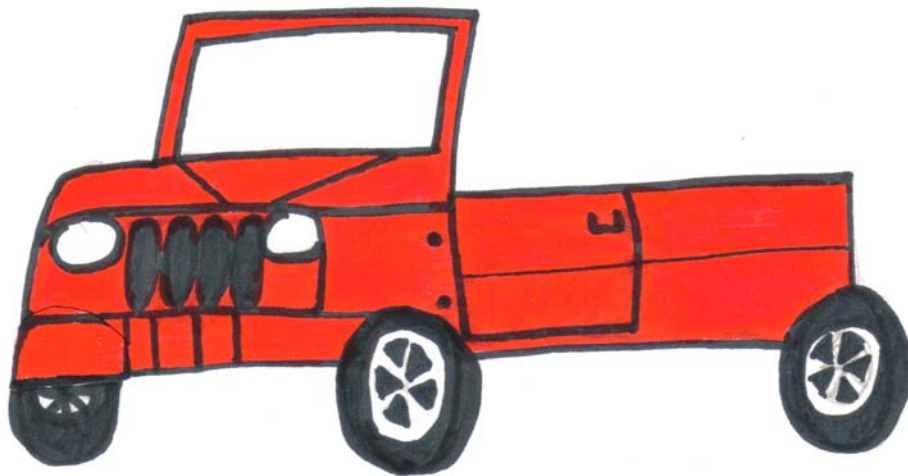


# **Tommy's Tiny Red Truck:** **The Story of Tommy, a Child with Autism**



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**TOMMY’S TINY RED TRUCK:  
THE STORY OF TOMMY, A CHILD WITH AUTISM**

“Tommy’s Tiny Red Truck: The Story of Tommy, A Child with Autism” was written to empower children to gain insight into the world of autism. It is simple, direct, and compassionate.

It is my hope that the story of Tommy will foster sensitivity and understanding in children for their classmates and friends with autism.

The book contains a “Read-to-Me-Story” for children, as well as “Resource Sections” and “Notes to Teachers and Parents.” The various sections of this book can be used independently and can also be modified for use with different age groups.

It is also my hope that this book will allow children to understand, that although others may sometimes act differently, they are really the same in the most important and wonderful ways!

Each child is like a snowflake: unique, delicate, beautiful, and so very wonderful!

**Tommy’s Tiny Red Truck: The Story of Tommy, A Child with Autism  
By JoAnn D. Jackovino**

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## SNOWFLAKES

As Mrs. Jones, the school nurse, walked down the hall to the first grade classroom, she smiled to herself and thought, “I think this group will learn many new things today when they meet Tommy.”

Mrs. Jones then opened the door to Mrs. Ryan’s classroom which she visited at least twice a week to discuss important health related topics. As Mrs. Jones stepped inside the classroom, she smiled at the students sitting on the bright yellow and green rug waiting for her.

“Good Morning, boys and girls, and how are all my beautiful snowflakes doing today?” asked Mrs. Jones.

Laura, sitting on the edge of the bright yellow and green classroom rug said, “Oh, we snowflakes are all super-duper fine today, Mrs. Jones,”

From the back row Sammy called out, “What are you all talking about? It’s April and there are no snowflakes.”

Mrs. Jones smiled and asked the class, “Does anyone remember the wonderful ‘Snowflake Story’ that I read to you last year?”

All the students raised their hands. Only Sammy sat there with his hands on his lap, looking confused.

“Henry, can you please explain the ‘Snowflake Story’ to the class for me?” asked Mrs. Jones.

Henry stood up and said, “Sure, I can do that.”

Then Henry said, “Every single snowflake in the world is different. No two snowflakes are alike. Snowflakes are one-of-a-kind. And all the children and grown-up people in the whole wide world are wonderfully different and one-of-a-kind, too,” beamed Henry.

Mrs. Jones smiled, “That’s right, Henry. No two snowflakes are alike. And no two people in the entire world are alike either. Each person is wonderfully different. Each person is one-of-a-kind.”

“Now,” said Mrs. Jones, “I am going to read a story about a boy named Tommy and his tiny red truck. But before I begin, I want to go over our ‘Human-Kind Rules’ with you.”

Mrs. Jones then opened a large piece of cardboard shaped like a heart and began to read the following “Human-Kind Rules” to the class. “Please repeat these very important rules after me,” she said. Mrs. Jones then began to read the very important “Human-Kind Rules” to her students.

***Teacher notes:***

***You can have your students respond to these “Human-Kind Rules” as they repeat them with you.***

***You can pause between each rule to discuss them with your students.***

## THE HUMAN-KIND RULES

Be kind to others.  
It is easy to do.  
If you are kind to others,  
They will be kind to you.

