

Mini & Milo

THE LAST PLUM



VENITA DIMOS & NATASHIA CURTIN

WALKER BOOKS



Mini & Milo

BIG SKILLS FOR
The perfect
book to share for
COMPETITION
& L
MINI PEOPLE



THE LAST PLUM

Venita Dimos & Natasha Curtin

TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Venita Dimos

WALKER BOOKS

About the Series

MINI AND MILO: THE LAST PLUM
CREATORS: VENITA DIMOS AND NATASHIA CURTIN
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Story-led, with humour and heart, this series follows the adventures of Mini the elephant and Milo the rabbit as they navigate friendship and all its ups and downs. Each book explores aspects of social and emotional intelligence, such as mindset, positive self-talk, listening, communicating about emotions, competitiveness and collaboration, problem solving, managing conflict, with further books to come.

The books explore key life skills in a fun, humorous and imaginative way; with Mini the elephant finding a resolution for each problem through trial and error. This helps build young readers' confidence in problem solving.

The books reward repeated readings because of their humour, dynamic read-aloud texts and satisfying plot resolutions. The detailed illustrations supplement the texts and create a fully dimensional world for Mini.

They are ideal for early childhood settings, as well as classroom use up to Grade 3.



The perfect book to talk about competitiveness, collaboration, individual strengths, self-identity and goal setting.

Mini is wild about winning. When she is one plum short for her entry into the Annual Delicious and Delightful Cooking Competition, she asks her best friend Milo for his last plum. Milo doesn't want to hand it over but Mini is determined to have it. Will Mini manage to make her plum pie, or will she find another, very special, ingredient?

THEMES INCLUDE:

- Self-Identity/Self-Awareness • Strengths
- Optimistic Thinking/Resilience/Adaptability • Self Management • Acceptance
- Collaboration • Conflict Resolution • Communication Skills • Expressing Emotions • Problem Solving • Friendship • Empathy • Cooking • Gardening

These notes are designed for using the book in grades 1-3 classrooms. They provide the following:

- Act as a guide for reading the book with a class;
- Offer detailed suggestions and scripts for exercises and activities to develop an understanding of effective communication about emotions and how to communicate calmly, with kindness. Worksheets and reflective questions are also provided (at the end of the document);
- Highlight other themes for discussion; and
- Link the book to curriculum focus areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary and visual literacy.

About the Author:

Venita Dimos is an experienced Lawyer, Mediator and Neuroleadership coach. For over 20 years she has helped thousands of people solve complex problems and navigate difficult times in their lives. As a mother of three daughters, she is passionate about empowering children with the skills and resilience to navigate the inevitable curveballs that life throws at them. Venita's books explore key life skills in a fun, humorous and imaginative way. Her *Mini & Milo* series has been driven by the importance of teaching children emotional and social intelligence early on, so they arrive into adulthood armed with skills that support their future success and happiness.

Venita is an outright optimist, loves heartfelt conversations and has a penchant for all things chocolate.

Visit her online at www.mediationcompany.com.au, LinkedIn and Instagram @venitadimos

About the Illustrator:

Natashia (pronounced NA-TAR-SHA) curtin is an upcoming illustrator who is developing a reputation for the charm and emotional clarity of her illustrations in books, including *Vernon the Penguin*.

Natashia grew up in a Yolngu township in the Northern Territory, and completed high school while living in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. She always had her nose in a book, or was drawing pictures – because computer games weren't invented yet, and it was stinky hot outside. She moved to Melbourne in the 1990s to study graphic design and learned how to live in a big city. While working as a graphic designer, Natashia met and married a lovely man, and they had two boys (who don't draw, because computer games were invented).

You can follow her on Instagram, Facebook or at natashiacurtin.com

Notes from Venita:

The world loves to tell kids that winning is everything, but what happens when they believe it?

From the moment children start school, they're thrown into a world of competition – races, awards, scores, results, rankings, and the push to succeed. If they don't come out on top, this can erode their confidence and leave them feeling defeated and overwhelmed. It can also lead them into a cycle of comparison, where they start to measure themselves against others, questioning their own self-worth.

The pressure to compete isn't just in their immediate world; it's everywhere. As a mother of three children, I see how easy it is for kids to subconsciously fall into the trap of comparing themselves to others, especially when exposed to countless people and images on social media. From my own personal experience, I found myself, in my 40s as a solo parent, struggling to measure my life and achievements against those of others.

My experience as a Lawyer, in an industry focused on winning and losing, and later as a Mediator, where I saw how people's conflicts focused on the need to 'win,' reinforced for me how harmful this mindset can be. I wrote "The Last Plum" to help children shift the focus away from competition – and instead focus towards learning to be true to themselves, understanding their personal strengths, setting and achieving their own goals, knowing that games and competitions offer opportunities for fun and personal growth as well as 'winning', and experiencing the joy of collaborating.

I want my children – and all children—to understand that their value doesn't come from winning or losing, but from being true to who they are. This book is my way of sharing that message with them and with the world.

Reviews for the series:

"An important message for all of us."

Reading Time review of *The Teeny-Tiny Voice*

"Appealing animal characters paired with stories about important life skills makes the Mini & Milo series pitch perfect. They're a great prompt for discussion, but can also be read for pure enjoyment."

Kids Book Review of *Elephants Can't Jump*

"Trial and error helps support decision making, while working together on a problem supports friendship and cooperative behaviour. The Mini and Milo series create situations where cooperation is at its centres and children reading will see that problems can be solved through cooperation and trying things out, particularly after asking a friend for help."

ReadPlus review of *The Big Flappy Ears*

"A gentle story told with warmth and empathy and delightful illustrations bursting with colour and energy will ensure children love spending time with this pair and learn plenty of things along the way. Problem solving, working together and how to be a supportive friend are at the heart of Mini and Milo's story."

A Word About Books review of *The Big Flappy Ears*

"These are the feelings that we can't always put into words ... I think this is why this series is good for readers of all ages, to help us understand how we feel, how others feel, and how everyone navigates the world differently and understands the world differently."

Ashleigh Meikle (The Book Muse) review of *The Big Flappy Ears*

Teacher Notes

BEFORE READING - THE BOOK COVER

If this is the first *Mini and Milo* book you have read with your class, begin by pointing out the series name and book title.

The main characters in this book are called *Mini and Milo*. What does Mini mean? Based only on the cover, which character do you think would be called Mini? Mini is actually the elephant character. Are elephants small? Discuss this use of a joke/humour.

Alternatively, if you have read other *Mini and Milo* books with the class before, *begin by reminding them about the characters on the front cover*. Do they remember what happened to Mini in a previous book? Mini has a problem to solve in each book in the series – can they predict what the problem is in this book? Do they think Mini will be successful in solving it? In the cover illustration of this book, the two friends are both reaching up high to something in a tree. Can students see what it is? Have any of them seen a plum growing before, or tasted a plum? Can students suggest what Mini and Milo might want the plum for?

Milo is not looking at the plum. He's looking at Mini. Can students suggest how he's feeling (worried)? What might he be worried about?

WHILE READING

Pause and look at the single page illustration in the preliminary pages. What two items are depicted here (Mini's trunk and a plum)?

Notice the small lines that indicate the trunk is moving. What kind of movement do students think this is (Small, quivery, excited, slow, sneaking up ...)?

Spend some time discussing the illustration on the imprint double-page spread (Milo in his garden).

What is Milo doing (gardening) and can students guess how he feels while doing it (He is smiling, has upright posture, is waving – suggesting he feels happy and enjoys gardening)? What is the relationship between Mini and Milo?

Can students see what's growing on the tree? Have any of them seen a plum tree before? Tasted a plum?

Can students guess what vegetables are growing in front of the fence?

On the first text page, we are told that Mini is "*Wild about plums*" and "*Wild about winning*". What items in the illustration show us how much Mini likes these things (Large bag of plums beside her, displays of awards and ribbons, illustrations in the magazine she is reading)?

When Milo doesn't want to give Mini his plum, Mini comes up with all sorts of suggestions. What are some words for what Mini is doing on these pages? She is *negotiating*. She is trying to *persuade*. She is *trying to solve a problem*.

When Mini is going to the shop to try to buy a plum, she thinks "*Milo is not being a very good friend*." Do students believe this is true?

(If you have read other *Mini and Milo* books with the class, you could ask them to recall some of the ways Milo helped and looked after Mini in those books, as a friend does.)

