



JEMIMA  
SMALL  
Versus

THE UNIVERSE

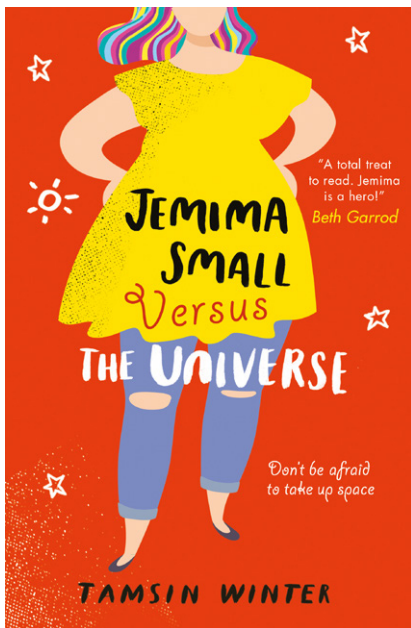
TEACHING NOTES  
For KS3 Teachers



TAMSIN WINTER



# ABOUT THE BOOK



Jemima Small is funny and super smart. She knows a lot of things. Like the fact that she's made of 206 bones, over 600 muscles and trillions of cells. What she doesn't know is how that can be true and yet she can still feel like nothing... or how being made to join the school's "special" healthy lifestyle group - A.K.A Fat Club - could feel any less special, and make her question her dream of applying for her favourite TV quiz show. But she also knows that the biggest stars in the universe are the brightest. And maybe it's her time to shine...

A brilliantly funny and touching new novel exploring bullying, body confidence and, most importantly, learning how to be happy with who you are.

Tamsin Winter first came up with the idea for writing *Jemima Small Versus the Universe* after reading a newspaper article. It was about an eleven-year-old girl receiving a letter from her school telling her she was overweight. The entire article was about the mother's reaction – how outraged she was about the school sending her daughter a letter like this – but nothing about how the girl was feeling.

Tamsin describes what she thought about as she looked at the photograph of that girl in the newspaper: "I wondered what she was feeling. I thought about how receiving a letter like that would have affected me at her age, when I was already self-conscious and insecure and my body was changing in so many ways. Jemima's story came from that. We are bombarded with messages from the media telling us how our bodies could be improved, yet our lives would improve dramatically if we weren't judged for the way we look."

*Jemima Small Versus the Universe* is an empowering story that Tamsin Winter hopes will encourage readers to look in the mirror and appreciate all the qualities they share with the stars.



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tamsin Winter grew up in a tiny village in the Northamptonshire countryside. She spent her childhood reading books and writing stories, mostly about cats (she loves cats so much that they always appear in her books). She has a degree in English literature and creative writing, and has been teaching, travelling the world and daydreaming for most of her adult life. Her first book, *Being Miss Nobody*, about a girl with selective mutism, won multiple awards and was nominated for the 2018 Carnegie Medal. Tamsin is passionate about writing stories that she hopes can make a difference to readers' lives.

*"More than anything, I hope my stories teach young people to believe in themselves. Because that's what makes magical things happen."*



Visit Tamsin's website to find out more:  
[tamsinwinter.com](http://tamsinwinter.com)



The following teaching notes are aimed at students in Key Stage 3.

Each section covers a range of skills and has been designed with the English curriculum in mind. These notes include:



*Reading activities*



*Writing activities*



*Speaking and listening activities*

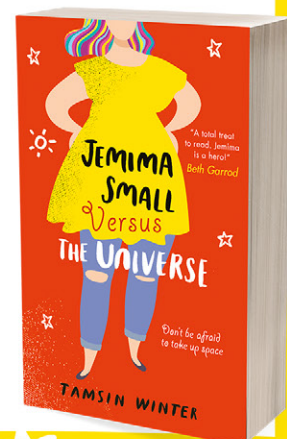


*Research activities (which could be completed at home)*



*Special Brainiac activities - designed to stretch and challenge your students*

They also include cross-curricular links to science and technology, maths, history, citizenship and PSHE.



# CHAPTER 1



## Reading and discussion activities

1. Discuss students' first impressions of: Jemima, Dad, Jasper and Nana in pairs or small groups. Encourage them to use evidence from the chapter to support their opinions.
2. Ask students to find evidence which shows Jemima feels uncomfortable in her own skin because of what happens in the Dolphin Bay Beachwear shop. Discuss how this and the name-calling on the Plank affect her.
3. *"I could feel their disapproval surrounding me, like water vapour condensing into tiny droplets and forming a fog"* (page 13) Ask students to explain what this simile suggests about how Jemima feels.
4. Ask students to find evidence from pages 14-16 which shows the "grotesque" comment has a long-term effect on Jemima. Discuss short and long term effects of bullying and body shaming. You may wish to read Tamsin's response to the third question in the interview with her at the back of the book where she discusses her personal experience of body shaming and disordered eating.
5. Ask students to summarise the chapter in 100 words or fewer. Then to summarise it in ten words, then just one. Each student then shares their choice of word with the class and explains their choice.