Never speak unkind words to anyone.  
Unkind words can hurt. It is true.  
How would you feel if someone spoke unkind words to you?

Never raise your hand in anger if someone will not listen to you.  
Sometimes people need time to be alone.  
I know I do!

People and snowflakes are so very different,  
Yet in many ways they are alike, too.  
Snowflakes are fragile, delicate, and beautiful.  
But no snowflake is more unique and beautiful than YOU!!!

Help a classmate.  
Help a friend.  
Help your mom, dad, and teachers, too.

Be a helper-friend to others.  
It's the "Human-Kind" thing to do!

Always remember to follow the "Human-Kind Rules."  
It's the "Human-Kind" thing to do!

"What should we always remember to do?" asks Mrs. Jones. And the class responds:

**REMEMBER TO ALWAYS:**

**PRACTICE THE HUMAN-KIND RULES:**

**BE KIND!**

**BE NICE!**

**BECOME A HELPER-FRIEND!**

*Teacher notes:*

*Students can “Brainstorm” these rules and even add their own new “Helper-Friend Rules” to this list. They can also put their favorite “Rules” to music.*

*Students can also design a poster or banner for their classroom listing “Helper-Friend Rules” they feel are important.*

*Students can also be given “Great Job, Helper-Friend Points” for their acts of kindness in helping others in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and on the school playground.*

*Students can even be given end of the year prizes for their “Helper-Friends” points.*

When Mrs. Jones and her class finished reading the “Human-Kind Rules,” she smiled at them and said, “Great job! Now, would you all like to hear the story of ‘Tommy’s Tiny Red Truck’?”

The students called out, “Yes! Sure! I would! Please tell us the story of Tommy and his tiny red truck!”

Mrs. Jones smiled and said, “Boys and girls, when I finish reading the story of ‘Tommy’s Tiny Red Truck’ to you, I would like you all to think about two very important questions for me.

*The two questions are:*

*Which people in this story are ‘Helper-Friends’ to Tommy?*

*How would you have been a ‘Helper-Friend’ to Tommy if you had been on the school playground that day?”*

Mrs. Jones then opened the book and began reading the story of “Tommy’s Tiny Red Truck” to the class.

## Tommy's Tiny Red Truck

Tommy was six years old and did not speak to anyone.

He liked to sit on the floor by himself and spin the back wheels of his tiny red truck with his fingers. "Spin, Spin, Spin" went the wheels of Tommy's tiny red truck.

Tommy's tiny red truck was small enough to fit into the palm of his hand. It was a bright and shiny red truck with black and silver wheels. He loved his truck and took it with him everywhere he went.

Tommy took his tiny red truck to the park where he would sit on a blanket on the grass. Holding his tiny red truck in his left hand, he would spin the back wheels with his right hand. "Spin, Spin, Spin" went the wheels of his tiny red truck.

Tommy took his tiny red truck to the zoo where he would sit quietly on a bench. Holding the tiny red truck in his left hand, he would spin the back wheels of his truck with his right hand. "Spin, Spin, Spin" went the wheels of his tiny red truck.

Tommy even took his tiny red truck with him when he went to his Grandmother's house for dinner. After dinner, Tommy would sit at the table, hold his tiny red truck in his hands, and "Spin, Spin, Spin" the wheels of his truck.

Tommy was in the first grade. He went to school every day. Every morning before going to school, Tommy put his tiny red truck into the pocket of his brown pants.

At recess that day, Tommy's classmates played on the swings and slides in the school playground while others played with a large plastic bat and ball.

Tommy did not play on the swings and slides. He did not play with the large plastic bat and ball either.

Instead, Tommy walked to a quiet corner of the playground and reached into his pocket for his tiny red truck.

As Tommy began to play with his tiny red truck, Matt, a new boy at school, walked over to him.

Matt saw Tommy playing with his tiny red truck and said, "Hey, that's a great looking truck. Can I play with it?"

Tommy did not answer Matt. He didn't even look up at him. "Spin, Spin, Spin" went the wheels of Tommy's tiny red truck.

"Ah, come on," said Matt. "I only want to look at your truck."

All of a sudden, Matt grabbed the tiny red truck from Tommy, and Tommy began to scream and cry.

Lucy, a classmate, heard Tommy scream and ran over to help.

"Matt," said Lucy. "What are you doing? Why did you take Tommy's truck from him?"

"I only wanted to look at it for a minute," said Matt, handing Tommy back his red truck.