Milo has been nurturing his tree and waiting ages for his last plum to ripen, while Mini ate some of her bag of plums. It's OK for Mini to feel disappointed that she doesn't have ten plums, but she could also feel proud and excited for her friend and all the effort he has made.

Spend some time looking at the illustration of the fruit shop and be sure to highlight the empty carton in the display. What was in this carton (plums – the shop has run out) and how do we know (there is a picture of a plum on the label on the empty box)? What other fruits and vegetables are depicted in the illustration?

Mini is distraught about only having 9 plums. The text tells us “*Mini needed one last plum to win the Annual Delicious and Delightful Cooking Competition.*” This is a thought that Mini has. Do students agree – does Mini **need** to win the competition, and does she have to **have** 10 plums to win it? What else could Mini do (make a smaller pie, make the pie using just 9 plums and give it her best shot, have fun and challenge herself to try making a different recipe, try a different hobby this year ...)? (See more on this in the **problem-solving** section below.)

“*She had to win.*” Again, this is a thought that Mini has. Can students remember a time when they wanted something so badly it felt like they just had to have it? What do students think would really happen if Mini didn't win? What things apart from winning could make Mini feel good? (Mini could have fun learning a different recipe and try tasting a different kind of food; she could offer the food she makes to her friends and family; she could cook with a friend and enjoy collaborating; she could decorate the food to make it look as pretty as possible ...)

There could be other good things Mini would enjoy doing other than cooking: looking at the illustrations in the book we might guess that she loves playing with friends or being outside with her Mum. (See more on this in the **Small Wins** and **Notice Your Thoughts** sections below.)

“*There was only one thing left to do.*” – before you turn the page, have students use the clues in the illustration to guess what Mini is going to do. The clock tells us it's 5am – Mini is waking up early to do something when other people aren't awake.

Do students think stealing the plum is a good decision? What effects might stealing the plum have? Was that really the “*only one thing left to do*”? Sometimes when we're in a difficult situation we might feel there's only one solution, but really there are other solutions that we just haven't thought of yet. (See more on this in the **problem solving** section below.)

What happens on the right-hand-side page, after Milo spots Mini stealing the plum? (Milo chases Mini around the garden, past the flower-pot, watering can and wheelbarrow). How do we know they are running/moving fast? There are three illustrations of the pair on this one page. What difference would it make if the chase was presented over three separate pages instead?

View the illustration of the two friends on the 'I'm sorry Milo' page. Can students tell how Mini and Milo are feeling? (See more on this in the **emotion words** and **non-verbal communication** exercises below.)

Do students agree that making or creating something with a friend – *working together/ collaborating* - is better than doing it alone? And why? (It's fun, you can talk and laugh while you do it, you can get it done faster, you can share ideas and make them better, you can help each other to improve ...).

Spend some time looking at the double page cooking competition spread. Who won the competition? Does anyone know the name of the very fancy cake koala cooked (Croquembouche)? Can students name some of the other dishes that were cooked (banana sundae, fondue, chips ...)?

What's planted in the foreground on the last page?

WIN-WIN: UNDERSTANDING STRENGTHS AND SELF-IDENTITY, INCLUDING OTHERS, SETTING GOALS AND PRACTISING POSITIVE SELF TALK.

The objective of this section is to teach kids that:

- **W** - Winning
- **I** - Is
- **N** - Nice

But what's important is:

- **W** - Who I Am (awareness of my strengths/self-identity)
- **I** - Including others (including others in games, treating people the way I want to be treated, recognising and celebrating other people's strengths and contributions)
- **N** - Noticing My Thoughts (awareness of my inner critic/Teeny-Tiny Voice, understanding that losing doesn't change who I am, accepting that no-one wins every single time, and noticing the good things that happen even when I don't win)

The objective of this 3-step program is to reshape how children view competition and teach them that their identity and self-worth is not tied to a single outcome of winning a game, prize or medal.

Children will learn that while winning can bring a sense of accomplishment, it doesn't change who they are. They will also learn that no-one wins every single time. The program explores the bigger picture of what truly matters - their character, personal growth and kindness to themselves and others.

Suggested exercises for all 3 steps are outlined below, with the relevant **printables** and **template worksheets** at the end of these Teacher Notes.

A printable poster is also included, summarising the below key statements for each step.

Step 1: WHO I AM

- Winning or losing does **not** change who I am.
- My value comes from who I **am**, not what I win.
- We all have different **strengths** and can learn from each other.
- I'm still **me** whether I win or lose.

Step 2: INCLUDE OTHERS

- It's more **fun** when everyone is included.
- Everyone has something **special** to teach others.
- We do our best when we work as a **team**.
- I can be a good friend by **including** others in what I do.

Step 3: NOTICE MY THOUGHTS

- Everyone feels disappointed, sad, or angry sometimes.
- No-one wins every single time.
- I can **lift myself up** again by changing my thoughts.
- My **Bounce-Back Ball** and **Bounce-Back Steps** help me feel better when I'm upset.
- I can change my **thoughts** to help me feel strong and happy!

"WHO I AM" Exercise 1: My Winning Strengths

The Objective of this exercise is to help children understand that their value comes from their identity and strengths, not from winning. The below **template worksheet** provides a number of questions for students to answer, to encourage self-awareness and understanding that true worth comes from within, not from what you win. The activity also teaches children to recognise, appreciate and learn from the different strengths of others.

Script

Today we are going to look at what makes each of us special and unique. Your value doesn't come from winning or losing—it comes from who you are and what you're good at. Everyone has different strengths, and that's what makes each of us special. This activity is all about recognising your own strengths, the things that make you happy, and what you're proud of. It's important to remember that it's not about comparing yourself to others—everyone has their own strengths, and that's what makes us all unique. When we constantly compare ourselves to other people it might make us feel like we're not good enough. Let's celebrate what makes each of us different and amazing!

As you fill out your worksheet, think about the things that make you feel strong and happy.

Reflection/Discussion Questions following "My Winning Strengths" Exercise

1. What did you learn about yourself and your strengths?
2. When you think back to the hardest things you've done, what are you most proud of?

3. How does knowing your strengths make you feel, even if you don't win every time?
4. How does it feel to know that we all have our own different strengths?
5. What can you learn from someone who has a different strength to you?

"WHO I AM" Exercise 2: Small Wins

The objective of this exercise is to identify that games and competitions offer opportunities for growth and fun, not just winning. The below **template worksheet** features a treasure map/treasure hunt which identifies a number of small 'wins' Mini has on her way to finding a treasure. Using this worksheet will encourage students to identify and value the non-tangible rewards that are gained from playing games, such as friendships, effort and skill-building. They will start noticing what things they enjoy, even when they don't win. Students will explore the deeper victories found in the journey of participating – the 'inside wins' such as personal growth that make us feel good on the inside, even if we don't have the 'external/outside' win of a medal or prize.

For younger students or less confident readers, the teacher might opt to read the text about each 'win' aloud, and discuss the meaning of each, before inviting students to colour in and decorate the sheet.

Older students who are confident readers may be able to colour/decorate the sheet and read about each of Mini's 'wins' on their own. The teacher could then ask the students to discuss some of the 'wins' and nominate their favourites.

Script

Mini and her friends are on an exciting race to find a treasure! Mini is determined to 'WIN' the biggest treasure, but along the way, she discovers small treasures that are just as important.

Even though Mini doesn't find the big treasure and 'loses' the game, she still has plenty of small wins to celebrate! Let's see if we can find Mini's small wins!

Reflection/Discussion Questions following "Small Wins" Exercise

1. What small wins did Mini find along the way, and why are they special?
2. How do you think Mini felt when she found the small wins, even if she didn't win the big treasure?
3. If you entered a competition and didn't win, what other things could you feel proud of, and why?
4. Why is it important to celebrate the small wins, even if you don't win the big prize?
5. What did Mini learn about winning and losing on her treasure hunt?

"WHO I AM" Exercise 3: Goal Setting (Ready. Set. Goal.)

This activity is an introduction to basic goal-setting in a fun and encouraging way. Teachers have the option of setting shorter goals with the activity spanning over short time periods (eg. weekly) or extended for larger goals to span over the month, or even term.

Teachers could ask students to set individual goals, or encourage the group to set a whole-class goal. Teachers might also choose to join in the fun and share their own goal and accountability with the class.

Completing the below **template worksheet** will assist students to record their goal, consider what steps they might need to take to achieve it, and then share the small 'wins' along the way.

