

# TEACHERS NOTES for THE BOY WHO LOST HIS LAUGH

Prepared by Dimity Powell & Heidi Cooper-Smith 2026

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## Type of Text

Picture book

## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

English Literacy

The Arts

Writing

Social Science, HPE

Science

Music

Maths

## THEMES

- Family / Parenting
- Relationships
- Social issues
- Positive Role Models
- Foster Care
- Adoption
- Belonging / Sense of Self

## Publication Details

Published: March 2026

Author: Dimity Powell

Illustrator: Heidi Cooper-Smith

Publisher: EK Books \$27.99

ISBN: 9781921497162

Format: Hardcover 32pp

Ideal for: 4 – 8-year-olds

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## SYNOPSIS

*Tim is a young primary schooler with a passion for dinosaurs and a laissez faire attitude towards his appearance. He craves affection and welcomes sibling rivalry but above all aches for a family to call his own. After being caught up in the foster care system for a number of years, Tim not only loses his laugh but his hope of settling down and unpacking his dinosaurs for good. Until one day, whilst residing with the Lees, his dream of living in a fulltime family makes a remarkable and humorous rebound. The Boy Who Lost His Laugh is a sensitive introductory look at the fabric of foster care that explores themes of family, foster family hopping, and belonging. Every foster care situation is different and unique, like the foster children who are subjected to it. Ideally, children in foster or kin care are able to return to their original family home, safely and permanently - 'reunification vs adoption' as it were. This sadly is not always the case and, at times, a situation of 'family hopping' ensues for one reason or another. It was this aspect of foster care that formed the basis of Tim's story, providing the catalyst for him losing his laugh.*

## AUTHOR BACKGROUND

Award winning children's author Dimity Powell loves filling every spare moment with words. She writes and reviews exclusively for children and is the Managing Editor for Kids' Book Review, one of the world's leading review sites for children's literature. She is a seasoned presenter both in Australia and overseas and believes picture books are food for the soul, to be consumed as often as possible. She regularly relishes creating her own including *Pippa and The Troublesome Twins* (2023), *This Is My Dad* (2022), *Oswald Messweather* (2021), *Pippa* (2019), the SCBWI Crystal Kite Award winner, *At the End of Holyrood Lane*, (2018) and the critically acclaimed, *The Fix-It Man*, (2017).

Dimity is a tireless advocate of Kids' Lit with strong convictions about the power of storytelling, diverse reading and writing. She loves sharing her accumulated knowledge with big and little kids and is a [Books in Homes Australia Volunteer Role Model](#), [Story City Community Mentor](#), [G.A.T.EWAYS online and onsite presenter](#), [Children's Publishing Academy presenter](#) and regularly facilitates [Write Like An Author writing workshop camps](#).

## WRITING STYLE

Dimity's writing style is often described as powerful and emotive, laced with humour and lilting language to soften the often-sensitive subject matter she tackles. She ... *seems to have the ability to touch on*

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*subjects that in other hands would seem worthy or didactic, and to make them heartbreakingly real and emotional, in a way that is accessible to both children and adults – Brian Falkner, children’s author and writing coach.*

*As with Leo from [This Is My Dad](#), the poignancy of Tim’s predicament was the main motivator for the language used in this narrative; a gentle combination of lilting vocabulary, occasional alliteration and my trademark sneaky dose of ambiguity to invite individual interpretation. I love the complexity a picture book text allows even when the deliberate absence of words is included to provide space for the illustrator to express their own magic.*

## ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

Award winning author-illustrator Heidi Cooper Smith always loved to draw, but it wasn’t until the arrival of three small children and the subsequent onset of a picture book addiction that she decided to try her hand at illustration. Six months later, she landed her first picture book contract and began writing soon after. Ten years on Heidi has been lucky enough to have worked with ten different publishers on a number of picture and chapter books. Among those she has author-illustrated are *Hatch* (2025, CSIRO), *Odd Sock Sid* (2023, Little Pink Dog Books) and *Secrets of the Seasons* (2022, Windy Hollow Books). As much as she loves creating books, Heidi spends most of her time covered in clay, working as a production and studio potter.

