

It takes just one kind act to change someone's world.

small ACTS

Kate GORDON Kate FOSTER



TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Romi Sharp

WALKER BOOKS



SMALL ACTS
CREATORS: KATE FOSTER & KATE GORDON
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About the Book

From acclaimed authors Kate Foster and Kate Gordon, a special story about being kind to others... and yourself.

There are people everywhere who need help, who might seem okay on the outside but aren't on the inside.

People whose entire day can be changed ...

Josh wants a friend but can't find anywhere he belongs ...

Ollie wants to express herself but doesn't want to be noticed ...

Small Acts introduces two kids with great hearts who know that helping others can start with one small act of kindness. Josh has a plan to start with just that. So does Ollie. What Josh and Ollie don't know yet is that they need each other to make their plans work.

About the Authors

Kate Foster is a children's author writing about friends, family, and dogs. Originally from a small town in the south east of England, she now lives on the stunning Gold Coast in Australia with her family and second-hand dogs. She is passionate about encouraging and teaching a wider understanding of autism and mental illness via positive approach and representation.

Kate Gordon grew up in a very bookish house, in a small town by the sea in Tasmania. After studying performing arts and realising she was a terrible actor, Kate decided to become a librarian. She never stopped writing and, in 2009, she applied for and won a Varuna fellowship, which led to all sorts of lovely writer things happening. Kate's first book, *Three Things About Daisy Blue*, was published in 2010. Her most recent publications are the middle-grade novels in the "Direleaf Hall" series, and *Aster's Good, Right Things*, which won the CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers.

About the Teacher Notes Author

Romi Sharp is a qualified Early Childhood and Primary School educator based in Melbourne, with a passion for art and children's literature. She currently works as a freelance publicist and digital marketer, copywriter, curriculum writer, video animator, book reviewer and picture book writer. Romi is the founder and director of the Australian support community for children's authors and illustrators, Just Write For Kids (est. 2014) and its subsidiary promotional service, Books On Tour PR & Marketing.

Curriculum Links

English (Language; Literature and Literacy) • The Arts (Visual Arts) •
Science (Biology) • Health and Physical Education • Humanities and
Social Sciences (Civics and Citizenship)

Themes

Neurodiversity • Kindness • Finding your place & people •
Emotions/feelings • Friendship

Teacher Notes

Before Reading

Ask students to discuss:

- How can one act of kindness change someone's world?
- What makes a good friend?
- Look at the cover of *Small Acts*. What do you notice about the items? What do you notice about the characters? How do you think they are feeling?
- What connections can you make with the title, cover image and reference to 'acts of kindness'?
- How does the cover make you feel? What might this story might be about? What do you wonder?
- Read the blurb.
Discuss.
- Watch the video about the Science of Kindness (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9UByLyOjBM>). Discuss the benefits and give some examples of being kind to others.

During/After Reading

Setting the scene

- How do the opening lines of each chapter set the scene? How does the format give the reader context in relation to the character and setting?
- Do each chapter's opening lines hook you in?
- Do each chapter's closing lines entice you to turn the page / want to know more?
- What do the authors intend for readers to think about?
- How do the introductions of the characters make you feel?

Neurodiversity

"Mr Parham was new to the school this year, but apparently, he's taught autistic children at his previous school, so he had experience and knowledge of things to help Josh most days." (p.5)

Discuss some of the ways Mr Parham understands what Josh (and Ollie) needs. How does he ensure Josh isn't overwhelmed by noise and crowds, and that expectations and routines are managed accordingly?

"Knowing spag bol was for dinner made him feel a bit better. It was his Friday treat!" (p.15)

"One of his coping techniques, when his emotions gathered like a swarm of bees and stung his brain, was to write." (p.16)

"Josh breathed in and out and tried to put clean images into his mind." (p.18)

Discuss some of the strategies used by the characters that help them with their challenges with their specific neurodiversity.

"There is a misconception that autistic people lack empathy." (p.27)

"That was another autism stereotype that didn't fit her properly. She was completely disorganised. She hated lists." (p.57)

Discuss and write down some commonly perceived ideas about autistic people. Can these ideas be challenged? Does this mean that neurotypical people can't share similar traits (and vice versa)? What does this tell you about face value?

"Ollie didn't like it – these two worlds, colliding. She didn't like it all." (p.73)

How does Ollie, in her mind, categorise where people and things belong? Why is she struggling with the fact that she is supposed to help Josh at school, with clubs, not with being kind in the park? Discuss the different ways that people think about their worlds. How might you react with things that are unexpected?

