

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

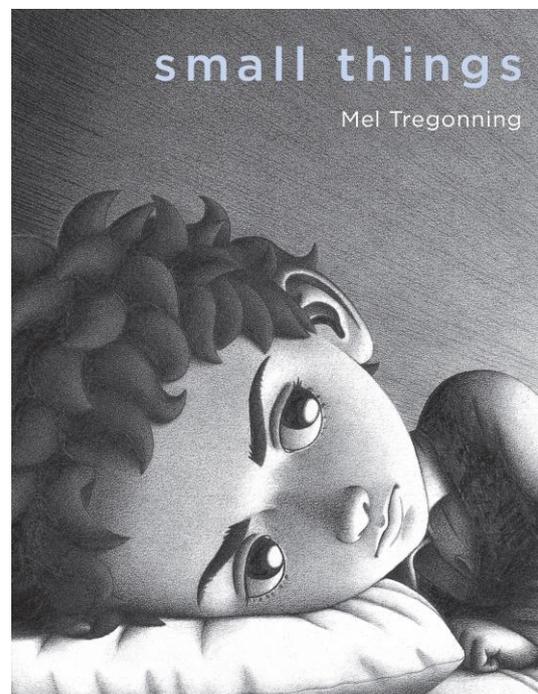
**Small Things**  
**by**  
**Mel Tregonning**

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

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.

The activities described in these notes are followed by relevant content description codes from the Australian Curriculum v8.2 for school years 7 to 10.

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

### HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION - PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

#### Being healthy, safe and active

**Small Group Activity:** Many resources are available to assist people in coping with difficulties in their lives. Each group should **research** one of the following resources to identify and critically review two different strategies and/or techniques provided by the resource.

- Apps (e.g., 'Smiling Mind' <http://smilingmind.com.au/>, 'Check-in' <https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/thecheckin>)
- Online resources (beyondblue, ReachOut, Kids Helpline, Lifeline)
- Written resources (magazines, self-help books)
- In-person resources (friends, parents, teachers, counsellors)

ACPPS071

**Research** strategies aimed at promoting self-care and ways to support others. **Summarise** the strategies into a guide for people your age.

ACPPS072

**Reflection Journal:** Keep a reflection journal (see an example below) to list the various challenges you have faced over the last two-week period and how you responded to them.

	Situation	Challenges faced	What I thought	How I felt	How I behaved	Reflection
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						
Saturday						
Sunday						

**Small Group Activity:** Teacher to select a moral dilemma scenario. Using their decision-making skills, students must come up with a solution to the dilemma. Each small group must explain to the whole class why they decided to do what they did, despite the consequences.

ACPPS073

**Watch** *Risk*, the first episode of the ABC TV documentary *Whatever! The Science of Teens* (2009). Using this and one other source, **write an essay** about risk and social influence for teenagers.

ACPPS092

**Identify** various realistic 'risky' scenarios that might apply to teenagers, and come up with safer alternatives, for example:

- Getting into a car with a friend who's been drinking – getting a ride home from someone sober
- Sneaking off to a party when you're meant to be at a friend's house – letting someone know where you are going/be assertive and encourage others to stay at your friend's place
- Daring each other to climb into an empty factory – make sure it's physically safe and try to keep the others from harm/walk away/talk your friends out of it.
- Venting about an argument you've had with someone online - write it on paper first, don't post it, vent to a trusted person instead, stay offline

ACPPS073, ACPPS091, ACPPS092

**Debate:** 'Belonging to a group is the most important thing to me at high school'.

ACPPS089, ACPPS092

Using a scenario from the book that you can connect with (either because you have had a similar experience yourself or someone you know has gone through something similar), **develop a problem-solving plan** that can be used to help you in the scenario. Be sure to include the following steps in your plan:

- Describe the problem
- Come up with 3 possible solutions to the problem

- Identify pros and cons for each of the 3 solutions
- Pick the 'best' solution
- List any potential barriers to implementing this solution

ACPPS071, ACPPS072, ACPPS073, ACPPS091, ACPPS092

**Write a reflective piece** about a situation where you have effectively solved a problem. Include what worked in you finding a resolution, what could have been helpful in the process and what you have learnt from the process.

ACPPS071, ACPPS072, ACPPS073, ACPPS091, ACPPS092

## Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing

**Debate:** 'It is easier to support others than help ourselves'.

ACPPS076,

**Discuss:** What do you think your role should be if your friend has a mental illness? Consider the limitations a friend might have in offering support.

ACPPS074, ACPPS075, ACPPS076, ACPPS093, ACPPS094

One of the challenges faced by the young boy in *Small Things* relates to academic pressure. Have a **class discussion** about how academic pressure affects students in your school, and come up with some strategies that will assist in reducing stress around academic performance.

ACPPS076, ACPPS094

There are many factors which may prevent you from connecting with others. **Write** down factors you see as being a potential barrier to a friendship, and how you would be able to overcome these barriers.