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Heidi began illustrating traditionally, using a mix of watercolour, ink, coloured pencil and pastels. Initially only using an iPad for touch-ups or last-minute changes, Heidi has since transitioned to illustrating digitally for efficiency and convenience, using scanned watercolour colours and textures, as well as digital watercolour brushes to bring in aspects of her favourite traditional media. She loves to illustrate most subjects, but particularly enjoys drawing children at play.

## SELLING POINTS

- Exciting new Australian author and illustrator team.
- Zero – 100-year readership.
- Engages the concepts of mental and emotional well-being and balance.
- Spotlights diverse family dynamics and their impact on family members and family well-being.
- Highlights global contemporary societal issues.

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- Addresses aspects of the fostering, in home caring systems, and kin care, promoting further examination.
- Promotes positive (parenting) role modelling.
- Addresses the Australian primary SOSE curricula plus many other areas including English, Science, Art, HPE, and Social Sciences.
- Endearing character-driven visual narrative provides humour and sensitivity through a soothing colour palette and authentic, detailed portrayal of these characters both human and otherwise.

### ABOUT WRITING *THE BOY WHO LOST HIS LAUGH*

Back in 2012, I was a prolific producer of short stories for kids. They usually centred around a prompt or theme. One such competition invited stories about 'laughter'. I entered a piece entitled *The Boy Who Lost His Laugh*. It won first prize. It was a moving, emotive story that focused on one little boy's need to find his forever family and feel 'normal'. Tim bounced from one foster family to the next, gradually losing hope and with it, his laugh. I wanted to explore how, in just a few short paragraphs, someone like Tim could regain a sense of belonging and security and thus his joie de vivre. Scroll forward 10 years or so when I realised that more people needed to hear Tim's story: people who might be in a similar situation or want to foster kids themselves, or perhaps had no working awareness of the foster care system. Thus began, the quest to reduce Tim's story from an entree to an appetizer-sized picture book format. The bones were already there, the rest flowed fairly smoothly. The facts and figures that I then amassed and submitted along with the manuscript were what really convinced me that I had done the right thing; in bringing to light the plight of out of home care, emergency care and foster care kids.

### ABOUT ILLUSTRATING *THE BOY WHO LOST HIS LAUGH*

*The Boy Who Lost His Laugh* was both enjoyable and challenging to illustrate, being a story with multiple characters based around a sensitive topic charged with emotion. I decided to use clothing and a subtle animal character as symbols to support the changes in the story. The hoodie Tim gradually retreats into as he loses his laugh, is thrown back at the end when it returns. A caterpillar travels with Tim to his new home, transitioning into a cocoon when Tim is preparing to leave, and then emerging at the end as a butterfly when Tim is told he is becoming part of the family. The colour palette throughout the book is quite muted to reflect the mood of the story. This contrasts with Tim's hoodie, which stands out in a bold red. There is always a delicate balancing act between choosing colours because they look good across the book vs making sure those colours fit with the emotion and feel of the story.

## TEACHING POINTS & ACTIVITIES

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Foundation to Year 6 primary aged children. Some activities may be applicable to early secondary school students, as well. Where possible, Australian Curriculum goal codes have been included which address Foundation to Year 2 curriculum learning outcomes and apply directly to the targeted audience intended for this book, (4 – 9 years).

### Knowledge and Literal Understanding

- Before Reading (Interpreting, analyzing, evaluating / ACELY1660)
  - Show the cover to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about.
  - Read the back cover blurb. Does this give them more of an idea of what the book could be about?
  - Ask students if they can recognize the setting of this story from the cover image.
- During Reading
  - Ask students if Tim reminds them of anyone they know: a friend, a sibling, themselves perhaps.
  - What is their first impression of Tim? Do they regard him as happy, shy, worried, wistful, outgoing, pensive or friendly?
  - What changes does Tim experience during the story?
  - Discuss why they think Tim is so quiet and withdrawn.
  - Ask students how they perceive Tim's situation. Do they think he is happy? Or anxious, sad or depressed.

