



Just the Way We Are

By Jessica Shirvington

Illustrations by Claire Robertson

Book Summary:

A celebration of families of every kind!

Meet Anna, Chiara, Henry, Izzy and Jack. Their families may not look like your family, but that's okay... they're perfect, just the way they are.

From bestselling author Jessica Shirvington and much-loved illustrator Claire Robertson comes a gorgeous, heart-warming new picture book, celebrating families of every shape and size.

Curriculum Areas and Key Learning Outcomes:

Language and Literacy

Visual Arts

Appropriate Ages:

2-5

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Notes by Simone Evans

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Introduction

In this story we meet Anna, Chiara, Henry, Izzy and Jack. They might all live on the same street but their families are all very different.

Anna lives with her mum and dad but she also lives with her Grandpa, making three generations in one house. Anna's parents both work busy jobs so Grandpa looks after her a lot. Anna and Grandpa are like two peas in a pod, they like having adventures and cooking up a storm in the kitchen.

Chiara is lucky enough to have two dads: Dad and Papa. Sometimes this confuses her friends and so she explains how she still does all the same things that they do. Chiara likes to ride her BMX bike really fast with Dad while Papa makes sure she is safely bundled up in a helmet, knee and elbow pads.

Henry lives with his mum and brother in one house and their dad lives in a different house. Henry used to dislike his parents being separated but now he prefers it because it means everyone is happy. His mum and dad have fun spending time with the boys at important events, like his brother's athletics carnival (and trips to the ice cream shop!).

Izzy lives with her two guardians (Jenny and Aaron) who she now calls Mum and Dad. Jenny and Aaron are very loving and they have adopted three other children as well. They all live together in one big happy house.

Jack lives with his mum and it's just the two of them. Jack's mum made Jack because she had so much love to give. Their family might be the smallest on the street but his mum's hugs are HUGE.

Anna, Chiara, Henry, Izzy and Jack show us how each of their families is perfect in their own special way; just the way they are.

About the Author/Illustrator

Jessica Shirvington lives in Sydney with her husband of twelve years, FOXTEL presenter and former Olympic sprinter Matt Shirvington, and their two daughters. She has previously founded and run a coffee distribution company, Stella Imports, in London, and been involved in managing the restaurants Fuel Bistro, Tow Bar and MG Garage in Sydney. She is currently a full-time mum, author and co-director in the company MPS Investments Pty Ltd.

Study Notes on Themes and Curriculum Areas

Themes and key discussion points

- a) Families: celebrating different shapes and sizes

In the story we are introduced to five very different families. Some are small and some are big; one has two dads and two only have one mum; one family has four adopted children and one family lives in two different houses. This story reminds us that not every family has to be exactly the same to be happy.

Discussion Points: *How many people are in your family? Is yours a large family or a small one? How is your family different to a friend's family? How is it the same? Is there anything you would change about your family? Why/Why not? What is the problem with wishing you were exactly like someone else's family?*

- b) Families: perfection and big love

The kids on the street explain that if you get 'lots of hugs filled with love' then your family must be perfect 'just the way you are'. You might of wished you had the 'perfect' family before, perhaps there is even something that you wish was different about your family, but this story reminds us that *love* defines a family and being surrounded by lots of love is the most important thing of all.

Discussion Points: *What does the word 'perfect' mean you? Has your idea of 'perfect' changed after reading this story? Why/Why not?*

Curriculum areas and key learning outcomes

a) Literacy and language during reading: questions for discussion

These questions can be discussed after the story has been read through once, or upon a second reading. They are designed to support students' engagement with the text and develop their visual literacy and comprehension skills.

1. What is the purple tree Anna is talking about? Can a tree be purple? Look at the picture. Do you recognise this tree? What is it called? *It loos like a Jacaranda tree.*
2. What 'cool adventure' are Grandpa and Anna having on the way home? Can you read what Grandpa has written on her backpack? Have you heard of NASA before?
3. Anna's parents go to work each day to do 'busy and important things'. Can you suggest some different occupations Anna's parents may have?
4. Do you think Grandpa likes living with Anna and her parents? Why? Who do you think Grandpa's child is?
5. What dessert might Grandpa and Anna be making everyone on Friday night? Would *you* want to clean up that kitchen? What 'dazzling deserts' can you make?
6. What does the word 'dazzling' actually mean? What or who can 'dazzle'? Use the word dazzling in three different sentences.
7. What do you think Chiara's dog might be called?
8. On the couch Chiara's dad has his arm in a sling! How do you think he hurt himself? When do you think this might have happened?
9. Henry's mum has done some shopping. What can you see in the bag? What do you think they are making for dinner?

