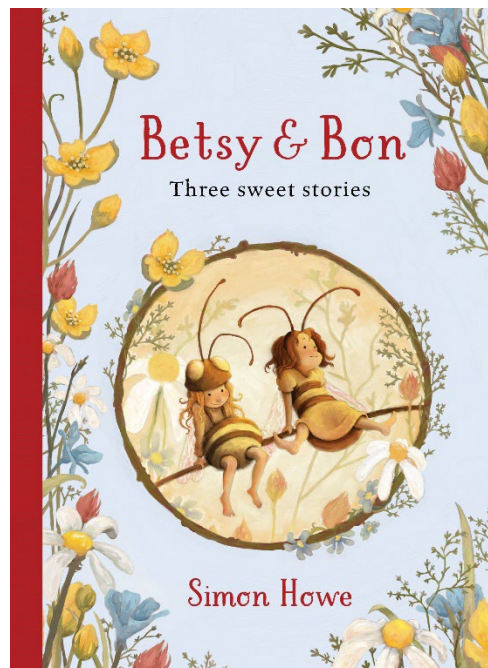


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BETSY AND BON: Three Sweet Stories

Simon Howe



Teachers' Notes

Prepared by Christina Wheeler, who is a practising teacher librarian
with a background in the Australian curriculum (English)

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SYNOPSIS

Two busy bees, Betsy and Bon, live at the bottom of the garden, surrounded by patches of wildflowers, fresh breezes and lovely friends. They spend their days as any bees would – building hives, playing games and enjoying the warmth of the sun. Together with their other friends in the garden, these kind and thoughtful bees use cooperation and creativity to navigate their way through each day's adventure.

Shared through three sweet stories, *Betsy and Bon* is a celebration of nature, imagination and friendship.

THEMES

- Courage
- Friendship
- Imagination
- Inclusion
- Creativity
- Cooperation; Teamwork
- Open-mindedness
- Gardens
- Short stories

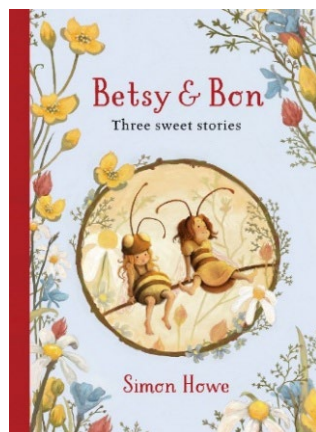
WRITING STYLE

Betsy and Bon is written in third person, past tense. It shares the whimsical adventures of two very endearing bees, Betsy and Bon. Gently told, each story touches on themes of friendship, cooperation and creativity. As the bees decide who can live in their hive, what game to play and where to enjoy a sumptuous afternoon tea, younger readers will come to understand the value of sharing feelings, compromising on big ideas and including everyone in the fun. The nostalgic and detailed illustrations are simply beautiful, inviting readers to explore the bottom of the garden where 'the sun is warm and the breeze is cool'. Perfect for bedtime stories or newly independent readers, this timeless collection of three sweet stories will be read again and again. It is suited to audiences aged 5–8.

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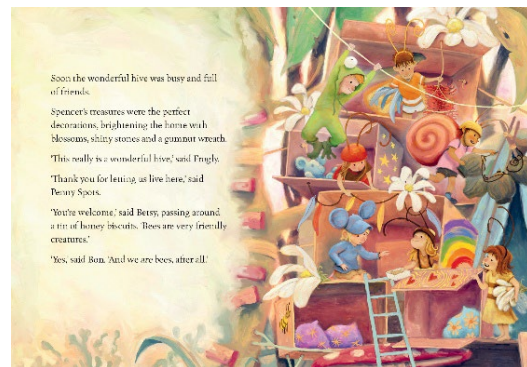
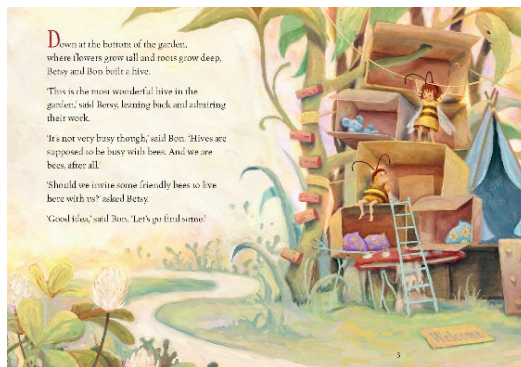
STUDY NOTES

- Before reading *Betsy and Bon*, look carefully at the front and back covers. What do you notice on the front cover (below) that gives clues about the book's characters and setting? What are you wondering about this story collection?



