

## TEN TINY THINGS

MEG MCKINLAY AND KYLE HUGHES-ODGERS

PUBLICATION DATE: AUGUST 2012

ISBN: 9781921888946 \* RRP \$24.99

THEMES: Environment, early learning, school, nature

YEAR LEVEL: Y1, Y2, Y3

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

AWARDS: Winner, SCBWI Crystal Kite Award, 2013

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Tessa and Zachary have become very used to their 'drive to school' lifestyle. Every morning their mum drives them in the car and picks them up at the end of the day. They both relish being able to sit back and immerse themselves in the coolness of the air conditioning on hot days and the warmth of the heater when it is cold.

But one day, disaster strikes! The car breaks down, and Tessa and Zachary are not able to be driven to school in the morning.

After pondering the problem for a while, the family decide they will all have to walk to school instead. So the children set out for school on foot with their mother. Tessa and Zachary find the going tough, and complain constantly about the journey being too hot and too hilly, and their bags weighing too much to carry. Their legs hurt and they huff and puff as they struggle along.

But then Tessa notices something lying on the ground. She stops to pick it up and discovers it is red, sparkly and very tiny. Next is Zachary's turn to make a discovery. He finds a small blue, smooth shape and holds it in his hand. The mood of the journey has suddenly changed, and Tessa and Zachary revel in one new discovery after another.

In the afternoon, their mother arrives to pick them up in the 'green, shiny machine' again, pleased it has been repaired. But the spell of car has been broken and now no longer holds the attraction it did just a few hours earlier. Tessa and Zachary have learnt a valuable lesson about the joy of slowing down and enjoying the many splendid things the world has to offer to those who choose to look. No longer committed car travellers, they knowingly tell their mother the next day that they think they will have to walk. And walk they do, from then on.

### ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Meg McKinlay is a children's writer and poet who lives in Fremantle. She grew up in a car-free home and is a great lover of walking. It's how she starts the day. It's how she keeps the dog happy. It's how she shakes ideas loose when she's stuck on a story. And as much as possible, it's how she gets from here to there and back again. The idea for *Ten Tiny Things* came from a game she devised with her daughter, which is cunningly entitled, 'Things We Would Never Have Seen If We Had Been Driving'. Other books by the author include *The Truth About Penguins*, *Duck for a Day* and *No Bears*.

Kyle Hughes-Odgers is an Australian painter, illustrator and installation artist. He has exhibited artwork and created large-scale street art extensively throughout Australia and internationally: Los Angeles, New York City, Singapore and Europe. His work is held in numerous private and public art collections. In 2010, Hughes-Odgers completed a 45-lineal-metre public art commission for Murdoch University (Western Australia) followed by a solo exhibition with Turner Galleries. 2012 saw Hughes-Odgers hold an international solo exhibition in Berlin (Okazi gallery) and complete a 50-metre public art commission in the Perth Cultural



Centre. His work has previously featured in publications such as *Street Art New York*, *Kingbrown*, and *Empty* magazine.

## STUDY NOTES

*Ten Tiny Things*, as a children's picture book, would usually be read by an adult to a child. It may take several readings for a young child to master the book's use of metaphor (i.e. 'the shiny machine'). An adult reader can assist here by showing the child the illustrations and asking questions about what they notice. The story could also be used with upper grades, where children can read the story independently and use it as the basis for learning activities. The font used, as well as the white text on brown background page layout adopted on many of the pages, would make this a challenging independent read for a young child but would be suitable for older children.

Here are some ways to explore the book together in a class setting:

### Let's talk about car travel:

This book lends itself beautifully to discussions about car travel and other choices that can be made for getting to and from school. Using the story as a base, the discussion could then lead on to other journeys that are made by car, and different options for transport that could be used. For young children the discussion could focus on what they notice on their own journey to school and whether they walk, drive or ride a bike. For older children it could be about discussing distance and time, and the need for establishing a balance between 'have to be there on time' and the need to slow down and enjoy the journey along the way. For adult readers the story reminds us that as parents and teachers, almost everything we do and say is being watched by a child.

Who said ' .... ?' game.

### Finding ten tiny things:

Visit an outdoor play space such as a section of the playground, a beach, a park or a quiet street nearby. Encourage children to safely explore their natural environment and to find ten tiny things of their own. This is a great activity to do on a day when the leaves are falling, the wind has been blowing recently or the acorns have just begun to drop from an oak tree.

Children could find:

- leaves of different shapes, colours and sizes
- berries and seed pods
- shells
- driftwood
- pieces of wood or bark
- flowers

It is useful to spend a few minutes in the area yourself first to ensure there are not any 'nasties' lurking about which could cut a small hand or cause an injury in some way. You will also need to consider storage, as small children will happily stuff their pockets with treasures if they are not given a suitable paper bag or container for holding their items. Once each child has collected ten things, they can be used for various purposes, including:

- organising into categories based on shape, colour, texture or size
- graphing and recording data about the items
- making up a story
- using as part of a collage or diorama
- mastering simple addition and subtraction equations using real objects

If children take their objects with them to use later it is important to check that what they have collected is suitable. Remember that in some locations there may be restrictions on what you can take away from the area (for example, in national parks or protected marine environments).

