



## Slug Days

**Sara Leach**

**Rebecca Bender, Illustrator**

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*This is a winsome, gentle introduction to the differences and challenges of autism spectrum disorders.*

Solace in fixed routines. Attention to detail. Misreading social cues. These and other tendencies are shared by many children with autism spectrum disorder, and they are compassionately embodied in Lauren, a perceptive elementary schooler in Sara Leach's *Slug Days*.

The thoughtful chapter book spans the course of a week, highlighting Lauren's ups and downs while inviting intermediate readers to glimpse how one girl with ASD perceives her world. Expressive pencil illustrations by Rebecca Bender feature Lauren, her family, and her classmates.

Lauren endures what she whimsically dubs "slug days," when little seems to go right. She misses out on anticipated activities, has her motivations misunderstood, and encounters peers who react to her in unexpected ways. Slug days intersperse with butterfly days, when the promise of ice cream or crafts brings joy.

Well-chosen scenes reveal common scenarios—such as boarding a school bus—that magnify in significance when the usual order of events is interrupted. Lauren's struggle to communicate her needs and emotions laces through the story, but never builds into crescendos; her self-regulating skills prevent her from completely melting down. The plot culminates with Lauren beginning to find acceptance. It's a straightforward, readily grasped depiction of a child's sensitivity to her environment.

Subtle moments illustrate Lauren's perfectionism as well as her sometimes humorous, infinitely logical, literal way of interpreting comments. When a teacher chides her for wasting everyone's time, Lauren notes to herself that it is only this particular teacher's time that is being wasted.

Without delving into fine detail, the book portrays enough aspects of living with ASD to be familiar to those on the spectrum and those who care for them. From agendas (the Canadian version of IEPs) to a teacher's lesson on making friends to a father staving off a tantrum during a project by using clever redirection, *Slug Days* weaves in challenges with ease.

*Slug Days* wisely presents autism as neither disability nor exceptionalism. It's a fact that Lauren lives with; it shapes her encounters without necessarily limiting them. At the book's core lies a wish that anyone can identify with: the need for a friend. This winsome, gentle introduction to differences will be a positive addition to school and home libraries.

KAREN RIGBY (Children's SIP 2017)

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