This objective of this exercise is to teach children to recognise both external and internal wins.

While coming first in a competition or race, receiving an award or getting the highest mark (External/Outside Wins) is nice, the real wins in life come from the effort, practice and learning that happens along the way. By encouraging children to celebrate small steps and personal growth (Inside Wins) this exercise helps them understand that true 'wins' come from within – like gaining new skills, trying their best and feeling proud of their progress.

Regular check-ins allow students to reflect and celebrate their 'Inside Wins' - reinforcing the idea that success is more about the journey of growth, commitment, and personal responsibility, rather than the final outcome.

This activity is a confidence-booster and can be repeated as often as teachers choose. The more the activity is repeated, the more students focus on improving themselves, rather than focusing only on external/ outside 'wins'.

Script

OUTSIDE WINS: These are the things everyone else can 'see', like winning a game, scoring a goal, finishing first, or getting a trophy.

INSIDE WINS: These are the things you are proud of yourself for, on the inside. Inside Wins include:

- Being proud for doing your best.
- Trying something hard.
- Helping others achieve their goals.
- Learning something new.
- Not giving up when things feel hard.
- Being a good friend or good sport when you lose a game.
- Staying calm when you feel frustrated.
- Overcoming a fear and facing something that scares you.

These things make you feel good on the inside – you feel proud of yourself even if no-one else notices.

Step 1: READY

Set your goal for the week/month. Think of one thing you have never done before and would like to do. It could be learning something new, or something you want to get better at. Examples include learning how to draw a dog, running around the oval without a break, catching a ball three times in a row, making a new friend, speaking in front of the class, reading a new book. Why is this goal important to you? How will it make you feel once you've achieved it?

Step 2: SET

WHAT one baby step do you need to take this week to bring you closer to your goal? For example, I will read two pages of my book every day; I will practice throwing a ball 10 times; I will draw a dog two times every day.

WHEN you will you do this? For example, after school every Monday, at lunchtime, on the weekend.

WHO do you need to check with or ask for help before you set your step? How will you remember to do it?

Step 3: GOAL

Encourage kids to share their small wins with friends, family, or in class. Sharing their achievements, no matter how small, can boost their pride and motivate others too. This can be done weekly, or even daily for smaller goals.

Reflection/Discussion Questions for during and after the "Ready. Set. Goal" Exercise

1. What are you most excited about in setting your goal?

2. How do you think you will feel once you achieve your goal?
3. What will you do if you don't achieve your goal?
4. How will you remind yourself to work on your goal every day?
5. Who can you talk to if you get stuck on achieving your goal?

"INCLUDING OTHERS" Exercise 1: Baking Competition Strengths

Part 2 of the "Win-Win" Program is about "Including Others". The objective of this part is to highlight the importance of collaboration and inclusion. The Program shows children the power of being able to identify and appreciate other people's strengths and the importance of working together and including others in their activities. Children will learn that everyone has unique abilities that can contribute to a collective effort, making the experience more fun and rewarding, strengthening friendships and building a sense of community.

In this first exercise, students are asked to complete the below "Annual Delicious and Delightful Cooking Competition" template worksheet, allocating tasks to Mini's friends according to their strengths.

Script

Competing can feel exciting, but there is something even more magical ... the most fun happens when we invite our friends to join in and share the excitement and fun! In last year's Annual Delicious and Delightful Baking Competition, Mini discovered that baking with her friend Milo was the best part! They got to laugh, share ideas, work together and had had so much fun that Mini forgot all about competition! Let's see how including others can make everything more fun and how each friend can help in their own special way!

Mini wants to include *ALL* her friends in this year's Annual Delicious and Delightful Baking Competition! Each of her friends has a special strength that can help make their baking even better. Your job is to help Mini figure out how each friend can help in their own special way!

Let's help Mini and her friends work together to make the most fun cake ever!

Reflection/Discussion Questions following the "Baking Competition strengths" Exercise

1. Did any of Mini's friends' strengths surprise you? (Did you guess that Indah would be good at maths and measurements, and Feng enjoys watching cooking shows?)
2. Do you think including all of Mini's friends would make the baking competition more fun? Why?
3. How do you think Mini's friends would feel when they got to all be included?
4. Do you think working together would help Mini and her friends create the best cake ever? Why?
5. If you were one of Mini's friends, which job would you choose, and why?

Optional related discussion point (to prompt conversations about comparing ourselves to others): Indah is good at maths and measurement. She is so good that she won first prize in an inter-school maths competition!

Josie-Jo loves sports and jumping and she has been having fun and practising very hard on the high jump, but she hasn't won a high jump competition yet.

Who do students think is better: Indah or Josie-Jo? Do they think it is helpful to compare the two friends?

Josie-Jo came first in the running race and Mini came last. But Mini can read a whole book on her own and Josie-Jo is having trouble learning to read.

Who do students think is better: Mini or Josie-Jo? Do they think it is helpful to compare the two friends?

Milo is confident to ask questions in class and likes playing with lots of friend. Feng is shy and prefers to only play with one friend. Who do students think is better: Milo or Feng? Is it helpful to compare?

Optional related visual literacy activity: The characters included in this worksheet appear frequently in the *Mini and Milo* books. If you have other books in the series in your classroom or library, students could spend time looking for their favourite characters in their pages and write a sentence about what the character is doing.

"INCLUDING OTHERS" Exercise 2: A Cake Made With Friends

This activity helps children understand the value of collaboration, teamwork and the joy of sharing ideas. It teaches children the joy of creating something together and shows how everyone's contributions can combine to create something unique and wonderful. Children learn to appreciate other people's contributions and strengths, even though they are different to their own.

Students work in groups of 2 or more, each group using the below **template worksheet** to design and decorate a "cake". To complete this activity, students will need to be provided with additional craft items, such as:

- Cardboard or thick paper
- Coloured paper
- Coloured pens or pencils
- Pipe cleaners, cotton balls, stickers, gems, glitter, pom-poms or similar items, to use as 'decorations'

Script

Just like how Mini and Milo worked together, you're going to work together to design and decorate a cake that Mini and her friends can make for next year's Annual Delicious and Delightful Baking Competition. Let's see how amazing it is when everyone adds their own special touch!

Instructions

Step 1: DESIGN A CAKE - children work in groups of 2 or more to DESIGN (i.e. draw) their cake on the worksheet provided.

Step 2: CREATE A CAKE - after drawing the cake, use cardboard or thick paper to have children CREATE the cake they designed using craft material. For example, they can cut the thick paper into the cake shape, tear paper for frosting, use pipe cleaners for borders, cotton balls for frosting, add stickers, gems, glitter or pom-poms for decorations.

Step 3: SHARE - Have children present their finished cake to the class and talk about what **their partner (or someone else in their group)** added to the cake (rather than what they themselves added). Ask them to identify one thing they like most about what **their partner (or someone else in their group)** added. This helps children shift their focus away from themselves and towards valuing other people's strengths and contributions.

Reflection/Discussion Questions following "Making a Cake" Exercise

1. How did working together make designing the cake more fun and the ideas better?
2. What was your favourite thing that **your partner** did to help create Mini's cake?
3. What did you learn from **your partner** during this activity that you didn't know before?

4. What was the most fun part about working together on this activity?
5. What would you like to say to your partner to thank them for their help and ideas?

"NOTICING YOUR THOUGHTS/TEENY-TINY VOICE" Exercise 1 – What Could Mini Think Instead?

This 3rd part of the Program is designed to teach children how to build resilience and optimism after experiencing disappointment, set-backs, mistakes, failure or losing.

In this first exercise, children will learn to "Notice" negative thinking and consciously replace negative thinking with new, optimistic thought patterns that embrace positivity, hope, resilience and self-kindness.

Another book in the Mini and Milo series, *The Teeny-Tiny Voice*, deals specifically with our inner critic, helping children understand Self-Talk and encouraging Self-Talk. You could read *The Teeny-Tiny Voice* with your class to support the below exercises. You could also use/modify some of the exercises outlined in the Teacher Notes for *The Teeny-Tiny Voice*.

The below **printable** lists examples of negative and positive self-talk and is designed to help children understand the power of their thoughts and how those thoughts can impact their emotions and relationships. By identifying and replacing negative thoughts Mini might have about her friend Milo with more positive perspectives, children will learn how changing their thinking can lead to optimism and stronger friendships.

Teachers could choose to print a copy for each student to keep as a reference (students could then circle some of the items on the sheet as you run through the reflection questions).