"Matt, Tommy didn't want to give you his truck. You should not have taken it from him. You were not being a 'Helper-Friend' to Tommy," said Lucy.

“Why was he yelling? I only wanted see his truck,” grumbled Matt.

Mrs. Prince, the children’s teacher, rushed over to the group.

“What seems to be the problem?” she asked in a concerned voice.

Lucy called out, “Oh, Mrs. Prince, Matt just grabbed Tommy’s red truck from him and made him cry.”

Mrs. Prince walked over to Tommy and said, “Tommy, I am sorry that Matt grabbed your favorite truck from you.”

She then turned to Lucy and said, “Lucy, thank you for following our ‘Human-Kind Rules,’ and for being a ‘Helper-Friend’ to Tommy.”

Mrs. Prince then looked at Matt and said in a quiet voice, “Matthew, I know that you are Tommy’s new friend, but how would you feel if someone grabbed your toy from your hands when you were playing with it?”

Matt thought for a minute and said to his teacher, “I guess I’d get really upset and really angry, too.”

Matt slowly turned to Tommy who was standing next to him holding his tiny red truck tightly in his hands and said, “Hey, Tommy, I’m sorry for grabbing your truck.”

Tommy did not respond to Matt. Instead, he began to “Spin, Spin,Spin” the wheels of his tiny red truck.

Mrs. Prince looked at both of her students then said to Matt, “Matt, I’m glad that you apologized to Tommy. It is always important to say ‘I’m sorry’ when we hurt a friend’s feelings.”

Mrs. Prince then smiled at Lucy, Tommy, and Matt and turned to her students who were still playing and said, “Boys and girls, recess is over. Please line up by the fence. It’s time to go back to class.”

Matt quickly walked off and got into line with his classmates.

Mrs. Prince turned to Tommy and quietly said, “Tommy, it’s time to go back to our classroom. Why don’t we walk there together?”

Lucy smiled and said, “I have a favorite truck, too, but mine is yellow with flowers painted on it!”

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Mrs. Jones slowly closed the book she was reading and said, “That’s the end of our story for today, boys and girls.”

She then said, “I hope you all liked learning about Tommy and his Tiny Red Truck. Remember, tonight I want you all to think about the two questions I am placing on the board, and the next time I visit your class we will discuss them. At that time, we will also learn more about our friend, Tommy.

Mrs. Jones then walked to the blackboard and wrote the following two questions:

***Which people in this story are “HelperFriends” to Tommy?***

***How would you have been a “Helper-Friend” to Tommy if you had been on the school playground that day?***

When Mrs. Jones, the school nurse, finished writing the two questions on the board for the class, she smiled at them and said, “I will see you all in just a few days, and we will all discuss the questions I have left for you to think about.

Mrs. Jones then turned, opened the classroom door, and walked down the hall to visit another first grade class filled with unique, delicate, beautiful snowflakes!

***Teacher notes:***

***In this section students will learn that although Tommy may appear to be different from them, he is really the same in so many important and wonderful ways.***

## **JUST LIKE YOU**

Tommy in some ways may seem a little different, but in many, many ways he is..... **Just like you!**

Tommy has parents who love him.  
**Just like you!**

Tommy lives in a house or an apartment.  
**Just like you!**

Tommy has a favorite food.  
**Just like you!**

Tommy goes to school each day to learn new and interesting things.  
**Just like you!**

Tommy has a favorite toy.  
**Just like you!**

Tommy is unique and wonderful.  
**Just like you!**

Can anyone think of other ways Tommy is **Just like You?**

**Students respond to this question.**

***Teacher notes:***

***Students can discuss other ways in which people are alike and different.***

***Students can discuss things they personally like that make them different from their classmates and friends such as hobbies they have, foods they like to eat, their favorite colors, favorite sports, etc.***

***Students can also discuss things that make each of them the same, such as going to school, having a birthday, summer vacations, etc.***

***Teacher and Parent Notes:***

***In this section children are introduced to some very important facts about Autism while using their imaginations.***

***IMAGINE THIS***

**Let us all *Imagine* how we might feel, and how our friend Tommy might feel in the following situations:**

***IMAGINE IF. . . . .***

You could not talk in everyday words to tell anyone what you wanted or needed.

**HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?**

***Students respond to this question.***

- Tommy might get very upset. He is unable to speak simple, everyday words to his parents and friends. He might become quiet or he might hum to himself or even scream because he can't use everyday words to express himself.

***IMAGINE IF. . . . .***

You could understand what people were saying to you but could not answer them with everyday words.

**HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?**

***Students respond to this question.***

- Tommy would probably get frustrated, upset, and angry. He might even yell or shout or he might get very quiet and simply walk away to be by himself.

***IMAGINE IF.....***

You had such powerful, sensitive hearing that even the softest sounds were often too loud and hurt your ears.

**HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?**

*Students respond to this question.*

- Tommy would probably cover his ears or even say words over and over to drown out the noises around him.

***IMAGINE IF.....***

When you walked into your bedroom or classroom, you saw every book, pencil, desk, bed, window, rug, color, and person in the entire room all at the same time as a big, messy clutter.

**HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?**

*Students respond to this question.*

- Tommy might become confused and even frightened. He might cry or make unusual movements over and over in order to feel less upset by his messy, cluttered surroundings.

***IMAGINE IF.....***

You are working quietly at your desk, when all of a sudden the fire alarm goes off and everyone has to leave the building quickly and quietly.

## HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

*Students respond to this question.*

- Tommy does not like to be surprised by sudden changes in his daily routine. He might begin to do something like clap his hands or rock from side to side to help him feel calmer.

## **IMAGINE IF.....**

Your class is playing a game called, “Let’s Pretend.” In this game everyone pretends to be their favorite cartoon character. Tommy does not join his classmates in this game. Instead, he sits by himself and plays with his tiny red truck.

## HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

*Students respond to this question*

- Tommy has a difficult time pretending and expressing his imagination. He would probably prefer games with words and numbers or using the computer.

*Parent and Teacher Notes:*

*The information in the “Imagine This Section” can be used to initiate family discussions or classroom lessons at age appropriate levels.*

## THINGS WE HAVE LEARNED

*The information in “Things We Have Learned” can be used by educators and parents at age appropriate levels.*

Tommy does not talk to others, but some children with autism can and do speak.

Although Tommy does not like to be held or hugged, some children with autism do enjoy being hugged.

Just as Tommy would “spin, spin, spin” the wheels of his tiny red truck to possibly calm and comfort himself, other children with autism often repeat various other sounds or motions when they experience sensory overload.

There are, of course, many other differences to be found in children with autism, for each child is unique and has different abilities, likes, and dislikes.

Today children with special needs are being helped through the expert skills of researchers, doctors, therapists, teachers, parents, and other adult caregivers.

**Each and every one of us can help, too! Reach out, help, and befriend another; and they just might reach out, help, and befriend you!**

## MORE ABOUT TOMMY

*This section can be used by educators and parents for discussion with children at age appropriate levels.*

When Tommy was very young, his parents noticed that he did not like to be picked-up or hugged by anyone. Tommy did not make eye contact with his parents or answer them when they called to him. Tommy didn't respond to many things.

Tommy's parents were concerned about his behavior and took him to his doctor. They were told by his doctor that Tommy had autism. Autism, they learned, is a disorder that does not allow the body to receive signals that are transmitted or sent from the brain.

They learned that children with autism often do not communicate verbally with others.

They learned that children with autism often have difficulty socializing with others.

They learned that children with autism may often exhibit repetitive self-stimulatory behaviors or "stims" which are felt to have a possible calming effect on them.

They also learned that children with autism are being helped by many skilled and dedicated people. With the help of these dedicated and skilled researchers, doctors, therapists, teachers, caregivers, and family members, children with autism are today facing a future filled with hope.

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*The Autism Answer Book* by William Stillman

*Andy and His Yellow Frisbee* by Mary Thompson

## *About the Author*

JoAnn Jackovino is an educator with over thirty years teaching experience. She has numerous teaching certifications in both New Jersey and Florida.

Ms. Jackovino has been writing children's stories for over twenty years. A few of the topics covered in her children's stories include: Friendship, Self-Respect, Healthy Eating Habits, Proper Nutrition, Proper School Behavior, and other important Life-Lessons for children grades Pre-K to Grade 4.

Ms. Jackovino is presently still teaching, writing, and storytelling.

You can find many of Ms. Jackovino's stories at **[magicfrogtales.com](http://magicfrogtales.com)**

### *A Personal Note to Parents and Teachers:*

*I hope this brief look into the characters of Tommy, Lucy, and Matt will give children the opportunity to look for the good in others, show kindness to others, feel compassion for others, and even become possible "Helper-Friends" to the people they meet in the classroom, on the playground, and even at home.*

*If every child who reads or listens to the story of "Tommy's Tiny Red Truck" remembers only two words, I hope those two words will be: "Be Nice!"*

*From my heart to yours,  
JoAnn Jackovino (Ms. Jo)*