



**A Teacher's  
Guide to  
*Mac and  
Cheese and the  
Personal Space Invader***





## Meet the author: Jolene Gutiérrez



- Jolene grew up on a farm in northeastern Colorado and has helped care for animals like pigs, cows, horses, donkeys, cats, dogs, chickens, rabbits, toads, lizards, parakeets, fish, hamsters, ferrets, hedgehogs, and guinea pigs! Why do you think she chose guinea pigs as Oliver's classroom pet?
- Jolene pretended she was a librarian and a writer when she was little. She volunteered at libraries as a teenager and she has been a teacher librarian since 1995. How many years has she been teaching?
- There were no neighbors near Jolene's farm, so she always felt like she didn't really know how to be a friend. Once she started school, she learned that watching others, drawing pictures, and asking for help were great ways to learn friendship skills. How do you practice friendship skills?
- Learn more about Jolene and her books at [www.jolenegutierrez.com](http://www.jolenegutierrez.com).

## Meet the illustrator: Heather Bell



- Heather whole-heartedly believes that hidden within our everyday lives is a secret realm glimpsed through books, music, and children's laughter.
- Heather holds a BFA in Painting from the Kansas City Art Institute. She is a member of SCBWI, a Children's Book Academy graduate, and a mommy.
- When Heather's not illustrating and writing, she searches out story ideas as an undercover school bus driver. If you've ever ridden a bus, think about all of the wonderful things bus drivers see and hear. If you were a bus driver, what kind of stories would you write? What kind of illustrations might you create?
- Heather uses different materials when she illustrates. Sometimes she uses acrylic paints, but for Mac and Cheese and the Personal Space Invader, she used watercolor inks and edited images on the computer as well. What are your favorite art materials? What are your favorite things to draw?
- Learn more about Heather, her art, and her books at [www.heatherbellbooks.com](http://www.heatherbellbooks.com).

This guide was created by Jolene Gutiérrez, M.L.S., teacher and librarian. She has held her Colorado teaching license with endorsements in English Language Arts and School Library Media since 2000.





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**Title:** *Mac and Cheese and the Personal Space Invader*

**Author:** Jolene Gutiérrez

**Illustrator:** Heather Bell

**Ages: 4-8/Grades: P-3**

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**KEYWORDS:** Friendship skills, social skills, social cues, nonverbal cues, social inferences, body language, communication, personal space, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal reflection, modeling, class culture, classmates, teachers.

**SUMMARY:** When Mrs. López tells Oliver that their guinea pig class pets are best friends, Oliver begins studying them to see how friends act. Cuddling and snuggling with his classmates doesn't make them happy, though, so Oliver learns about personal space and how to be a good human friend.

“At a time when parents and teachers struggle to teach kids about how close is too close—what is appropriate personal space—here comes *Mac and Cheese* to gently show the way. Jolene Gutiérrez’s text and Heather Bell’s illustrations provide a light-hearted story that demonstrates how kids live, think, and act.” —Avi, winner of the Newbery Medal and author of over 75 books

“Adorably illustrated and gently written, *Mac and Cheese* is a delight.” —Elana K. Arnold, award-winning author of *A Boy Called Bat* and *What Riley Wore*

“*Mac and Cheese and the Personal Space Invader* is a cute and fun book helping to explain the character’s struggle with understanding human proxemics. Not able to naturally interpret the non-verbal cues of his classmates, his caring teacher and his love for the class animals help him logically understand this slice of human social processing.” —Craig A. Knippenberg, LCSW, M.Div., author of *Wired and Connected: Brain-Based Solutions To Ensure Your Child’s Social and Emotional Success*.

#### **ABOUT CLEAR FORK/SPORK:**

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## English Language Arts

### Reading Comprehension

Before reading *Mac and Cheese and the Personal Space Invader*, explore the parts of the book. Look at the front and back cover as well as the spine and ask students:

- What information is included on the spine?
- Where is the front cover? The back cover? What do you see on the front and back covers?
- What is an author's job? What is her name?
- What is an illustrator's job? What is her name?
- Do you think this book is fiction or nonfiction?
- Who do you think Mac is? Who is Cheese?
- What do you think a "personal space invader" is?
- How do you think the characters are feeling?
- What do you think this story might be about?



Look at the title page and ask students:

- How are these guinea pigs similar to the ones we saw on the front and back covers? How are they different?

Read the book to your students.

Post-Reading discussion:

- Who are the main characters in this story?
- What happens in the beginning of the story?
- What do you think Oliver wants most?
- When do things start to go badly for Oliver?
- How does Oliver try to fix things? What might you have done differently?
- What happens at the end of the story? What do you predict will happen next?

### Language Activities: Vocabulary

*"Permission to enter your personal space?"*

- What does the word permission mean? What does personal space mean?
- Why do you think it's important that Oliver asked permission to enter Mrs. López's personal space?

*"Some people feel uncomfortable if you enter their personal space bubble or get too close."*

- How might people who are uncomfortable act? What might they do or say?
- Why do you think personal space is sometimes called a bubble?