## Writing activity

Students write a description of a day at the beach using the zooming in and out technique. For example, they might begin with describing the sky, the cliffs, and ships on the horizon then slowly "zoom in" to the intricate patterns and textures of a shell lying on the sand. They should aim to use all of the five senses in their descriptions. Showing a picture of a pebble beach and zooming in on objects in the picture might help students to understand and use this writing technique if it's new to them.



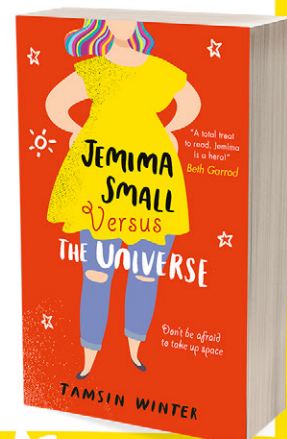
## Research activities

- Who was Isaac Newton and did he really discover gravity just from watching an apple fall from a tree?
- What happened on the ill-fated Apollo 13 space mission?

## Brainiac activity

Can anyone in your class do long multiplication in their head? Jemima got the answer to  $391 \times 39$  wrong, but can anyone in the class get it right in three minutes?

ANSWER = 15,249. You may wish to share with students that Tamsin, unlike Jemima, is not particularly gifted at maths and had to recruit the help of a maths teacher for most of the sums in the book and could definitely never do long multiplication in her head!





# CHAPTERS 2-5



## Reading activities

1. Students should imagine they are Miki, Jemima's best friend. Write a witness statement about what happened in the science lesson and how the beakers got broken. They should stick to the facts as described in the book, but they may wish to consider how Miki might describe the incident in order to protect Jemima. Would he also claim it was an accident?
2. Discuss students' first impressions of Mrs Savage. Do they agree with Jemima that her name suits her?
3. MINI ESSAY using POINT-EVIDENCE-EXPLAIN: How does the writer create sympathy for Jemima at the end of Chapter 5 (pages 50-51)?

## Writing activities

1. On page 34 Jemima states: *"Best friends have this sort of weird super power. They can see what's happening inside your heart. Like an electrocardiogram."* Get students to write some similes of their own to capture what it means to be a best friend. They can illustrate them too!
2. Write Jemima's apology letter to Mr Shaw. Students may wish to consider how Jemima may make this letter a small act of rebellion in itself. Perhaps she would employ some subtle sarcasm. And of course she would use lots of long words!

## Speaking and listening activities

- Class or paired discussion: Was Jemima wrong to smash the beakers? If you were the headteacher, Mrs Savage, would you give Jemima a punishment? If so, what? If not, why not? Explain your reasons.
- Dramatise the scene with Mrs Savage to show different interpretations of her character. Students could include monologues/duologues to reveal what Mrs Savage and/or Jemima are really thinking.

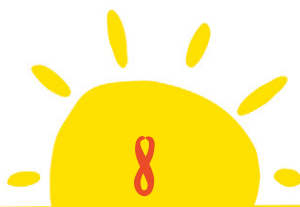
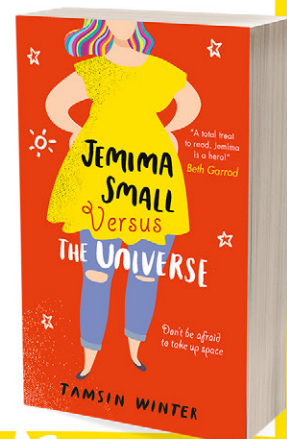


## Research activity

On page 20 Jemima claims that dyeing her hair is a human rights issue. What is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child? Find out about this international document and choose 5 or 6 children's rights that you think are the most important for students at school to be aware of and create a poster.

## Brainiac activities

1. On page 40, Jemima states that: *"weight is partly gravity. And if I lived on the moon, I'd hardly weigh anything at all."* Find out how much a 10kg bag of sand would weigh on the moon, and then on the other planets in our solar system.
2. On page 44, Jemima describes a planet called HD 189733 b as *"the most inhospitable planet in the universe"*. Re-read her description of it and find out more about what it is like on this planet. Imagine you are in a special space vehicle exploring this or a different inhospitable planet. Write a report describing what the extreme conditions are like.





