

Teacher's Notes



The Little Things

Written by Penny Harrison

Illustrated by Hannah Sommerville

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Primary school-aged readers (grades 1-2)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - ACELT1582
 - ACELA1469
 - ACELT1592

THEMES

- Feeling worried or sad
- Mindfulness
- Friendship
- Happiness
- Slowing down

SYNOPSIS

Some days are just harder than others. Maybe you feel worried about something that's happening, or maybe it's just that happiness seems a bit harder to find. On those days, it can help to slow down and find little moments of joy until you feel good again. The little things are different for everyone – we can find them in nature, or friendships, or simple treats like watching a movie or drinking hot chocolate, but they're there if we look for them.

The Little Things is a gentle book that acknowledges feelings of anxiety and sadness, and encourages taking the time to notice the small, good, things, and making time for mindfulness in our busy lives.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Penny Harrison is a children's author, book reviewer, garden writer and lifestyle journalist. A professional writer for more than 20 years, she has contributed to a variety of leading magazines, newspapers, guides and books, writing about everything from raising toddlers to raising chickens. Penny grew up on a farm in central-western New South Wales and spent her days exploring the bush and planning treasure hunts with her four brothers and sisters. Nowadays, she lives in a rambling old garden in the Yarra Valley with her husband, two young children and an ever-growing menagerie of animals and plants.

Hannah Sommerville is a best-selling picture book illustrator who creates enchanting watercolour, gouache and digital illustrations in her studio on the South Coast of New South Wales. Hannah earned a Bachelor of Creative Arts (Visual Arts and Graphic Design) at the University of Wollongong in 2006 and began illustrating in 2010 after the arrival of her young children. Hannah is a storyteller who enjoys creating picture books that capture the imagination, tenderness and playfulness that surround children and family life. Her picture book *Digby & Claude*, written by Emma Allen, was selected for the CBCA 2019 Notables list.

THEMES

Anxiety is increasingly common in children and can impact physical and mental health. Feelings of anxiety can look like overwhelm, frustration, fear and worry, and can result in intrusive thoughts, physical sensations and uncontrolled behaviours.

The Little Things explores and acknowledges these feelings, without labelling them, allowing the reader to shape the way conversations about their feelings play out. The gentle, open way sadness is described gives young people a sense of agency as it makes space for them to articulate their own feelings of sadness or anxiety, and then to think about how mindfulness and slowing things down might help them to navigate these feelings without being overwhelmed.

WRITING STYLE

Penny Harrison uses gentle rhyming couplets to draw attention to some of the little things that can make a bad day seem less overwhelming. By limiting the text to only one or two rhymes per page, the reader is encouraged to read at an easy pace, which reinforces the practice of mindfulness (and makes the book its own kind of mindful activity!)

By writing in second person 'you', she makes the reader the subject of the story, inviting them to pick and choose from the little moments observed in the text and to think about which ones fit their lives (or perhaps even add their own).



COMPREHENSION

- What colours are used to show sadness in the story?
- Make a list of the 'little things' that appear in the story that bring joy. What else would you add to this list?
- How does the story make you feel as you read it? How does it make you feel about sadness, or worry?
- Underline the words on each page that rhyme. What do you notice about where they are in each line?
- Which pages or scenes are similar to your own life? Which ones would you like to try to do more of?
- Friendship isn't mentioned in the story, but if you look at the illustrations, you'll see how important friends are in each scene. Discuss the way that friendship is explored in the book. How do your own friends help you when you feel sad?
- Do you think this is the story of one kid, or many? Why?

WRITING EXERCISE

The last picture in the book doesn't have any text. What do you think this picture means? Write your own rhyming couplet to accompany this illustration.

(A rhyming couplet is two lines of poetry that rhyme.)

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Hannah Sommerville's illustrations bring a gentle light into the story that adds a sense of comfort. Her images, like the text, are scattered across the pages, which encourages readers to find their own way through the story, and to take their time exploring each page. There's a lot to find in these detailed pictures, so readers can stop and explore the pages that feel familiar to them.

The first line of the book talks about sadness as 'grey', and happening when 'the sunshine stays away', so readers might like to consider the way that we attach certain light or colour to different feelings, and explore the way that Hannah Sommerville uses these elements in her pictures to capture feelings of happiness or hope.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Draw a picture of something that makes you feel happy. (As an extension, write a rhyming couplet to go along with it.)
2. Write about a time that you've felt 'sad or grey'. Describe how you felt in that moment. What helped to make you feel better?



3. Draw a picture of something you feel worried or sad or anxious about. What can you add to the drawing to make you look at the worry differently? Maybe you could make it smaller, or draw it floating away, or change the colour.
4. What are some of the little things you do that make you feel calm and happy? Share your activities in small groups, taking the time to show people how it goes, and allow them to ask questions.

RELATED READING

Jetty Jumping by Andrea Rowe

Mr Huff by Anna Walker

The Red Tree by Shaun Tan

The Little Coven by Penny Harrison

Slow Down, World by Tai Snaith