Kindness

"There were so many amazing humans making big differences every single day." "He was kind, wasn't he?" (p.2)

- In what ways can people be kind and make a difference to someone's world? Does an act of kindness always need to be something difficult/expensive/generous/time-consuming?
- How does Josh put pressure on himself in the beginning to make a grand gesture? What did he work out was the best way to be kind in the end?

- How do Josh's parents help him understand how small gestures can help someone? (Chapter 3)
- What does Ollie enjoy doing for people as 'acts of kindness'? How does it make her feel? (Chapter 4)
- Discuss the concept; our 'true meaning' in life is kindness. (p.60)
- In Chapter 13, Mr Parham explains to Josh that his kindness towards Ollie may have been received differently to how he was expecting. What kind acts did Josh do, what was he expecting would happen, and how were these 'paid forward' by Ollie? How is kindness 'contagious'?
- In Chapter 14, Ollie's mind is "*buzzing, beeping, whirring, whizzing, too fast, too fast, too fast.*" (p.95). How does Ollie feel about the acts of kindness from Josh? Name some emotions she may be feeling (e.g. confused, overwhelmed, undeserving). Discuss the disparity between the two perspectives.
- How does Ollie view and accept 'kindness' in the end?

Finding your place and people

"He wouldn't talk about the art to anyone else though... he'd learned not to keep doing it. Judging stares like that sent his tummy into a surging tsunami." (p.31)

- Josh has learned strategies to help him cope in social situations. Discuss Josh's feelings in this scenario, and how this has impacted on his physical, emotional and social wellbeing.
- What significant moment happened for Josh, Ollie and Andrew on the art gallery excursion? Why was it the best day of Josh's life?

"I saw my therapist and she's diagnosed me as autistic." (p.214)

Andrew explains his diagnosis as autistic, and how he and Josh and Ollie are similar in some ways but different in other ways. Discuss how 'finding your tribe' doesn't necessarily mean everything about the people in the group is the same.

Emotions/feelings

Ollie preferred the name Minerva because "*It sounded like someone who was too great and powerful and fully themselves to be boy or girl. Someone who was infinite.*" (p.10)

- Discuss how Ollie feels about herself as a 'girl'.
- What has been the impact of her emotional journey to accept her whole self?

In Chapter 7, Josh's notebook is returned to him, and he decides that Ollie is the person he was meant to help.

- How do you think both of these realisations have made him feel?
- Write down some describing verbs and adjectives about his feelings.

How are the 'heavy cloaks' of sadness and longing (p.56) that Ollie sees making her feel? Why has she taken on these responsibilities? What is she struggling with?

"He felt very messy on the inside and his skin prickled and his head throbbed. His hands were squeezed tight into fists." (p.65)

- Explain the types of emotions that this phrase conjures in your mind. Draw a labelled diagram of the physical feelings on a body outline. Add your own physical feelings (knot in your tummy, shaky knees, etc.) when you feel anxious or worried.

Ollie describes the day when Millie ended their friendship as the worst day of her life, as it broke her heart and her brain (p.155).

- What kind of impact has Millie's actions, then and throughout the story, had on Ollie? Can you relate? What other life events might also have the same kind of emotional impact? (E.g. loss, death, other trauma)

In Chapter 35, Josh has an emotion he can't explain. It says, "*he wanted to run inside the classroom and tell Ollie that she was amazing and brilliant and brave and courageous... having her as his friend was one of the best moments of his life ever.*" (p.224) What emotion do you think he means?

Friendship

“*And Ollie didn’t do ‘friends’*” (p.11) What are the expectations with ‘friendship’ that might seem overwhelming for some people?

In Chapter 4, Ollie’s sister Beth talks about her friend Jaz wearing ‘culturally inappropriate’ clothing (p.24), and everyone was talking behind her back about it. What do you think of Ollie’s response, and what behaviours show friendship and kindness in this situation (or lack thereof)? What is better – the truth or sparing someone’s feelings?

In Chapter 6, we learn about why Millie dislikes Ollie. Would you classify Millie as a bully? Why or why not? What are common bullying behaviours? What could Millie do differently to be more friendly and empathetic to Ollie? Could Ollie do anything differently? Discuss how Millie’s behaviour changed throughout the story.

How does Ollie’s relationship with Josh change throughout the story? Do you think she only initially wanted to complete her ‘kind acts’ mission or did she actually want a friend all along?

How did Josh show friendship and kindness to Ollie in Chapter 23? How would you describe his actions when speaking to Millie? What do you think of Ollie’s reaction to this?

