

# What If Bunny's Not a Bully? — Teaching Guide

## About the Book

Ideas about bullies (and how we define people) are turned on their heads in this playful rhyming story that questions why a child is being labeled a bully.

Elephant says everyone on the playground should stay far away from Bunny because she's super mean. But Kitty has questions: How did Bunny become a bully? Was she born that way? Was she stung by a bullybug? Or maybe she caught the bully flu? Wait, does that mean bullying is contagious? And if it is, couldn't the other animals catch it, too? But ... then no one would play with them either, and that doesn't seem fair. Is it possible that Bunny is sorry? Should they give her a second chance?

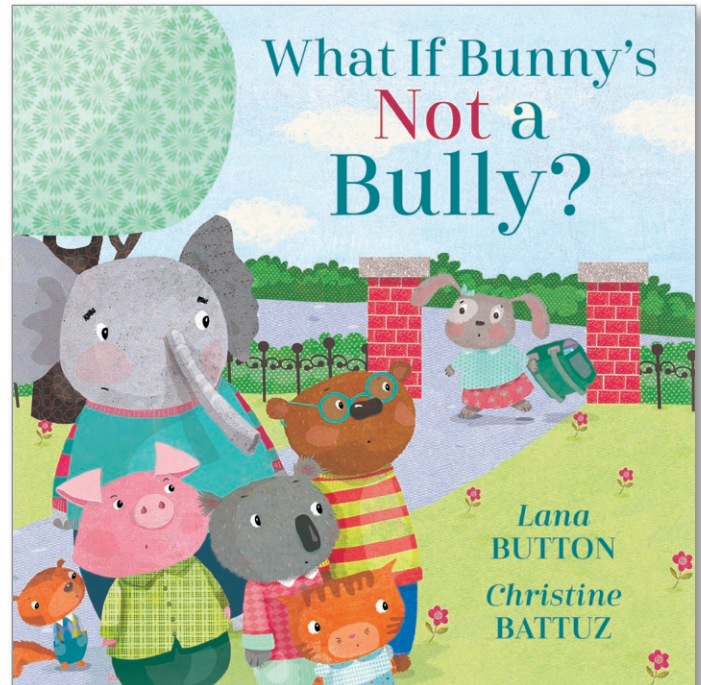
Not your typical bullying story, Lana Button's fresh take flips the focus from the child being bullied to the one being called a bully. In cadenced rhyming text, the compassionate and insightful Kitty leads children through a series of questions that get at the core of the assumptions we make about others and how it feels to be on the other side of name-calling. Christine Battuz's expressive illustrations use tenderness and a touch of humor to complement the emotional level of the text. Altogether, this is a perfect child-level exploration of empathy.

## About the Author

**LANA BUTTON** is from the tiny border town of St. Stephen, New Brunswick. She grew up with a passion to perform, spending hours singing into her skipping-rope handle to large crowds of imaginary people. Lana studied acting and performed in front of theatergoing crowds and on TV and film sets in Montreal and Vancouver. But when she began studying early childhood education, Lana fell in love with the magic of picture books and began writing. She strives to tell self-esteem-boosting stories that give children something to cheer about!

Lana loves author visits and presentations. She has had the pleasure of presenting to large crowds of non-imaginary children in school settings, libraries and festivals, from Saskatchewan's Festival of Words to St. Lucia's Rainforest of Reading. She was also a proud touring author for TD Canadian Children's Book Week.

Lana works with literary organizations that support children through books, such as IBBY Canada, First Book Canada and the One World School House. She and her husband live in Burlington, Ontario, with their doting dog and their demanding cat. Lana has three amazing daughters who are all grown up, but will thankfully still listen to picture books.



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## About the Illustrator

**CHRISTINE BATTUZ** was born in France and received her Masters of Fine Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts of Perugia in Italy. She has illustrated over sixty books for children, and has taught art to children of all ages. Christine draws all the time, and she also loves camping near mountains and rivers — especially with her husband and son. She lives in Bromont, Quebec.



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## About This Resource

Every text, even a picture book, can be a platform for children to better understand the world. Picture books specifically help young children develop their sense of self. When children look at pictures and illustrations, they are trying to place themselves and the people they know inside the story. It is important that students see themselves in the texts they encounter, and know that who they are is valued. Picture books also aid in children's development of empathy and understanding the experiences of others. A curriculum that provides opportunities to envision diverse ways of being and lived realities gives students opportunities to learn about their own and other people's experiences, and this builds understanding and respect, as well as academic foundations and the desire to learn to read. The activities in this guide are aimed at exploring these themes.

