

A Teacher's Guide to  
**Is Your Buffalo Ready**  
**for Kindergarten?**

Written by Audrey Vernick  
Illustrated By Daniel Jennewein

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for **Kindergarten?**



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## Praise for

### *Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten?*

Recommended by *U.S.A. Today* for the starting-school crowd!

“This book should add some laughs while reassuring children that they are, in fact, ready for the big leap into school...just the thing to calm those night-before nerves.”

~*Booklist*

“Audrey Vernick’s witty text makes this shy student a super-sized hit as he adjusts to his new classroom...Little ones about to spend their first days in kindergarten will be reassured by this big guy’s successful efforts to fit in.” ~*Bookpage*

“Whether you’re reading to kids trembling on the verge of kindergarten or looking for a way to broach discussion about kindergarten policies now that the school year has started, this will provide a fine and comfortingly oblique way to address that big step up.” ~*Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books*

“To this tongue-in-cheek direct-address text, Jennewein matches clean, cartoon compositions ...The giant ruminant's goofy grin matches that of his redheaded owner's and heightens the ridiculousness of the scenario. As an embodiment of school anxiety, this buffalo leads the herd.”~ *Kirkus Reviews*

“This story's simple lesson about individuality is cleverly expressed through Vernick's gentle wit and Jennewein's crayon-outlined kindergartners—most of all, the furry and ungainly reader surrogate with whom kids will readily relate.”

~*Publisher's Weekly, Starred Review*

“This wacky picture book, with its bold cartoonlike illustrations of a buffalo that snorts, dances, and makes faces, may help apprehensive youngsters to be more at ease about going to school...Vernick's amusing tale will prove handy as a first-day-of-school book recommendation for children and teachers alike.”

~*School Library Journal*

"Audrey Vernick's witty, conversational text reads like a pep talk as she transfers typical first-day anxieties from child to buffalo with hilarious consequences ... The diversity of the students in buffalo's classroom is also a nice touch in this book that celebrates the differences among us ... Provides a welcome reprieve from the standard back-to-school, easing-the-jitters books. Two hooves up."

~*The Tampa Tribune*

## Story Summary

Your buffalo is growing up. He plays with friends. He shares his toys. He's smart! But is he ready for kindergarten? (And is kindergarten ready for him?) A hilarious look at first-day-of-school jitters.

## About the Author

In addition to writing for children, **AUDREY VERNICK** has published more than a dozen short stories for adults in a variety of magazines and literary journals. The New Jersey State Council of the Arts has honored Audrey twice with its prestigious fiction fellowship, in 1999 and 2005. She lives near the ocean in New Jersey with one husband, two children, and a dog. Learn more about Audrey and her work at [www.audreyvernick.com](http://www.audreyvernick.com).



## About the Illustrator



**DANIEL JENNEWEIN** has been drawing since kindergarten, where he could mainly be found drawing skulls and hooks, to the irritation of some adults.

He studied at Art Center College of Design near Montreux, Switzerland and later in Pasadena, California, where he graduated with a BFA in Graphic Design in 1998. He worked as an Art Director for several agencies, designing corporate designs and websites for clients large and small. Now he works as a freelance illustrator in Frankfurt, Germany where he lives with his wife, Lenore, and two fancy Sacred Birman cats.

You can visit him online at [www.danieljennewein.com](http://www.danieljennewein.com).

## Pre-Reading

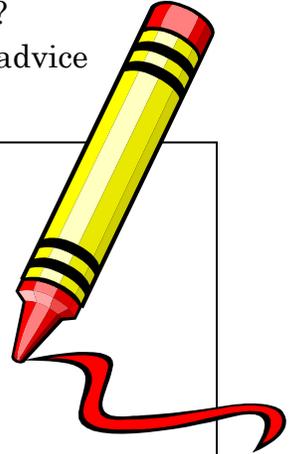
### Words of Wisdom

Do your students remember their first day of school? What was exciting? Surprising? Scary? Compose a group letter to next year's class offering advice for success.

Dear Kindergarten Class,

After \_\_\_\_ months of learning and fun with Ms. Brown, we have some words of wisdom to pass on to you:

First...



