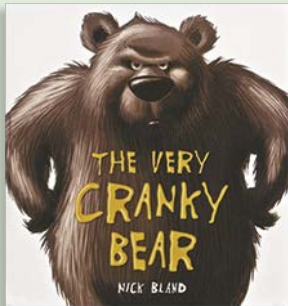


# Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...



## Problem-solving with *The Very Cranky Bear*

Most children's stories revolve around a problem that needs to be solved. A key part of building your child's story comprehension is helping her understand the problem, as well as the actions that the characters take to solve it.

Fully understanding the problem isn't always easy for children because it requires some "reading between the lines". Children must think beyond the words on the page in order to fill in the meaning that hasn't been specifically stated.

You can build your child's understanding by having conversations about the problems as they come up. Encouraging your child to think about how the characters might solve the problem not only deepens her understanding of the story, but it also builds her own problem-solving skills and prepares her for reading and writing on her own later.

### The Book

*The Very Cranky Bear* by Nick Bland

### Why we chose it

This fun book is about four animal friends who find a nice warm cave to play in so they can get out of the cold and the rain. But a very cranky bear inside the cave is not pleased that they're there, and he orders them out.

This book has a very clear problem in it that the four friends need to solve – they need to figure out how to convince the bear to let them play inside. And to solve this problem, the friends need to figure out what the bear's problem is as well – what's making him so cranky and how can they make him happier?

These layers of problems offer lots of opportunities to have conversations with your child about problem-solving.

## First reading

The first reading is all about helping your child understand the basic story. Once she understands more about what's happening, she'll have more to say about it and she'll be able to think about the story in different ways.

So the first time you read the book, point out the basic elements of the story, like who the main characters are, where the story takes place, and what the problem is (at Hanen, we call these basic story elements CSPAR, and you can learn more about how to highlight these for your child here.)

For this reading, you want to keep the story moving and have very short conversations that help your child remember the characters and their actions, and also identify the problems in the story. For example, you could point out the problem by saying, "These animals have a big problem – they really want to stay warm in the cave, but the cranky bear won't let them!"

## Re-reading

Once you feel that your child has a basic understanding of the story, you can start to have longer conversations and talk more deeply about the problems the characters face. You'll want to help your child:

- Understand what the problems are
- Understand why the characters choose to take certain actions to solve the problem
- Use her judgment to decide if an action will solve the problem or not, and explain why
- Think of her own solutions

You can promote this deeper understanding in 2 ways:

1. By making "thinking-out-loud" comments
2. By asking questions that build understanding

## Make Thinking-out-loud comments

"Thinking-out-loud" comments show your child how you are thinking about the story and trying to figure out things that aren't actually stated in the book. These comments usually start with words like, "I'm thinking that...", "I'm wondering about..." or "I'm trying to figure out..."

Although comments don't require a response, if you make a comment based on a part of the book your child is interested in, and then pause to give him time to think, chances are he'll want to say something about it!

Here are some examples of "thinking-out-loud" comments you could use to explain the problem and help your child understand the actions the characters take to solve it:

- "Uh-oh. The animals need to get back inside the cave to stay warm. I wonder what they can do to make the bear let them inside"

## Make Thinking-out-loud comments *Con't*

- “I think the zebra is trying to think of a solution – if they can cheer the bear up, maybe he won’t mind them playing in his cave.”
- “I wonder why the bear is so cranky. Maybe he’s just really tired”
- Oh no – I’m thinking they have an even *bigger* problem now – the bear looks even crankier than before!”
- Here are some “thinking-out-loud” comments you could use to help your child think about solutions to the problem any why they may or may not work:
- “I’m trying to figure out why the zebra thinks he can solve the problem by giving the bear stripes. Maybe feels that because he likes having stripes, everybody must want them!”
- “I’m thinking that giving the bear a mane may not solve the problem. He already has fur – a mane would make him so hot!”
- “I’m thinking the sheep’s idea might work because he’s thinking about what the bear really needs.”

By making these types of comments, you’re modelling a way for your child to express her thoughts and ideas. You’re also demonstrating different ways she can think about what’s happening in the book, and how she can look for meaning beyond the written words.

## Ask questions that build understanding

Asking questions is another way to build your child’s understanding of the problem and to get her thinking about the solutions.

You can ask questions like:

- “The lion thinks he can make the bear happy by giving him a mane. Do you think that would be a good solution?” Encourage your child to tell you why or why not.
- “The moose tried to solve the problem by giving the bear some antlers. Why do you think that didn’t work?”
- “The sheep’s solution solved the problem! Why do you think his solution worked so well?”

When you ask a question, make sure to wait long enough to give your child a chance to think before she responds. If she doesn’t have reply, you can offer an answer yourself to stimulate her ideas.

The more times you read the story, the more “thinking-out-loud” comments you can make and the more questions you can ask to deepen her understanding. As you engage your child in conversations that encourage him to think more deeply about a book, you’re helping to build the comprehension skills he’ll need to read and write successfully on his own.

**We hope you enjoyed this Book Nook post.**

**If you have any questions, comments or suggestions, feel free to [send us your feedback](#).**