# CHAPTERS 6-10



## Reading activities

Students sketch a picture of Auntie Luna as she is described by Jemima in Chapter 9. They should surround their sketches with short quotations to support what they have drawn, and underneath, write their impressions of her character and what she means to Jemima.

## Writing activities

Students write Jemima's diary at the end of Chapter 10. They should include her feelings and concerns about "Fat Club" as well as how she feels about herself and her relationships.

## Research activity

What is so special about the Himalayas? Students could find some interesting facts and pictures to share with the class. Students could read an extract from *Running on the Roof of the World* by Jess Butterworth, which is set in the Himalayan landscape.

## Brainiac activities

A twelve-sided shape is called a dodecagon. Students could find out the names for shapes with 11-20 sides and see if they can find ways to remember how to spell them all.



# CHAPTERS 11-13



## Reading activities

Students should re-read pages 85-87 when Jemima discovers the box belonging to her mother:

1. How does Jemima feel at this point?
2. Which descriptive techniques do you find particularly effective in conveying Jemima's feelings in this section? You may wish to comment on individual words and phrases, language techniques like similes, and/or sentence forms like short/minor sentences.

## Writing activity

Students should imagine they are Mr Nelson or one of Jemima's friends. Write a one-minute speech persuading Jemima to take the *Brainiacs* test. Students should try to use all of the AFORESTRY techniques (Alliteration, Facts, Opinions, Rhetorical Questions, Emotive Language, Statistics, Triples, Repetition, You - Pronouns) in order to create a convincing argument.

## Speaking and listening activity

What makes a powerful speech? Watch and read some examples here:

<https://www.englishtrackers.com/english-blog/10-famous-speeches-in-english-and-what-you-can-learn-from-them>

Students could then practise and perform their own persuasive speeches on a topic of their own choice, using all the AFORESTRY techniques and aiming to speak confidently. If students are not able to speak in front of the class, perhaps they could record their speech at home. Topics can be of a serious nature like body confidence or bullying or something important to them, or they may wish to choose something more light-hearted.



# CHAPTERS 14-19



## Reading activities

1. On page 107 Jemima states: "My dad could actually be okay sometimes." Create a character profile of Jemima's dad. Include a sketch of him as he's described in the book. Include key quotes as well as your own opinion of him and how he responds to Jemima.
2. What do you think of Gina Grantley-Bond? What do you think she means by the "GGB effect"?
3. Students should imagine they are Gina. Write a short monologue which explains a little about her past and the aims of her healthy lifestyle class.

## Writing activity

YOU WILL NEED: a large jar. In Chapter 16, Luna predicts Jemima's future. Students should write their own predictions about what will happen next – at "Fat Club", with *Brainiacs*, with Jemima's confidence and something else they think will happen. Students should write these on paper with their names on and put them into a jar. Then seal up the jar and open it again once you have read the entire novel to see how accurate they were.

## Speaking and listening activity

On page 134 Jemima says she discovered last year that people are not interested in the history of quinoa. In pairs, create an extraordinarily interesting three minute presentation about something people usually find very boring or mundane or uninteresting. The challenge is to make the class find it interesting! Some time will be needed for research. Ideas for topics: tarmac, paper, doors, lightbulbs, chairs, toast, queues, washing up, etc.



## Research activity

Jemima's Great-Great Auntie Lilian was famous for her fortune-telling beard. Find out about someone unconventional from history or somebody who is still alive today whose story is inspiring.

## Brainiac activity

Play a game of Countdown – choose nine random letters and see how many words/the longest word students can make. You can even do the maths round! Students can work in pairs or individually. The famous Countdown clock is here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeotZyzm2us>



# CHAPTERS 20-24



## Reading and discussion activity

How does Jemima feel at the end of Chapter 24? Has writing down the negative words and destroying them helped her? Does she see herself differently?

## Writing activity

Students should write a description of exploring a crystal cave or walking around an enormous lake. They should use lots of sensory and figurative language so their reader feels as though they are there.

## Speaking and listening activity

Try a class meditation! There are lots of guided meditations on YouTube, or you may wish to do something like Gina in Chapter 20. Insist that students are quiet, allow them some time to get comfortable and encourage them to close their eyes. Reassure them that the idea is for them to completely relax, and that they are safe. Begin by simply listening to their own breath. Then slowly count their breathing in and out to begin the process. Meditation is not easy and it's normal for some students to feel a little uncomfortable, anxious or self-conscious (often shown through giggling or fidgeting) at first. But once they relax into it they will really enjoy it.

## Brainiac activity

On page 182 Jemima says: "*Human evolution has a major design flaw.*" Get students to design something that would improve the human body; it can be as technological as they like, but it must aim to solve a problem that humans face because of our design.