- *Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative and explanatory texts in which students name what they are “writing” about and share some information about it.*

### Take a Book Walk

Show the front cover and point out the title, author and illustrator. What is happening in the illustration? Have students brainstorm a list of what they might do to get a buffalo ready for Kindergarten!

- *Name the author and illustrator of a text and define the role of each.*
- *Relate pictures and illustrations to the overall story in which they appear.*
- *Use pictures, illustrations, and details in a story to describe characters, events, or settings.*

## Vocabulary

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following words. Encourage them to use picture clues to infer meanings as you read.

<i>mane</i>	<i>hump</i>	<i>resist</i>	<i>grazing</i>
<i>masterpiece</i>	<i>cooperating</i>	<i>frustrated</i>	<i>tempted</i>
<i>nudge</i>	<i>spiffy</i>	<i>tightrope</i>	<i>look sharp</i>

- *Ask questions about unknown words in a text.*
- *Use newly learned words acquired through conversations, reading, and responding to texts.*

## Discussion Starters

1. Where is the buffalo going? (*knowledge*)
2. How does the buffalo feel on his first day of Kindergarten? (*comprehension*)
3. If a nervous buffalo came into your classroom on the first day of school, what would you say and do to make him feel better? (*application*)
4. Look at the illustration on the title page. What are the people in the bus thinking? What is the buffalo thinking? What could happen next? Now look at the illustration on the last page. How will the girl convince the buffalo to come home? (*analysis*)
5. Sometimes the buffalo feels shy because he's so different from everyone else. In the end, he discovers that "Everyone's special in his or her own way." What makes you special? Draw a self-portrait and add "\_\_\_\_\_ is special because \_\_\_\_\_." (*synthesis*)
6. The book begins with: "Some people say Kindergarten is no place for a buffalo. How crazy is that?"

Do you think Kindergarten is a good place for a buffalo? Why or why not?  
Brainstorm ideas for good and bad places for buffaloes. (*evaluation*)

Good places for a buffalo:	Bad places for a buffalo:
my classroom	my mom's office
a prairie	on a ship at sea

## Student Activities

### Is Your State's Animal Ready for Kindergarten?

The buffalo is the state animal of Oklahoma. Visit [www.stateanimals.com](http://www.stateanimals.com) to find out about your own state's animal(s). (For those in Oklahoma, you have more than one!) Rewrite *Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten?* starring your state's animal.



- *Explain the role of historical symbols, monuments, and holidays and how they affect the American identity.*
- *Write narratives that include at least two or more appropriately sequenced events.*

### Hoof Painting

In the story, the buffalo “finger paints” with his hooves. Discuss the shape of the hooves (round with a missing wedge). What other things have this shape? (a piece of pie, pizza, etc.). Search Google images for “animal tracks” and let students compare the tracks of different animals with buffalo tracks.

Cut buffalo hoof shapes from sponges. Let students dip the sponges in paint and create their own masterpiece.

On a large piece of mural paper, let students leave their own tracks. Paint the bottom of each child's foot and let them leave their footprints on the paper, making a path going in one direction. When the footprints dry, let them add the buffalo footprints next to their own. Hang the mural outside of your classroom with a caption like:

**“Room 109 is on the right track!”**

- *Identify patterns in the environment.*
- *Identify basic shapes in the environment.*
- *Identify and describe relationships among two-dimensional shapes (e.g. same size, same shape).*
- *Create two-dimensional works of art while exploring color, line, shape, form, texture, and space.*

## Making Change



The buffalo is proud to have his image on the buffalo nickel. How much is a nickel worth? How much is a buffalo nickel worth today? Learn more about the buffalo nickel from the United States Mint:

<http://www.usmint.gov/kids>. (He also makes an appearance on quarters from Kansas and North Dakota.)

Visit <http://www.usmint.gov/kids/games/makingchange> to design your own coin.

- *Count and perform simple computations with money.*

## Clowning Around

What would a clown Kindergarten classroom look like? What kinds of things would you learn? Make clown hats by decorating a circular piece of construction paper. Cut the circle from one edge to the center, then shape the paper into a cone and staple it closed.