Alternatively, you could display the page on their electronic whiteboard/projector to discuss as a group.

Script

Sometimes, we all have thoughts that make us sad, or frustrated or angry – but did you know that changing the way you **think** can change the way you **feel**? We can choose new thoughts to help us feel better and bounce-back faster. Today, we're going to help Mini find some new thoughts to help her feel happier and bounce-back from feeling sad or angry.

We'll look at some thoughts Mini had about Milo, or about winning, that might have made her a bit ... *plum-crazy!* Then we'll find new, kinder thoughts that can help Mini bounce-back, be a better friend and feel happier.

Reflection/Discussion Questions following "What Could Mini Think Instead?" Exercise

1. How do you think Mini felt when she had her old thoughts?
2. Why do you think it's important for Mini to think in a new way?
3. Which new thought do you think will help Mini feel the happiest?
4. How do you think Mini will feel after using her new thoughts?
5. How do the new thoughts help Mini be a better friend to Milo?
6. Can you think of a time when you had a thought similar to Mini's old thoughts?
7. Which new thought would be your favourite to use when you feel upset?

"NOTICE YOUR THOUGHTS" Exercise 2 – Bounce-Back Ball

The following "Bounce-Back", worksheets are designed to help children visualise emotional resilience as a simple, relatable ball that 'bounces' back up after hitting the ground.

By using this common term, children will learn that it's okay to feel upset when they do not get what they want, but just like a ball bounces back, they can choose to respond by finding the strength to get up again, try their best, and keep going.

For this first activity, use the below **template worksheet** to encourage children to create their own 'Bounce-Back Ball', filling it with positive thoughts that make them feel strong and happy. The activity is designed to help children build emotional resilience and adaptability by incorporating a daily habit of optimistic and resilient thinking when faced with everyday challenges.

Script

Today we're going to create your own special 'Bounce-Back Ball' by filling it with positive thoughts that make you feel happy and strong. Inside your ball, you can write or draw anything that helps you 'bounce-back' when you're feeling down.

Just like a ball bounces up again and again, your 'Bounce-Back' ball is like a superpower that you can look at again and again when things aren't going your way, and you need a little boost to feel happy and strong again!

Reflection/Discussion Questions following "Bounce-Back Ball" Exercise

1. How did you feel when you were making your Bounce-Back Ball?
2. How do you feel when you look at your Bounce-Back Ball?
3. When might you need to use your Bounce-Back Ball?
4. Which thought in your Bounce-Back Ball makes you feel the happiest?
5. Do you have a special place where you will put your Bounce-Back Ball?
6. Which positive thought in your Bounce-Back Ball will you share with a friend who's feeling down?

"NOTICE YOUR THOUGHTS" Exercise 3 – Bounce-Back Steps

This activity complements the 'Bounce Back Ball' worksheet by teaching children practical **steps** and specific **actions** they can take to feel better when facing challenges. Together with the positive thoughts in the 'Bounce-Back Ball' it empowers children to develop both the mindset and the tools they need to bounce back from difficult situations.

Students can use the below **template worksheet** to record some of their favourite ways to 'bounce-back'. The worksheet includes a number of suggested actions, or students can add their own.

Script

Remember how we filled our Bounce Back Ball with positive thoughts that help us feel strong and happy? Now, we're going to think about some actions we can take when things go wrong and we need to bounce back. Everyone feels disappointed, sad, or angry sometimes, but you can use both your Bounce Back Steps and Bounce Back Ball to lift yourself up and find your smile again!

Reflection/Discussion Questions following "Bounce-Back Steps" Exercise

1. What are some situations when you might need to use your Bounce-Back Steps?
2. How will the Bounce-Back Steps help you when you're feeling down?
3. Which Bounce-Back Step do you think will help you feel better the fastest?
4. How will you remember to use your Bounce-Back Steps when you need them?
5. Is there a Bounce-Back Step you can use every day to feel happy and positive?
6. Which Bounce-Back Step can you do together with a friend to help them when they feel down?

OTHER DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

Problem-solving

In each of the Mini and Milo books, Mini has a problem, and she tries various ideas to solve that problem – sometimes with help from someone else – before reaching a final solution. Mini's problem-solving efforts provide a great model for kids and can encourage them to develop resilience. If your class has read more than one book in the series, you may have discussed the plot device "problem and solution" and completed an exercise tracing the various solutions Mini tries as part of her 'trial and error' problem-solving.

The Last Plum adds another dimension to Mini's problem-solving. In this book, she needs to 'reframe' the problem, replacing Old Thoughts with New Thoughts (as in the **What Could Mini Think Instead?** Exercise).

Look back at the pages in which Mini is distraught about only having 9 plums ("Mini **needed** one last plum to win the Annual Delicious and Delightful Cooking Competition.", "She **had** to win.") and decides to take Milo's plum ("There was only one thing left to do.")

Sometimes when we're in a difficult situation we might feel there's only one solution, but really there are other solutions that we just haven't thought of yet.

At the end of the story, does Mini still think she **has** to win the competition? Does she think she **has** to bake a plum pie and **has** to have 10 plums to do it?

What New Thoughts have replaced Mini's Old Thoughts? (She can still have fun without winning – or even entering the competition, she can enjoy baking a delicious carrot cake instead of a plum pie,

it's more fun collaborating with her friend than upsetting him by taking his last plum ...)

Comparing ourselves to others

It's natural to compare ourselves to others from time to time, but this is only beneficial if it inspires us to try hard and aim high. For example, it can encourage collaboration when we notice that someone has a strength or skill we don't have and we want to learn from them.

However, constantly comparing ourselves to others can make us feel like we're not good enough, make us doubt our abilities and demotivate us. It can impact our self-esteem. When students are aware of their own strengths, setting their own goals and measuring their own progress (self-comparing, rather than comparing themselves to others) this will help students avoid the negative effects of comparison. Several of the exercises and activities in these Teacher Notes offer prompts for discussion about comparing ourselves to others.

Teachers could set aside time to specifically discuss Comparison, and invite students to talk about what they learned in some of these exercises:

- When students completed the **My Winning Strengths Exercise**, they thought about their own unique, individual strengths. They didn't compare themselves to others. The exercise celebrated what makes each of us different and amazing.
- The reflection questions at the end of **Baking Competition Strengths Exercise** include some scenarios "comparing" the characters' achievements. These highlight again that each character has individual traits and strengths and comparing them is not useful.

- The **What Could Mini Think Instead?** **Exercise** suggests positive alternatives for negative thoughts, including:

Positive Thoughts	Negative Thoughts
If I don't win, it means I'm not good at baking.	Win or lose, I'm proud of trying!
Winning is the only thing that matters.	Winning isn't the only important part.
Koala won the Baking Competition this year. I will never be as good as Koala.	I had a lot of fun trying a new recipe and making a cake with my friend. I don't have to win in everything I do.

- The Teacher Notes for another book in the Mini and Milo series, *The Teeny-Tiny Voice*, also include Exercises on positive Self-Talk, that are relevant [here](#). In particular, "MAKE IT POSITIVE" Exercise 2: *Reframing negative Self-Talk*

Vocab and Language

Alliteration

Point out some of the examples of alliteration in the text and have students identify others (examples include wild about winning; delicious and delightful; pavlova, pudding, pancakes; wibbled and wobbled; twisted and twirled).

How does the phrase 'delicious and delightful' sound when you read it aloud? How does it make students feel? Brainstorm other phrases that make you feel a similar way (perhaps: bright and bubbly; jolly and jiggly ...)

Consider the list: pavlova, pudding, pancakes. Brainstorm other foods that could be added to this list (pie, poppadums, pasta, pizza, pineapple ...)

Alternatively, the teacher could present a list of foods to the students, some of which begin with the letter “p” and some of which don’t, and ask them to select the appropriate ones to add to this alliterative list.

Word Meanings

What do these words mean:

- Annual
- Ripen

Food and Cooking Vocab and directive writing; Gardening Vocab

Can students name the ingredients Mini has on the bench when she is getting ready to make the plum pie, and when she and Milo are baking carrot cake?

Can they name their favourite foods and some of the ingredients in them?

Can they identify some of the measuring and mixing/sifting/grating tools illustrated in the book?

You could use these discussions as a launch pad for an exercise on recipes, directive writing and/or cookery. The below **board game**, in which students collect ingredients for a plum pie, also ties into these themes.