How does Ollie become friends with Andrew, and why? What do you think of the relationship between Andrew and Josh? Do they understand each other, or is it complicated/confusing? Why do you think Andrew didn’t tell Josh about what happened to him? How did things change after he told Josh and Ollie about the bullying and helping people in the homeless shelter?

In Chapter 28, Ollie explains the story of what happened between her and Millie. Why was Millie so unkind? How does this scenario make you feel? Later, Millie apologises to Ollie. What are your thoughts on forgiveness?

Character Development

Make a list of adjectives and phrases that describe the characters, Josh, Ollie and Andrew. What are their interests, likes, dislikes, appearances, how they think about themselves, what others think of them, and so on.

How have Josh and Ollie changed from the beginning of the story to the end? How does art help Ollie manage the pressures of what she is ‘supposed’ to be? Does her view of her own character change? What kinds of things would you tell Ollie when she is doubting herself? What strategies can you think of to help overcome this feeling?

In Chapter 34, Ollie has a revelation: “*Maybe she really did need to start being kind to herself, just a little bit. And maybe, just sometimes, she could let other people be kind to her, too.*” (p.219) Discuss Ollie’s character development, and how she realises that kindness is not only about doing kind things for other people.

Vocabulary

‘charities’, ‘tense’, ‘grinding’, ‘gritted’, ‘furiously’, ‘passionate’, ‘artistic’, ‘meltdowns’, ‘superpower’, ‘expected’, ‘contagious’, ‘vigorously’, ‘tingles’, ‘anxious’, ‘frighteningly’, ‘stimming’, ‘friendship’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘rampaging’

Use the terms from the text (and your own) to:

- Write the definitions and use them in sentences or short stories.
- Sort and categorise them into nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives.
- Find and write synonyms and antonyms of particular terms.
- Find and write rhyming words, then use them in a poem.
- Find spelling patterns with common digraphs and trigraphs, such as ‘gh’ or ‘ous’. Make lists of more words with similar phonemes.
- Find compound words and write their equations. E.g. ‘super’ + ‘power’ = ‘superpower’.

Literary Devices

Similes

“*His arms and hands and legs were numb, and he felt like a stick insect on a branch, not moving, mimicking its surroundings.*” (p.3)

“*... like a swarm of bees and stung his brain...*” (p.16)
“*Josh’s mind and heart felt light, as light as a mosquito buzzing in the air.*” (p.19)

“*He gritted his teeth, as excited as a tiny fluffy penguin swimming back and forth in icy water.*” (p.33)

“He was as sure as a green jumping spider leaping on to its prey.” (p.99)

“His heart hammered like a woodpecker’s beak.” (p.128)

“He couldn’t stop the new burning inside his belly, like fierce hot lava busting from a volcano. A club!” (p.159)

“But she was as still as a terrified possum.” (p.204)

“As cool as a refreshing breeze on a super hot summer’s day.” (p.216)

“Josh’s heart pounded, his nails dug into his thighs, and thoughts raced through his brain like a flock of emus speeding through the desert.” (p.221)

A simile is a figure of speech comparing one thing with another of a different kind, using words such as ‘like’, ‘so’, ‘as’ than’.

Thinking about one of the above similes (e.g. ‘he felt like a stick insect on a branch’), write your own simile to show how Josh (or another character) felt in that moment or scenario. Other similes for the above example might include, ‘as trapped as a bird in a cage’, ‘like being stuck between a rock and a hard place’, ‘more numb than cold feet’, and so on.

- Choose a simile to expand/innovate and illustrate your sentence.
- Compare the similes above for their similarities and differences. List the emotions associated with each. Which ones are negative feelings and which ones are positive?
- Find more similes in the text.
- Discuss why you think the authors have used so many similes for this story.

Metaphors/Analogies:

“Poetry happened, for her, in silence. It was the plant that grew inside her when the silence gave it space to grow. Noise was like concrete, to Ollie, trapping everything inside.” (p.23)

“It was a cloak on top of her” “Everywhere, there was hurt and sadness and longing and Ollie was just covered up in these heavy cloaks.” (p.56)

“His tummy was more settled than it was earlier, but it still felt like there were hundreds of cockroaches and spiders crawling about inside.” (p.128)

A metaphor or analogy is a figure of speech to represent an object or action symbolic of something else.

In the first example, Ollie describes how her poetry is a flourishing plant when it’s given space to grow in silence, however this is not literally the case. Here, growth and hindrance are representing silence and noise, respectively.

Write another metaphor or analogy to describe one of the examples above. Be creative!