Have students act out various daily school scenarios while wearing the clown hats. How would clowns line up? Get a drink of water? Transition from circle time to their seats? After letting students clown around, have them contrast “clown” behavior with good student behavior. Close by taking two class photos—a clown photo with the hats and a serious photo without the hats. Display both photos side-by-side.

- *Demonstrate an understanding of rules by following most classroom routines.*
- *Original movement is generated through improvisational skills and techniques.*

## Blowing Off Steam

The buffalo gets mad when someone takes his blocks away or calls him names (like *fluppalo*). What does he do to keep his cool? Brainstorm some ways to calm down when someone says or does something upsetting.

- *Identify cause-and-effect relationships in a text.*
- *Determine possible causes of conflict between people and appropriate ways to prevent and resolve them.*
- *Explain healthy ways of coping with common stressful situations experienced by children.*

## Buffalo Backpack

What would a buffalo put in his backpack? What do we carry in our backpacks?

Have students sit in a circle and empty the contents of their backpacks. Help them categorize their things by putting hula hoops in the center of the circle (or make circles with string). Ask a student to place one backpack item in one of the hula hoops. Everyone who has something similar can place it in the same hula hoop (writing utensils, snacks, etc.).



Repeat this until all objects have been categorized and summarize the results in a bar graph.

- *Sort common objects into categories to gain a sense of the concepts the categories represent.*
- *Read, interpret, construct, and analyze displays of data using a bar graph.*

