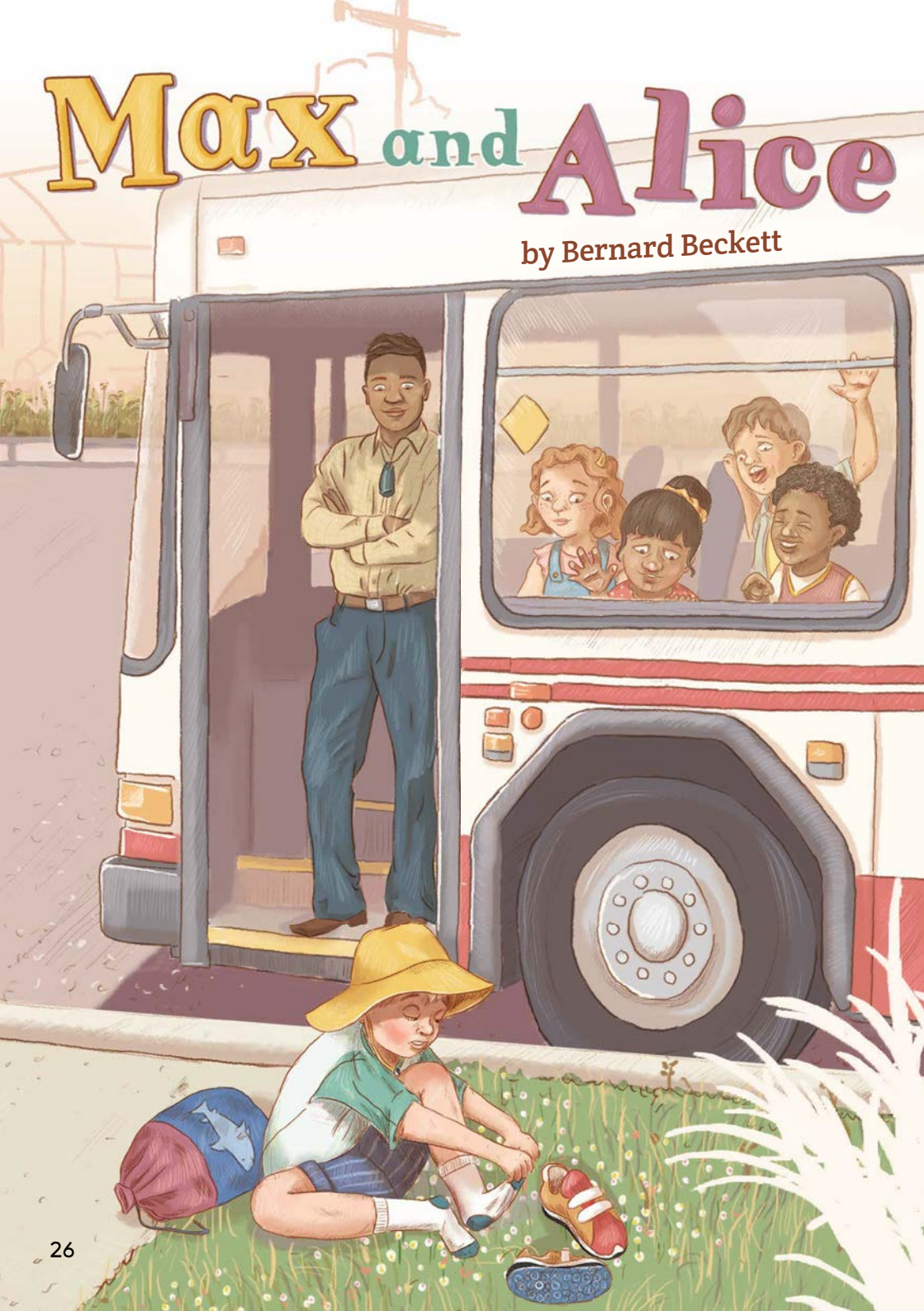


Max and Alice

by Bernard Beckett



On the day of the swimming sports, Max took off his shoes and socks and put them on again three times. Only then was he happy that his socks were lined up exactly the way he liked them.

The other kids waited on the bus. Adam and Noah laughed out the bus window. When Mr Sandbrook told them to be quiet, they slumped down behind the seat and pulled faces.

