

A House of Her Own

Written by Jenny Hughes

Illustrated by Jonathan Bentley

Published September 2014 by Little Hare

SYNOPSIS

A gently humorous story that explores the clash between a quest for independence and the longing for security. As Audrey becomes older and bigger than yesterday, she needs a bigger house. 'Your house is getting too small for me,' she explains to her dad. Audrey wants a house that is a place to call her own. She asks her dad to build her one – the top of a tree. It is an ideal house with a bathtub for snorkelling, a place to drink tea, and somewhere to hide the dirty cups.

Whatever Audrey wanted in her new house, her dad made for her. The house was perfect in every way, but now she was by herself.

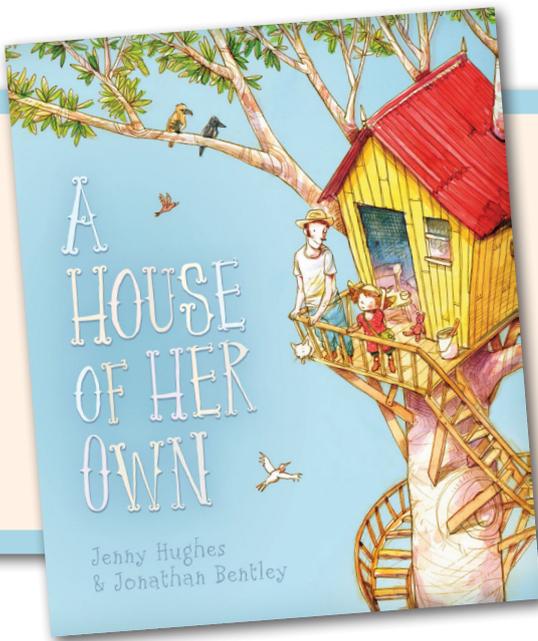
THEMES

This story is a gentle exploration of the struggle between a quest for independence and the longing for security. Audrey imagines she can live independently and designs a house built on childhood dreams that is essentially impractical. Audrey's generous-spirited father allows Audrey to discover for herself whether she would rather come home or stay by herself in her tree-house.

The dominant mood of the story is a jaunty confidence that quickly becomes fragility and finally resolves with relief and comfort.

WRITING STYLE

The author, Jenny Hughes, has primarily used dialogue to tell this story. We learn about Audrey's character and her emotional journey from confident, to unsure, to relieved, through what she says. Her goal, her motivation, the turning point in her narrative journey and the resolution are all portrayed through dialogue. Audrey's emotions are implied, never explained. For example, we infer that Audrey is feeling afraid because her tummy 'turns over', but we are never explicitly told that Audrey is afraid. The simple, unobtrusive authorial voice allows readers to make up their own minds as they go, resulting in a more 'immersive', interpretative and vivid reading experience.



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ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Illustrator Jonathan Bentley's illustrations seem simple and uncomplicated, and yet he has designed the illustrations to give the reader a vivid emotional experience of the story. The emotion is never overstated on the characters' faces, but implied and suggested through action, composition and colour choices. Initially, bright clean primary colours suggest cheerful, normal domesticity (bright reds, yellows, blues). As the story progresses, secondary and tertiary colours suggest the interior drama of story, especially as dusk creeps in. On the final page, the bright warm yellow of the lights inside the house contrast with the gloom outside, enhancing the sense of warmth and security that the main house provides. Where Audrey is experiencing increasing anxiety, Jonathan Bentley makes dramatic use of directionality, perspective, empty space and pictorial depth to emphasise Audrey's feeling of isolation.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Jenny Hughes was born and raised in rural Australia as the second-youngest of six children. She was a quiet and shy child, and spent many hours poring over books and playing in imaginary worlds. Her working career took her in many directions, but nothing seemed to 'fit'. Finally she followed her heart and began to write. She loves music, dancing, hot tea and scones, but the thing that makes her happiest is writing and drawing. Jenny now lives in Orange, New South Wales, with her scruffy little dog, Scruffy. She plans to keep writing until she's a little old lady. *The Lilac Ladies* was her first picture book.