ACPPS093

**Develop an artistic chart** to document the various stages and factors involved in developing a satisfying relationship. Think outside of the box and allow yourself to be creative by using colour, textures and other materials.

ACPPS074, ACPPS075, ACPPS093

**Research and write** about a mental health disorder. Include the definition, at least two factors which contribute to the development of the disorder, and strategies used to assist in reducing symptoms.

ACPPS095

**Find an article** in a newspaper or magazine aimed at promoting positive mental health or physical health. **Critically review** the article and the strategies identified.

ACPPS095

## Contributing to healthy and active communities

**Discuss:** How would you deal with a situation where a friend wants to join your sport team but the other players do not like this person?

ACPPS079

**Reflect** on a team sport you've played recently. What was your experience like? What was your role? What were the roles of others? Did you get along with others in the group? Is there anything you would have liked to change about this experience?

ACPPS079

You have been asked to **advise** the coach of a famous athlete who is going through hard times (both on and off the field) which is impacting their performance. This

coach is infamous for being aggressive and loud to players. Develop a list of things you would suggest this coach a) say and b) do to help improve the player's performance and overall wellbeing.

ACPPS098

**Research** a physical or mental health issue. Make sure you include a definition of the issue, treatment, and support agencies available for young people dealing with the issue. Present your research to the class and as a class discuss differences and/or similarities between how physical and mental health issues are seen in society, treated and supported.

ACPPS077

**Interview** people from different generations to find out their view of mental health. Using cross-generational perspectives from your interviews, answer the following question: 'Are today's efforts to reduce stigma around mental illness working?'

ACPPS096

**Research** a local health service (GP office, counselling service, hospital, sexual health clinic) and write about what the service offers the community and how the community can access its services.

ACPPS077, ACPPS096

**Research** various services, products and information available for people with a mental health or physical issue. What gaps do you identify in the system? **Come up with possible solutions** to reduce these gaps.

ACPPS077, ACPPS096

Choose an anti-bullying campaign and **write** about what works well and what doesn't work well in getting the anti-bullying message across for the campaign. **Identify any changes** that would make the campaign stronger for an audience of your age group.

ACPPS077, ACPPS096

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

### ENGLISH

#### Language for interaction

Choose two scenes from the book and **create the dialogue** between these characters. How does the language you came up with determine the mood of the scene? Discuss how language can influence the way we interact with others and our moods.

ACELA1551, ACELA1564

#### Text structure and organisation

*Small Things* delicately touches on mental health issues in a book format. **Explore and compare other mediums** and/or technologies and evaluate their effectiveness in portraying mental health issues.

ACELA1566

#### Texts in context

**Find lyrics** in songs that reflect similar themes to *Small Things*. **Critically analyse** how Mel Tregonning and the lyric writer used different ways of communicating (visual versus written/spoken) to express themselves.

ACELY1749

What **connections** can you identify between *Small Things* and the lyrics from Simon and Garfunkel's song *The Sound of Silence* (1964).

ACELY1749

### Literature and context

Select a culture different to your own and research its belief around wellbeing. Write an essay **comparing and contrasting** this culture's belief with our own.

ACELT1619, ACELT1626, ACELT1633

### Responding to literature

**Small Group Activity:** Discuss and share your personal responses to *Small Things*. Explore the reasons behind why people may have responded differently to the book.

ACELT1620, ACELT1803, ACELT1627, ACELT1771, ACELT1640, ACELT1812

### Creating literature

Choose a character from the book (other than the young boy) and **tell the story from their perspective**.

ACELT1625, ACELT1644

Choose a page from the book and **write a first or third person narrative** to describe what is happening.

ACELT1625, ACELT1625, ACELT1644

### Interpreting, analysing and evaluating

How does Mel Tregonning use shading to **represent emotions** in *Small Things*?

ACELY1744

**How is emotion conveyed** through the absence of colour in *Small Things*?

ACELY1744

### Creating texts

Using iMovie, **create an online trailer** for *Small Things*, and pick appropriate music to complement the trailer.

ACELY1725, ACELY1726, ACELY1736, ACELY1738, ACELY1746, ACELY1756

*Small Things* touches on the importance of having social supports. Think about a time when someone has supported you through a difficult time. **Write a letter** to that person (you do not have to identify them), expressing your thanks and how their support helped you.

ACELY1725, ACELY1726, ACELY1810, ACELY1736, ACELY1738, ACELY1746, ACELY1756

## 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 book encourages you to bring the book 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

Smiling Mind App, <http://smilingmind.com.au/>

Check-in App, <https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/help-someone-you-know/thecheckin>

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

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

Kids Helpline <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

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

White Ribbon, <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/programs>

Love Bites, <http://napcan.org.au/OUR-PROGRAMS/LOVE-BITES/>

Duluth Model of Power and Control, <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/>

ABC Television's documentary *Whatever! The Science of Teens*: 'Risk' episode (2009)

Simon and Garfunkel's song 'The Sound of Silence' (1964)

## 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.