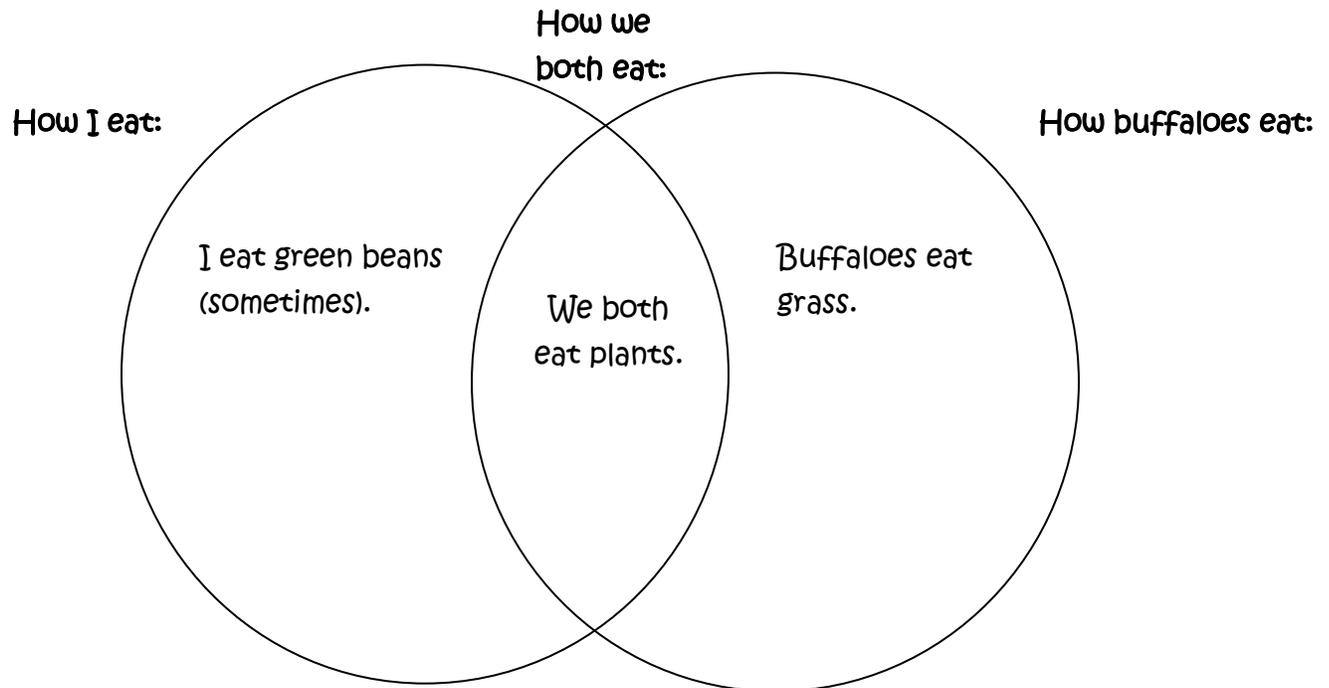
## Buffalo Friends

Look at the illustration in the second scene of the story. What do you think the boy in the striped shirt is saying? What could you say to make a new student feel welcome? Role play in small groups or pairs so students will be prepared to welcome a new student in the future.

- *Use information from illustrations and other visual elements in a text with the words to develop an understanding of the setting, characters, and plot.*
- *Play roles observed through life experiences.*
- *Portray characters when given specifics about circumstances, plot, and thematic intent, demonstrating logical story sequence and informed character choices.*

## Yum!

Discuss the buffalo's eating habits during snack time. Use a Venn diagram like the one below to compare how buffaloes and people eat.



Visit <http://www.lewisandclarktrail.com/buffalo.htm> to see how important the buffalo was to Native American life in the west. They used all parts of the buffalo, including buffalo chips as fuel for their fires!

- *Construct, interpret and analyze displays of data using a Venn Diagram.*
- *Explore cultural practices of Native American groups.*

## Paper Cuts



What shapes have the students cut from paper in the third scene? Try to draw and then cut animal shapes like the buffalo and his classmates have done.

If this is tricky, try snipping some virtual snowflakes here:

<http://snowflakes.barkleyus.com/>

- *Create more recognizable representations as eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills develop.*

## Counting on Towers



How many blocks high is the buffalo's block tower? How high is the girl's tower? Whose is higher? How much higher?

Use a Google image search to find images of towers around the world, including such examples as the Eiffel Tower, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and modern towers in Dubai.

Let students build their own towers from blocks. What is the secret to building the highest towers? Compare and contrast the construction of towers that topple easily vs. sturdier towers.

- *Spontaneously count for own purposes (e.g., counting blocks).*
- *Compare numbers in different contexts (e.g., using words such as more and less).*
- *Make three-dimensional constructions and models (e.g., sculptures that have height, depth, and width).*
- *Use standard and nonstandard measurement units (e.g., measuring body length with unifix cubes, using a tape measure to gauge height of block construction).*
- *Identify and describe spatial relationships among objects in space and their relative shapes and sizes, including smaller/larger/same size, longer/shorter, wider/narrower.*

## Text-to-Text Connections

► Read *Library Lion* by Michelle Knudsen, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes. Compare how the lion and the buffalo act in each story. Introduce the concept of personification by listing human-like behaviors for the lion and the buffalo. Which one acts more like a person?

► Share Robert Fulgham's poem *All I Ever Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Compare the poem's advice with the class rules in *Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten?* Are any of them similar? Now compare them with your classroom rules.

- *Compare and contrast characters or events from different stories addressing similar themes.*

## Bring Your Buffalo (and other furry friends) to School

Have students bring their favorite stuffed animals to school. Let them introduce their animal friends to the class and show them around the room. Sit in a circle and have each child teach a class rule to his or her stuffed animal.

- *Participate in conversations with peers and adults about grade-level topics studied in class.*
- *Listen to others and take turns speaking.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of rules by following most classroom routines.*

## Cave Drawings

Even people who lived thousands of years ago (in caves!) loved the buffalo. We know this because of the cave paintings they left behind. Visit <http://www.lascaux.culture.fr> to see cave images of bison and other animals that were painted over 17,000 years ago.

To read the website in English, click on the left-hand menu, go to the bottom, and click on the British flag. While on the virtual tour, click on the prompt that says “explore crossed bison.” Compare and contrast this cave drawing with the drawing of the buffalo in the story.

Hang brown mural paper on the wall and let students do their own “cave paintings” featuring animals they have seen in your area. Research local animals here: <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/>.