# CHAPTERS 25-29



## Reading activity

**YOU WILL NEED:** a big pile of old magazines and newspapers (we recommend asking students/other teachers to bring these in a couple of weeks in advance to get a big pile) scissors, glue.

Read the extract from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* when Victor Frankenstein brings his monster to life (Chapter 5) available here:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/84/84-h/84-h.htm#chap05>

Discuss Frankenstein's aim (to create a kind of superhuman), how he created it (sewing together stolen body parts) and his reaction to the creature once it wakes (completely horrified).

In Chapter 29 Jemima attempts to create the "perfect girl" by cutting body parts out of a magazine. Using a different picture for each body part, get your students to create the perfect human, just as Jemima (and Frankenstein) attempted to do. This activity works particularly well if you get students to swap magazines/newspapers every time they hear a lightning bolt sound effect (available on YouTube here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SluUq2YOWv4>) every 3 minutes or so. That way they can't simply cut out a whole ready-made body! This is a messy lesson but your students will love it and get so much out of it. Students not only learn about Shelley's *Frankenstein*, you can discuss body image with them, how we are surrounded by "perfect" bodies in the media, and also how sometimes aiming for the "perfect" body creates a monster. The 'monsters' also make a freakishly brilliant display! Tamsin would love to see your creations.

Tweet @MsWinterTweets



## Writing activity

Jemima writes the “*difficult to defeat*” quote from Mr Nelson as though it is a kind of battle cry - to build up her confidence and remind her she is a tough competitor. Get students to write their own name with a Mr Nelson style battle cry underneath. Something to remind them of their importance and self-worth. You could even make a class display of these.

## Speaking and listening activity

Students create a persuasive TV or radio advert for a brand-new magic show coming soon to a venue near you. They can make up their own magician(s) or use The Incredible Illusionist Jasper Diamond and his Tarantula-tastic Sidekick Tornado. They should use as many adjectives and as much alliteration as they can!

## Research activity

Students should create an author profile of Mary Shelley, including how she came up with the idea for the novel *Frankenstein*.

## Brainiac activity

Find out the origin of the word ‘galvanise’, what it means and how it links to the novel *Frankenstein*.



# CHAPTERS 30-33



## Reading activities

1. By the end of Chapter 30, Jemima has come to like and admire Gina. Students should explain how their relationship has changed since the first "Fat Club" in Chapter 18.
2. In Chapter 33, Jasper performs his magic show. What did students find impressive about his performance? What do they think of his character? Is he really as annoying as Jemima makes out?
3. Sketch Jasper performing a magic trick. Add a speech bubble to show what Jasper thinks about it and a thought bubble for what Jemima thinks.

## Writing activity

Create an anti-bullying campaign, you could come up with a name for it such as Bullying Hurts. Students can create posters, include "real-life" stories taken from *Jemima Small Versus the Universe*, write poems or songs. You could encourage them to come up with ideas for reporting different forms of bullying including cyber-bullying.

## Speaking and listening activity

Students dramatise the section of Chapter 31 where Jemima and Miki have their fortune told by Mystic Avani. They can use the book as a script, or go freestyle! Some may even wish to dramatise Luna telling someone's fortune using the tarot cards.

## Research activity

Students should use <https://www.thesaurus.com> to create a "Word Doctor App" page in their book by finding out synonyms for these common adjectives: beautiful, funny, good, interesting, big, small, calm, brave, bad, strong.

## Brainiac activity

On page 255, Jemima wonders how she can know all the incredible facts about her body, but still feel like nothing. Get students to write a poem based on incredible facts about the human body. (They'll need to research these first.) They may wish to call it:

You Are Not Nothing.





# CHAPTERS 34-37



## Reading activities

Students should re-read page 271-272 when Jemima encounters Lottie at the *Brainiacs* competition, then answer:

1. How is Lottie presented at this point in the book?
2. Why do you think Jemima is friendly towards her?
3. How does Jemima feel by the end of the chapter?
4. What does Jemima mean by "channel my inner box jellyfish?"
5. Do you think Jemima has changed since the first chapters of the novel?  
If so, in what ways and why?

## Writing activity

On page 280, Gina's words come back to Jemima: *Hold your head up.*  
Students can write about a time someone gave them confidence in themselves.

## Speaking and listening activity

**CLASS DEBATE:** On page 257 Jemima describes Delta II, a violent video game in her local arcade. Do violent video games encourage young people to act violently? Should they be banned? You may wish to give your class some time to research this topic and prepare their arguments.