The illustrations of Milo gardening could inspire similar exercises in gardening vocab. If your school has a vegetable or other garden, students may be able to look at some of the gardening tools in real life, and write/draw/discuss about growing fruit or vegetables.

Emotion words and non-verbal communication

Review the illustration of Mini and Milo sitting near each other, after the plum has been squashed (“I’m sorry, Milo ...”)

What do students observe about the characters’ postures and facial expressions? (Eg. their shoulders are slumped – Milo’s ears are slumped too!, they’re looking downwards and away from each other, Mini’s arms are wrapped around herself defensively - and even her trunk is tangled!)

These non-verbal cues tell us how the characters are feeling.

Brainstorm some words to describe how they feel. For example, bad, sad, worried, embarrassed, disappointed, sorry ...

Contrast this to the non-verbal cues in the illustration at the bottom right of the following page spread (“you’ll never run out of plums again!”). Brainstorm a list of words to describe how the characters feel in this image.

Humour

The messages in each of the Mini and Milo books are conveyed with wonderful humour. In *The Last Plum*, there are many funny aspects to this story and the accompanying illustrations!

Return to the discussion about the humour in Mini’s name – she is definitely not small! Look at the spread towards the end of the book, where the cooking competition has been judged and the koala has won. Notice what the characters are up to: seagulls stealing chips, mice making a mess with cheese fondue. Can students play the role of a newspaper reporter and write a paragraph about all the things that are happening in this scene?

Ask students to identify anything else in the book they find funny. Perhaps it’s the sheep judge scoffing Mini’s pies in the photos from the competition; the very small mice buying huge fruit and cheese at the fruit shop; or the physical humour/absurdity of a large elephant climbing a thin tree.

Visual Literacy and Visual Arts

Cover Design/Colour and Framing

If you have read other books in the series with the class before, ask them to look at the covers of all the books together.

What do they notice about the background illustrations and the character illustrations? What effect does it have to see Mini and Milo in full colour, and the backgrounds – in this case the clouds and brick wall – in a single colour?

This could be extended to a bigger discussion about framing and colour. Consider the image with the carrot cake in the oven (“because it was made with a friend”). This is framed in an unusual way, as if the viewer is inside the oven looking out. We can see the whole cake – the cake is the most important element in the picture. But we can’t see all of Mini and Milo, only their faces, Mini’s trunk and Milo’s hands/paws.

The feeling this image conveys is happy and positive. What are some of the elements that create this feeling? (The bright colours of the cake and oven gloves; the expressions on the character’s faces, which we can see very clearly; the way their postures mirror each other, creating harmony...)

Interior/Exterior

Look at the illustration of Milo spotting Mini through the window, as she tries to steal the plum. Notice that Milo is inside the house, looking out, and we can guess he’s in bed because of the bedclothes at the bottom of the page. Mini is outside and the window functions like a kind of ‘frame within a frame’ around the image of what she’s doing. (Students might also notice the colours in the sky, which tell us it is sunrise.)

Students could create similar interior/exterior images, looking through a window or door ‘frame’. These could be collaged using an exterior scene cut from a magazine.

Aerial view/looking from above

Consider the image on the right-hand side of the page, after Mini has squashed the plum. This is an aerial view, that is, we are looking at the scene from above. Notice that we can see the top of Mini’s head and the top of Milo’s head.

Have students seen aerial views like this before, and where? (Possibly they have seen drone footage on TV or online.)

Place familiar objects from the classroom on a desk or shelf at students’ eye level, then place them on the floor where students can view them from above. How does this change how the objects are seen? Students could select some objects and photograph them from eye level and from above, then project the images on the whiteboard to show the class.

Numeracy

The Last Plum could also be used as a jumping off point for numeracy games and exercises.

For example, two of the illustrations feature 9 plums arranged in different patterns: one has them all in a horizontal line, one in a truncated pyramid. Students could cut 9 plum shapes out of paper, colour them, and try arranging them in different shapes and groupings (a 3X3 square, 2 triangles of 3 and 6, etc). What happens if you add a 10th plum?

Students could use real-life measuring cups and spoons like those featured in the illustrations of Mini cooking to measure and portion different ingredients.

The below **board game** also involves numeracy activities, as students collect and 'add up' the ingredients they need to make a plum pie.

Board Game – Mini's Plum Pie Challenge

The below **printable board game** could be a fun wrap-up to a unit of work on *The Last Plum*. It includes numeracy elements (as students collect and 'add up' the ingredients they need to make a plum pie.) It also ties into the themes of cooking, recipes and directive writing.

The game is played by 2 or more players. A printable playing board (A3) size is provided below. Students will also need one tally sheet (list of ingredients) for each player.

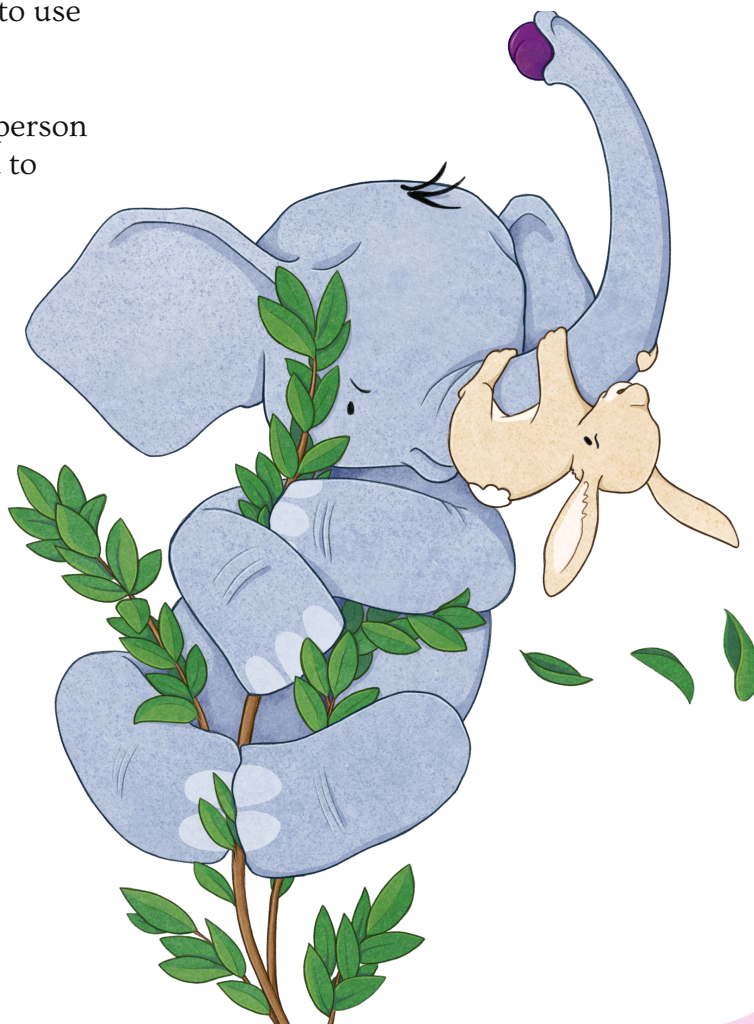
Students need a dice to roll, and a counter each. If you don't have commercial counters, you could cut out plum shapes and have students colour their individual plum to use as a counter.

The aim of the game is to be the first person to collect all of the ingredients needed to bake Mini's famous plum pie.

Before playing, students roll the dice. The person with the lowest number goes first. Players take turns rolling the dice and moving the corresponding number of squares around the board.

When they land on a square with an ingredient listed, they can add that ingredient to their tally (circle it on their tally sheet). If they land on a square with a picture of Mini and Milo, they can choose to collect any ingredient they still need.

The squares are in a loop – players continue to go around the loop till one of them collects all the ingredients needed.



1. WIN-WIN poster

Win-Win!

**Winning is nice, but what's
more important is:**

WHO I AM	INCLUDE OTHERS	NOTICE MY THOUGHTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Winning or losing does not change who I am.• My value comes from who I am, not what I win.• We all have different strengths and can learn from each other.• I'm still me whether I win or lose.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's more fun when everyone is included.• Everyone has something special to teach others.• We do our best when we work as a team.• I can be a good friend by including others in what I do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyone feels disappointed, sad, or angry sometimes.• I can lift myself up again by changing my thoughts.• My Bounce-Back Ball and Bounce-Back Steps help me feel better when I'm upset.• I can change my thoughts to help me feel strong and happy!

