



Ben the Inventor

Robin Stevenson
illustrated by David Parkins

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About the Book

Inventors invent inventions! That's what Ben and his best friend Jack like to say. When Ben discovers that Jack's family is planning to move to another city, he decides they should put their inventions to work. The boys figure that if no one buys Jack's house, Jack won't have to move away, so all they need is a plan to scare off potential buyers! Luckily, inventors are good at coming up with plans...

About the Author

Robin Stevenson is the author of a dozen novels for children and teens. Her books have been nominated for many awards, including the Governor General's Literary Award, the BC Book Prize and the Chocolate Lily. Robin was born in England, grew up in Ontario, and worked for a number of years as a social worker. She currently lives in Victoria where she teaches writing and is at work on her next book. *Ben the Inventor* is her second book about Ben, and was inspired by her own seven-year-old son.

About the Writing

I began writing *Ben the Inventor* when a For Sale sign appeared in front of the house across the street and it seemed that my son's good friend would be moving away. At that time, my son was fascinated by inventions, Rube Goldberg devices and secret codes, so those interests made their way into the story. I had a lot of fun writing it and my son helped by sharing his ideas, reading the story as it evolved, and making suggestions to improve it.

Teaching Ideas—Curriculum Connections

Prereading Ideas

- What inventions do we use every day? (Make a list—zippers, telephones, erasers...)
- Have you ever wanted to invent something? What kind of machine would you like to invent? Draw a picture or diagram of it.

Classroom Discussion Questions

1. In *Ben the Inventor*, Ben “doesn’t have a choice about a lot of things, like brushing his teeth twice a day and sharing toys with his little sister, Stella,” but when he finds out that his friend Jack will be moving to another city, he thinks that is a very big thing not to have a choice about. What kinds of things do you think kids should get to make their own choices about?
2. Do you think Ben and Jack will stay friends after Jack moves away? How might their friendship change?
3. Jack and Ben try to prevent Jack’s house from selling, but ultimately have to accept Jack’s move. There is a saying: Every cloud has a silver lining. Do you think Jack’s move has a “silver lining” for Ben? What might it be?

Suggested Activities

- What did you think of the ending of the story? How else could it have ended? If you were the author, how would you have chosen to end it? As a class, write an alternate ending for this story.
- The “Stupendous Contraption” that Ben and Jack build is an example of a *Rube Goldberg device*.
 - ♦ Learn about Rube Goldberg, the Pulitzer Prize winning inventor and cartoonist, and see some of his designs on the website www.rubegoldberg.com. Watch a YouTube video of a Rube Goldberg device.
 - ♦ Collect some materials (wooden train track, marbles, toy cars, dominos, balloons, string, etc.) and try building a Rube Goldberg device. Students could work in pairs, with each pair building one part of the machine, and then figure out how to connect the parts as a group.
- If you don’t have time to build an actual machine, planning and drawing a Rube Goldberg device is fun too. Look at the illustrations in chapters 4 and 6 for an example, or look up some of Rube Goldberg’s own cartoons for more ideas.
- Ben and Jack make up a secret code to communicate. Read about secret codes and try making up one of your own. You can do this with a partner...and use it to send each other a secret message!

Other Titles and Websites of Interest

Electric Gadgets and Gizmos: Battery-Powered Buildable Gadgets that Go! by Alan and Lynn Bartholomew

Electric Mischief—Battery Powered Gadgets Kids Can Build by Alan and Lynn Bartholomew

How Nearly Everything Was Invented by Dorling Kindersley

Ideas That Changed the World: Incredible Inventions and the Stories Behind Them by Dorling Kindersley

If I Built A Car by Chris Van Dusen

Mechanimals by Chris Tougas

Transformed: How Everyday Things are Made by Bill Slavin

Wendel's Workshop by Chris Riddell

This music video by Ok Go shows a really fun Rube Goldberg device in action.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qybUFnY7Y8w

Other Books by the Author from Orca Book Publishers

Ben's Robot (Orca Echoes)

Big Guy (Orca Soundings)

Dead in the Water (Orca Sports)

Escape Velocity (teen fiction)

Impossible Things (juvenile fiction)

Inferno (teen fiction)

In the Woods (Orca Soundings)

Liars and Fools (juvenile fiction)

Outback (Orca Soundings)

Out of Order (teen fiction)

A Thousand Shades of Blue (teen fiction)

Awards and Reviews

Ben's Robot

Chocolate Lily nominee

CCBC Best Books

Resource Links "The Year's Best"

Ben's Robot

“Stevenson, whose son inspired this story, certainly knows the heart of children like Ben and can communicate the fun and frustrations of learning...This delightful story, which tells the tale of an adventurous little boy, will keep young readers flipping the pages to see what will happen next. Highly Recommended.” —*CM Magazine*

“A story which will be enjoyed by both male and female audiences, *Ben's Robot* highlights the challenges of friendship, play, imagination, and sharing...This is a humorous, imaginative and creative story that will hook reader and imagination alike. Highly Recommended.” —*Resource Links*

“Within a simple story, Robin Stevenson subtly weaves the elements of imagination, friendship and loneliness, along with a bit of mystery and magic. With just a few details, she fills out Ben's personality...Parkins' fine illustrations are fun and move the story along easily for the new reader. His googly-eyed robot is a gem.”

—*Canadian Children's Book News*