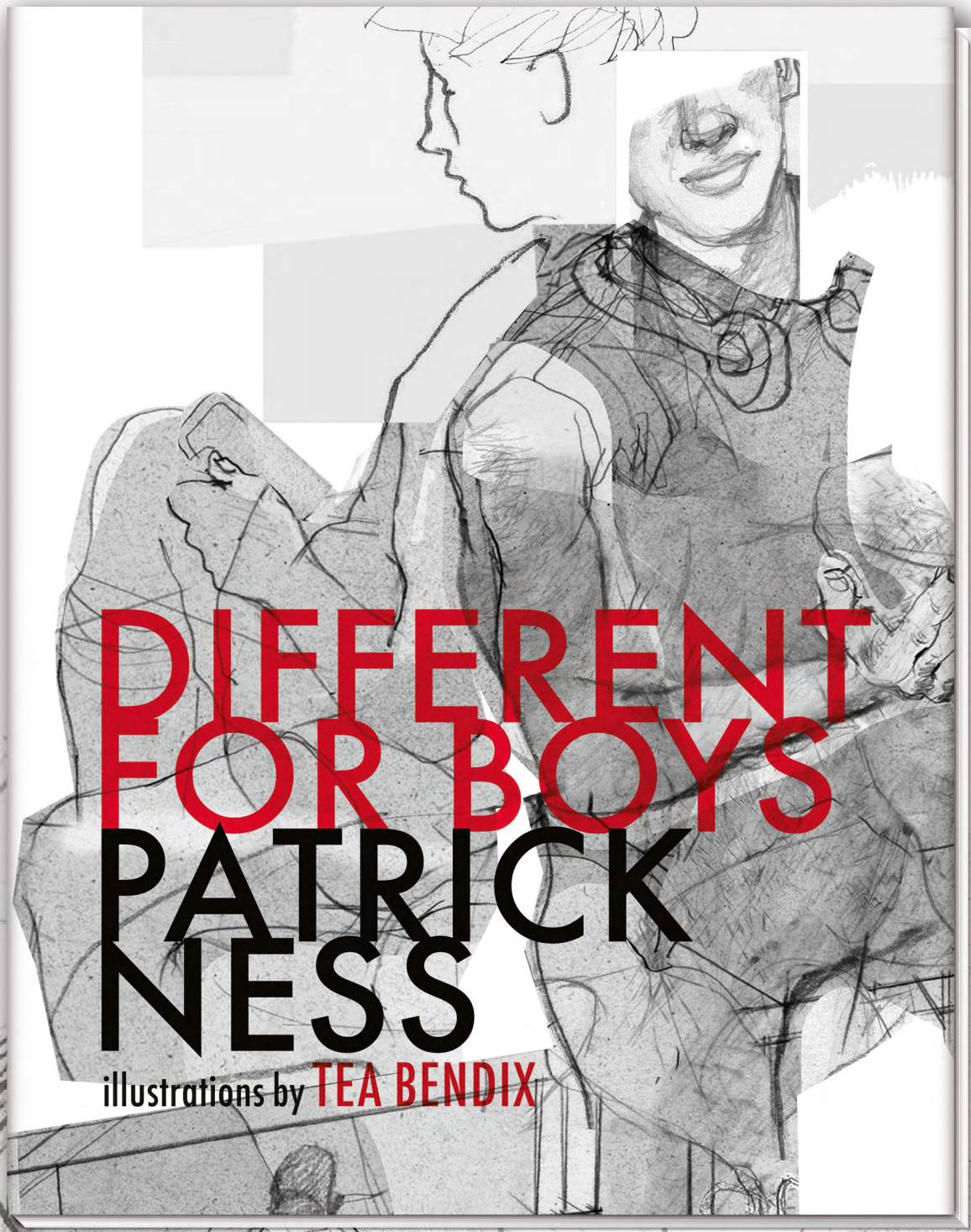


DISCUSSION GUIDE



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DIFFERENT FOR BOYS PATRICK NESS

