

**PRIMARY YEARS**  
**Teachers' Notes**  
**by Kym Carlson**

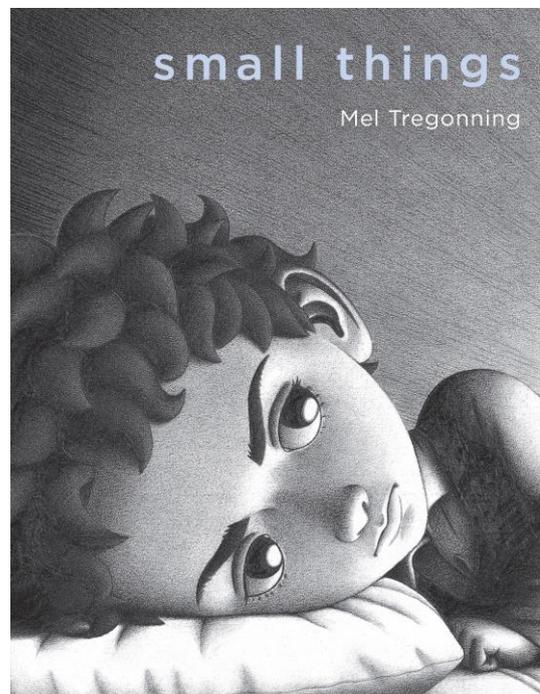
**Small Things**  
**by**  
**Mel Tregonning**

**ISBN 9781742379791**

**Recommended for ages 10-16 years**

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## INTRODUCTION

*Small Things* by Mel Tregonning is a truly unique and moving book. The illustrations are beautiful and emotionally evocative and will resonate with audiences beyond barriers such as age, gender, race or situation. The tale is a familiar one to us all, whether we've directly experienced it or simply been witness to it. It is the kind of book where you can take away something new each time you experience it. One of the wonders of *Small Things* is how it captures the essence of our humanity. It is a timeless piece, to be enjoyed by all.

## PLOT SUMMARY

*Small Things* tells the tale of a young boy trying to find his place in the world and struggling to do so. No matter how he tries and longs to fit in and connect with his peers and those around him he just cannot seem to get there. As he looks around him, all he can see are the successes of others—*they* are able to make friends, *they* are able to smile and laugh, *they* are doing well at school, ultimately, *they* have what *he* is missing.

Gradually, all these 'small things' start to creep in and the cracks begin to show. Despite attempts to ignore and resist, they keep growing and chipping away at him. No one seems to understand and he feels alone in his despair. He withdraws further and further from those around him as the darkness descends.

It is the persistence of a friendly face, and the sharing of a connected experience which begins a turnaround for the boy. He starts to realise that he is able to feel stronger with the support of others, and with renewed determination, regains a sense of control. He even comes to see that his experience is not an isolated one, that everyone is affected by some small things, and with this, he sees a familiar face in the crowd...

## THEMES

- Connectedness
- Belonging
- Identity
- Relationships
- Family
- Resilience
- Mental health
- Wellbeing
- Similarities and differences
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Power and control
- Perception
- Pressures

## LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM

### Health and Physical Education

*Small Things* complements content covered in the Australian Health and Physical Education Curriculum. The book may be used as a resource to help facilitate and promote discussion and activity around the Personal, Social and Community Health strand of the Health and Physical Education curriculum, and is particularly relevant to the following sub-strands:

- Being healthy, safe and active
- Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing
- Contributing to healthy and active communities

## English

*Small Things* serves as an excellent resource to complement content covered in the Australian English Curriculum. The book may be used as a resource to help facilitate and promote discussion and activity around the Language, Literature, and Literacy strands of the Australian English Curriculum, and is particularly relevant to the following sub-strands:

- Language for interaction
- Text structure and organisation
- Expressing and developing ideas
- Literature and context
- Responding to literature
- Creating literature
- Interacting with others
- Interpreting, analysing and evaluating

The activities described in these notes are followed by relevant content description codes from the Australian Curriculum v8.2 and AusVELS, mostly referring to primary Years 3 to 6.

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Please note that the recommended activities are suggestions only, and may need to be modified to suit students' individual learning needs. Teachers may also wish to adapt these activities to complement their own teaching style.

**CAUTION:** teachers should be aware of and sensitive to the emotional nature of *Small Things*. Students will react differently to the book, depending on their personality and individual experiences. It is important for teachers to clarify and/or remind students of confidentiality prior to starting any activities. Please ensure a plan is in place, if the occasion should arise where a student becomes distressed during an activity.

## HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

### Being healthy, safe and active

**List** some ways the young boy changes from the beginning to the end of the book.

ACPPS033, ACPPS034, ACPPS036, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS03

**Develop a timeline** to represent how you have grown and changed over the last year. You can use various materials (e.g., electronic, paper, fabric, clay etc.).

ACPPS033, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS052

**Identify and discuss** some similarities and differences the boy shares with his peers.

ACPPS033, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051

**Draw a picture** of yourself (be creative). Around the picture write down qualities you have that make you similar to others, and qualities that make you stand out from others.