10. How far away do you think Henry's dad lives? Do you think the family can walk between each house?
11. Henry's brother did pretty well in his running race. How many events do you think he might have competed in that day? Have you ever won anything? Were your family there to watch you?
12. Izzy and her family go to the local fair. When was the last time you were at a fair? Did you go on any rides? Was there a giant slide?
13. What book do you think Jack's mum is reading to him in bed? Do you have a favourite story to read at night? Do you ever read to your parents at bedtime or do they always read to you?
14. Jack is going camping. What are all the things he might need for spending a night in a tent? Can you see his mum there?
15. How many families live on the street? How many kids are there altogether? (*Count them aloud*) How many adults? Who is Anna's Grandpa chatting to? Can you spot the Jacaranda tree?

b) Literacy and language after reading: oral language activities

Activity: Get into pairs and in *one minute* tell your partner all the things that you enjoy doing with your family. Don't stop thinking of ideas until the teacher calls STOP and SWAP! The second person to go has to be *even more* imaginative and suggest what they enjoy doing with their family. When the class returns to sit in a circle, share your partner's best three activities with the group.

Activity: Sit in a class circle and close your eyes. Imagine all the members of your family and think carefully about how your family makes you feel. Now think of one word to sum up what family means to you (*love, warmth, support, fun, encouragement*). Share your word in turn with the class and if someone says your word then quickly think of a *new* word to share (the teacher should record these words for use in the associated art activity).

Activity: For homework, interview a member of your family from a different generation and create an oral report on their life and experiences to share with the class. You might like to start with some questions about where they grew up and what their family house was like when they were your age. Perhaps ask how many brothers and sisters they had and what their parents did for a living. Find out if they lived with any grandparents and what kinds of things the family did for fun. Consider some of the similarities and differences between growing up in their family and in your own. You may like to record the interview and have someone help you write up the notes for your oral presentation. If your interview subject has any photographs to share of their youth, bring them in for your report.

b) Visual Arts

'Yes, you're right, we might not look like your family, but that's because this is *my* family,' (Anna). In the illustrations we see lots of framed photographs of the different families on the street.

For these art activities students will need to bring in two photographs of their whole family doing something fun together (coloured photocopies can be made at school so that originals may be taken home).

Activity: Experiment with different drawing and painting mediums. Each student should be given four small (a5 size) pieces of art paper. Students recreate one of their family photographs in four different ways, using four different mediums. A suggestion for different mediums would be: chalk pastels softly shaded, watercolour paints lightly mixed, oil pastels strongly blended and brightly coloured inks painted with nibs. Each artwork, although based on the same family image, will take on a unique artistic style and texture that can be discussed. A quick Google search of 'gold frame templates' will give you a template to print in colour so you may 'frame' each artwork. Alternatively, silver

aluminum foil can be cut and glued around each artwork to create a 'frame' for the photographs.

Activity: Bring your second family photograph to life. Students use coloured modeling clay or play-do to create their three-dimensional family from the photograph. Students should try to make the faces as expressive as possible. They may need to make furniture for their family to sit on (for example if they are playing a game at home) or a natural environment for their family (for example if they are on the ski slopes, in the bush, or at the beach). If the family is using any important objects in the photo (like a scrabble set or fishing rods) these items should be moulded as well. Sit family portraits inside a shoebox and again add a large gold 'frame' to the front of each box it so it looks like a photo frame that has come to life.

Activity: The front cover of a picture book can give us lots of clues about what the story might be about. After you have read the book, re-examine the front cover and consider whether a different cover would also work with this story. Now that we know a bit more about the story have a go at re-drawing the front cover. Present your new front cover to the class and explain your illustration choices.

Activity: Classroom display. Create a 'Family Jacaranda Tree' and 'Cloud-filled Word Sky' in your classroom.

1. Draw a template of the trunk and branches on a large roll of paper (this can reach half way up the classroom wall). Make sure each student has his or her own 'branch' to decorate.
2. Collect real bark from the playground or students can bring this in from home.
3. Affix bark to the trunk and branches of the tree (PVA craft glue will be best for this activity).

4. Have students look closely at the 'cloud writing' on the final page of the story, which reads 'Just the way you are!' Using different shades of grey textas, students select a word from the previous oral language activity and write/create a large word cloud for the sky above the tree. Students can also create a large cloud heading 'Just the way you are!' and place a copy of the book next to the tree on display.
5. On each branch students should display a copy of their (photocopied) family photographs as well as their four 'framed' family drawings.
6. Display the three-dimensional models around the base of the trunk alongside the alternative cover illustrations created by students.
7. Finally, scatter the area surrounding the branches with light and dark purple crepe paper (scrunched and glued) for the Jacaranda flowers.

About the Author of the Teachers' Notes

Simone Evans attended Newtown High School of the Performing Arts before completing a Bachelor of Media and Communications at Charles Sturt University and later, a Graduate Diploma of Learning & Teaching with the University of Southern Queensland. She has helped produce theatre and festivals in Australia and England, taught primary school classes in sunny Byron Bay and is now the Education Coordinator at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney.