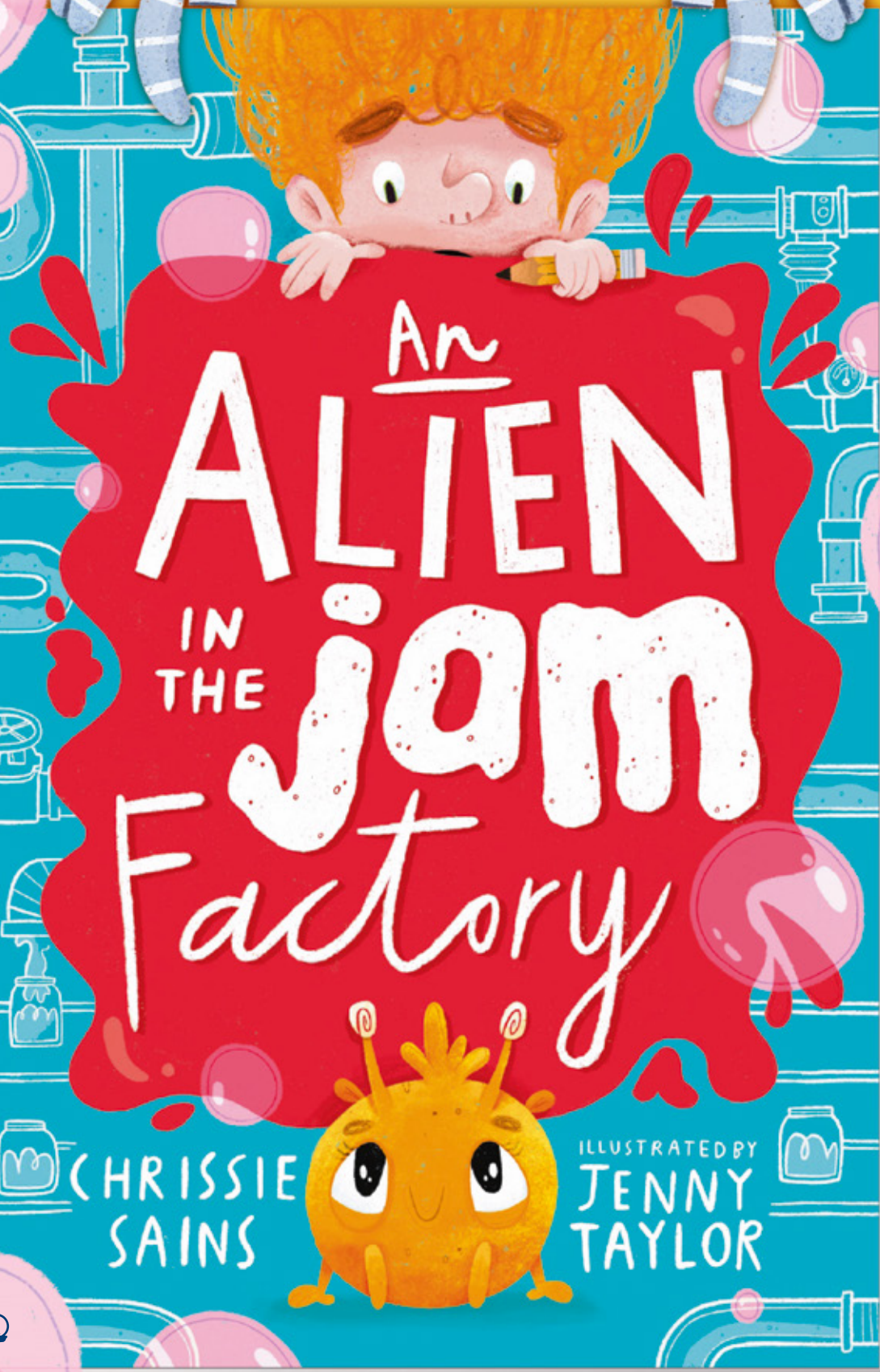


WALKER BOOKS
DISCUSSION
GUIDE



CHRISSIE
SAINS

ILLUSTRATED BY
JENNY
TAYLOR



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An ALIEN IN THE Jam Factory

CHRISSIE SAINS ILLUSTRATED BY **JENNY TAYLOR**

ABOUT THE BOOK

A hilarious, fast-paced adventure, *An Alien in the Jam Factory* is a sure-fire hit for young and emerging readers. Sains' quick and witty text is beautifully offset by Taylor's illustrations as we meet Scooter McLay, inventor extraordinaire and jam-fanatic, who helps run the McLay's jam factory that his parents own. Life, however, isn't perfect; overlooked by others due to his cerebral palsy and never able to show anyone his genius inventions due to his parents' strict health and safety policy, he even has to let his pet snail go when it proves too much of a worry. But when an alien arrives in the factory, and they unearth a sinister plot from bitter rival Daffy Dodgy (of Dodgy Doughnuts), life suddenly becomes much more exciting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chrissie Sains grew up in Billericay, Essex, where she spent her childhood seeking adventure and finding trouble. Described by her teachers as having a "lively imagination", Chrissie's escapades include her attempted rescue of the school's pet fish and the discovery in a field of a dead body that turned out to be two tyres under a sheet. She has swum with sharks, scuba-dived shipwrecks and sky-dived from a plane. Chrissie has a background in marketing and events but now writes full time and is a graduate of the Golden Egg Academy and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She lives in Essex with her husband, two bookworms and two rabbits.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jenny Taylor is an illustrator and graphic designer originally from Scotland, but now living in Preston, England. Drawing stories since 1997, when she first discovered what pencils and paints could really do, she has finally achieved her childhood dream with this debut book about aliens and jam. When not drawing, Jenny enjoys long walks in the shade with her ginger companion, "attempting" new and complicated recipes or watching her favourite animated movies. You can find more of Jenny's work at www.jennytaylordesign.com and on Instagram @jennytaylordraws