ACPPS033, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS052

**Discuss:** At the beginning of the book, the young boy has difficulty expressing how he is feeling and what he needs. If you were having difficulties at school, how would you let others know in a way that would be helpful to you?

ACPPS034, ACPPS036, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS053

**List** three people you would turn to if you needed help in making a decision. Explain why you chose those people.

ACPPS034, ACPPS036, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS053

**Create a mind map** representing your decision-making processes over a day (i.e., decisions you made, factors that contributed to your final decision). As a class, discuss any apparent themes in student's decision-making process.

ACPPS034, ACPPS036, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS053

Select a situation from the book you can relate to, and **write** about what you would do when faced with that situation. For example:

- What did you do when someone you weren't friends with tried to join in an activity you were doing with your friends?
- What did you do when you were having trouble with classwork?
- What did you do when you were worried about a friend or someone in your class?

ACPPS034, ACPPS036, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051, ACPPS053

**Class Activity:** Teacher to prepare a list of positive decision-making behaviours/actions (see below for an example), a bunch of tokens, and a container with each student's name written on it. Over a period of two weeks, students are to observe each other and when they see one of their classmates engaging in one of the listed behaviours/actions, they are to put a token in that student's container. At the end of the two weeks, the person with the most tokens receives a reward.

**LOOK OUT FOR THESE BEHAVIOURS/ACTIONS**

- Raises their hand instead of yelling out
- Shares something with another student
- Wears a hat on a sunny day
- Brings an umbrella/raincoat on a rainy day
- Asks teacher or another student when they need help
- Helps someone who is having difficulty

ACPPS034, ACPPS036, ACPPS036  
ACPPS051



**Class Activity:** Watch Stephen Herek's film *The Mighty Ducks: Champions* (1992) and have students **draw comparisons** between themes from the movie and the book. Discuss these as a class.

ACPPS037, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Pick three different scenes** from the book and **describe** what is going on and how the boy may be feeling in each of those scenes.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Write a letter** to your future self.

In the letter, talk about how things are going for you at the moment, how you feel about the year ahead and what changes you are hoping for.

Seal the envelope and read it after 12 months.

ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Imagine** you are friends with the boy in *Small Things*. What could you do to help him feel more included at school?

**Identify and discuss** your ideas with the person sitting next to you.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Identify and list** all the ways people show they care about someone else in *Small Things* (e.g., girl inviting boy to sit with her, sister hugging brother when he seems sad).

ACPPS037, ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**List** three ways in which you demonstrate care to a) friends and b) family.

**Discuss** the similarities and/or differences between a) and b).

ACPPS037, ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Small Group Activity:** The first page of the book illustrates a situation where the young boy tries to include himself with his peers, but is rejected by them instead.

**Create a role play** with a positive outcome for all (i.e., the young boy is included and the group is happy).

ACPPS037, ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Describe** a situation that occurred in class over the past week where you

- a) were proud of how you communicated with someone,
- b) cooperated well with someone, or
- c) demonstrated care for someone.

ACPPS037  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Paired Activity:** There are a few situations in the book which highlight some of the difficulties in maintaining a friendship. **Write and design a guidebook** for younger children entitled *How to Keep Friends*.

ACPPS037  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Point out scenes** from the book where you think the boy communicated successfully to express himself, and scenes where you think the boy did not successfully communicate to express himself.

ACPPS037  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Class Activity:** Watch Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen's film *Inside Out* (2015).

**Identify and discuss** the similarities between how the young girl in *Inside Out* and the young boy in *Small Things* express their feelings. (See [related English activity](#) below.)

ACPPS037, ACPPS038, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

*Small Things* is a picture book with no words. Yet it is able to communicate quite powerful messages to readers. Pick your favourite scene from the book and **create a dialogue** for the characters in that scene.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Class Activity: Debate** the topic 'assertive communication is the best type of communication'.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Small Group Activity:** Students to **choreograph a dance or create a performance** as a way to express:

- a) happiness,
- b) sadness or
- c) anger.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Write** about the difference between being friendly and being a friend.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**List** things which help build friendships and things which can be barriers to building friendships.

ACPPS037, ACPPS038, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

**Small Group Activity:** Come up with a list of 'true' and 'false' qualities a friend would have.

For example:

True	False
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kind</li><li>• Sharing</li><li>• Friendly</li><li>• Playful</li><li>• Helpful</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nasty</li><li>• Not inclusive</li><li>• Unfriendly</li><li>• Mean</li><li>• Unhelpful</li></ul>

ACPPS037, ACPPS038, ACPPS039  
ACPPS055, ACPPS056

## Contributing to healthy and active communities

Relationships play an important role in this book. **Write** about the how you relate to others while playing sport.

ACPPS040, ACPPS041  
ACPPS058

Think about a world without relationships. What would this look like to you? **Draw a picture** depicting this.

ACPPS040, ACPPS041  
ACPPS058, ACPPS060

**Paired Activity:** Imagine you are trying to comfort a friend who is upset. One of you will act this out using no words and the other will act this out using words.

After you have done this, discuss the differences you noticed.

