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The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness by Colin Thompson

Publisher Random House Australia

Readership Primary and secondary school students

Genre Fable

Setting Home, the dog shelter and in between

Language Poignant, and metaphorical at times

Illustration Sophisticated, symbolic style with subtle details. Created using an Apple Mac, Wacom Cintiq graphics tablet and Photoshop

Themes Loneliness and acceptance

Synopsis George lives with his grandmother but their lives are unconnected. He visits the dog shelter on Fridays and finds a dog that is a reflection of himself: scruffy and sad but dignified and accepting. It is the dog's last day before being taken through the ominous green door. George rushes home and gains permission to keep him and Jeremy, the three-legged dog, thinks that his new home is heaven. George and his grandmother make different legs to help Jeremy walk, including one that is a wheel. The book ends positively but realistically, 'The empty place inside George didn't seem so empty any more. And the three of them lived happily ever after for a very long time.'

Teaching Applications

- **Visual Literacy 1. Cover** How is the cover illustration symmetrical? Where does the vector (real or imaginary diagonal lines to guide the eye), created here by the characters' bodies, and where their eyes are pointing, make the viewer look? Why? **2. Characters** Why are the characters drawn with rounded shapes? George What hides George's face? Why? When do we see his face completely? Why does he have a kite? Grandmother What makes her seem old, traditional and domestic? When does this change and how? Sketch her with straight, angular lines. What does her personality and lifestyle seem like in this form? **3. Setting** How does perspective; high, low and mid camera angle shots; texture and colour create the atmosphere of the different settings? **4. Light Source** Colin Thompson uses light sources effectively in his books. Find examples in this book and discuss where the light source is coming from, what it illuminates, and why? **5. Doorways** Thompson also often features doorways. Find the doorways in this book. What do they represent? Students draw their own interpretations of doorways that may lead to something bad, good and unexpected.
- **Jeremy's Early Life** Write a short story or description of what Jeremy's life was like before entering the dog shelter (He had never been inside a house.) and what may have happened to him. Display this written text as 'Framed Text' (see 'Display').
- **Read** *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley*, *The Violin Man*, *Falling Angels* and other books by Colin Thompson and *Let's Get a Pup* by Bob Graham.

Display

- **Framed Text** Some of the written text is framed cleverly. Find examples of this in the book, such as inside picture frames, on the sheet on the clothesline and on the blind. Handwrite or type the story or description in 'Teaching Applications' above, 'Jeremy's Early Life', onto paper, thin canvas or calico to resemble the blind as a scroll. Hang open or closed. Link these creatively with coloured wool, kite string and a blue cord as owned by the each of the characters and wound throughout parts of the book.
- **Jeremy's Leg** Use Adobe Photoshop software (also used by Colin Thompson), or an equivalent, to create images of Jeremy with different legs.
- **Newspaper Setting Collage** George and his grandmother tear up newspaper to make a leg for Jeremy. Make a large collage of the scene at the dog shelter. Use different types and textures of newspapers or magazines for the bricks, the wire cages, the path, the door and the tree.
- **Armchair** Drape a comfortable armchair in green fabric to use for a reading chair.

Author/Illustrator Website www.colinthompson.com

