

# Bernard Stops the Bullies

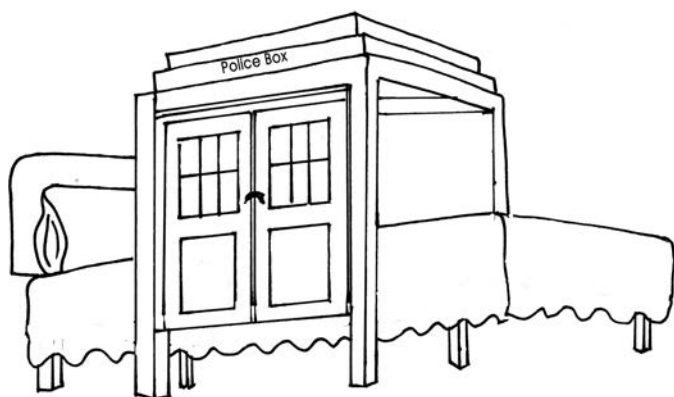
Bernard was a bit odd. He didn't mind admitting it. He knew he was odd, and oddly, he enjoyed being odd, and he enjoyed people thinking he was odd. His teachers were extremely fond of him but would always be polite in their descriptions:

'Bernard?' Mr Lee said, when asked to describe the Year 5 pupil. 'He's a bit ... erm... ooh, er... I'm not sure I can think of the word... erm... Different. Yes, that's it. Bernard. Different. Definitely different. But very friendly. Always friendly. Lovely lad Bernard. But certainly different.' (Mr Lee was Bernard's teacher. He would never call Bernard odd. But 'interesting' is the code word teachers use for 'odd'.

Bernard's friends also thought he was odd. They never actually called him odd. That would have been rude. But they definitely thought he was odd. And they liked him for it.

So what was it that made Bernard 'different'?

Well, he did odd things. He was a bit of a fan of Doctor Who. No, that's wrong. He wasn't a bit of a fan of Doctor Who. He was a lot of a fan of Doctor Who. That in itself of course does not make him odd. Many children and adults are fans of Doctor Who. But do they sleep in a tardis? Bernard does. Bernard persuaded his grandad to build a tardis around his bed, so that when he went to



bed at night, he had to open the tardis door, just like Doctor Who. Bernard would walk through the tardis door, in his Doctor Who pyjamas, and climb into bed, which of course, was covered in a Doctor Who quilt.

But his Doctor Who habits weren't the only things to make Bernard odd. Oh no. There were others. He had odd eating habits. For his lunch he would eat the oddest sandwiches (from his Doctor Who lunchbox). Peanut butter and tuna, was his favourite combination. He always had this on Mondays and Fridays. Tuesday was raspberry jelly with roasted peanuts. Wednesday was cold baked beans with lettuce, and Thursday was chicken and, wait for it... Marmite. Yes, that's right. Chicken and Marmite. His friends had learned to accept it. He'd been eating these strange sandwiches ever since he started school and he was never going to change.

'I like the flavours,' he would say. 'Far more interesting than everyone else's.'

And it wasn't just his Doctor Who habits and his strange sandwich choices. Oh no. Bernard was odd in other ways too. He had odd pets. He kept woodlice. Yes, woodlice. In a large glass tank, in his bedroom, next to the tardis. He would regularly put fresh pieces of rotting wood in the tank to keep his little pets happy. Bernard couldn't understand what his friends found so interesting about their cats and dogs. Woodlice were far more interesting. They ate wood, for a start. How much more interesting can a pet get?!

And it wasn't just Bernard's Doctor Who habits, his strange sandwich choices and his pets that ate wood, that made Bernard odd. Oh no. Bernard was odd in other ways too, but for now, you'll just have to accept my word for it.

Bernard was in Year 5 now – 5L to be precise. He was beginning to work out what life was all about. He was beginning to realise that some people are very friendly, and kind, and fun to be with (these people were Bernard's friends), and then there were the other kind of people. These were not Bernard's friends. Bernard was beginning to realise that being interested in unusual things was not without its problems. Although his friends seemed to think he was interesting and fun to be with, there were others who used Bernard's unusual habits to be unkind to him.

