

Swing by Michael Hall



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## About the Book

Four letters of the alphabet meet on the school playground, by the swings. At first, they are reluctant to play together because of their differences, but eventually they begin to swing high up in the air. As they play together, they experience the joy that comes from sharing and making new friends. Maybe being different isn't a bad thing, after all!

## Before Reading

Show the students the two-page title spread and ask where they think this story takes place. How do they know? What do they notice outside the window? After determining it is the playground, ask the students what they like to do when playing there. What might happen if a group of children who don't know one another all want to use the swings at the same time?

## Discussion Questions

1. Read the first page of the story. When the second letter wants to play, ask the students how they would have responded to his question, "Can I play with you?"
2. How does the first letter respond? Why?
3. What happens when the third and fourth letters ask to play?
4. After disagreement and arguments, what does the fourth letter suggest? What happens?
5. When the letters stop swinging, they are in a different order. What else has changed besides their order?
6. How have the letters' feelings changed throughout the story?
7. What do the letters realize by the end of the story?
8. Read the list of "Today's Words" written on the easel in the classroom illustration. What do these words have in common? Are there other words that could be added to this list? How are these words related to this story?





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## Classroom Activities

**Same and Different.** Pair each student with a partner. Have the pairs take turns asking each other a question. If the questioner agrees with his partner's response, they should say, "Same!" If they feel differently, say, "Different!" and share their own idea. For example, the first partner might ask, "What's your favorite color?" The other child could respond, "Blue." The first partner either says "Same!" or "Different—I like green!" After the activity, ask the students how it felt to discover things that are the same and different about their friends.

**Playground Fun.** Ask the students to suggest five or six playground activities. List them on a chart. Then have the students choose their favorite activity. Create a graph by having them place a tally mark next to their activity or writing their name on a Post-it and placing it next to their choice. When the graph is complete, ask the students questions about the graph. Which choice was the favorite? Which was the least favorite? How many more children elected one choice over another? Was there a tie? The students can create a picture of their favorite playground activity to display with the graph.

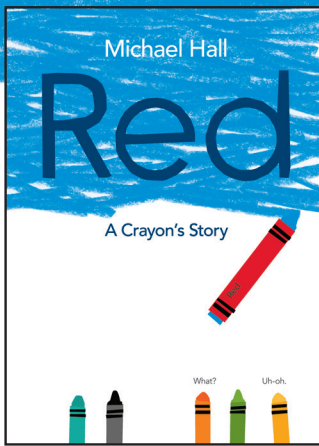
**How to Make a Friend.** As a group (or individually, for older students), create a how-to story entitled, "How to Make a Friend." Show the students how to use transitional words (e.g., first, next, then, last) as you record their ideas. For example, "First, I smile at a new friend. Next, I say my name and ask for theirs. Then, I ask what they

like to do. Last, we play together!" After the story is written, have the students provide illustrations to match the text. Put the pages together to create a book that they can read and enjoy!

**We Are All Different.** Discuss how the letters were initially reluctant to play with one another because of their differences. Then discuss all the ways people differ from one another (e.g., different hair, skin, height, birthdays, home, foods, interests, talents). Tell the students they are going to celebrate their differences by sharing their own unique talent or interest during "Sharing Day." One child might sing a song, while another might share a rock collection. Discuss how everyone's differences should be celebrated. Wouldn't the world be a dull place if we were all the same?

**Let's Play!** What if two children are playing together and a third child wants to join the game? What if some kids are playing soccer and another child takes their ball? What if a child is sitting alone on a bench? Discuss these and other scenarios and have the students role-play ways to resolve these playground conflicts.

**All Mixed Up.** The letters in this story were all mixed up until they finally spelled the word "LOVE." Give pairs of students a small group of letters (magnetic letters or letter tiles) and challenge them to rearrange the letters to form words. What words can they make? Have them record the list of words they create using their given letters.