Visual Literacy / Show Don’t Tell:

“Mrs Mayhew said in a voice that sliced into Josh’s ears and brain... His hands were shaking a little. His cheeks and ears burned and his eyes were watery...” (p.47)

“The excitement bubble exploded into a magnificent monsoon of colourful raindrops fizzing under Josh’s skin, and his mind conjured up images of what kinds of paintings and photos there would be in Rainforest Rescue.” (p.63)

How does the language used ‘show’ the reader how the character is feeling or create a visual image in your mind, rather than simply ‘telling’ us what it is? What words show how Josh is feeling when he hears Mrs Mayhew’s voice? How is this more effective than writing, ‘Josh didn’t like her voice’?

Write your own sentence ‘showing’ a character feeling anxious, excited, sad, or another emotion.

Idioms:

“I’ll share the refreshments out and we can get this party started.” (p.169)

- Discuss the meaning behind, ‘get this party started’. (To begin doing fun or entertaining things).
- Andrew is referring to the starting of their first Kindness Club meeting, and Josh reminds him that it’s not a party. What does this tell you about Josh? (It is common for autistic people to take things literally).

“On the inside, she was dancing like nobody was watching...” (p.239)

Discuss the meaning behind the phrase, ‘dance like nobody’s watching’. (To act or behave in a free-spirited or genuine manner).

An idiom is a phrase or expression that usually presents a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase.

- What are some examples of common idioms you know?
- Brainstorm other idioms that could relate to the above examples. For example, idioms for the feeling of ‘freedom’ could be, ‘free as a bird’, ‘spread one’s wings’, ‘on the loose’, ‘a free spirit’, and so on.

Writing Style / Structure Format

Various formatting styles are used throughout the book, including lists and notes, chapter headings for each character and day, and alternating chapters between characters.

- How do you think these techniques reflect the needs/interests of the characters in the book?
- How do these techniques help readers with understanding context, as well as engaging them in reading?

Further Discussion Questions

- Where is the story’s setting? (Which city? What other locations?)
- What are the main themes of the story? What important messages do the authors intend to portray?
- What did you learn about Josh, Ollie and Andrew? What did you learn about people on the autism spectrum?
- What are the most important things that Josh and Ollie have learned about themselves? (To be themselves, to be kind, they are good friends to others, they are capable of anything, they are brave, they are enough). Do you think these will help them in the future?

- Why did Josh and Ollie choose to show kindness to others, and start the Kindness Club? What significant moments in the story helped them with their mission? (The kindness video, observing each other, the art gallery excursion, Andrew’s return).
- Re-read the final two pages and discuss the ‘life lessons’ from Ollie, and how she interprets ‘kindness’ in her poem.
- What did you learn about the way people with autism want to be treated?
- What did you learn about their coping mechanisms in times of stress? Are you now more aware of strategies that could help someone you know, or yourself?
- Who were the bullies in the story, what challenges did they create for others, and how did they change by the end of the story?
- Discuss the ways and provide examples of how the different characters in the story showed the following values and traits: friendship, bravery, confidence, self-belief, understanding, kindness, humour, problem-solving, forgiveness.
- What is the importance of The Arts? Why was it so important for the friends to be able to express their thoughts and feelings through art, photography and graphic design? What is your preferred visual art activity? Why?
- How do you think the authors have used language and text format to appeal to a range of readers, including autistic children? Think about the literary devices, layouts, usage of chosen font types, kind of vocabulary used, and so on.
- Did you find the dialogue between the characters realistic? Why or why not?
- What aspects of the story did you find the most insightful, inspiring or interesting? Why?
- Do you have a favourite scene from the story? Why this one?
- What do you think will happen after this story ends? Do you think the friends will continue the Kindness Club, or start another club? What might they do next time?

Characters

- Josh
- Ollie
- Andrew
- Mr Parham
- Josh's parents
- Ollie's parents
- Ollie's sister, Beth
- Ollie's aunty, Olive
- Millie Mercado
- Other supporting characters

Who is your favourite character? Why?

Who is your least favourite character? Why?

Character Analysis

Use the following acronym (STEAL) to identify features of one of the characters from *Small Acts*. Find parts of the text to show the way they Speak, Think, Effect on others, Act and Look.

- **Speech** – what does the character say? How do they speak?
 - **Thought** – what are the character's thoughts and feelings?
 - **Effect on others** – how do people react to the character?
 - **Actions** – what does the character do?
 - **Looks** – what does the character look like?
1. Choose a character to create a character profile page, including a name, picture, adjectives / descriptive language to describe their appearance, personality traits, interests, dislikes, and so on.
 2. Use the STEAL method to develop your own character when writing a narrative.