'The Hive'

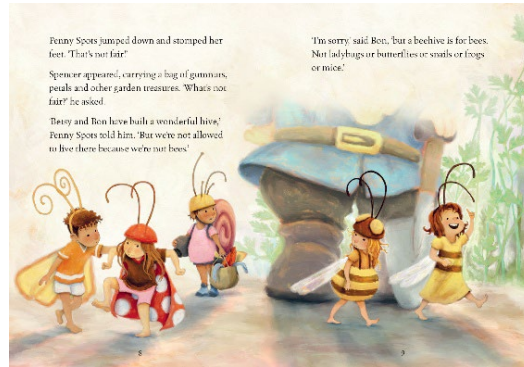
- What is the main complication in 'The Hive'? How is this resolved?
- Compare the first and last spreads of 'The Hive' (below. pp. 2–3, 16–17). Use these to help explain what happens in this story.



- Why does Bon tell her friends they can't live in the hive with her and Betsy? How would you feel if you were Frogly, Harrington Mouse, Penny Spots, Spencer or Butter Benjamin? In the role of one of these characters, write a short journal entry about this.

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- Describe the facial expressions and body language of the characters in the illustration below (pp. 8–9). How do these details help readers to better understand the story?

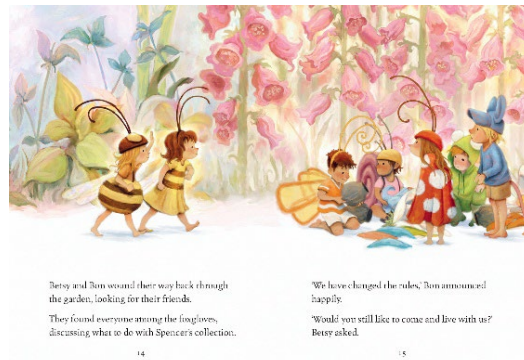


- Role-play the scene above. Add extra dialogue to further explore how these characters are feeling.
- Before finishing the story, make predictions about what may happen next.
- With a partner, take on the roles of Betsy and Ben. Using the illustrations below (pp. 10–11), have a conversation about the situation you find yourselves in and how you might resolve it. In the role of either Betsy or Ben, write a journal entry about your day up to this point.



- Betsy asks the question, 'What if ...'? (p. 12) Why is this such a helpful way to problem solve? Think about a time you and your friends had to resolve a problem. How might a 'What if ...' solution have helped?
- Discuss the following statement: Sometimes, rules can be changed.
- With reference to the illustration below (pp. 14–15), write a recount about this day from the point of view of Frogly, Harrington Mouse, Penny Spots, Butter Benjamin or Spencer.

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- Create a diorama or model of Betsy and Bon's hive as shown on the final spread of this story (pp. 16–17). Alternatively, use large cardboard boxes to re-create their hive as a classroom display. Use these pieces to help retell the story to a friend, teacher or buddies from a younger year level.
- Using repurposed/recycled resources, create costumes for the characters in *Betsy and Bon*. Use these to retell 'The Hive' in a dramatisation.

'The Good Idea'

- In this story, Betsy and Bon find it difficult to choose the right game to play. Has this ever happened to you and your friends? How did you overcome this challenge? Share in a reflection.
- What other games could Betsy and Bon have played together in the garden? What games do you and your friends like to play? Share the aim and instructions of one of these games.
- With reference to the spreads below (pp. 24–27), explain how the illustrations share the bees' feelings about the games they are playing. Why is it good that Bon can share her feelings with Betsy so openly? What strategies do you use when feeling this way?



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- What do you think Betsy and Bon may be thinking in the middle image below (pp. 32–33)? Using this sequence of images (pp. 30–35), retell this part of the story.



Bon stood on a primrose and looked through her binoculars. She could see Betsy clearly.

32

She waved to Betsy, and Betsy waved back. This was fun. This was a good idea.

33



The two bees wanted to give each other a high five.

But they couldn't.