illustrations by
TEA BENDIX

ABOUT THE BOOK

Ant Stevenson has many questions, like when did he stop being a virgin? Are there degrees of virginity? And is it different for boys? Especially for boys who like boys? Ant tries to figure out the answers to his questions as he balances his relationships with three very different boys: Charlie, who is both virulently homophobic and yet close friends with Ant; Jack, whose camp behaviour makes him the target of Charlie's rage; and finally, Freddie, who just wants Ant to try out for the rugby team. From the bestselling author of the Chaos Walking trilogy comes a timely and important story about inclusivity, prejudice and friendship.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Ness is the award-winning and bestselling author of the Chaos Walking trilogy, which inspired a major motion picture. He is also the author of critically acclaimed novels *A Monster Calls*, *More Than This*, *Release*, *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*, *And the Ocean Was Our Sky* and *Burn*. He has won every major prize in children's fiction, including the Carnegie Medal twice. He has also written the screenplay for the film version of *A Monster Calls* and *Class*, the BBC *Doctor Who* drama.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Tea Bendix is a Danish illustrator, author, graphic designer and live drawing performer, based in Copenhagen. She graduated from the Danish School of Design and works across different media, including picture books, non-fiction, apps, children's radio and drawings for TV.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

Different For Boys is a story unlike any other. A self-censoring LGBTQ+ novel that leaves a whole story untold for the reader, this astonishing book lays bare the complex relationships that can govern male adolescence in sparse, at times comic, at times heartrending prose. Ant is trying to make sense of his life, and answer some of the big questions. Friendships with Charlie, Jack and Freddie all take new turns, Ant must navigate his own feelings and the pressures in his friends' lives, in this vital story about acceptance, prejudice, love and relationships.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Ask for the group's opinion on the book – who would be willing to share something they enjoyed about it? What effect did the book have on anyone? Had anyone read the original short story that this book was based on?

1. Ant

'All right then, if we're starting out honest, here's pretty much everything I've done (it's not as bad as it sounds).' – p.7

How does the author present Ant? How does his character come across? What effect does this have on the reader?

How would the book be a different reading experience if it were presented in the third person?

2. Charlie

'Charlie isn't a bad guy. He isn't, despite how he's acting and what's going to happen in the rest of this story.' – p.21

What drives Charlie? Why are his actions so homophobic? Why does Ant make excuses for Charlie before the reader finds out what happens? Are Charlie's actions mitigated but what Ant tells the reader? Are his actions forgivable? If so, why? If not, why not? Is there more to Charlie's constant focus on Ant trying for the football team than just football?

3. Censoring

'I've _____, of course. Everyone _____.' – p.7

What effect does the censoring of words, phrases and details from the narrative have on the reader? Why has the author chosen to do this? Why is Ant aware of the censorship? What does this suggest about the details being censored? Who is doing the censoring? Is there a link to historical external censorship?

4. Different for Boys?

'I think it's different for boys, boys like me anyway. I think I get to choose...' – p.100

Why is the book called *Different for Boys*? Is what different? Why? How? Is the title purely about virginity? Or is it more than this?

5. Narrative fidelity

'Jack shoots a glare at Charlie. "I see you've been talking to _____ here."

"Hey!" Charlie says. "What was behind the box?"' – p.18

Why can other characters also see the censorship in the narrative? What does the author suggest by allowing these other voices to see the world in which the narrative is taking place? Are the characters encroaching on Ant's world? What effect does this have? What does it say about Ant's relationships with his friends? What does it mean that some characters can't see what's being censored in other characters' speech?

6. Freddie

'"Ah, big lovely Freddie." Jack looks over at me. "Straight, you know. As a Roman road."' – p.95

What impact does Freddie have on the action of the novel? What role does he play within the story? Does Ant present Freddie any differently to Charlie or Jack? How, if so? Why is the arrival of Freddie 'where this all *really* starts'?

7. Jack

'Because you don't really notice when it happens over time, do you? Jack's your friend. You like him because you've always liked him.' – p.17

Before the ending, how is Jack presented to the reader? In what ways does Ant's portrayal of Jack change? As narrator, and aware of the ending he's building towards, does Ant hint at the direction the novel is going in? What is the significance of the timing of the novel? (The events take place just after Jack and Ant have gone two months without speaking – see p.63.) Why is it significant that Jack *isn't* 'the love of [Ant's] life'?

8. Illustration

How do the illustrations complement the text? What do they bring to the novel that enhances or changes the reading experience? Does anyone feel they would have responded differently to the book without the illustrations? How is the censorship presented in the illustrations? What effect does this have?

9. Private vs personal

'...that really is the kind of private thing that should go behind a black box and not all of this swearing and sex crap.'
– p.101

Read out the last paragraph on page 101 to the group. What does Ant mean by the quotation given here? How does this relate to the wider issue of censorship? Who ultimately *should* be responsible for what is censored? And why should this 'private thing' be behind a black box, by Ant's own volition, instead of 'all this swearing and sex crap'?