2. My Winning Strengths



What makes me happy: _____

What makes me laugh: _____

What am I good at: _____

I feel most proud of myself when: _____

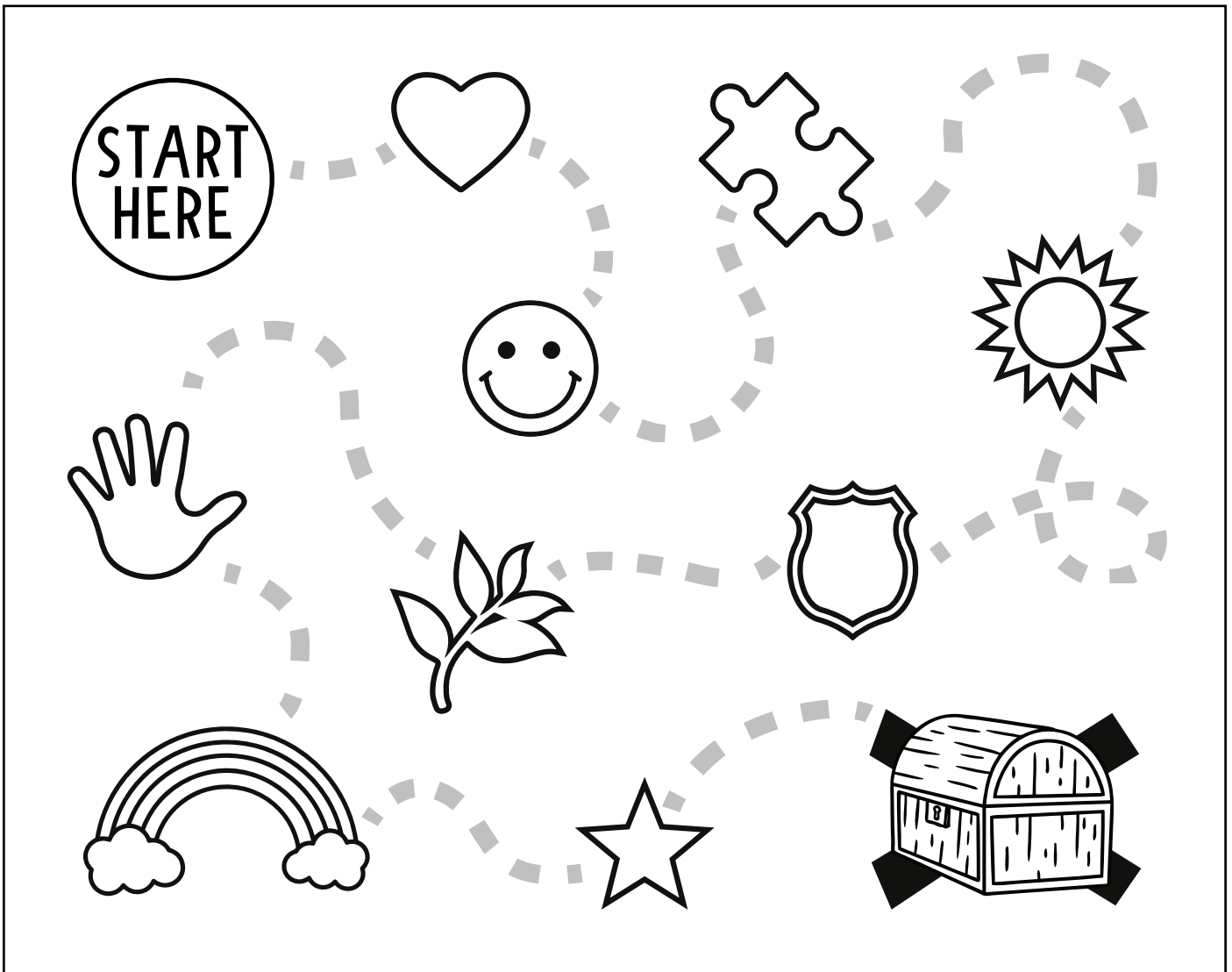
The hardest thing I have ever done is: _____

The things I like to do in my free time are: _____

One day I want to be: _____

What I love about me is: _____

3. Small Wins Treasure Hunt



Symbol	Meaning
Heart	Mini was proud for giving it a go.
Smiley Face	Mini had lots of fun.
Puzzle Piece	Mini learned something new.
Sun	Mini stayed positive, even when she was behind.
Shield	Mini was brave and didn't give up.
Leaf	Mini stayed calm when the game was tough.
Hand	Mini and Milo helped each other.
Rainbow	Mini played fairly and was kind.
Star	Mini was a good sport when Milo won.

4. Ready. Set. Goal.

Ready

Write down what you want to do and why you want to do it.

Set

Write about a baby step that will help you get closer to your goal.

GOAL!

Let's celebrate your small wins!
Circle the things you are proud of yourself for:

Doing my best

Trying something hard

Helping someone else with their goal

Learning something new

Not giving up when things felt hard

Staying calm when I felt frustrated

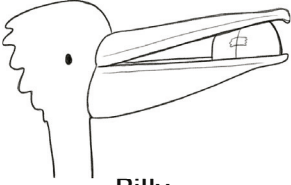
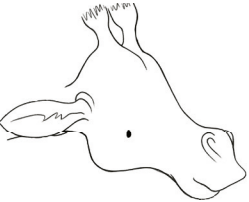



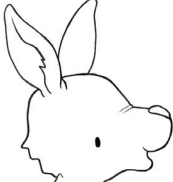
Taking some baby steps toward my goal

Write about anything else that made you proud:

5. Baking Competition Strengths

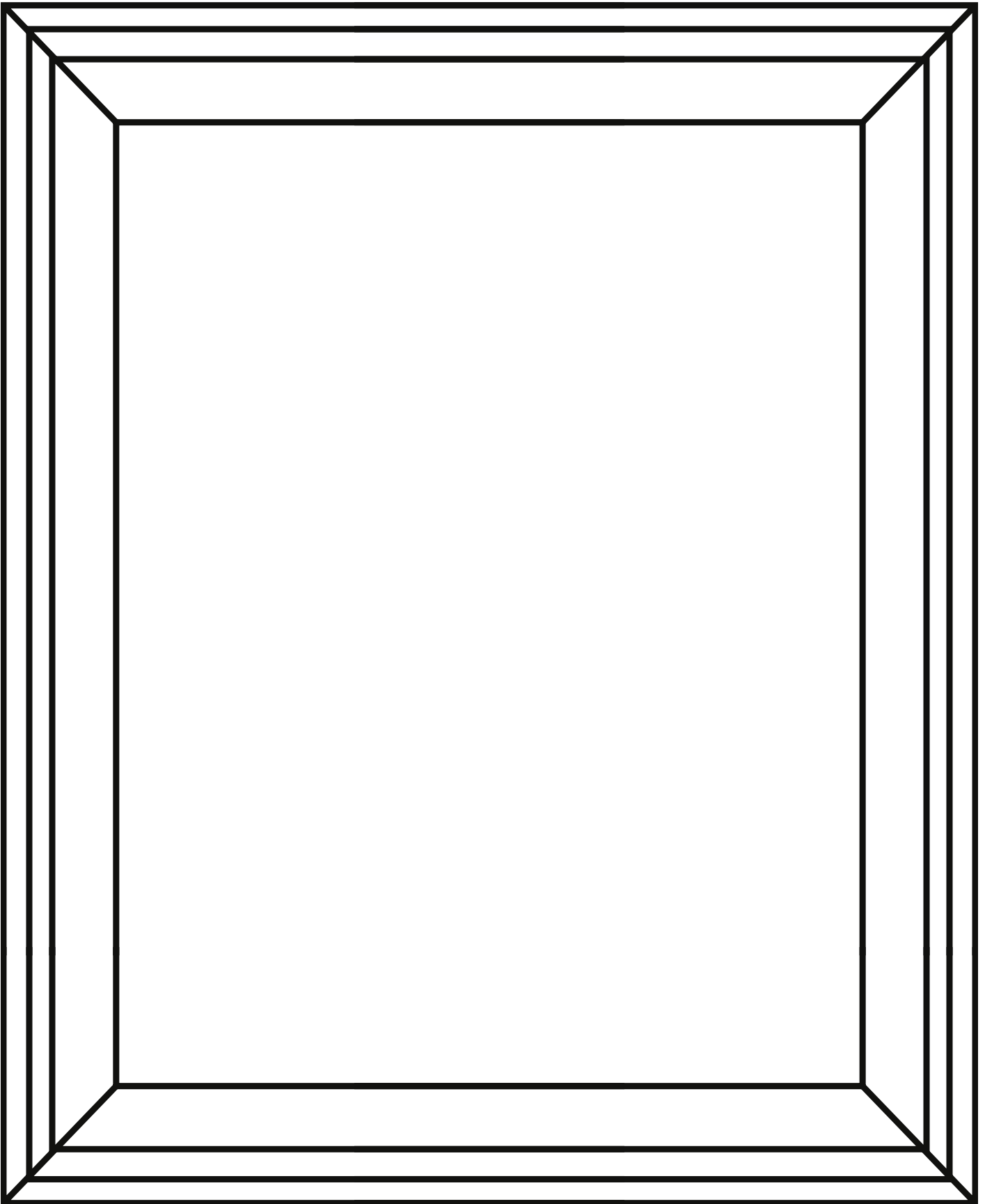
Mini wants to include ALL her friends in this year's Annual Delicious and Delightful Baking Competition! Each of Mini's friends has a special strength that can help make their baking even better.