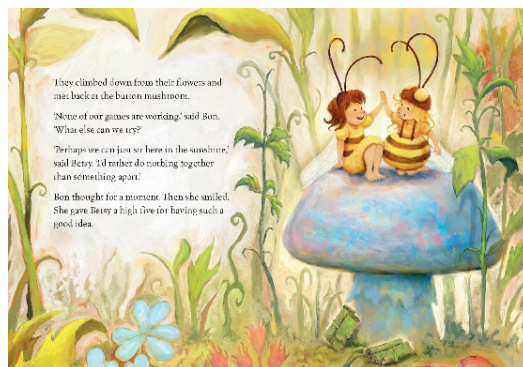
34



Bon was saying something, but Betsy couldn't hear. She was too far away.

'What did you say?' Betsy shouted. But Bon couldn't hear her either.

35



They climbed down from their flowers and met back at the button mushroom.

'None of our games are working,' said Bon. 'What else can we try?'

'Perhaps we can just sit here in the sunshine,' said Betsy. 'I'd rather do nothing together than something apart.'

Bon thought for a moment. Then she smiled. She gave Betsy a high five for having such a good idea.

- Rather than use put-downs, Betsy and Bon use put-ups. Why is this so important?
- How do Betsy and Bon demonstrate emotional regulation in 'The Good Idea'?
- How do Betsy and Bon show the qualities of good friendship in this story?

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- Discuss Betsy's comment, 'I'd rather do nothing together than something apart' (p. 34). In a reflection, share a time when this was true for you also.
- What have you learnt about yourself as a friend from reading 'The Good Idea'?

'The Sunny Spot'

- What do you think are the main messages being shared in 'The Sunny Spot'? How do the illustrations help show these?
- Write a recount of this story in the role of Harrington Mouse.
- Explain how the friends use teamwork and creativity to problem-solve.
- Plan and hold a class afternoon tea party like that in 'The Sunny Spot'. Alternatively, hold a play-based afternoon tea using props to re-enact this scene.
- Discuss the concepts of optimism and positivity. How does Butter Benjamin demonstrate these concepts in 'The Sunny Spot'?
- Choose one of the characters from 'The Sunny Spot'. Using the sequence of spreads below (pp. 42–49), retell this part of the story from their point of view.

Are you sure you don't want to sit near the chicken? They asked.

Ben was very sure. She was determined to have afternoon tea in the perfect sunny spot. So they began searching for things that might make a good bridge for mice.



nearly flower stems and leaves.



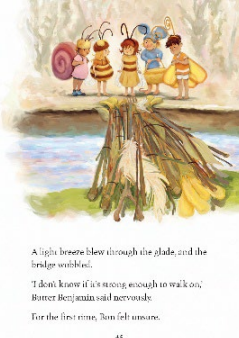
and feathers.

Harrington Mouse also found Spencer and Butter Benjamin playing in the wood nearby.

'Come join us for afternoon tea,' said Ben. But first we need to build a bridge.

Spencer and Butter Benjamin helped their friends fix everything together with grass and lay the bridge across the stream.





A light breeze blew through the glade, and the bridge wobbled.

'I don't know if it's strong enough to walk on,' Butter Benjamin said nervously.

For the first time, Ben felt unsure.

1.

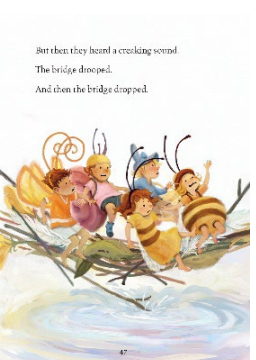


Let's give it a try,' said Ben. She began to walk carefully across the bridge.

'It works!' cheered Ben.

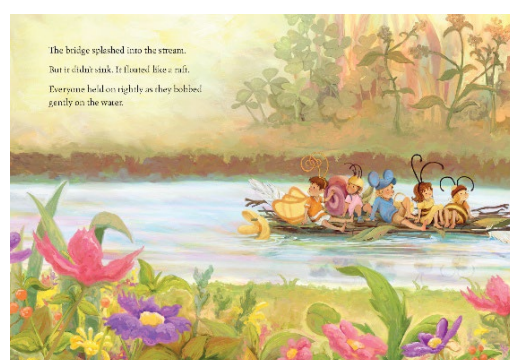
Everyone else followed.

2.



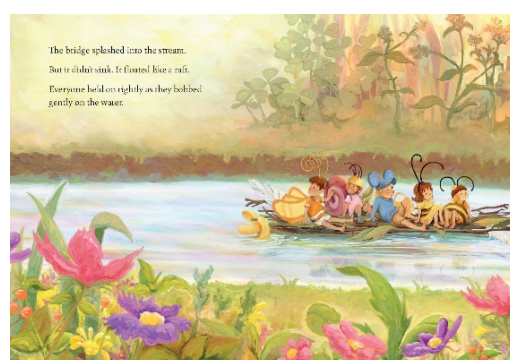
But then they heard a creaking sound. The bridge drooped. And then the bridge dropped.