### Inferential and Critical Thinking

- After Reading (Responding to literature / ACELT1783, ACELT1582, ACELT1578)
  - Ask students how they think Tim views his family situation by the ending of the story.
  - What are the students' impressions of the Lees?

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- Are they relieved that Tim found his forever family? Are they happy for him? If so, why?
- Do they find the ending: satisfying, touching, hopeful, predictable, a surprise, comforting, funny or a relief?
- Gently enquire if any of the students have ever experienced situations like Tim's or know someone in his circumstance. Discuss how this makes them feel.
- Examine the similarities between Tim's and his foster family and their own family dynamics and relationships.
- Whom do students regard as the main character of the story? Who are the sub or secondary characters? (e.g. caterpillar/butterfly, Parasaurolophus dinosaur, cat)
- Why are the sub characters important to the story?
- How do they support Tim and help him learn from his situation?
- How do Tim's dinosaur friends contribute to the story?

### CROSS-CURRICULAR DISCUSSION AND IDEAS

#### ENGLISH LITERACY SKILLS

Vocabulary (Language for interaction/ [ACELA1462](#))

- Alliteration – give examples from the story (figurative language)
- Onomatopoeia – give examples from the story (figurative language)
- Repetition – where and why is it used?
- Identify some of the metaphors and similes (figurative language) the author uses and discuss their meanings. For example; *rosy smelling kiss*
- Which metaphoric phrase (at the end of the story) is used to illustrate Tim's change of mood?
- Encourage students to identify some of the adjectives used. Can they suggest other words or ways to describe Tim's state of mind?
- Do certain words and adjectives link to the action sequences and emotions depicted in the illustrations? If so, which ones?

Grammar (Expressing and developing ideas / [ACELA1786](#), [ACELA1451](#), [ACELA1462](#))

- Names can mean many different things. What do they think the main character's name, Tim refers to? Could it be a play on words by the author? How is this shown through his personality in the story?

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- Discuss how the punctuation used enhances the flow and drama of the story, for example, the use of ellipses to encourage page turns, wonder, suspense.
- There is very little dialogue shown in this story. Why do students think this is? Does it make the story easier or less easy to follow?

### Comprehension

(Wellbeing / ACPPS005, ACELT1581)

- Get students to name the sequence of events in this story. Attempt this via:
  - Listing them as a group.
  - Writing out key sentences from the story, cutting them out and then getting students to arrange in order.
  - Illustrating scenes in correct order of occurrence.
- Discuss how it would affect the feeling and outcome of the story if it began at a different point in time, i.e. with Tim being with a different family other than the Lees. Or Tim already being adopted.
- Do the illustrations follow the story? Do they enhance it, if so, how?
- At which point or points do Tim's emotions change? How many times does this occur?
- Were students able to predict what would happen next? Name the clues – in the text and pictures? If not expected, how did it make them feel? Were they ever anxious about what could happen next?
- What do they think happens after Tim is adopted by the Lees?
- Make a list of the various emotions and the adjectives that describe them that Tim is experiencing e.g. lonely, worried, depressed, ashamed, strange, different, homeless, happy, relieved ...
- Discuss whether students feel this is a sad story, an anxious one or a happy one and encourage them to give reasons based on the words and images used.

### Writing

(Examining literature / ACELT1584)

- Identify whose point of view (POV) the story is written in.
- Attempt to write the story from a different POV: Tim's foster mother-Gina, Tim's foster sister-Dianne, Mrs Roser, the foster care coordinator, Tim's Parasaurolophus dinosaur!
- Get students to choose a scene and rewrite it using just dialogue.
- Define the difference between dialogue and internal thought and how it is shown in the narrative. Where does Tim use the latter and how does it make the reader feel about him?