Collecting ten tiny things can also be a lovely activity to add to a homework sheet as it encourages the whole family to get outdoors and explore the natural environment. Children could be asked to take a different person

for a walk each day, or to collect something new each time they walk. At the end of the week the whole class could get together to talk about who they walked with and what they discovered in the world around them.

### **Observing ten tiny things:**

Visit an outdoor play space such as a section of the playground, a beach, a park or a quiet street nearby. Have children bring along pencils and sketchbooks or notebooks. Get each child to find their ten tiny things but, instead of collecting them, have them draw or write about them. This can take the form of a story, a series of images or a map of their surroundings using the items they observe in situ. These can be useful for various purposes:

teaching children to observe but not touch nature and wildlife

making up a story

map making

teaching observation and attention to detail through drawing and describing activities

The author and illustrator invite students to feature their ten tiny things on a blogspot:

<http://tentinythings.blogspot.com.au>

Submissions can be made to: [tentinythings@megmckinlay.com](mailto:tentinythings@megmckinlay.com)

### **Persuasive writing task:**

This book and its closely intertwined themes offer an obvious challenge for a persuasive writing prompt:

‘Children should walk to school instead of being driven.’

This simple statement lends itself well to the task of developing a persuasive writing text. Children should

remember to include an introduction followed by a series of points in the body of the text, and a conclusion.

The body of the text is used to persuade the reader using terms such as ‘I think’ or ‘I believe’ as well as more complex phrases such as ‘We can solve this by ...’ or ‘What would happen

if ...?’

The conclusion should respond to the initial statements made in the introduction, with no new information or facts being brought in at this point. Children may need to be reminded that the purpose of writing in this style is to persuade the reader to share their viewpoint.

### **Participating in National Walk Safely to School Day:**

National Walk Safely to School Day is an event held annually to encourage children to walk safely to school rather than being driven in the car. Supporting information for the day can be found on the Walk to School website at [www.walk.com.au](http://www.walk.com.au)

We know that around half of all car journeys cover less than three kilometres in distance. For many children the drive to school has become a habit rather than a necessity. Teaching some simple strategies and ensuring your school utilises some unique measures themselves can do a lot towards minimising car use and maximising foot traffic to your school. Some ideas include:

providing a flexible start time so that children have free play or tabletop activities for the first ten minutes of the day, allowing parents a little more time to complete a walk to school

ensuring there is adequate provision for children to change shoes if needed and to have a drink and snack when they arrive

exploring some safe routes around the school that can be walked easily

lobbying the local council to install footpaths and crossings where required

putting information in the school newsletter about other parents who are happy to share walking supervision duties with a group of children

offering walking activities within the school grounds if the local area is not suitable for walking traffic

posting information about bus routes on the school website

As many people use the car simply out of habit, it can take a while to initiate change in your school environment. Remember that there is great value in role modelling, and teachers getting out and putting on their sneakers can be a great motivator for the kids to do the same!

## **Why did she write it like that?**

It is useful for older children to consider what the author may have had in mind when creating a text. This begins to move them from seeing a text as a literal piece of writing to one which has been created with a purpose, using particular approaches and tools to affect the reader. Start by asking children 'Why do you think the author wrote the story?' The way children answer this question will tell you a little about how they perceive the story, and whether they are working on a literal or inferred meaning level. Discussions about the author's intentions are useful as they help children to realise that texts may be written in order to inform, entertain, describe, recount or instruct. They can also lead to further discussions about writing tools such as using metaphor (such as the green machine being a metaphor for a car) and the use of repeated initial letters known as alliteration (such as the repetition of 'c' in the line 'It was cosy and comfortable and calm.')

## **If I were the illustrator ...**

Children of all ages can take on the role of illustrator for a piece of writing. Your students could be asked to share their ideas about what they would do if they were the illustrator for this story. Discuss the positive and negative features of the illustrations from their point of view, and then talk about what they might do differently in their newly assigned job as 'illustrator'. Ask them to create their own 'Zachary' and 'Tessa' paper puppets which they can use to retell the story or use as part of their own play about walking to school. Show them several different mediums they could use for creating their own artworks based on the plot of the story, such as pastels, watercolours, water pencils or cut-outs of geometric shapes such as triangles and rectangles similar to the style used in the book.

## **Exploring 2-D shapes:**

As older children move into middle and upper primary levels, they are expected to name and reproduce basic 2-D and 3-D shapes. This book is a fun and engaging way of showing children the practical application of geometric shapes in artworks and illustrations. The pages are filled with semicircles, triangles, diamonds, rectangles and curves, although it takes a keen eye to find them all. Children could try their hand at using a similar technique to create their own artwork based on geometric shapes, or could be asked to identify the same shapes around the school grounds.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

The author and illustrator invite students to submit their own tiny things for inclusion on the *Ten Tiny Things* blog: <http://tentinythings.blogspot.com.au>

Submissions can be made to: [tentinythings@megmckinlay.com](mailto:tentinythings@megmckinlay.com)

National Walk to School Day: <http://www.walk.com.au>

Illustrator website: <http://kylehughesodgers.com>

Author website: <http://megmckinlay.com>