Look at the list of Mini's friends and see what each one is good at. Draw a line to match each friend to a job they would do well.

 <p>Billy</p>	<p>Loves eating food. Loves going to grocery stores and food shops. Can carry lots of things in his beak.</p>	<p>Suggesting what cake the group can cook.</p>
 <p>Fleur</p>	<p>Loves flowers. Will give anything a go. Enjoys making things look good.</p>	<p>Going shopping for all the ingredients and carrying things home.</p>
 <p>Indah</p>	<p>Loves bananas. Is good at maths and understands measurements and how to use scales.</p>	<p>Carefully measuring the ingredients in the right quantities.</p>
 <p>George</p>	<p>Likes eating gum leaves. Enjoys being the leader of the group and helping others do things well.</p>	<p>Beating the eggs very fast and stirring the cake.</p>
 <p>Feng</p>	<p>Likes to know what's going on. Enjoys watching cooking shows on TV and looking at magazines about cooking.</p>	<p>Making sure everyone has done their jobs, in the right order. Then tasting the cake before it goes in the oven.</p>
 <p>Josie-Jo</p>	<p>Loves sports, jumping around and doing physical things.</p>	<p>Decorating the cake after it's cooked.</p>

6. A Cake Made With Friends

Design and decorate a “cake” with the craft items provided.

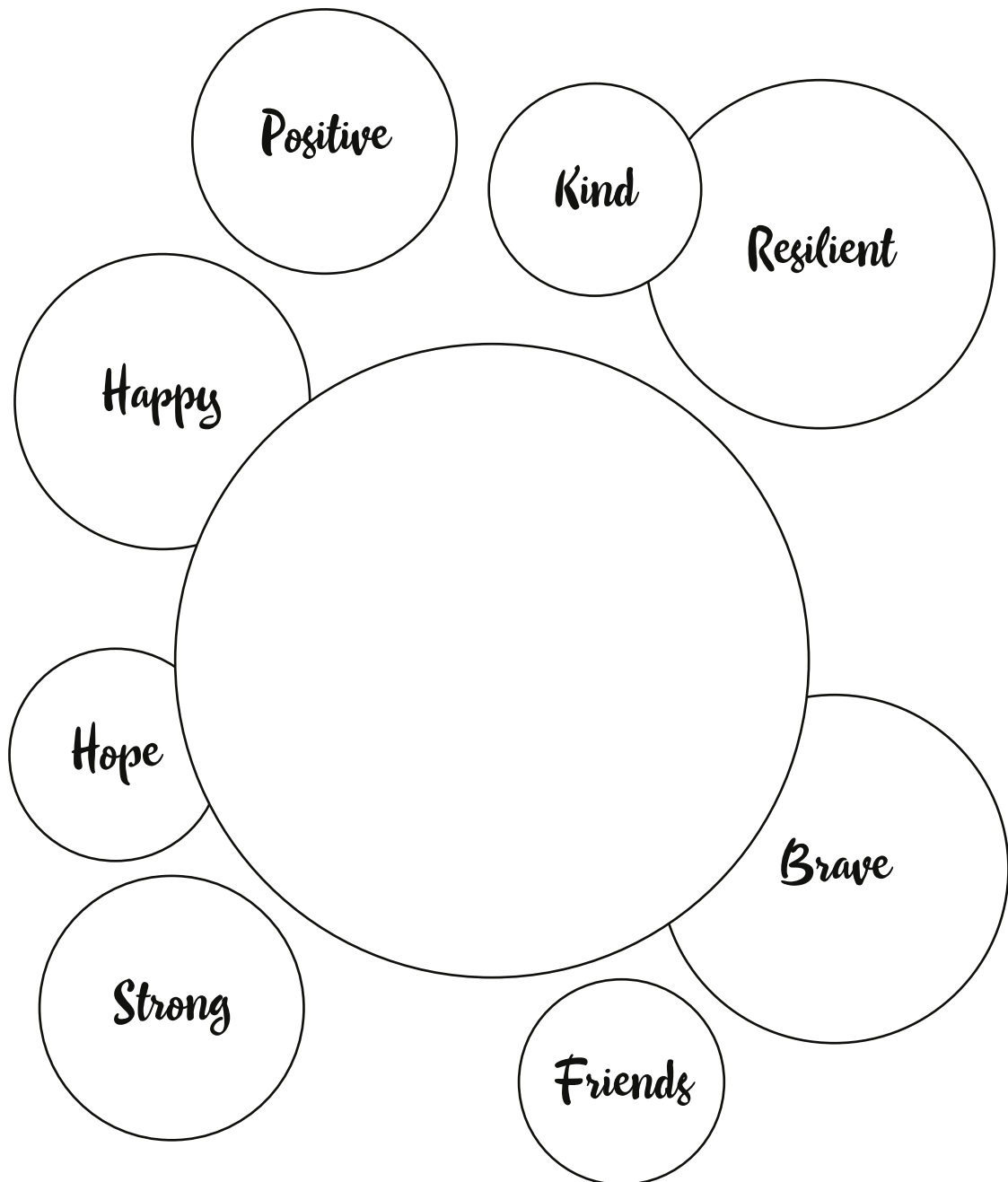


7. What Could Mini Think Instead?

Old Thoughts	New Thoughts
I have to win the baking competition every year.	I can still enjoy baking even if I don't win.
Milo is being a bad friend.	Milo is still my friend, but he was waiting weeks for his plum to ripen.
I have to make a plum cake every year.	I will try my best to bake a different cake.
Milo didn't help me because he doesn't care.	Milo's plum is his special treat, but he is still a good friend.
Milo should give me his last plum.	Milo took care of his plum and it was special to him.
If I don't win, it means I'm not good at baking.	Win or lose, I'm proud of trying!
Winning is the only thing that matters.	Winning isn't the only important part.
Koala won the Baking Competition this year. I will never be as good as Koala.	I had a lot of fun trying a new recipe and making a cake with my friend. I don't have to win in everything I do.