## Overview

Pre-Activity: Pre-Reading for Prediction

*Whole Group*

Activity One: Group Reading and Discussion of Context

*Whole Group*

Activity Two: Discussion of Illustrations and Themes

*Small Groups*

Activity Three: Independent Illustrating

*Individual Work*

Optional Activity Four: Independent Writing

*Individual Work for Older Children*

## Pre-Activity: Pre-Reading for Prediction

*Whole Group*

Show children the cover of *What If Bunny's Not a Bully?*, and leaf through the entire book slowly. Make sure that children look closely at each page, but don't read the words yet. The important part of this activity is to understand that story can be communicated with pictures as well as words — which of course the children already know. Reinforcing this fact will give them confidence in their abilities to do the same thing in a later activity.

## WHY THIS ACTIVITY IS IMPORTANT

Visual thinking is an important skill for children as they learn to read, and then as they master the skill. The illustrations in picture books help children understand the words they are reading, and if they review those images before hearing the story, they can compare their own predictions about the story with what they later read or hear. Furthermore, as children learn to read on their own, when they encounter difficulty with the words, the pictures will help them figure out the story.

## SPREAD-BY-SPREAD DISCUSSION

**On the first spread,** point to the elephant. Ask children to describe her. Now have them look at all the other animals. Which animal is speaking? How can they tell? Which animals are listening? How can they tell?

**On the second spread,** ask children to keep their eyes on the animals' mouths. Again, it is only the elephant whose mouth is open. Have children describe the looks on the faces of the animals standing with the elephant. Now have them describe the look on the face of the new character — Bunny, just coming through the gate.

As you turn to **the third spread,** ask children to explain what's changed. You will probably hear: everyone has turned around or they all turned their back on Bunny. Ask children how Bunny looks now. What do they think she's feeling?

**On the fourth spread,** a new character seems to be speaking. Introduce Kitty, and ask children why they think she's speaking. How can they tell? And, what does Elephant seem to do in response? (Also talk.)





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**The fifth spread** may confuse children, because without the words of the story, it is hard to know where we are now. Have them focus on what they see that is familiar. There is Kitty at the bottom of the left-hand page, looking up. Who is she looking at? Children may or may not recognize that the other characters on this page are baby versions of the animals we have already met. It's okay if they don't see that. Ask what they see on the right-hand page of this spread. (Bunny, getting stung by a bee?)



**On the sixth spread**, ask children to point to Bunny everywhere they see her. What's happening in each picture of her? (In one, she has a lump growing on her head. In another, she has spots all over her face, like the chicken pox. In the third, she is in a framed picture, proud of herself.)

What is happening now, **on the seventh spread**? Who do the children see here? (Bunny, Elephant, and another animal from earlier in the book. But they all look old.) Explain that it's okay not to know what's going on right now. They're just trying to predict possibilities, and see what story the pictures tell.

**On the eighth spread**, ask which character we see now. It's Kitty, and she looks worried. What do children think those things are, flying around in the air? Remind them that they don't need to know for sure, they're just guessing.

**On the ninth spread**, point to Kitty in the foreground. What is she looking up at now? (It looks like the other kids have their backs to her). Ask them to explain what they think is happening on the right-hand side of the page. (Everyone is laughing and having a good time.)

**On the tenth spread**, point out that there are no words. Even though you won't be reading the words yet, this is still useful for the children to notice this even before they hear the story. Ask what they think is happening now. Where is Bunny? How does she look? How do the other animals look? What do children think the characters are all feeling now?

Who do children see **on the eleventh spread**? Point out that this is the first page where only two characters appear in such large scale. This means something important. If you want to explain that this indicates that Kitty and Bunny are really the main characters of the story, you can. Or you can just lead them to observe that these are the two featured here, as we get very close to the end of the book, and ask what they think that means.

**On the twelfth spread**, point to the group of animals. Ask children to describe what they think the kids are feeling now. How has that changed from earlier in the book? How do they think Bunny is feeling? Why might she have gotten off the swing?



**On the thirteenth spread**, ask children to tell you who they think is talking now. Is it Elephant? (No, it's Kitty and Bunny.) How do children know that? What do they think Kitty and Bunny might be talking about? Why are the other animals listening?

What seems to be happening **on the fourteenth spread**? Do children think Elephant is talking now, or doing something else? What are Kitty and Bunny doing now? Can children remember the beginning of the book, where the pictures didn't show Bunny hanging out with Kitty, or anyone else? What might be happening now?

Ask children what seems to be happening on the **last page of the book**. Do they think this story will end happily? Why or why not?

## SUMMARY

In this pre-reading activity, you have given children the tools to trust their own interpretation of the illustrations. Even if some of them made incorrect predictions, the simple act of wondering about the story these pictures tell will make them more engaged readers. Because you have asked them what they think is going on in each spread, they will now be eager to see if they were right.

Tell children that it's almost time to read the story aloud.

