

Is for
Belonging

Shannon Anderson

illustrated by John Joven

B

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Shannon Anderson • illustrated by John Joven

free spirit
PUBLISHING®



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Dedicated to my dear friend Christy Fleming—
an amazing friend, parent, and role model for
compassion and kindness.

—SA

To my amazing friend D!

—JJ

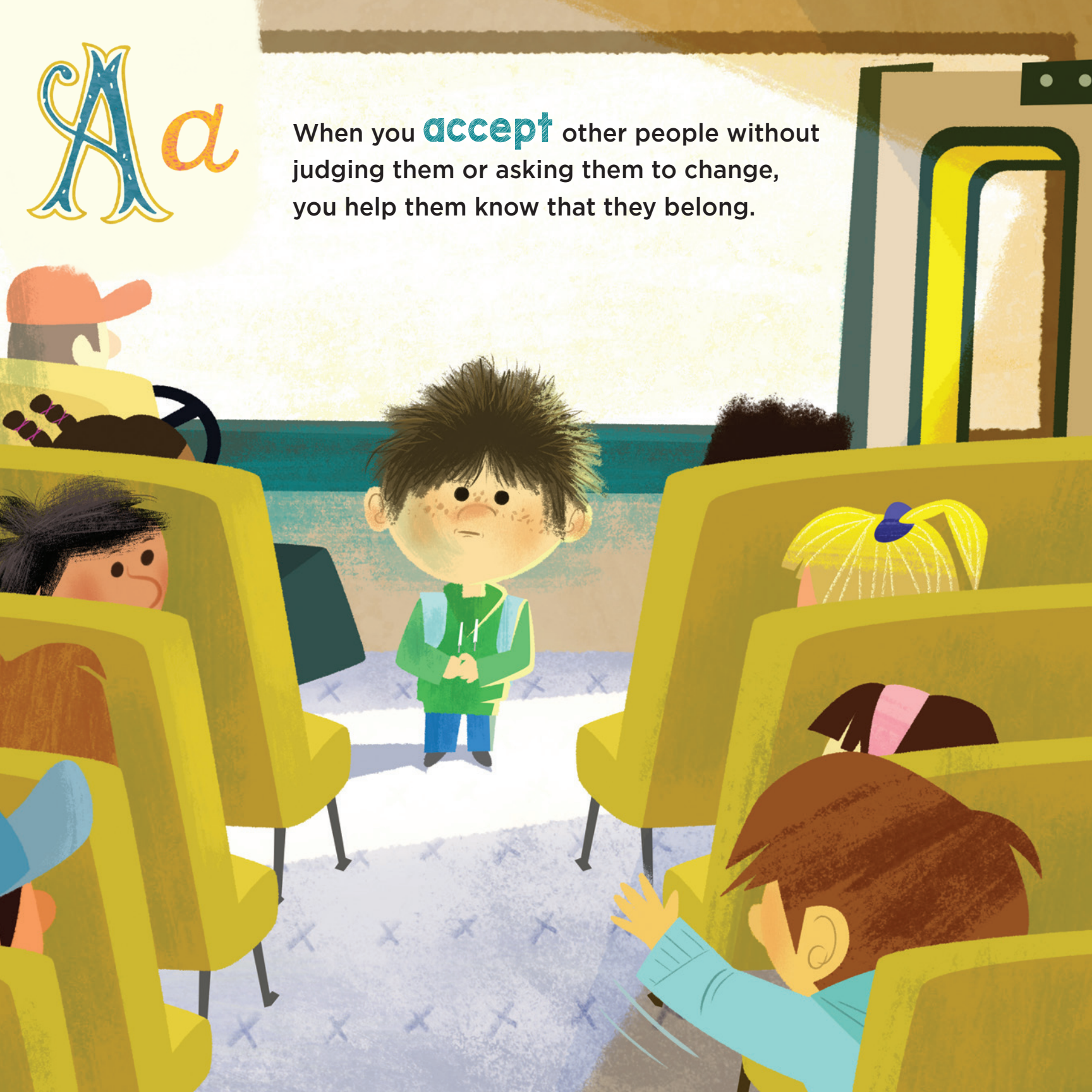
What does it mean to belong? Belonging is about getting to be YOU in a class, a family, a group, and the world. Everyone belongs here!

This is different from fitting in—and it's way better. When people try to “fit in,” they often think they have to be like someone else to be a part of a group. But you don't have to change yourself to belong or be included.



A a

When you **accept** other people without judging them or asking them to change, you help them know that they belong.



When you are welcomed and loved exactly as you are, you feel that you belong. **Belonging** feels safe. It helps us be confident and brave.

B b



C c

When you **care** about others, you want them to be happy, loved, and safe. One way to show that you care about someone is to listen to them. We all want to be heard.



D d

You have the power to **decide** how you will treat others. You can choose kind and caring actions.





Activities to Build Empathy and Belonging

You can use the activities in this section to foster and strengthen a sense of belonging among the children you spend time with—whether you're a teacher, counselor, family member, or other caring adult. Feel free to adapt these in ways that work best for your group. (Most of these activities also work well if you're reading the book one-on-one!) Building empathy and belonging leads to greater levels of self-esteem, a stronger sense of self-identity, and better peer relationships. Helping all kids feel that they are valued, seen, heard, and safe improves their academic, social, and emotional outcomes. What could be better than that?

Share and Care

When we share items we care about, it opens up conversation and allows us to get to know each other better. We can appreciate everyone for their interests and passions.

Invite children to share an item that means a lot to them. Give each child the opportunity to show their item and tell why it is special. Perhaps it has significance in their family or culture or it belongs to a collection they treasure. It could be that it was given to them by a special person in their life, or maybe they created the item themselves. Invite respectful questions and conversation from the group.

Reaching by Teaching

When children teach each other, they get to share their unique talents. In turn, kids develop mutual appreciation for



their peers and their various abilities. You can have pairs teach each other one-on-one or allow children to take turns teaching the entire group.

Have children choose something they could teach to others. This could be making an origami frog, doing a card trick, using a particular app, showing how to draw something, or just about anything else that can be taught in 10 to 15 minutes! Be sure to give children time to prepare and gather items they may need. In the case of demonstrations that involve pets, cooking, or specialized equipment, you may want to give them the option to film themselves at home and share the video.

The “You’re Special!” Project

It feels good to know that others appreciate us—and it also feels good to show our appreciation for others. By giving children the chance to offer and receive compliments and affirmation, this activity serves as a powerful morale-booster and showcases how all of us are special and wonderful in our own unique ways.

This project is best begun after your group has already had some time to get to know each other. Explain that the “You’re Special!” project is a way for them to share kind words and authentic compliments, creating an environment where everyone feels welcomed and accepted exactly as they are. Be sure to take time to explain what it means to give thoughtful, sincere affirmations. They should be as specific and personalized as possible. Also encourage children to focus on admirable talents, skills, attitudes, and personality traits rather than appearance or other more superficial qualities. For example, children might say why they are thankful to have someone else in the group, share a memory of a positive interaction with them, or describe ways they help others. You can brainstorm some ideas as a group (perhaps about someone who is in the community but not part of your group) and then work to make the compliments stronger so children understand how to craft authentic and meaningful compliments.

