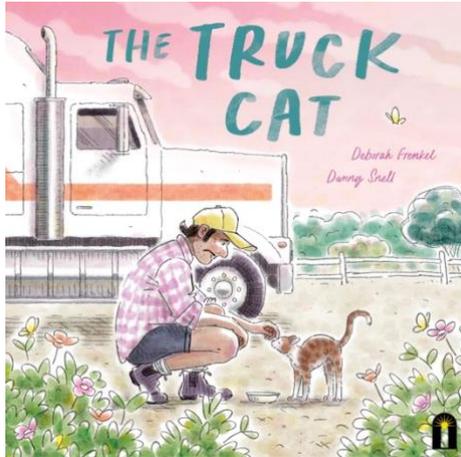


## Teacher's Notes



### *The Truck Cat*

Written by Deborah Frenkel

Illustrated by Danny Snell

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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### LEARNING OUTCOMES

#### RECOMMENDED FOR

Primary-aged readers (ages 3+, grades 1-2)

#### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: HASS, English
- General capabilities:
  - AC9HS1S01
  - AC0HS2S01
  - AC9E1LA01
  - AC9E2LA01

### THEMES

- Immigration
- Loneliness
- Friendship
- Family

### SYNOPSIS

Tinka is a truck cat, travelling the open roads of Australia with Yacoub in his truck. Yacoub doesn't know many other people, but he and Tinka always have each other. Until one day, Tinka gets distracted chasing a white butterfly and ends up on a busy main road, with cars and trucks separating him from Yacoub.

Luckily, Tinka is saved by a kind-hearted baker, Mari, who takes him into her home and her life and feeds him. But Tinka always worries about Yacoub, out there in the silence. Yacoub worries about Tinka too, missing the companionship of his friend ... until one day, a smell draws him to the window of a bakery, where a familiar face waits for him.

*The Truck Cat* gently introduces readers to themes of immigration, home, and feeling like the outsider without being prescriptive.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

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**Deborah Frenkel** is a Melbourne-based writer of everything from books to billboards and even the words on the back of cereal boxes. Her writing for children includes picture books about nature, imagination, and different kinds of belonging.

As a child **Danny Snell** was a reluctant reader, so it was pictures rather than words that drew him to the wonder of books. Danny went on to study graphic design and illustration at the University of South Australia and he now works as a picture book illustrator and author. His books have won a number of awards including the CBCA Eve Pownall Award, the Environment Award for Children's Literature, and the Speech Pathology Australia Book of the Year Award. Danny lives in Adelaide with his partner, his two daughters and a sleepy old cat. And yes, he loves to read.

## THEMES

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### Immigration:

Over 7.5 million people in Australia originally come from somewhere else. Does this surprise you? Discuss the concept of immigration with students and make a list of why people might decide to migrate to another country. What are some of the things that make it hard to migrate?

### Connection:

Think about this line in the book: 'Yacoub and Mari kept talking. In the same language. Understanding each other.' Do you think the writer means the language they're speaking verbally here, or do you think they're referring to something else? If so, what other language might they be speaking?

## WRITING STYLE

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Tinka, Yacoub and Mari might be fictional, but the things they experience happen to a lot of real people, and a lot of places in the book are real. Discuss the difference between fact and fiction. What are some of the things that tell us whether the book we're reading is one or the other?

## COMPREHENSION

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- What kind of cat is Tinka? How does this make him different from other types of cats?
- Why does Yacoub drive the truck? How does he describe the landscape? What does this tell you?
- What are some of the things that Yacoub remembers when he's quiet? How do you think these memories make him feel?
- What does Tinka remember?
- What do Tinka and Yacoub have in common?



- What does Mari have that Tinka likes?
- What does immigration mean?
- How is life with Mari different to life with Yacoub? What does Tinka wonder about Yacoub?
- What leads Yacoub back to Tinka (and to Mari)?
- Make a list of some of the changes that take place in Tinka's life after Mari and Yacoub meet. Use the information in the words and the images for your answer.
- What does Tinka learn about home at the end of the story? What would you say home is?

## WRITING EXERCISE

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How do you think Yacoub feels when Tinka goes missing? We follow Tinka at this point in this story, so we know what happens to him, but write 3–5 sentences to describe what happens to Yacoub when Tinka goes missing and draw pictures to accompany your story.

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE

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Although a lot of the illustrations take up the whole page, there are also a lot of pictures in the book that are smaller, almost like a photograph or snapshot. Discuss the way that this allows the illustrator to 'zoom in' on particular details and why they might want to do that. Invite students to bring in a collection of photos to assemble like a picture book page, and to reflect on the story they tell.

When we look at the pictures, we immediately notice things that are at the front. But look closer at the background – what other details do you notice? What do they tell you about the story?

## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

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1. A lot of writers use real life as an inspiration for their work. Invite students to think about an interesting place or person they know. What kind of story would you tell about them? Why do you think writers choose to use real life as inspiration for their work?
2. Explore the Immigration Museum online (or, if you live close enough, organise an excursion) <https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/>  
Explore some of the stories in their collection – what are some of the things you learn? If you were going to write a story about someone's life, what details would you include? What questions would you need to ask?
3. Draw a map of all of the places mentioned in the story, and draw a picture of one of the places that Tinka has lived.
4. One of the ways we can tell a story is to think of it like a journey, with a beginning, an end, and some interesting stops along the way. Write a story that follows this structure. Where would it start? Where would you stop? Write one interesting thing that could happen in each place.



## RELATED READING

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*The Fire Wombat*

By Jackie French, illustrated by Danny Snell

*The Turtle and the Flood*

By Jackie French, illustrated by Danny Snell

*My Two Blankets*

By Irena Kolbald, illustrated by Freya Blackwood

*The Boy Who Tried to Shrink His Name*

By Sandhya Parappukaran, illustrated by Michelle Pereira

*Are We There Yet?*

Written and illustrated by Alison Lester