Alice watched Max carefully checking each sock. She smiled at him, the way her parents had taught her to smile at people who were having a hard day. So did Alice's friend Amy. Last winter, Alice, Amy, and Louis had started a kindness club in the library at lunchtime. But some older kids had stolen all the felt pens and drawn on the cushions, and the librarian had closed the club down.

Max didn't seem to notice them smiling. He was too busy concentrating on his socks.

On the day the teacher aide, Ms Va'a, brought her lamb and miniature pony to school, Max hugged the lamb and told it stories. When it was time to go back to class, he cried and shouted, "No!"

Melissa and Avril whispered to each other, and two of the other boys at his table sniggered.

Alice waited until Max looked at her, and then she smiled at him. She used her very best supportive smile, which she'd been practising at home in the mirror. Max wiped his eyes with his sleeve and ran to his favourite beanbag. He didn't smile back.

On the day of the earthquake drill, everyone climbed underneath their desks, the way they had practised. But Max didn't go under his own desk. He hid under Mr Sandbrook's desk, and when the drill was over and it was time to come out, Max wouldn't move. He stayed there, clinging to the metal legs as if he was trying to stop himself sliding across the floor.

Mr Sandbrook crouched down and tried to explain to Max that it was only a drill. But Max stayed put.

Alice and Bao talked to Mr Sandbrook, and he said they could sit next to Max. Nobody spoke. After a while, Alice showed Max her new pencil sharpener. It lit up with green and blue flashes when it was used. Max took the sharpener in his hands and smiled. He crawled out from under the desk without being asked and joined the others. Alice didn't ask for her pencil sharpener back, even though it had been a present from her auntie.



On the day of school sports, Alice tripped on a skipping rope and grazed her knee. Little drops of bright red blood ran down her leg and stained her new blue socks.

“Are you all right?” Chantelle asked. Chantelle knew Alice didn’t like the sight of blood. Alice nodded, trying hard not to cry. She knew if she looked down at the graze, it would frighten her, so she screwed up her eyes and turned her face to the hot sunshine.

Mr Sandbrook came over. “Chantelle, Avery,” he said, “please take Alice over to the office to get a plaster.”

Alice stood up. Her legs began shaking, and she wanted to sit down again. Then she felt a hand take hers. It was a small hand, no bigger than her own. It was Max’s hand. He didn’t say anything.

Chantelle, Avery, and Max took Alice to the main office. Chantelle explained what had happened. Max watched carefully as Denise in the office wiped Alice’s knee clean and gave her a choice of plasters. Alice chose a blue one with white clouds.



On the day that was exactly one week before Alice's birthday, she brought six invitations to class. They were in bright yellow envelopes with eight glittering stars on the front, one for each year she'd been alive. Alice had glued them on herself. Five of the cards were for Chantelle, Amy, Avery, Louis, and Bao. The sixth card was for Max.

That afternoon, Alice watched Max run out to meet his mother. She always waited beside the drinking fountain. Max pulled the card out of his bag and showed it to her. Max's mother hugged him and whispered something in his ear. Max turned around and pointed at Alice. Max's mother looked towards Alice and smiled.



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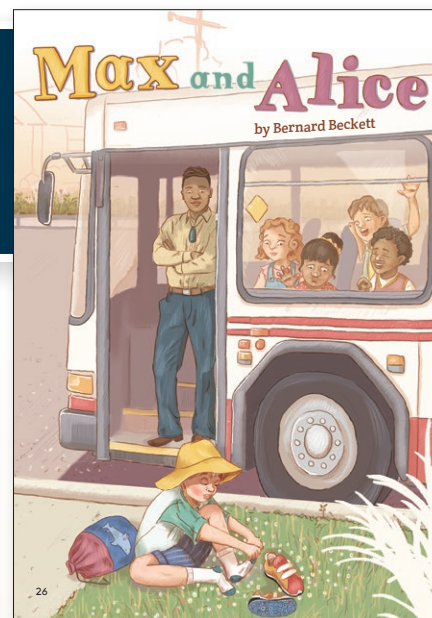
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Curriculum learning areas	English Health and Physical Education
Reading year level	Year 4
Keywords	Asperger's, ASD, Autism, Autism Spectrum Disorder, birthday, bullying, difference, diversity, friendship, identity, interpersonal skills, managing self, relating to others, relationships, respect, school, smiles, support