

# Benji, the Bad Day, and Me by Sally J. Pla, illustrated by Ken Min

## Identities & Themes

- South Asian/Middle Eastern American
- Ability and Neurodiversity (Autism)
- Kindness
- Feelings

## Teacher Reflection Questions

1. How do you make space for students to notice and name their emotions in your classroom environment? How can you be more intentional in giving your students opportunities to do this?
2. More and more classrooms have students on the autism spectrum. What can you do to help your students show empathy, respect, and compassion to autistic students?

## Background Information for Teacher

After reading the book to students, read the Author's Note in back of the book to your students and discuss any questions they have.

### Language hint:

Many children have a friend, relative, or classmate who is autistic. Helping children understand autism is important because they can't always tell someone is on the autism spectrum by looking at them. Children don't need a long medical lecture. Give a brief explanation about why their friend might behave differently than they do and a chance to ask questions. You could say:

"Our brains all work a little differently from everyone else's. Autism is one way people's brains work differently. You can't always tell someone is autistic by looking at them. Our autistic friends might be really smart about some things. They might also have a harder time with loud noises, bright lights, or strong-tasting foods than other people do. And they might need a little extra help from friends to get to know other people or to know what to do about how people around them are feeling. The important thing to remember, though, is that not all autistic people have the same traits. Autism is a spectrum, and people on the autistic spectrum are as diverse and unique as any of us."

See also the **Ability and Neurodiversity Primer** in the back of this guide.

## Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- Empathy & Understanding
- Healthy Complex Identities
- Respect Across Differences
- Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- Responsiveness & Action

## Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision Making
- Relationship Skills

## Read this to the students before reading the book:

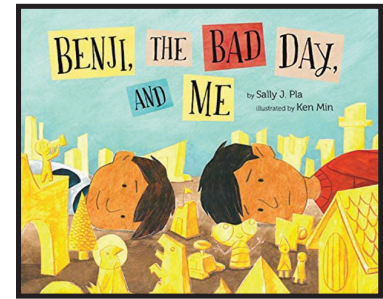
*Sammy is having a bad day, and when he gets home, it doesn't seem to get much better. Amidst everyone's accommodations for his brother, Benji, who is on the autism spectrum, it doesn't seem like anyone cares. Unexpectedly, it's Benji who makes Sammy feel better and shows his love for his brother.*

## Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. How are Sammy and Benji alike? Different?
2. **Describe Benji and Sammy's relationship.**
3. **What accommodations does the family make for Benji?**
4. **How does Sammy feel about the attention Benji gets? How can you tell?**
5. Why is Sammy having a bad day?
6. What happens to Sammy's day when he gets home?
7. **How do you handle bad days?**
8. **What do you need on those days and how do you get it?**
9. How does Benji show he loves his brother, Sammy? How does Sammy show he loves Benji?
10. **How can you help a classmate, friend, or family member when they are having a bad day?**

## Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Think about a time when you had a terrible day and felt the way Sammy felt. What did you do? What made you feel better?
2. How do the different members of your family show their love for you? What do they do that's unique to them?
3. Are you a sibling to others? If so, what is hard about being a sibling?
4. Invite your class to help you create a way to check-in or a "How are you feeling?" board in your classroom. Discuss what they would like to see included. You can use simple online surveys, emotion wheels, Zones of Regulation, emojis, or some other way to give them the opportunity to express and name their emotions. Checking in can be part of a morning or mid-day routine, and you can invite students to lead it. Be sure to include a variety of emotions and expanded vocabulary for students, so they can continue to grow their own emotional vocabulary.



## Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe characters/  
Character development
- Character point of view
- Making inferences
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Sequencing