ACPPS040  
ACPPS058

Pick one of the themes found in *Small Things* and **present a speech** relating to the theme of your choice to the class.

ACPPS040  
ACPPS058

**Small Group Activity:** Each group is given one of the following categories:

- a) confident using body language
- b) confident using spoken words
- c) unconfident using body language
- d) unconfident using spoken words.

Your group needs to research the meaning of your category and create a role play to act it out.

Can the rest of the class guess which category your group was role playing?

ACPPS040  
ACPPS058

**Develop a profile** of your favourite athlete or sporting hero. Your profile should include basic information about the person as well as the positive contributions they have made to their team. If they are not in a team think about how their actions have positively contributed to the development of their sport.

ACPPS040, ACPPS041  
ACPPS058, ACPPS059

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

### ENGLISH

#### Language for interaction

**Small Group Activity:** Consider the different ways we communicate – Written, Spoken, Body language, Tone of voice, Register.

List the advantages and disadvantages of one of these ways of communicating.

ACELA1476, ACELA1488, ACELA1516, ACELA1517

## Creating Literature

**Compose a short blurb** for *Small Things*.

ACELT1601, ACELT1607, ACELT1791

**Write a short story** about a member of your family helping you in a time of need.

ACELY1682, ACELT1794

**Create a visual representation** of your own creature-like things that appear in the book. Then write a brief explanation of your creation and what it represents.

ACELT1601, ACELT1791, ACELT1607

**Research various book reviews** in newspapers, magazines, or online forums. Write a review for *Small Things*.

ACELT1601, ACELT1791 ACELT1798

**Create a 'road map'** representing your journey through school so far (the ups and downs) and your associated feelings. Get creative!

ACELT1601

**Design a poster** to advertise the support services available at your school.

ACELT1601, ACELT1791

## Literature and context

**Summarise** each member of the boy's family and the role they played in helping him.

ACELT1594

## Responding to literature

Various characters, including the young boy in the book, appear to put on some sort of 'mask' to hide their inner feelings.

**Create a mask** of your own. One side should represent the 'public you' and the other side should represent the 'private you'.

ACELT1596

**Activity:** imagine the boy is a friend of yours. What advice would you give him?

ACELT1596

## Interpreting, analysing and evaluating

**Identify and write** about the message you think the author was trying to get across to her audience.

Watch Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen's film *Inside Out* (2015) and **write about themes** found in the movie and in *Small Things*.

ACELY1678, ACELY1679, ACELY1680

## CONCLUSION

*Small Things* is one of those books where you will remember details of the day when you view it. It's a touching book that needs no words to convey its simple yet powerful message. The wordless picture book encourages you to bring it to life, by drawing upon your own life experiences and knowledge. The only limitation will be your imagination. Essentially, you can have a different experience of the book each time you open it. That is part of the charm of *Small Things*.

## RESOURCE LIST

### RESOURCES REFERRED TO IN THESE NOTES

Stephen Herek's film *The Mighty Ducks: Champions* (1992)

Pete Docter and Ronnie Del Carmen's film *Inside Out* (2015)

### OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

Beyondblue (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>)

ReachOut (<http://au.reachout.com/>)

Kids help Line (<https://kidshelpline.com.au/>)

Lifeline (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>)

## ABOUT THE WRITERS

### MEL TREGONNING

Mel Tregonning was born in Perth, Western Australia in 1983. A published cartoonist since primary school, at age 16 she began a long-running comic strip in a national magazine. Over the decades, Mel's illustration style grew to encompass surrealism, cyberpunk, Art Nouveau, manga, commercial art and photorealism. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design at Curtin University, during which time her first manga, *Toy*, was serialised in *Xuan Xuan*. Mel broke a finger on her drawing hand during a real-life game of Quidditch – which stopped nothing, but was scary for a second. She won the international Illustrators of the Future competition in 2006. She was an in-house illustrator for RIC Publications, and her first short story, 'Night', was published by Gestalt in 2009. Initially inspired by Jim Davis, Charles Schultz and Murray Ball, Mel's influences expanded to include her family and friends, Osamu Tezuka, Studio Ghibli, HR Geiger, Shaun Tan, *The Matrix*, Muse and Yukito Kishiro. She liked laksa, Baskin and Robbins ice-cream, HBO's *Game of Thrones*, Harry Potter and really good stand-up comedy. Sadly, Mel passed away in 2014. She is survived by her sister, brother, mother and father – and an incredible body of work.

### KYM CARLSON

Kym Carlson has extensive experience counselling young people, parents, and families. Kym regularly runs support groups and education programs for young people and parents in school and community settings, and has been instrumental in establishing the suite of early intervention school programs run by KYDS Youth Development Service Inc. (a registered charity) across Northern Sydney. Kym's experience is often called upon by other organisations, and she is a regular speaker and panelist for interagency meetings and staff development sessions for professionals working in the youth and youth education sectors. Kym holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Post Graduate Diploma of Psychology, a Post Graduate Diploma of Applied Psychology, and is an Associate Member of the Australian Psychological Society.