And one thing Bernard hated more than anything else in the world was conflict – disagreements, arguments. He could never understand why people did it. What was the point? Someone would always get upset. Usually, everybody got upset! He just couldn't understand it.

Bernard's mum and dad had always told him to be proud of who he is, and not to worry about what other people thought. 'If you want to eat chicken and Marmite sandwiches, you eat 'em,' Bernard's dad said to him.

'Yes, and why shouldn't a boy have woodlice as pets?' asked his mum. 'We're proud of you Bernard.'

Bernard's teachers had always supported him and encouraged him to share his unusual interests with the rest of the class. During the science topic on mini-beasts in Year 3 Bernard had been a great help. He'd even brought his pets in to take part in an experiment.

Maybe those who said unkind things to him were jealous.

Bernard could remember the unkind comments some members of 5L had made that day.

'Huh!' shouted Andy, as the children trooped from the classroom, 'Who wants to know all that

rubbish about woodlice? What good do they do? What a waste of time.'

'What a stupid thing to have as a pet. Bet he's got names for them all too,' sniggered Tracey as she walked past him with her friends, who joined in with her giggles.

Bernard was hurt by those comments and later that evening he thought long and hard about what he could have said in reply. He could have been nasty back. He could have said to Andy, 'It's not rubbish about woodlice. You have no interests apart from football. That's all you're bothered about – kicking a silly little ball around, trying to get it through two silly little posts, and most of the time, they're not even posts – they're silly little jumpers, or silly little cones.'

But he didn't.

He could have said to Tracey, 'They're not stupid things to have as pets. They're really interesting and easy to look after. And I don't have names for them. They're woodlice. I'm not stupid.' Bernard knew that Tracey had a pet dog that she never took for a walk, despite promising her mum and dad that she would. He could have made a comment about that. But he didn't.

No. Bernard simply ignored the nasty comments made by Tracey and Andy, and instead went to play with his friends.

Andy and Tracey's comments were unkind. But they weren't the only ones. You can imagine what happened in the school dining room when Bernard produced his odd and wonderful sandwiches:

'What's it going to be today Woodlice Man?' Andy's gang would say, straining their necks to see what was in Bernard's lunch box. 'Is it sherbet and cheese? Or maybe Mars Bar and sprouts?'

Each comment would be followed by laughter and giggles, but Bernard just opened his lunch box and ate his odd, but tasty sandwiches.

Bernard's friends couldn't understand how he could just ignore them. He never seemed upset by what other people said to him. Of course, inside, Bernard was seething with anger. He secretly wanted to push his chicken and Marmite sandwiches into Andy's face so hard that the Marmite stung the inside of his nostrils. But that would have been a waste of bread, and chicken, and Marmite. He wanted to go round to Tracey's house when she wasn't there and put some of his woodlice into her bed so that when she woke up the next morning, they were crawling all over her face, and up her nose. But that would not have been fair on his woodlice.

So instead of saying something nasty back when Andy said one of his nasty comments, Bernard simply imagined him with a face full of chicken

and Marmite sandwich, his nose stinging. And when Tracey said something nasty, he simply imagined her with a face full of woodlice, some crawling up her nose, and her screaming. So he didn't need to say anything, because he knew that if he did, he would lose. There were more of them, and let's face it, he was a bit odd.

And you know what happened after a while?

Andy and Tracey stopped being nasty to Bernard. Once they realised that he wasn't going to get upset by their comments, and he wasn't going to say anything back, they gave up.

Bernard remembered the day the comments stopped. He sat down at the table in the dining room. Nothing. He opened his sandwich box. Today was raspberry jelly and peanuts on wholemeal bread. Mmm. No comments. No giggles.

He also remembered what happened in the playground that same day. Andy said something nasty to John in Year 4. John said something nasty back, they had a big argument and both ended up missing afternoon play. On the other side of the playground, Tracey said something behind Lucy Chapman in Year 3 and Lucy hit her with a skipping rope. They both missed afternoon play and Mrs Davies sent a letter home to her mum.

Meanwhile, Bernard played with his friends, and had a really good chat about who was the best ever Doctor Who.