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

There are plenty of topics and themes to explore in *An Alien in the Jam Factory*, with a wealth of creative follow-on activities, should you wish to extend the engagement. Be aware that sensitivity may be required when discussing representations of disability in the book, and similarly, while a comedy text, take care if discussing Scooter's loneliness or any other topics that may relate to group members' own lived experience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask the group what they most liked about the book. Did anyone have a favourite part? Can they explain why they liked it? What sort of book was it? Introduce the idea of "genre" if unfamiliar, and explore some common themes – comedy, adventure, even sci-fi. Ask if the book reminded the group of anything else they'd read or seen.



1. Scooter

“When Scooter McLay decided to do something, there was very little that anyone could do to stop him.” – p.5

What makes Scooter stand out from other children? What about his name – why does the author choose to give him the name Scooter? What are his *characteristics*? Look at the picture on p.4 together to help conversation. What does “determined manner” mean? Talk about Scooter’s determination. Does this affect how he approaches having cerebral palsy?

2. Fizzbee

“It looked ... well, actually it looked like a little orange rubber ball...” – p.35

Are Fizzbee and Scooter similar in any ways? How are they different? What was anyone in the group expecting when the alien ship came through the window? How would anyone describe Fizzbee’s character? Can anyone think of other books or stories with aliens in them? How does Fizzbee compare to those aliens?

EXTENSION: Create your own alien – set members the task, individually or in groups, of creating another alien. What will it look like? How will it communicate? What will it be able to do? Why has it come to Earth? Alternatively, play a picture version of a game like Consequences, where everyone draws an alien head, then folds the paper over and passes the paper on to the next person, who draws the body, etc., until you have a room full of aliens. Come up with names and attributes for the aliens all together.

3. Daffy Dodgy

“At age 78, Daffy had never been on a roller coaster. She’d never even been on holiday.” – p.19

Introduce the term “villain” and check understanding. Who is the villain of the book? What makes her a villain? What does she want? What makes her the way she is? How does she compare to other villains? What about her love for her pet guinea pig, Boris? At the end of the book, what changes?

4. Parents

“Mum had flipped out about a snail. What would the two of them say about an alien?” – p.45

Why are Scooter’s parents so strict with him? Are they being fair to Scooter? Do they understand him, or how he feels? How could they have been more accepting of Scooter’s feelings? Do parents and children always get along? Has anyone in the group ever wanted a pet that their parents wouldn’t let them have? Did they have a similar conversation to the one Scooter has with his parents?

5. Ideas and inventions

“...those eight minutes had also produced something else: *hyper-creativity*.” – p.7

Why is it important that Fizzbee can “see” ideas in different colours? How does that make Scooter feel? Why is Fizzbee drawn to Earth in the first place? What did anyone in the group think of all of Scooter’s inventions, like his Hand-Bots or his Brussels sprout battery? Which ones would they most like to have invented themselves?

EXTENSION: Individually or in groups, come up with an invention that solves a real-life problem. Think of something that’s hard, or really annoying (like household chores), and come up with an invention that could help you to do this. What would it look like? How would it work? What would power it? Share your ideas together.

6. Jam

“McLay’s Jam now sold over a thousand different flavours of jam. Not just strawberry, or raspberry, or blackberry. Oh no.” – p.9

McLay’s jam factory creates lots of different flavour jams. How many can you remember as a group? List them out. Check p.9 for some help. Who would like to try all those different jams? Would anyone try a Brussels sprout jam? What is the best flavour jam, and why? Encourage group members to convince one another their favourite jam is the best – what sort of language can they use to help convince others?



7. Shrinking liquid

"A huge table loomed over him like a mountain, a book rested on it, easily the size of a house." – p.119

What would it be like to be tiny, like Scooter when he drinks the shrinking liquid? Imagine you had been shrunk to that size – how might you feel? What would be the best part of being so tiny? What would be the worst part?

EXTENSION: Creative writing; write a short story about your own adventure, having drunk shrinking liquid. Think about how everything would feel and look if you were tiny – can you create a perilous adventure out of something that would seem ordinary to a full-sized person?

8. Alien visitors

"I haven't actually asked what you want, have I? Or why you're here? Or where you come from?" – p.83

Fizzbee very quickly learns all about Earth and the rules of the jam factory, but if an alien visited Earth, what do group members think they would make of it? Would they like it? Why? How would people react to them? Why? What might they find confusing that seems normal to us?

EXTENSION: Imagine you are an alien and have just arrived on Earth. Describe what you see, as people go about their normal days. Would it seem normal to you? Why, or why not? Write a report back to your home planet, or an alien diary, describing all the strange things that humans do.