## Research activity

Students can find out about the Greek stories behind the words: echo, narcissist, fury, atlas, chronological, hypnosis, iridescent, chaos. They could create a cartoon strip based on their favourite one, showing how the meaning of the word came about.

## Brainiac activity

Hold a class spelling bee using some of the words from the book.



# CHAPTERS 38-42



## Reading activities

On page 282, Jemima describes feeling as though she has wings. Read the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus here:

<https://www.greekmyths-greekmythology.com/myth-of-daedalus-and-icarus/>

Then read the poem Icarus by Wendy A Shaffer, here:

<http://strangehorizons.com/poetry/icarus/>

Students can then create their own poems based on a different Greek myth, or based on Jemima's day at the *Brainiac* competition (which could end with the word aliferous).

Tamsin would love to read your poems! Tweet them to @MsWinterTweets

## Writing activity

Students should write a list of instructions for performing a simple task or magic trick using sequencing connectives, adverbs and adjectives to make them clear to your reader. Try them out in the classroom! If you fancy demonstrating how useful instructions can be, this one works great! (You may need to borrow some tea towels from home/the canteen):

<https://www.instructables.com/id/Make-a-Tea-Towel-Chicken/>

## Speaking and listening activity

Students create and perform a TV advert for Camp Go Wild! They should imagine their target audience is someone like Jemima, who really hates camping and outdoor sports. Can they persuade someone like her to go to Camp Go Wild!? Students could rate each other's adverts out of five based on how entertaining and persuasive they are.

## Brainiac activity

Students should imagine they are aliferous – they have wings. Write a powerful description of taking off, slowly flying above the school, up into the sky, past the clouds and up and up where they touch the boundary between Earth's atmosphere and space. What do they imagine flying might feel like? What would it look and feel like to see and touch where space begins?



# CHAPTERS 43-47



## Reading activities

What do we learn about Gina and what effect does she have on Jemima on pages 314-318?

**ESSAY WRITING PRACTICE:** Gina is fundamental to Jemima gaining confidence at Camp Go Wild! Do you agree? Use evidence/examples from Chapters 40-42 in your response.

## Writing activity

On page 317, Jemima says her team needed someone to make a "big splash". Students write about a time they or someone they know had a positive impact on someone else.

On page 319, Jemima is amazed by the night sky. Look at some of NASA's photographs of our universe. Students should pick one to describe using lots of literary devices. You can search NASA's photographs here:

<https://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/index.html>

## Speaking and listening activity

It only takes a moment to post something online, but its effects can last a lifetime. Group discussion: what are the short and long term effects of cyberbullying?



# CHAPTERS 48-50



## Reading activities

**MINI ESSAY:** How does the writer build tension before filming begins on pages 363 to 365?

## Writing activity

Jemima describes some of the memories she has of her dad that mean a lot to her. Write about a memory (or memories) that is/are "truly extraordinary" to you.

## Speaking and listening activity

**ROLE PLAY:** Dramatise an interview with Jemima or one of the other contestants immediately after the show.

## Research activity

Thalassa was a goddess of the sea who wore robes made of seaweed. Students could research another Greek god or goddess and share their findings with the class. They could even design a suitable costume for them.





# CHAPTER 51



## Reading activities

Students should discuss then answer in their books:

1. Why does coming second feel like the “*biggest thing ever*” to Jemima? Reflect on the rest of her story in your answer.
2. How does Jemima feel at the very end of the book? How has she changed since the opening chapter?
3. Which parts of the book did you enjoy the most?
4. What would you say is the main message of the story?
5. Annotate this picture of Jemima with words you now associate with her character.



## Writing activity

Students write the Clifton Echo newspaper article entitled **JEMIMA SMALL WINS BIG**.

## Brainiac activity

Hold a class *Brainiac*-style competition based on the book. You could split the class into groups and get each group to lead a 10 question round.





# POST-READING ACTIVITIES



- Create a book trailer.
- Write the next chapter or an epilogue for *Jemima Small Versus the Universe*.
- Create a mind map based on one of the themes in the book.
- Create a travel brochure for Clifton-on-Sea.
- Make a comic strip of your favourite scene.
- Write a letter or email to the author. Tamsin always tries her best to respond!
- Write ten chat room style questions to prompt a discussion about the book.
- Write an acrostic poem about the book using the letters from the book's title, or about your favourite character.
- Dramatise an interview with Jemima or one of the other characters from the book.
- Write a three-minute speech based on what you would say to one of the characters if you had the chance.
- Stage an interview with the author.
- Write a book review.
- Write a short story with body confidence or anti-bullying as the main message.



Visit Tamsin's website to find out more:

**[tamsinwinter.com](http://tamsinwinter.com)**