8. My Bounce-Back Ball

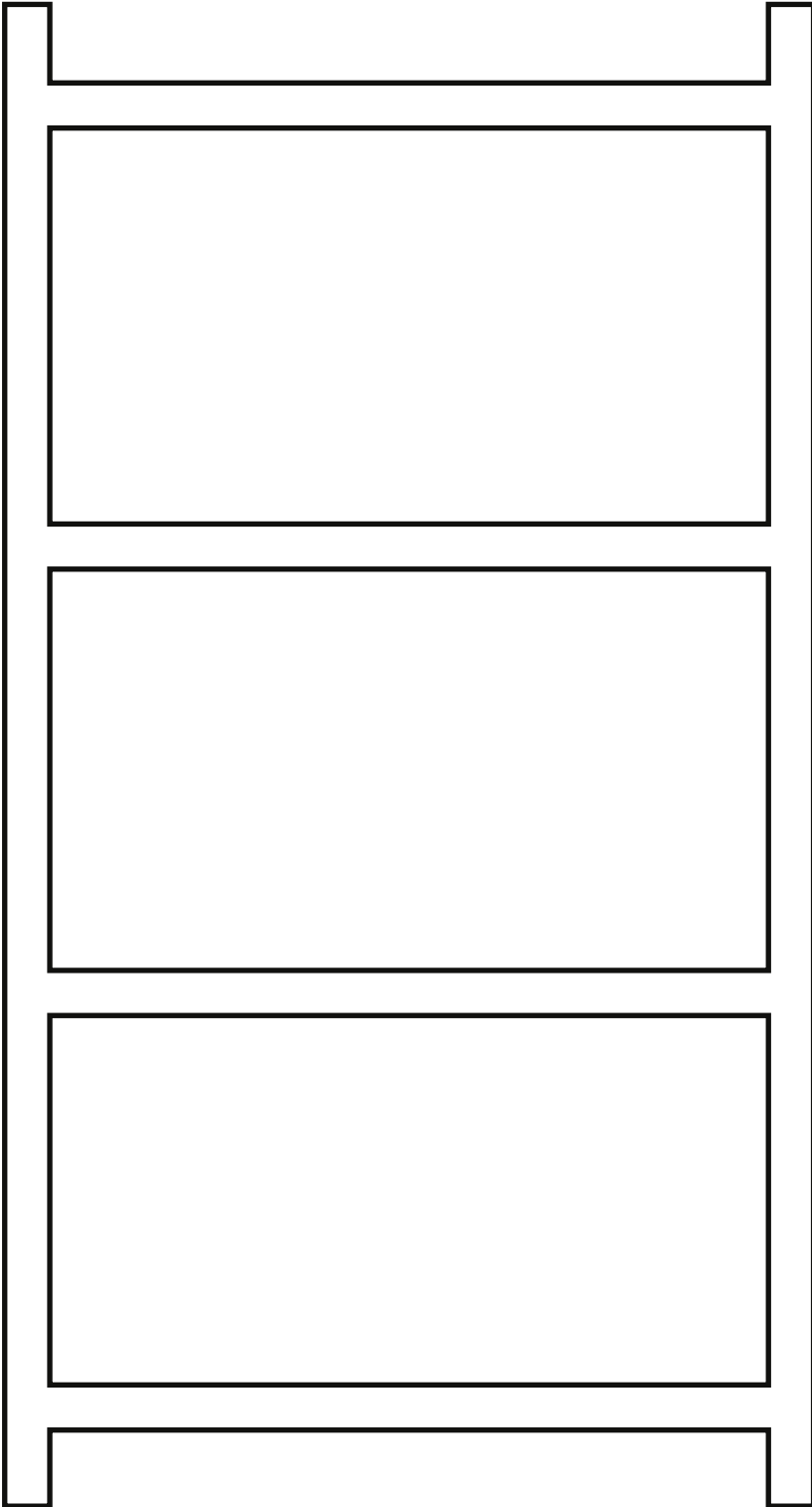
Write your favourite positive thoughts in your Bounce-Back Ball. Choose some from the list below, or write your own! When you are finished, colour in or decorate your Bounce-Back Ball.



- I can have fun even if I don't win.
- If I practice, I can do hard things.
- I did my best, and that's what matters.
- I can always try again.
- Winning isn't everything.
- I'm proud of myself for trying.
- No-one wins every time.
- Win or lose, I am always me!

9. Bounce-Back Steps

Write or draw some of your favourite Bounce-Back Steps in the ladder!
You can choose from the steps below, or include your own.



Take three deep breaths

Count to 10

Colour in a picture

Play a game

Talk to a friend

Read a book

Ask for help

Sing a song

Imagine my favourite place

Dance around!

Play with my pet

Do a puzzle

Ask for a hug

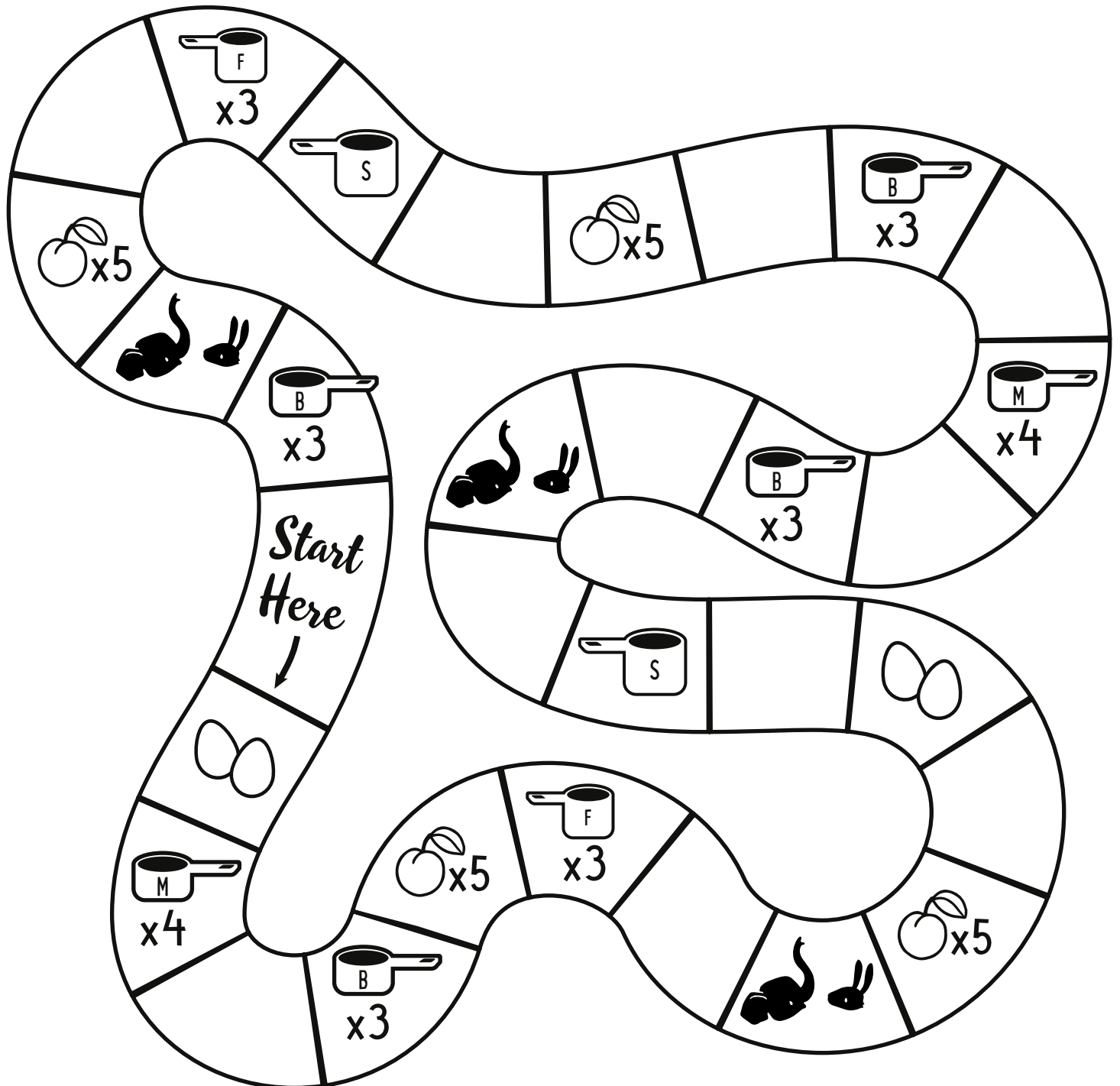
Look at pictures I love

Think of 3 things that make
me happy

10. Mini's Plum Pie Challenge

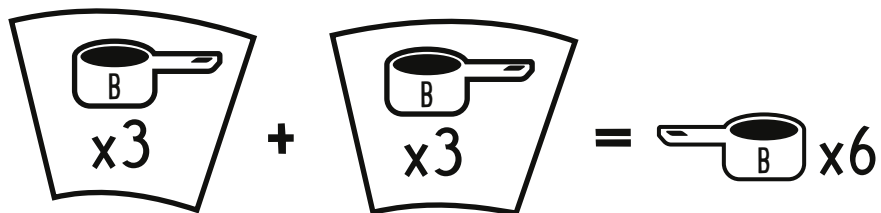
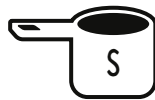
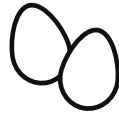
Can you collect all the ingredients needed to bake Mini's famous plum pie?

Roll your dice to move around the board. When you land on a square with ingredients, add them to your tally sheet. If you land on a square with a picture of Mini and Milo, collect ANY ingredient you still need.



Mini's Plum Pie Challenge Tally Sheet

Can you collect all the ingredients needed to bake Mini's famous plum pie?
Circle each ingredient as you collect it.





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