

Need a HUG?

Meet Jez Alborough's Latest Charmer



"Some people write children's books for their own children," says bestselling author-illustrator Jez Alborough. "But I write for the child I was."

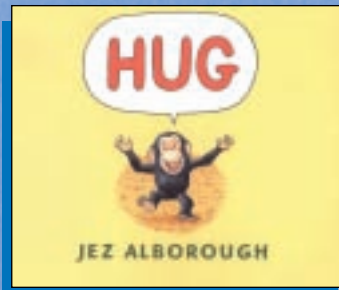
Clearly, he remembers the experience well. His readaloud trio—*Where's My Teddy?*, *It's the Bear!*, and *My Friend Bear*—has sold more than a million copies. *Where's My Teddy?* was named a National Council of Teachers of English Notable Children's Book and a *Parents Best Book of the Year*.

In Alborough's new book, *Hug*, a tiny chimp named Bobo invokes the universal language, uniting his friends in a group hug to end all group hugs. The author-illustrator known for his joyful wordplay here transforms a total of three words—and some of the most tenderly expressive animals ever created—into an endearing tribute to love and belonging.

Each Expression a Vital Clue

Why just three words? "When I drew the story up in a dummy book," says Alborough, "it had no words at all, but I felt that I should try to tell it with words to see if it added anything. I found that the most effective approach was to use language but sparingly. The word 'hug' itself became a motif expressing different emotions at different points in the story. At the beginning, Bobo says it quite happily as a recognition of what he sees the other animals doing. Gradually the emotion behind the word changes to longing, sadness, and—when Mom still hasn't turned up—despair."

The limited text, the subject, and the simplicity of the story combine to make *Hug* perfect for very young children. But as Alborough points out, creating a "simple" book is actually an enormous challenge: "With so few words, the pictures have to carry the storytelling. Every expression becomes a vital clue to what's going on emotionally at each stage in the story."



"I liked the idea that if every mom or dad gives their child a hug after reading the book, there will be one more hug in the world."
—Jez Alborough

The Universal Language

Jez Alborough says that he also wanted the many different species of animals in the book to represent various nationalities united in their understanding of the language of hugging. "To see the amazing patchwork coat of giraffes," he says, "next to the shiny gray and pink hide of the hippos or the multicolored snakes not only served to make the book brighter and more colorful, it was an important symbol for me."

In the beginning, he depicted various animals hugging in a way unique to their species—the elephants with their trunks, the snakes entwined—and while this worked on one level, Alborough felt the book would have more punch if the hugs were linked

with a story. "And if you're writing about hugs," he points out, "there is only one real story—a lost hug. It is the story of the lost child in the supermarket; there may be other adults to care for him or her in the interim, but only a hug from Mom will make the child feel safe again."

One More Hug in the World

To celebrate the publication of *Hug*, Walker Books—Candlewick's sister company in England—sponsored an official Hug Week at the American School in London. Children raised money by collecting hugs through their families, and the week culminated in a fantastic Hugathon. Five hundred children joined up in one gigantic hug and set a new record for the *Guinness Book of World Records!* Proceeds from the event benefited Children in Need, a registered charity that donates money to various children's causes.

The Hugathon is a natural extension of Jez Alborough's vision for this most affectionate of picture books. "From the beginning," he says, "I liked the idea that if every mom or dad gives their child a hug after reading the book, there will be one more hug in the world."



CANDLEWICK PRESS
2067 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140