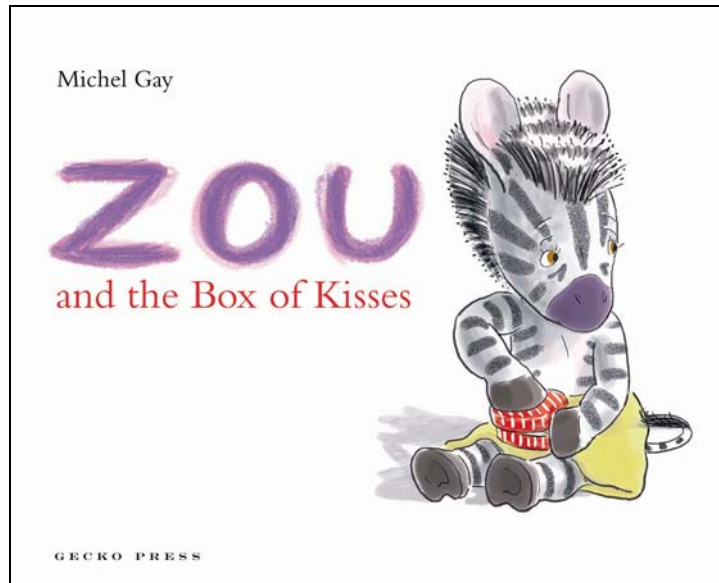


## Zou and the Box of Kisses

by Michel Gay

Published by Gecko Press



### Synopsis

Zou the zebra is off to a school holiday camp but gets anxious when he thinks about bedtime without his parents around. His parents make a box of bedtime kisses for him to take as a comforter. He bravely boards the train but cannot sleep because another tiny zebra will not be comforted. Rather than feel sorry for himself, Zou offers the tiny zebra his 'kisses'. It turns out none of the other zebra children are sleeping and they all need Zou's kisses for reassurance. Zou's new friends help him forget his anxieties and he enjoys the holiday.

**Author:** Michel Gay is a popular European illustrator who has illustrated more than 60 books for children, many of them self-authored. His Zou character has been made into an animated TV series.

**Themes:** This is a story that explores two very common childhood anxieties: staying away from home without one's parents, and meeting new people. It shows the complex mix of feelings involved: excitement, fear, pretending to be brave, shyness, sadness, shame, and empathy. It demonstrates that generosity

can be the key to making friends and overcoming worries. This book focuses on feelings by using recognisable, engaging character-types, rather than high drama.

### **Activities**

1. Identify Zou's feelings as the story progresses – use both the text and the expressions on his face to help you. Make a chart showing Zou's feelings as they change during the story.
2. Is Zou alone with his feelings? How do the other zebra children feel? How does the author make us believe that zebras have feelings similar to humans?
3. Share times when you have felt like Zou. For example when you went on a sleepover, a school camp, or were separated from your parents. How did you find some comfort or deal with your fears?
3. How does Zou make friends with the other zebra children? Brainstorm ways of making new friends. What do you think are the qualities of a good friend?
4. Write the story of what happened to Zou at the school holiday camp. Make up some adventures for him and his friends. This could be written as a diary from Zou's viewpoint or as an illustrated book.
5. Illustrations: Look at the use of light and dark to reflect Zou's feelings throughout the book. Why have shaded backgrounds been used? Which scenes have the brightest tones? Close-ups of Zou's face are used to focus on his feelings – which feelings are shown in close-up? How has the colour red been used to help important things stand out?
6. Paint your own picture using dull colours and paint a single item red as a focal point for the scene.
7. Create an animal character of your own. Give it a humanising feature such as an article of clothing. Draw a comic strip for your character.
8. Make a box of kisses using lipstick and tissue paper.
9. Reading: Read other books that use animals characters to explore friendship: for example, *Good For You, Good For Me* by Lorenz Pauli; *The Fearsome Five* by Wolf Erlbruch; *Amos and Boris* by William Steig. Make a collection of other

books that use animals to show human behaviour. Read *Zou*, the first book about this zebra.

10. Find out about real zebras. Make a poster showing where they live, what they eat and any special abilities they have. Or make a poster about trains.

11. Review the book. Why did you enjoy this book (or not)? Comment on the illustrations and what attracted you to them. What is a suitable age group for the book? Give it a rating.

*Teaching Notes by Raymond Huber*