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## Activity 1: Group Reading and Discussion of Context

### Whole Group

Go back to the beginning of *What If Bunny's Not a Bully?*, and read the story aloud to the group (or, for groups with students old enough to read, do a choral reading of the book).

Stop at the end of each page and discuss the illustrations now that students have the context of the story. When children are eager to talk more about the story and the pictures, stop reading and encourage the discussion.

### SPREAD-BY-SPREAD NOTES:

**Spread One:** Point out that children already know, from the review of illustrations, that Elephant is speaking here. It's important for students to notice this, so they understand these words are Elephant's opinion — not a statement of fact about Bunny.

*Ask: How else do you know the words on this page are spoken?* (The word “us” in the third line.)

**Spread Two:** Ask children if they think Bunny looks “extra mean today.” Remind students that reading involves asking questions about the text. Just because Elephant says Bunny looks mean, they can look at her to see for themselves.

Tell children how you think Bunny looks. (Scared, or eager, perhaps.)

Now ask how they would feel if they walked onto the playground and all the other kids “stuck together” like that.

**Spread Three:** Remind children that they noticed, as you reviewed the illustrations, that everyone turns their back on Bunny here. What do the words add to their understanding of what's happening? Do children think Bunny looks as though she'd like to fight them?

Point to Kitty in the illustration. Now that the children know a bit more about the story in this book, what do they think Kitty is doing here? (If the children don't come to this point in their discussion, say: *Maybe she's not sure Elephant is right about Bunny?*)

**Spread Four:** Now we get to hear from Kitty for the first time. When she asks why Elephant thinks Bunny is a bully, Elephant can't give a good answer. “It's always been that way” is not a reason. Elephant doesn't give any examples of Bunny being mean.

**Spread Five:** That answer sets Kitty off on an imaginative journey. On this spread we see Kitty wondering what might have made Bunny a bully. Ask children if they think any of these possibilities could have happened. Is anyone *born* a bully? Is there such a thing as a bullybug?

**Spread Six:** Kitty's imaginary journey continues here, as she asks more questions about what might have made Bunny a bully.

For each question Kitty asks, plan to ask the children if they think that thing is real, or could cause someone to become a bully.

This is a good time to pause and ask children if they have any ideas about what might make someone act out. Try to avoid using the word *bully* here — and instead focus on behavior.

*Ask: If one child is mean to another, what might have caused that behavior?* Children may have a hard time thinking in the abstract like this, so help them by asking: *Have you ever been mean to a sister or brother? What about to a friend? Can you remember why you did that?*

To help students laugh about this, ask if they were bitten by a bullybug, or if they'd passed a bully test at Be a Bully School.

When they see how silly those ideas are — and that sometimes children are mean to each other for small reasons or big reasons, or no reason at all — they'll be more open to the next question: *If you were mean to someone you loved, would you want to be forgiven?*

Encourage children to see that everyone makes mistakes.

**Spread Seven:** Here Kitty takes the reader far into the future, and wonders how long the others will exclude Bunny. This is the first direct mention that the group is “not letting Bunny play.” This is an important moment, so encourage children to really reflect on what the larger group is doing to Bunny.

Also point out that in this illustration, Bunny does look mean. *Ask: Did you think Bunny was mean as a child?* If students say no, it's important to take a moment ask them now: *Why might Bunny look mean as a grandma?*



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Allow for this discussion to last as long as it needs to. The point you want students to come away with is that being treated like a bully, and excluded from friendships, could turn someone into a mean person.

**Spread Eight:** Now Kitty starts to *really* empathize with Bunny. Explain to children that empathy is when we feel or imagine another person's feelings. She worries that if bully fever is contagious, she could become a bully. That makes her worry that she would be “doomed” with “no chance to make it right.”

Ask: *Why does Kitty worry she wouldn't have a chance to make it right?* (Because the other animals won't give Bunny a chance to make it right, so why would they give it to Kitty if she became a bully?)

**Spread Nine:** Now Kitty comes back to the playground. Her imaginary journey to find out what made Bunny a bully returns her to her friends with one plea: not to be left out.

Elephant assures Kitty that would never happen — they would never be so mean as to exclude Kitty. Point out how the other animals are all surrounding Kitty supportively, and one of them is even hugging her.

**Spread Ten:** Pause here, without speaking, for a moment. Let this message sink in with your children, just as it's sinking in with the animals on the page.

After a moment, ask: *Why do you think there are no words on this page?*

Now that children have the context of the story to accompany the illustration, ask them again what they see happening here. (All the animals are looking at Bunny. No one is talking. Bunny looks nervous.)

Ask: *How do you think the other animals feel?* (Like they realized they've been the mean ones, not Bunny.)

Now is a good time to ask your students if anyone has any idea what Bunny might have done to make Elephant and the others so mad. (It's okay for them not to know. No one knows! It hasn't been explained — and that's important for students to see.)