Activity Ideas

English

Creative Writing:

- Create your own Small Acts of Kindness list or chart, with the headings, 'WHO' and 'HOW'. Decide who you might like to assist with an act of kindness, and how you will go about it. (Ideas on pages 189 – 190).
- Create your own Sports Club, Kindness Club or School Activities list with pros and cons. Write down the benefits and disadvantages to trying a new activity.

Structural Writing:

- Write an information report or chart about your favourite creature. One of Josh's favourites is a 'glorious, speedy gecko'. Include adjectives, fun facts and pictures of your chosen creature. (See Science links below).
- Write a letter to a new friend, introducing yourself and naming/listing your interests or things you might have in common. Be sure to write something kind! Will it be formal or casual? Use the correct letter formatting.
- Write a poem about 'friends'. This could represent your friends, or it could be a poem about friendship. Decide on a style of poem; Haiku, Acrostic, Rhyming, Free Verse, Limerick, Ode, etc. Illustrate and share.

The Arts: Visual Art

- Visit an art gallery on an excursion. Observe and interpret different artists, styles of art, techniques, subjects and genres. Draw sketches of those pieces that resonate.
- Create a piece of art using natural materials, such as sticks and leaves, stones, paper, and other decorative items. Will it be a picture or a sculpture? Write a poem to 'make it a melody' of words and pictures. Will it be gifted as an act of kindness? Assess students' design and techniques in creating their art.
- Paint kind words, phrases or pictures onto rocks using acrylic paint or paint pens. Display or hand them out to your friends, or keep one as a self-regulation tool.
- Take photographs of your favourite things in nature or pieces of art. How can you experiment with lighting, angles, distance, orientation, etc? Present your work in a portfolio, gallery or slideshow (printed or digital).
- Contribute to a class gallery of art, sculpture, photography and nature. Invite other students, teachers and parents to attend your exhibition.
- Make origami paper art for friends, like flowers or hearts. Find instructions for a simple lotus flower here: How to Make a Simple Origami Lotus Flower: 14 Steps (<https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Simple-Origami-Lotus-Flower>)

Science

Rainforest Rescue

Students research and write / draw about their favourite creature that they can photograph themselves. Find out about its characteristics, special abilities, habitat, food, breeding, and so on.

Students can:

- Write and complete a detailed diagram about the animal's life cycle.
- Research and write a report / chart / slideshow all about their chosen animal, including interesting facts and information and their own photos and pictures.
- Make a 3D sculpture of their animal using natural materials.
- Find out conservation methods to ensure the survival of their animal.
- Share their findings and encourage sustainability practices amongst the community.

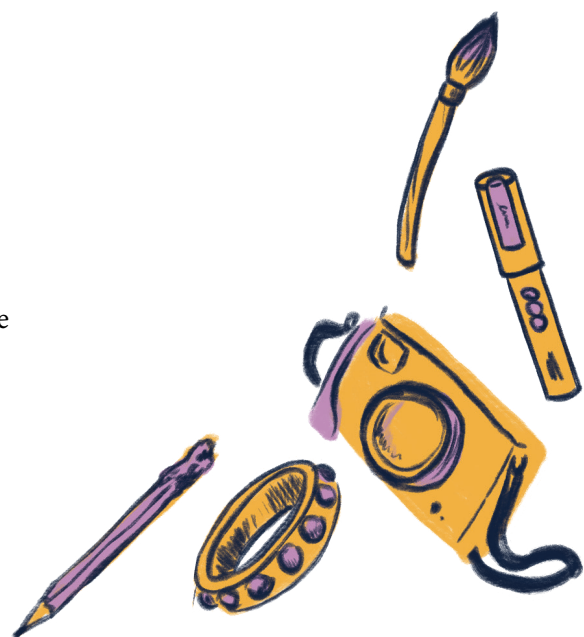
Health and Physical Education

Students explore a range of sporting and game skills by practicing equality, healthy mindset, effective coping strategies, physical skill and safety, and positive relationships with diverse people.

- Participate in a sports or activity club that you enjoy.
- Practice mindful breathing with slow, deep breaths, focusing on your heartbeat, smells and feels in the air. Fill your body and soul. Let yourself smile.
- Write a poem about or list calming techniques.
- Start your own Kindness Club! Make a list of ways to show kindness, as well as some general rules, for participants to get involved. Design a poster!
- Hide and display little notes of kindness, positive mantras or inspirational quotes around your classroom for everyone to read.

Humanities and Social Sciences

Research the needs of people and animals in your local community, such as visiting a homeless shelter or dog rescue centre. Brainstorm and list ways you can offer acts of kindness. Create posters and/or online adverts to invite others to help. How will the students work in groups to make a difference, no matter how small?





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