3.



The bridge splashed into the stream. But it didn't sink. It floated like a raft. Everyone held on tightly as they bobbed gently on the water.

4.



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- How do the actions of Bon's friends provide good role models of friendship? (See pp. 50–53.)



General

- Compare the opening line of each of the three stories:
 - Down at the bottom of the garden, where flowers grow **tall** and roots grow **deep** ...
 - Down at the bottom of the garden, where the sun is **warm** and the breeze is **cool** ...
 - Down at the bottom of the garden, where the buds are **small** and the blooms are **big** ...

Discuss the use of contrast in each line (see bolded words). Using this same language device, write your own story starter:

Down at the bottom of the garden ...

- For each story, complete a 'Two Stars and a What if?' review (see Resource Sheets on p. 10 of these notes).
- Which is your favourite illustration in *Betsy and Bon*? Why? Share in a reflection.
- Use Talking Strips to tell your friend about one of the stories.

First ...	Next ...	After that ...	Finally ...

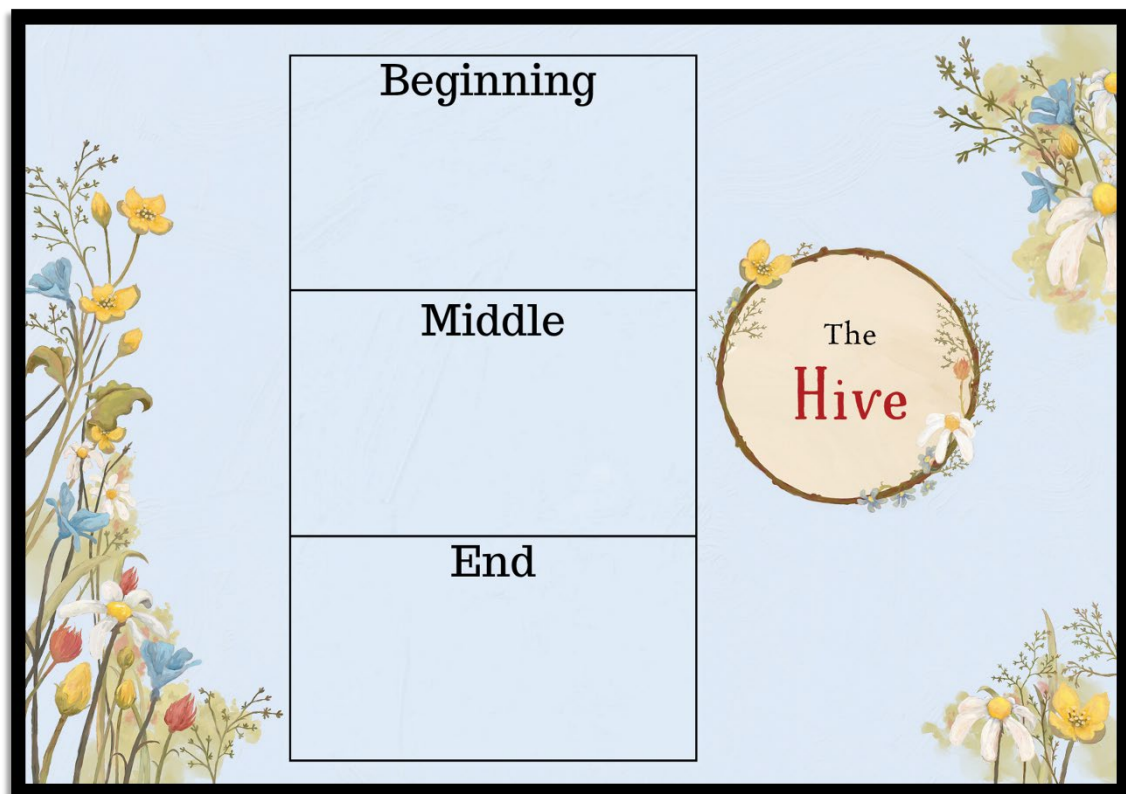
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- Which story can you most relate to in *Betsy and Bon*? Why? Share with a friend.
- Using the Resource Sheets (see p. 10 of these notes), briefly map each story using the BME model (beginning, middle, end).
- Write a six-word summary for each story.
- How is *Betsy and Bon* a book about inclusion?
- Using the characters and settings of this collection, write and illustrate your own Betsy and Bon story.
- Retell one of the three stories through either a puppet show or play. Create your own puppets, props and costumes from repurposed materials.
- Why do you think the stories in *Betsy and Bon* are described as 'sweet'?
- Create an additional character suitable for inclusion in *Betsy and Bon*. Give this character a name and personality traits. Write a *Betsy and Bon* story including this new character.
- Create Character Profiles for both Betsy and Bon. How are they similar and different? What are their strengths?
- Choose one of the spreads in *Betsy and Bon* and create a Y Chart. Record what you would see, hear and feel in this scene. Use these ideas to write a description of this scene.
- Re-create one of the illustrations in *Betsy and Bon* using watercolours or coloured pencils.
- Create a board game of *Betsy and Bon* that includes characters and events from the three stories.
- Discuss the importance of 'reading pictures' as well as the written text to fully understand these stories.
- Discuss the colour palette of the illustrations throughout the book. How do they reflect the joy of gardens and nature?
- Consider reading the following books/stories as companion texts to *Betsy and Bon*:
 - *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne (Methuen & Co.)
 - *Snugglypot and Cuddlepup* by May Gibbs (Angus & Robertson)
 - *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter (Frederick Warne & Co.)

