note pad out of my pocket and quietly sketch someone interesting across the way. I like the way it feels to get a line just right.

... I'm still trying to figure out how the magic happens. I'll always be working on the partnership of words and pictures that provides a rich and transporting reading experience; because a picture book is like an art gallery you can place in the hands of a child.

My goal is like a magician's goal – to make something appear where there was nothing; or a baker's – mix the ingredients into something delectable.

— Biography, *Pennsylvania One Book, Every Young Child*

## STUDY NOTES

This story can be enjoyed on a number of levels, and these notes cater to a range of different interest and ability levels. Please select the activities and questions that best suit your students.

### Before reading the book

- Show the front cover, point to and read the words ‘What About Bear?’ and ask the students to talk about the impressions they already have of the book. Who are the characters on the front cover? Where are they? What are they doing? What do the students think this might mean?
- Read the back cover blurb aloud. What do the students think the book might be about?

### While reading the book

- Read the story aloud. Talk about the rhythm and structure of the text. Unlike many picture books, the words don’t rhyme – why do the students think this is?
- The short, simple text is conveyed entirely via the characters’ dialogue. Discuss the way the dialogue is treated (colour, punctuation, etc.).
  - Each character’s speech is rendered in a different colour (green, yellow, blue). Show the students the first instance of each of these text colours and ask them who is talking. How can they tell? What is the effect of this, e.g. does it make it easier to understand the story?
  - Extension: talk about how written dialogue is often enclosed in quotation marks with or without a dialogue tag, e.g. “‘But Bear is my friend,’ said Goose.” Compare the two approaches to dialogue, perhaps with reference to another picture book the class has read recently. Ask the students why they think Suzanne Bloom has chosen to represent dialogue this way.

### After reading the book

Encourage student discussion as a class or in small groups.

- Talk about how Fox approaches playing with Goose and Bear. Is it successful? Why or why not? Does the approach change at different points in the story? Are there any other approaches Fox might have tried? What might have been the outcome?
- Discuss how Goose and Bear react to Fox. How are their reactions different? Why? What might they have done differently, and what might have been the outcome?

- Talk about how it feels when someone says they're not your friend, or they won't play with you. Discuss helpful and less helpful ways to react. Ask the students to share their experiences and feelings.
- Ask the students if they think Fox is deliberately excluding Bear, or doing it accidentally. Does it make a difference to Bear? Talk about whether or not people have a responsibility to choose games that everyone can enjoy when playing together.
- Discuss body language and facial expressions. Show the students a spread from the book and ask them to mirror the body language and facial expressions of each character in turn. What do they tell us about what the characters are feeling? How do they make the students feel?
- Talk about ages. Do the students think Bear, Goose and Fox are the same age, or different ages? Why? (You might discuss how they behave in the story, as well as size.) Do we expect older people to behave differently to younger people? Why or why not? Relate this to your school, e.g. peer-to-peer mentoring programs or expectations of older students.

## Writing and drawing activities

Students could:

- Make a list of the toys and games Goose, Bear and Fox play with in the story.
- Make a list of the reasons Fox says Bear can't play each of the games. Discuss: is Fox right? Is Fox being fair? Are they the same thing?
- Draw a picture of another game the characters could play together.
- Retell the story in their own words, either aloud or in writing.
- In small groups, pick a spread that features more than one character and each write a paragraph from the point of view of one of them at this point (in first or third person). How is the character feeling at this point of the story? What are they thinking about? Then share with the other members of the group and compare/contrast each character's point of view.

## Visual literacy

- Look at the name on the cover of the book. Talk about the creation of a picture book and discuss whether this book would have been as good if two different people had created the text and illustrations.
- Choose a spread from the book and ask students:
  - What is happening on this spread?
  - Does the text work without the illustration, and vice versa?
  - How does the picture complement, elaborate, or extend the detail of the written text?
  - Talk about reading paths. What is the first thing the students notice on the spread? Then where does their eye go? And then where? Why do the students think it is called a 'reading path'? Ask them to sketch or trace a rough copy of the image and draw their reading path on it.
  - What attitudes and emotions are being expressed – how does it make you feel?
  - What effect does the layout of the page have on you? For example, are you looking over someone's shoulder, or on the outside looking in?
  - What is the focus of this illustration? How is your attention drawn to it?
  - How would you describe each character at this point? As a starting point, consider their body language and their position on the page. What emotions do you think they are feeling? How do you know?
  - How would you describe the colours and tones in the illustration? How do they make you feel? Do they affect the way this story is being told?