## Language Activities: Spanish Vocabulary

Mrs. López sprinkles Spanish words into her discussions with students. Look at some of the words below and see if you can define them or guess at their definitions before reading the definition provided.



**amigos**—friends.

**buena idea**—good idea (the word *idea* is spelled the same in English and Spanish, but it's pronounced differently. In Spanish, it sounds like ee-day-ah instead of English's eye-dee-ah).

**cariño**—a word that can mean care but is also a term of endearment meaning something similar to dear or sweetie.

**felicidades**—congratulations, similar to the English word felicitations.

**libros**—books.

**mijo**—an abbreviation of *mi hijo*, which means “my son” but can also be used as a term of endearment for any male child.

**niños**—children.

## Writing Activities

- Write or tell a continuation of the story: What happens at school after Oliver and his classmates get back from the zoo field trip?
- Write or draw about how the story would change if there were different classroom pets?
- Think of a time when you've struggled with friendship skills. Write about your experience.
- Write a letter to Oliver sharing your thoughts and advice about friendship and personal space.
- Heather Bell has included Mac and Cheese throughout the book, and they have their own adventures. Try writing captions or dialogue for Mac and Cheese. What are they doing? What might they be saying?
- Write a book report or review of the book. What did you like about the book? What did you learn from the book? What might you have done differently if you were the author?

## Health/Social Skills

Read the Author's Note at the end of the book to your students and then pair students up.

- Practicing with your partner(s), how large is your personal space bubble?
- Practicing with your partner(s), rehearse kind ways to tell someone they are invading your personal space. What are some of your ideas?
- Practicing with your partner(s), rehearse ways to ask someone if you're invading their personal space. What are some of your ideas?

## Art/Media

- Create a watercolor painting and/or a pencil sketch of your own classroom. What is your favorite space in your classroom? Why? What is an area in your classroom you might change? Why? Try drawing or painting that area showing the changes you would make.
- Have you ever created sketches like Oliver does in order to learn about your world, your school, and your classmates? Try approaching something you do or see every day and make some sketches to help you better understand that situation, thing, or person.
- Heather Bell included little Mac and Cheeses having adventures throughout the book. Draw your own Mac and Cheese adventures in a 3-panel comic strip.
- Make your own sketchbook. Take plain printer paper, fold in half, and staple along the center fold. Grab your favorite writing utensil (crayon, marker, pencils, etc.), closely study something that interests you, and draw away!



## Science

- What do you think might be causing Mrs. López's sneezing attacks? Other than handing her a tissue, how might Oliver and his classmates help her?
- Create a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts humans and guinea pigs. How are they different? How are they the same?
- Oliver studies the world and records what he learns in his notebook. If the weather allows, go outside to sketch and write your observations in a nature journal. If you can't go outside, can you look out a window or find a video about a biome or habitat you're interested in? What animals do you see? What about insects? What type of vegetation surrounds you? What sounds do you hear? What type of weather are you experiencing? What do you smell? What do you taste?
- In the last scene of the book, we see Oliver's sketches of some of the animal behavior he sees at the zoo. Choose a zoo animal and research them using reliable resources. Which animal did you choose? What did you learn about their behavior? How does this animal show friendship? Based on what you learned in your research, do Oliver's sketches make sense? Why or why not?



## Math

- We know there is only one Mac, one Cheese, and one Oliver, but how many times throughout the book (including the front and back cover) do Mac, Cheese, and Oliver appear? Look closely!
- Estimate the diameter of the hula hoop Oliver uses as his personal space bubble.
- Estimate the weight of Mac. Estimate the weight of Cheese.

- Using a ruler, survey classmates to see how many inches they prefer between you and them. Make a chart or graph of your findings. Based on the number of classmates you interviewed, calculate the average distance your class prefers.
- Reference the study found in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology and use the statistics within the article to chart or graph the information (more information and articles are linked below in Social Studies):  
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c11a/9d92bc29e45aa711527833d3538943452d4b.pdf>

## **Social Studies**

### **Observe**

For the next week, observe personal space and/or friendship interactions at home and school. Write or draw your observations.

- What patterns did you notice?
- Which friendship or social skills did people seem to struggle with most? Why do you think?
- Which friendship or social skills do you struggle with the most? Why do you think? What is your plan for how you might work on those skills?

### **Research**

A study in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, “Preferred Interpersonal Distances: A Global Comparison,” can be found here:

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c11a/9d92bc29e45aa711527833d3538943452d4b.pdf>

Nearly 9,000 people from 42 countries were interviewed about personal space in this study.

Summary articles about the findings are available here:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/04/24/how-close-is-too-close-depends-on-where-you-live/>

and here: <https://science.howstuffworks.com/life/inside-the-mind/human-brain/which-countries-have-smallest-personal-space.htm>.

This study and these articles can be used as discussion or research starters.

- Which countries like the most space between them and strangers (or acquaintances or close personal friends)? Why do you think?
- Which countries like the least space between them and strangers (or acquaintances or close personal friends)? Why do you think?