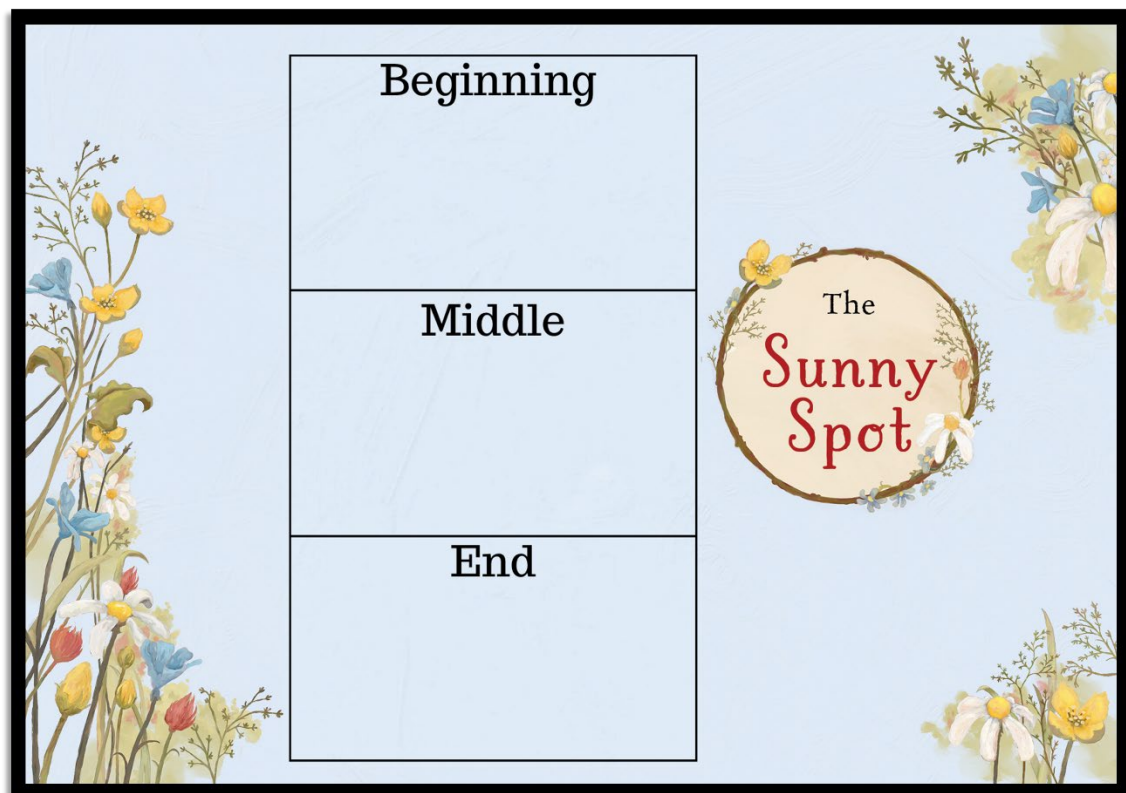
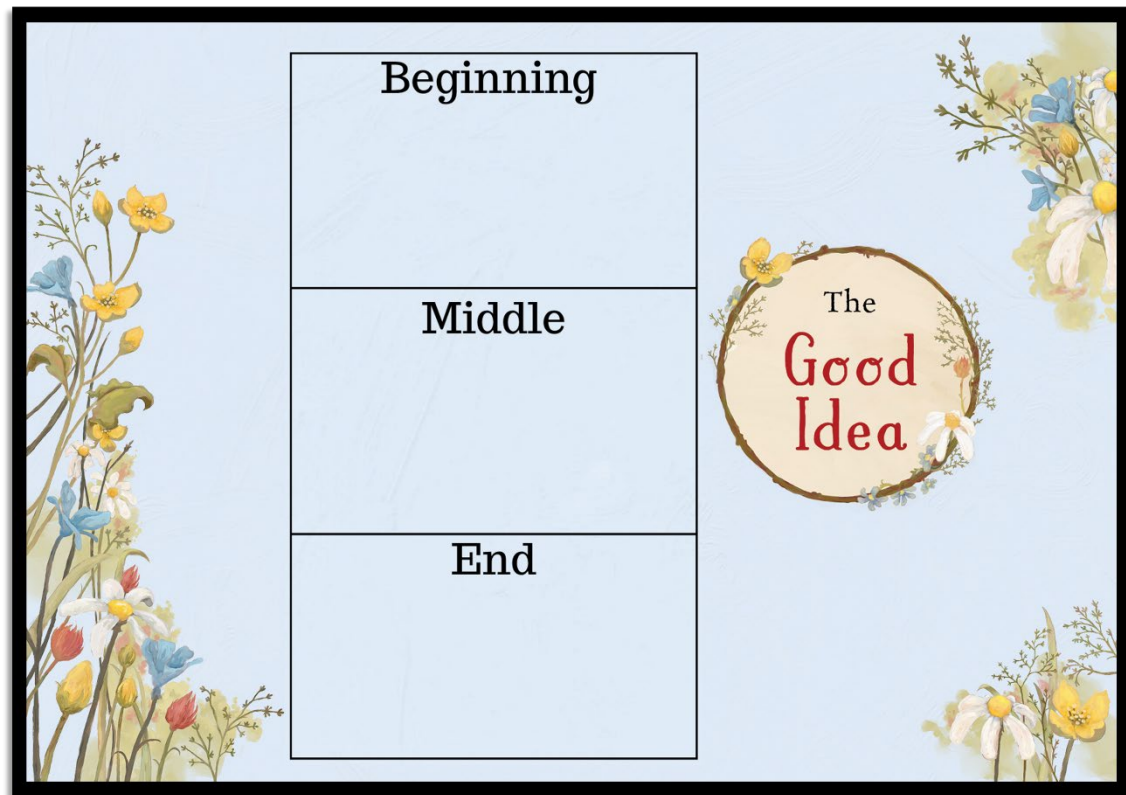
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AUTHOR MOTIVATION