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- Ask students to work in groups or pairs to create an Acrostic Poem using story words such as: HAPPY, UNHAPPY, HOPEFUL, DINOSAUR, MISERABLE, LAUGHTER, PARASAUROLOPHUS! Share with the class and compare.
- Write a book review of the story using the [WORKSHEET 1 Book Review](#)

### Literature and Media (Responding to literature / [ACELT1582](#), [ACELT1583](#))

- Enquire whether students have ever seen information, news articles, TV ads or YouTube videos etc. that depict foster families in a certain way. What are their thoughts on these? Do they feel they mirror their own situations / experiences?
- Ask students to name cartoons, books, fairy tales, movies or musicals that have similar themes to *The Boy Who Lost His Laugh* or feature characters as foster kids e.g.: *Stuart Little*, *Kung Fu Panda 2*, *Despicable Me*, *Tarzan*, *Annie*, *Lion*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Anne of Green Gables*, *Harry Potter*, *The Secret Life of Pets*
- Define which ones stick most in their memories and discuss why? Is it because of the way they make them feel or perhaps because they can relate to the character, for example?
- Consider how they end. Do all emotional tales end with uncertainty or on a happier note? If they think so, ask why they think this is.
- Which have the better endings? Which ones do students prefer most? Debate what makes a good ending and why that is important.

### VISUAL LITERACY (Expressing and developing ideas / [ACELA1453](#))

- Search for the visual clues the illustrator includes in the story to show a change of:
  - Emotion / action
  - Time / situation
- How do the end papers (inside the front and back covers) make students feel? What do they project about this story?
- How do the illustrations depict the personalities of the characters, notably Tim's, and what they are experiencing?
- Examine the perspective and angles used in the illustrations.
  - How does the use of altered or unusual perspectives enhance the story experience?
- How do the background patterns and colours influence the mood or feeling of the illustration?



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- What direction do most of the illustrations flow to and from? When does this direction change? How does this influence the story and what does it tell us about the main character?
- Tim is shown in nearly every illustration but often we only see the back of his head/hoodie. Why do they think this is? What emotion(s) is the illustrator trying to portray by doing this?
- How do certain colours make students feel? How can they apply these feelings to this story?
- Discuss the use of colours to project or symbolise emotion and a change of circumstances in this story. (Used with Visual Arts and Craft)
- Identify the predominant colour palette, and then list emotions to match those colours. Use their location in the story and the associated text to help identify matches. [WORKSHEET 2 Matching Emotions to Colours.](#)
- Ask students to draw their own favourite thing that gives them a sense of comfort and security. It might be a toy or object or a pet or even a dinosaur! (Used with Visual Arts and Crafts) Discuss why this object is important and what it represents for them (and Tim).

### MATHEMATICS

(Probability/Chance, Shape, Numbers and Patterns [ACMSP024, ACMMG042, ACMNA035](#))

- Chance and Probability
  - Explore the likelihood of Tim feeling more secure and confident *after* being adopted by the Lees. What predictions can students make based on the end of the story.
  - Tim began packing away his dinos and belongings immediately after he saw Mrs Roser with Gina. Discuss why and what aspects of probability and prediction prompted this action.
- Shapes
  - Identify the geometric shapes and symbols used throughout the illustrations e.g. circles, squares etc.
  - Count them and examine their use in the illustrations (e.g. photo graphs, Tim's room). Is it deliberate or incidental?
  - Discuss how certain shapes could produce certain subliminal impressions, e.g. order, calm, joy, confusion, despair and loss.
- Discuss the presence of patterns. Can students spot any – wall paper design, bedspread etc.?
- Spatial awareness. Have students complete a [custom made jigsaw puzzle](#) (try the [The Boy Who Lost His Laugh jigsaw puzzle!](#)) Use different numbers of pieces to increase difficulty and time how

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long it takes to complete based on level of difficulty. Is it easier or no different beginning with the border pieces already set up?