# Red by Michael Hall

## About the Book

Red has a bright red label, but he is, in fact, blue. His teacher tries to help him be red (let's draw strawberries!), his mother tries to help him be red by sending him out on a playdate with a yellow classmate (go draw a nice orange!), and the scissors try to help him be red by snipping his label so that he has room to breathe. But Red is miserable. He just can't be red, no matter how hard he tries! Finally, a brand-new friend offers a brand-new perspective, and Red discovers what readers have known all along. He's blue! Funny, insightful, layered, and colorful, *Red* is about being true to your inner self and following your own path.



## Before Reading

Take out a box of crayons and hold up one crayon. Ask the children what color crayon you are holding. How do they know it is that color? What would they draw with that particular color? Do this with several different crayons. Then begin reading the story.

## Discussion Questions

1. Read the first page of the story ("He was red") and ask children what they notice.
2. Why did everyone expect Red to draw red things? Does it surprise you that no one noticed what he was really like?
3. Pause after the page on which yellow and red try to make an orange that shows up green instead. Ask children why this happened.
4. Pause after reading the opinions under "Everyone seemed to have something to say." Do you agree with everyone's comments? Why or why not?
5. Read the pages about art supplies. How do you think the different art supplies can/should help Red?
6. After reading "One day, he met a new friend," ask children how Berry is different from everyone else.
7. What does Berry help the others understand? Why is this so important?
8. Until he meets Berry, Red cannot be himself, because everyone believes he is different than he actually is. Do you make judgments about people based on their appearances? Do people make assumptions about you?

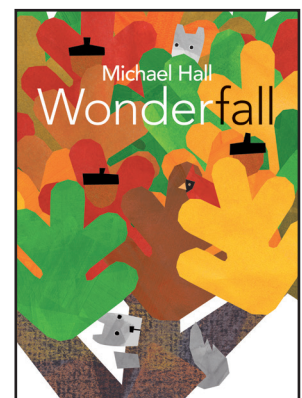
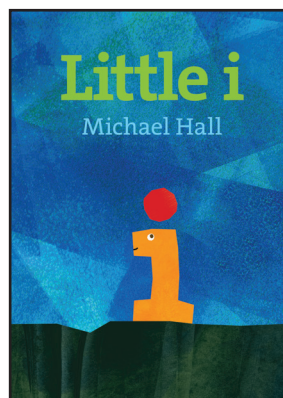
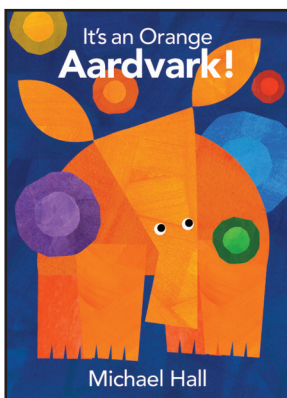
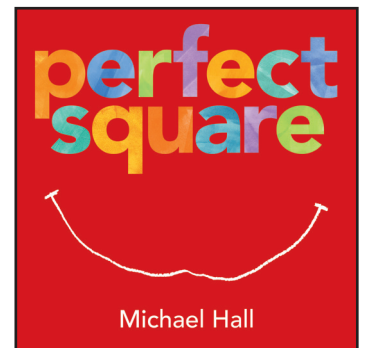
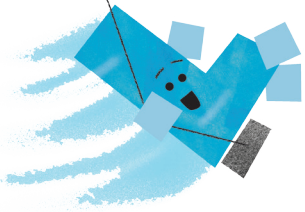
# About Michael Hall



Photo by Debra Kelley

**Michael Hall** is an award-winning designer whose work has been widely recognized for its simple and engaging approach. He studied biochemistry and psychology at the University of Michigan and worked in biomedical research for several years before becoming a designer. He is the creator of the *New York Times*–bestselling *My Heart Is Like a Zoo* and the acclaimed *Perfect Square*, *Cat Tale*, and *It's an Orange Aardvark!* He was also the creative director of the Hall Kelley design firm. He lives with his family in Minneapolis, Minnesota. You can reach him online at [www.michaelhallstudio.com](http://www.michaelhallstudio.com).

## READ, PLAY, DISCOVER with Michael Hall!



Guide created by Sue Ornstein, a first-grade teacher in the Byram Hills School District in Armonk, New York.