Like many of my ideas, *Betsy and Bon* began as a single drawing: two children, dressed up as bees and sitting on the stalk of a giant flower. I enjoyed the two characters and I wanted to know more about their world. I wanted them to have a story. And so I gave them names and a huge garden to live in.

Very quickly, I came up against the question of whether they are actual bees drawn to look like children, or real children dressed up as bees and playing in their own imaginary garden world. I decided that I didn't want (or need) to answer the question. I like that it's left open for the reader to consider.

I wanted Betsy's and Bon's temperaments to be contrasting yet complementary. I wanted to show how different personalities can support each other in different ways. I wanted the problems they face to have relatively low stakes, but to still take those stakes seriously. Not quite connecting with a friend during play, not having lunch where you prefer, or choosing to change a rule may seem like very small things. But small things can seem very big to a child. Low stakes can be towering.

Most of all, I wanted to write a series of stories showing children at play; learning how to connect and grow and support each other through disappointments. They are stories about loving, and being loved by, the other people in your garden.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Simon Howe is an illustrator and author with a broad appetite for children's literature, animation, storytelling and design. He has worked with several notable Australian authors on books for children, and has designed and directed animation for advertising and television. Grounded in themes of childhood, family, hope and home, his work has been nominated for the Australian Book Industry Awards and the Australian Book Design Awards, and his first authored book, *Shoosh!*, has been distributed by the Bounty Bag network to over 60,000 children in Queensland.