- *Determine locations of places and interpret information available on maps and globes.*
- *Explain how archaeological discoveries are used to develop and enhance understanding of life prior to written records.*
- *Understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.*
- *Use the Internet to explore and investigate questions with a teacher's support.*

## Buffalo Guide

Since you never know when a buffalo will show up in *your* classroom, it's best to be prepared! Create a class guide for new buffaloes (and kids) by taking photos or having students draw each area of the classroom. Add captions that would help a new member of the class understand daily routines.

Sample page:



- *Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative and explanatory texts in which students name what they are “writing” about and share some information about it.*
- *Demonstrate a growing ability to represent experiences, thoughts, and ideas through a variety of age-appropriate materials and visual art media using memory, observation, and imagination.*

## An Interview with Author

### Audrey Vernick

#### 1. How did you get the idea for *Is Your Buffalo ready for Kindergarten?*

Before writing *Is Your Buffalo Ready for Kindergarten*, I wrote what will be its sequel, *Teach Your Buffalo to Play Drums* (to be released in 2011). I was sitting with my son, waiting for the school bus. He had to bring pumpkin muffins to school for a consumer science class. Our dog was sniffing around those muffins. I said something along the lines of, "He's going to follow you to school. You're going to have to teach your dog to bake." And then I said, "A smarter writer than I would take that idea and run with it. Teach your dog to bake. Teach your cat to surf. Teach your buffalo to play drums..."



When I was walking the dog, later that morning, at least half the text of *Teach Your Buffalo To Play Drums* came to me.

When HarperCollins acquired the book, they offered me a two-book deal and we all agreed that a kindergarten book (I had been working on another, about an abominable snowman attending kindergarten) would be a good way to introduce the buffalo character.

#### 2. Once the idea came to you, what happened next? Did you jot it down right away? Let it simmer?

*Teach Your Buffalo to Play Drums* was the fastest book I ever wrote. I had a first draft that day. The kindergarten book took a bit longer to get right.

#### 3. What was the hardest part about writing this book? The most rewarding?

I learned a lot in the revision process on this book. My editor and I found a way to balance each other. I tended to write in a snarkier tone, and she worked to balance in more encouragement and sweetness. In the end, I think we found a really nice balance.

#### **4. How did the illustrations come about?**

The art director of HarperCollins had met a new illustrator, Daniel Jennewein, when attending the Bologna Children's Book Fair. She thought he might be just right for this project. She sent Daniel the text and asked him to create some sketches. What he sent back impressed us all so much. The humor in Daniel's artwork just blows me away. I'm still trying to figure out how his fairly simple buffalo eyes and eyebrows convey so much emotion.

Writers always hope that the illustrator the editor chooses will bring something special to the project--something the writer herself can't even envision. Daniel did all that and more.

#### **5. How did you know you wanted to become a writer?**

In college, writing classes were the only ones that came easily to me. I was very surprised when my professors responded well to what I wrote. I am so grateful to them for treating me like I was a writer, because I think it gave me an inkling that I could be one.

#### **6. Do you have a writing routine?**

I am not a writer with daily discipline. I have two children and though they're not young anymore (the younger one is 11) I'm very mindful of the fact that they will only live in my home for a finite amount of time. College is only four years away for the oldest. When I'm working on longer works, novels, I try to find large, uninterrupted blocks of time for my work. But for my picture books, especially once a first draft is completed, I find it easy to work in whatever little bits of time I have.

#### **7. What advice do you have for young writers?**

I have advice that no one wants to hear. I wouldn't have wanted to hear it when I was a young writer. But here it is: publication does not have to be your immediate goal. Publication is not the only way to mark the success of a writer. If your writing entertains, or helps you understand a problem, or makes you happy, then that's successful writing, too. There are two things you need to do to become a good writer: read and write a lot.

The other "secret" that I didn't know when I was young is that first drafts are only the very beginning. Excellent writing emerges when you keep working on the same text over and over--through the revision process.

**8. When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?**

I'm an avid baseball fan. I can't play! But whenever the Yankees are playing, I'm watching or listening. I read a lot. I enjoy hanging out with my family. I take very long walks with my dog, Rookie, every day; almost all my writing ideas come to me on those walks or in the shower. I love the beach, and am so happy to live a short drive away.