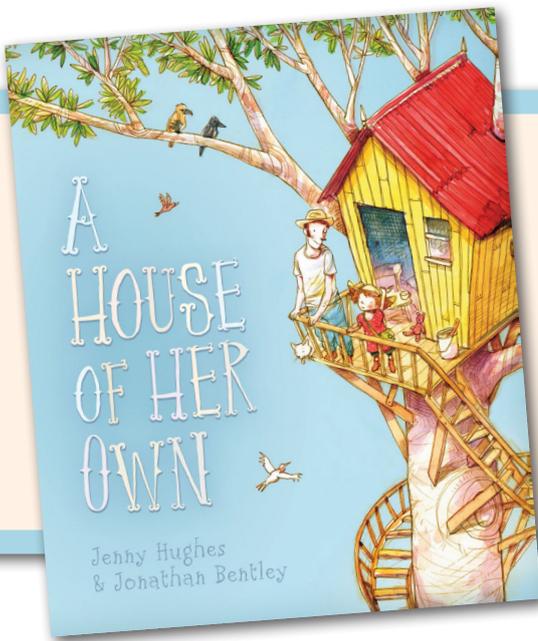
ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

As a little boy, Jonathan Bentley liked football and drawing. When he was about eight years old he realised he wasn't going to be good enough to play football for Leeds United, so he concentrated on drawing instead.

When he left school he studied at Brighton Polytechnic. Jonathan worked as a builder's labourer and kitchen hand for many years before he became a full-time illustrator, and he worked in London and Sydney before moving to Brisbane, Australia.

Jonathan has been an Editorial Illustrator at the Courier Mail newspaper for ten years, and has illustrated books for Margaret Wild, The Wiggles and Andrew Daddo.

Jonathan likes to work with a range of materials including acrylics, oils, and line and watercolour, and he looks forward to the day when he has a big barn-like studio somewhere in the countryside.



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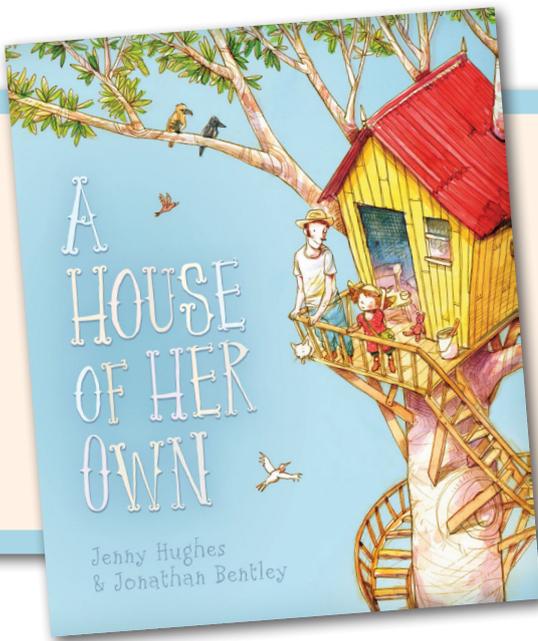
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STUDY NOTES

1. *Depending on what is going on around them, people behave differently at different times. How does Audrey's behaviour change between the beginning of the story and the end? How might noticing this change help you understand people better?*
2. *What are Audrey's feelings when her dad finishes the tree-house and leaves her behind? What sorts of things in the text help to tell you what her feelings are?*
3. *How do Jonathan Bentley's pictures help us feel the way Audrey feels when she is alone in her tree-house? What sort of feelings do you get when you look at the page that begins with the line 'Audrey's knees trembled'?*
4. *Certain things are important to Audrey and she tells her dad exactly how she wants her tree-house to be. Write a list of things that are important to you and that you would like to have in your perfect idea of a tree-house.*
5. *What things in the pictures and text tell us that Audrey has a good imagination?*
6. *What things tell us that her Dad has a good imagination?*
7. *Most stories tell us something about life. What lesson about life does Audrey learn in A House of her Own? How does her dad help her to learn this lesson?*



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ACTIVITIES

- Go back through the first few pages and try and figure out what would live in each of the places that Audrey's dad suggests she live in. For example, ask your class 'what would live in the chicken pen?' and 'what would you find in the shed?'. Get them to write down or discuss the many things that could be found in those places.
- Discuss with your class why children grow. You could get them to create their own height chart with measurements and illustrations.
- Ask the children to list out things they think they are getting too big for. Or things that are getting too small for them. Maybe their favourite jumper?
- Create a class story map of *A House of Her Own*. Invite a group of students to colour the story map while others work together to create a stick puppet of each character and house in the story. Keep the map and puppets in the class library.
- Ask your students to illustrate a timeline of what Audrey 'needs' in her new house. For example, first she 'will need a staircase'. Invite the children to draw a staircase with a banister, then next to it, draw the bathtub Audrey wants.
- Ask your class to write down all the things they have in their tree-house, or if they don't have a tree house, what they would have in one if they did. You could even get your students to draw that tree house.
- Ask your class to ask their parents if they have a height chart. This could be an opportunity to start a class growth chart using the charts that each child has made and brought in.