



At the Speed of Gus

by Richard Scrimger

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The Story

Augustus (Gus) Constantine's brain moves fast, and not necessarily on a straight track. His mind (and mouth) operates at a different speed than everyone else he knows. This probably has something to do with Gus's ADHD. His neurodivergence feels natural to him, but sometimes it lands him in a load of trouble.

For example, one morning, Gus takes morning announcements wildly off script. Even though he hears nothing but laughter from fellow students at Pendrell Elementary, he's finally pushed Miss Funn (who's anything but) and Principal Gorby (who's getting tired of Gus's endless jokes and unfiltered stream of consciousness) to the limit.

Now he's suspended for two whole days. With nothing else to do, Gus takes up his sister's invitation to take the ferry to meet her at her college. But on the ferry, his thoughts begin to race. He's having trouble concentrating and can't calm down. At the speed of Gus's brain, the ride gets wilder and wilder, until it's hard to tell what's real from what's imagined. With all these twists and turns and detours, will Gus be able to find his way to his destination?

Reading Group Questions

1. *At the Speed of Gus* is written as a kind of conversation with the reader. Does this technique make it easier or harder to engage with the narrator? Easier or harder to follow the story?
2. What do you think is the central conflict or struggle that Gus is facing in the story? Can you relate to his conflicts or problems? Does he remind you of anyone you know?
3. What point of view did the author use to tell this story? How do you think the author's choice to use this point of view allowed you to get to know Gus as a character?
4. What was your favourite funny or awkward moment in the story? Did any of these moments remind you of an awkward moment of your own?

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About the Author



Photo © Mark Raynes Roberts

Richard Scrimger is the award-winning author of more than twenty books for children and adults, including *Zombo* and *Downside Up* as well as *The Other Side of Perfect*, written in collaboration with Melanie Florence, which received a starred review from *Kirkus Reviews*. His latest, *Your Story Matters*, is a guide to writing endorsed by the Junior Library Guild. Richard is a popular presenter in schools. He lives in Toronto. Visit him at <http://www.scrimger.ca/>.

Author Q&A

Can you talk a little about the problems that Gus is facing in the book, and how they might have been drawn from some of your own experiences?

Might have? Gus is pretty much me. His brain works just like mine. Like Gus, I did announcements in high school. And like Gus I went off topic to make a joke, and got in trouble. My agent couldn't read the first draft of this story because it moved so fast that she was breathless. *You're just reading it*, I told her. *This is how I live*.

So much of this book is written with such quick, stream of consciousness pacing that it feels like you could have written it all in one sitting. What was the actual process of writing *At the Speed of Gus*? Did it come to you all at once?

Every hero is a version of the author. But Gus is not really a version of me—he is me. The book fell into place quickly because I was not “getting into” a character. I wrote the first draft with no filters. Later drafts involved stepping away from the character, slowing the pace of the action and Gus's thoughts. I built in time for the reader to take a break.

What do you hope readers, with ADHD or not, will take away from this book? What would you love for a reader to understand more after reading?

I don't write deep “message-y” books. I want to connect with my readers, and the best way to do that is to tell an engaging story. But at the same time, I want readers to take away something positive. If Gus makes you laugh—great. If he makes you laugh and think—even better. If he makes you feel better about yourself, if he reminds you that you are not alone—fantastic! We're all in this life together, and we do better when we share our stories.



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