**Spread Eleven:** Here Kitty is talking. Her imaginary journey and ability to empathize with Bunny has led her to think Bunny might have been trying to apologize for whatever she did for a long time.

Ask: *How does Bunny look now?* (Maybe a little hopeful.)

**Spread Twelve:** Now Kitty takes over the conversation. Elephant is no longer speaking, but Kitty encourages the other animals to stay and talk to Bunny.

Ask: *How do you think Kitty feels right now? Have you ever helped someone do something hard? How did you feel then?*

**Spread Thirteen:** Point out how simple Kitty's words are to Bunny. She doesn't try to explain anything. She just asks “how are you?” And that gives Bunny a chance to say she's sorry. Point out that we still don't know why, or what Bunny might be apologizing for, but that's okay. What matters is that everyone is listening (note the animals on the left side of the page).

**Spread Fourteen:** Now even Elephant realizes that she has been hard on Bunny. When she says “friends can make mistakes” she's admitting that she made one, too.

Notice where Kitty is standing. Ask: *What do you think helped Kitty walk over and put her arm around Bunny?* (Imagining how Bunny might have become a bully — empathizing with Bunny, and feeling how she might have been feeling.)

**Spread Fifteen:** Now children know why the animals all look so happy on the last page. Ask: *Have you ever needed to try again with someone?* See what kinds of answers children give.



## PREDICTIONS

To conclude your whole-group discussion, ask students to think about and comment on the predictions they made about the story when you reviewed the illustrations.

Now that children know what happens in the story, what do they think some of the most important lessons in this story are? Let this conversation go on for as long as you have time, or let this discussion lead into Activity Two, small-group discussions of the themes in the story, and how the illustrations help to communicate them.



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## Activity 2: Discussion of Illustrations and Themes

### *Small Groups*

Break students up into small groups for this discussion of the themes in *What If Bunny's Not a Bully?* The goal is to have one adult in each group, so group sizing depends on how many adults are available. This discussion can happen in a large group setting, if you're teaching on your own, but children will be more likely to talk if the groupings are more intimate.

Begin by asking children what they think the story is about. Answers will likely include bullying or friendship. Steer children to the topic of empathy.

Explain that the best way to encourage children to feel empathy for others is to explore things they have in common.

Therefore, you will go around the circle stating things about yourselves, and see what you have in common with the children in your group.

The adult in the group starts by stating something simple. You can name anything about yourself, from "I have an older sister," or "I have brown hair," to "I live in Quebec," and "I love cats."

The next person in the group does the same thing. If they share something with you, ("I also have brown hair") look them in the eye and say: *This is something we have in common.* If they say something entirely new, look them in the eye and repeat what they have said. If you also share that trait or fact about yourself, say so. If not, move on to the next person in your group.

As more and more people take their turn, there will be more people to share traits or facts with. Encourage everyone to speak up when they share something with another. Tell them to look the person in the eye and say: "We have that in common!"

Empathy also includes the ability to take another person's perspective and imagine what they think and how they feel. Fictional stories like *What If Bunny's Not a Bully?* offer excellent opportunities for teaching children empathy and sharpening their skills at seeing things from someone else's perspective.

Go through the book and revisit each page, asking at every turn: *What do the characters think, believe, want, or feel?* As children answer, ask a follow-up question: *How do you know?*

End the discussion by asking children if they have ever felt the way Elephant, Bunny or Kitty feel in the book. Allow children to practice empathizing with each other as they tell their own stories.



## Activity 3: Independent Illustrating

### *Individual Work*

For this activity, ask children to go through the book on their own and find a picture that shows an emotion they have experienced. Hand out tracing paper and pencils, and have them trace the character with whom they most identify.

Go around the room and point out the aspects of the illustration that reveal emotion. For example, on the second spread, Elephant's eyes and mouth are wide open. She looks alarmed, and maybe scared. When Elephant is feeling confident (maybe too confident) her eyes are closed and her mouth is open, showing that she's talking but not paying attention to others.

After children trace the page that means something to them, ask them to mimic it in a self-portrait. They should draw themselves feeling that same emotion. They can copy things like mouth and eyes (open or closed?) hand gestures, etc.

Collect and display the drawings on a board in the classroom.

## Optional Activity 4: Independent Writing

### *Individual Work for Older Children*

For students old enough to begin writing their own stories, give them the following prompt:

Think of a time you had a misunderstanding with someone. Maybe a friend did something that hurt your feelings, or maybe you made someone angry — but didn't mean to. Write the story from the perspective of the other person in the story.

Encourage students to illustrate their stories. As they're working, walk around and ask them questions. Some students might have many ideas but need help expressing them. Others might not know what to write about, and they may need help brainstorming.