## THE ARTS

### VISUAL ARTS / CRAFT (Visual Arts / Communicating ideas [ACAVAM108](#))

- Draw a Parasaurolophus! Well it's more of a dragon but why not experiment with different colours and shapes to change the style of your dragon into a prehistoric dinosaur? Change your 'cute' dino into a more ferocious one!
- Try drawing a different dinosaur. Use your imaginations instead of a tutorial instruction.
- Make your own Parasaurolophus puppets! Use the instructions included on the [Download Fun Page](#) or in this [video link](#). (Use with Science and Health and Physical Education)
- Using [colouring-in templates and worksheets](#) found online and throughout these notes, use colours to show the different levels of emotion in the various scenes.
- Invite students to name their favourite colour and explain why. (Use with Visual Literacy)
- Ask students which page (spread) of the story they feel is the most dramatic or moving one and how it makes them feel? (This is known as the Blue page in picture books although it is not always coloured just blue) In what part of the story does this page occur?
- Which spread do they consider the saddest?
- Which do they deem is the happiest page?
- Ask students to draw their own favourite activities or past times using their favourite colours. (Use with Visual Literacy)

### MUSIC (Communicating and interacting, wellbeing, Music [ACPPS020](#), [ACAMUM082](#))

- Listen to and watch the [Book Trailer](#) for this story. What type of music is used? How does it make students feel?
- What types of instruments suggest sad unhappy feelings? Excitement? Joy? Does the pace of the music dictate the feeling of this mini movie?
- Do students think background music is important for relaying the feel of the story and suggesting what it could be about? Do they think instrumental background music is enough or if a song with lyrics should be used instead; what would they choose?

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- Can music trigger certain memories? Ask students if they have a particular song that elicits strong memories, good or bad. (Use with Science)
- Encourage students to name instruments or music styles that describe the various movements, vocal sounds and habits of a person who is unhappy, despondent, sorrowful, happy.
- Can students name the wind instrument that most closely resembles the structure of a *Parasaurolophus*'s horn?!

### DRAMA

(Language for interaction, Drama [ACELA1787](#), [ACADM027](#))

- Using dinosaurs, toys or even sock puppets get students to re-enact the story. Rig up a small stage to facilitate this. (Use with Visual Arts and Crafts)
  - Enlist someone to be the narrator.
- Get students to experiment with how to manipulate the puppets to show the different emotions and voices used in the story. Cover:
  - Body Language
  - Stage position
  - Influence of music to the performance – when to use it to inject drama or relief for the audience.
- Re-enact the story with students but not using words or a narrator, just music to accentuate the:
  - 'Light and shade' moments of the story
  - Show scene changes
  - Mood changes (use with Music)
  - Partially re-enact a scene like Tim's sibling interaction or Mr Lee's trampolining incident through student role-play adding more comedy *or* drama to *alter* the scene outcome.

### SOCIAL SCIENCE

(Social Health [ACPPS005](#), [ACPPS017](#), [ACELA1787](#), [ACPPS020](#))

- Discuss the notion of family dynamics in relation to foster care families. Do the students understand:
  - What it means?
  - The various different examples: out of home care, kin-care, emergency care, adoption?

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- Why there are so many different variants of family structure? (Use with Inferential and Critical Thinking)
  - Ask what the term 'family' means to them. What constitutes a 'normal' family?
- Invite students to discuss their own family dynamic.
  - How many siblings they may or may not have.
  - Whether they are all related or not.
  - Do they regard having siblings as a positive or negative? If so, why.
  - Where they spend the most time in a family environment (if living with different parents, family groups or care givers).
- Get students to discuss how they feel when they are faced with certain situations they have little control or choice about e.g. changes in family situation, being outside of their comfort zones, meeting new people, trying new things / foods / customs.
- Examine the difference between fostering and adopting.
- Enquire if students have ever fostered, rescued, adopted someone, something or animal.
  - Identify the types of people or animals that would require fostering, rescuing, adopting etc. and thereby the circumstances that may elicit this need: e.g. an unsafe family environment, DV, refugee / diaspora situation, abandonment, change of circumstances financially, mentally, physically, etc. etc.
- Tim feels despondent at times because he is hoping for something he believes he will never have. Discuss this emotion and how it affects him, his family, society as a whole.
  - Ask how students respond when something makes them feel discouraged. Get them to list some of the ways or things that would help them feel less dispirited. Explore ways to cope with sad feelings: writing / drawing them down, stepping back and counting to ten, meditation, talking about them, engaging in your favourite activity, burning energy, crying, telling jokes, sharing your concerns with someone you trust ... and so on. [WORKSHEET 3 Safe People.](#)
- Despite a belief that he may never find his forever family, Tim *swallows his sad* and joins the Lees in the backyard. Discuss the (health) attributes of hope, desire, faith, optimism.
- Tim's outcome is a happy one for all concerned. Discuss why. Consider alternative outcomes and how they might have affected Tim's ability to 'laugh again'. (Use with Contemporary Society)