**9. What do you remember most about Kindergarten?**

My teacher, Miss Katinas, was a first-year teacher. I thought she was the most wonderful person alive. I adored playing in the kitchen area, which is kind of funny to me now because I'm not a very good cook.

I only remember one bad day in kindergarten. Miss Katinas asked each of us to think of a word that rhymed with our names. Each child, one at a time, went up to tell her the rhyming word. I remember Lisa rhymed her name with "pizza." I was outraged, as I didn't think that was a true rhyme. And I was in a panic, as I didn't know any words that rhymed with Audrey. (I also wondered what Gregory was going to say.) When it was my turn, I asked, meekly, "Does it have to be a real word?" I could see the empathy in Miss Katinas' face as she assured me that made-up words were just fine.

I invited Miss Katinas and her fiance to attend my dance recital. They did! And they invited me, and the class, to attend their wedding at the United Nations.

**10. Most importantly, have you ever gone to school with a buffalo?**

Not yet. I'm pretty sure, though, that on one of my school visits, there will be one waiting to meet me. And I have so much to tell him!

## An Interview with Illustrator Daniel Jennewein



### 1. When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

I've been drawing since I was a young child. In kindergarten, my favorite thing to draw was skulls, though I also drew a lot of animal scenes. When I went to art school, I chose design over illustration because I was more drawn to design at the time. I worked as a designer for many years, but the whole time, I continued drawing. Last year I decided to become a full-time illustrator.

### 2. What type of media do you like working with the most?

I use black fine liner pens or thick black pencil to draw. Then I usually scan my work in and color it using Photoshop. I also like to experiment with watercolors and other techniques, trying out different things to find what serves the subject matter best.

### 3. How did you break into the children's book illustrating profession?

Children's books are a great platform for humorous illustration, which I've always been interested in. I started working on some ideas for books and joined the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators to learn about the craft. In 2008, I attended a SCBWI conference at the Bologna Children's Book Fair in Italy and had the opportunity to show some of my work to art directors from major publishing houses. That's how I got the opportunity to do this book.

### 4. Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

An art director who saw my work in Bologna contacted me and told me she had a story that she thought fit my style. The author and I have never even met, but I hope we can someday.

**5. How long did it take to illustrate IS YOUR BUFFALO READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?**

About three months altogether. Once I got the finished manuscript, I did first sketches and character design which took me a couple of weeks. Then the publisher decided to revamp the story, so after a lot of waiting, I got the manuscript again and did a second round of sketches. Once these were approved, I spent a few weeks on final artwork.

**6. How did you decide on an illustration style for the book?**

The tone of the story determines the style. Because this story is so quirky and fun, I envisioned a bold look with strong black outlines and fresh slightly muted colors. The outlines are done with a black caran d'ache pencil on watercolor paper. The coloring I did in Photoshop.

**7. Are any of the characters or the setting modeled on real-life people and places?**

Although I did get very close to real buffaloes on my trip to South Dakota, I didn't model this buffalo after them because they were much too serious. A few of the kids are in fact modeled after friends and family. The boy who wears glasses is reminiscent of my father, while the red haired boy and Asian girl look a lot like best friends of mine.

**8. Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?**

I agree. As a child, you have no inhibitions and draw whatever you feel like. Later, the more you are criticized and the more you are taught what is acceptable and what is "good", the more you become self-conscious. Maybe you stop drawing because you think others are better than you or at least you stop drawing whatever comes into your head. It's more thought out and based on being accepted by teachers and peers. To remain an artist, you have to learn how to lose the inhibitions you built up and you have to be brave enough to define your own style instead of just doing what is expected.

**9. What do you like to do in your spare time?**

Even though illustration is my profession, I still do a lot of drawing in my spare time too. I try to do at least one drawing every day. I also enjoy travelling (I've been to over 40 countries), hiking and biking in nature, bikram yoga, escrima (stick fighting), going to the cinema, reading and hanging out with my wife, family and friends.

**10. What advice do you wish someone had given you on first day of Kindergarten?**

Don't eat the glue.