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- Different people mean different things to a child and their sense of wellbeing. Encourage students to give examples of people who they regard as important to them in their lives, both in and outside of the family unit. Use [WORKSHEET 4 Important People in My Life](#) to visually represent this.

### SCIENCE, NATURAL SCIENCE (STEM)

- Tim desperately wants a family to call his own and belong to forever. Until he finds one his '*legion of dinosaurs*' are his constant companion; his take-everywhere family. Many kids Tim's age have a gigantic fascination for dinosaurs. Discuss who loves dinosaurs and why they feel this way.
- Dino Discovery: Dinosaurs existed for millions of years across several different time spans or periods.
  - What is the study of dinosaurs (and other prehistoric life) called?
  - Can students name the three dinosaur time periods (within the Mesozoic Era)?
  - In which time period does the Parasaurolophus exist?
  - What type of dinosaur was the Parasaurolophus? Are students familiar with it? Is it a favourite or appreciated as much as some of the other better well-known species?
  - What did this species of dinosaur eat? Where did it live?
  - What is unique about it?
  - What do they think a Parasaurolophus really sounds like? Something [like this](#), perhaps?!
  - Discover more about Tim's favourite dino, [here](#)!
- Make your own [Parasaurolophus puppet](#). (Use with Visual Arts and Crafts)
- Experiment with different:
  - Designs – peg, moving, static
  - Materials – heavy cardboard, coloured paper, plastic vs. wooden pegs
  - Try designing your own finger puppet based on the unique head shape
- Consider the five senses and how music, smells and words can stimulate and trigger memories.
  - Hypothesize why they think this is and then research the answer.
  - Locate words, phrases and images the author and illustrator use in the story to add sensory detail and evoke the reader's senses. Discuss how this could enrich the story telling experience.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION (Health and Wellbeing / ACPPS005, ACPPS020)

- Dancing is a fun physical activity that makes you laugh, move and feel good – useful in times of stress and anxiety. What other physical activities could positively improve mental wellbeing, confidence and joy? (Hint: there were some in [The Fix-It Man](#)! And in [The Boy Who Lost His Laugh](#))
- Jumping is very physical, too. Especially on a trampoline as Mr Lee discovered! Jumping awakens every cell and nerve in your body increasing good circulation and positive energy. What other sports or activities involve jumping:
  - Examples High jump, long jump, skipping, mini tramps, Qi Gong, high diving, gymnastics, parkour, bungee jumping, horse riding, hopscotch, jump frog ... can they name more?
  - Can be played in pairs, groups, teams or even with a dog!
- What skills are needed for these sports: good eye hand coordination, the right equipment, team members, balance, social skills?
- Identify students who have tried some of these activities. How do they make them feel? Who would like to try them?
  - What's hard, scary, exciting, fun about these activities?
- Hopscotch is a fun playground game that hones coordination, balance, gross motor skills, cognitive ability, math knowledge and social interaction. It can be played at any age! Get students to design, draw or mark out their own hopscotch grid, using this [visual as a guide](#). [Learn how to play Hopscotch](#).
  - Experiment with the size of the squares (or rings) depending on age and ability of students
  - Leave some blank to encourage counting and memory of patterns
  - Change the rules to make progress more challenging (use with Maths).
  - Use letters of the alphabet in lieu of numbers!
  - Substitute dinosaurs for numbers or letters 🐲
- Have fun!