

44 Tiny Acrobats

Teaching Guide

INTRODUCTION

Suitable for: Children aged five to eight years old in Years One to Three

Based on: The adventures of Betsy and her forty-four mice, following their escape while on a trip to the circus

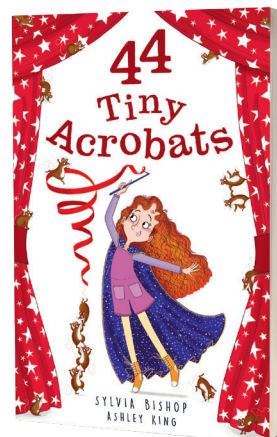
Ideal for: Emerging readers, especially reluctant readers

Includes: Four lessons that build towards children performing their own magic trick

Themes: Circus; Family; Inheritance; Magic; Performance; Greed & Wealth

ABOUT 44 TINY ACROBATS

Join brave and spirited heroine Betsy and her forty-four tiny mice in a thrilling new adventure. When Fry's Circus of Wonders pitches its tent opposite Betsy's house, Betsy feels a strange sense of longing. But Grandad can't even bear to look at it – it stirs up too many painful memories of Grandma's days as a circus performer. As her parents rally round Grandad, Betsy slips away to see the show. But Betsy isn't the only one enjoying the spectacle – her forty-four mice have escaped and seem intent on joining in! As the mice gatecrash the magic act, disaster strikes and Betsy finds herself facing up to the odious ringmaster with a lot of explaining to do... Beautifully illustrated in two-colour, *44 Tiny Acrobats* is the second adventure for Betsy and her forty-four mice, from the acclaimed duo behind *The Bookshop Girl*.



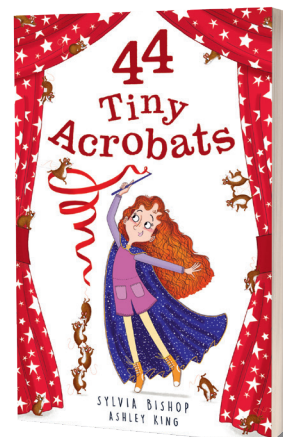
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR – SYLVIA BISHOP

Sylvia Bishop spent an entire childhood reading fiction, dreaming up stories and pretending. Now she writes her stories down, preferably by lamp-light with tea. Her first book, *Erica's Elephant*, was published in 2016. She has since written two further titles for young readers, *The Bookshop Girl* and *A Sea of Stories*, and two middle-grade mysteries, *The Secret of the Night Train* and *Trouble in New York*. Her books have been translated into sixteen languages, including French, Dutch, Russian and Japanese. 2020 saw the launch of *44 Tiny Secrets*, the first title in an exciting new series for young readers from Little Tiger. The next title, *44 Tiny Acrobats*, is due for release in February 2021. Find out more about Sylvia at sylviabishopbooks.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR – ASHLEY KING

Ashley King is a passionate illustrator working in leafy Warwickshire. He has a bachelor's degree with honours in Illustration and Animation. He skilfully hand-draws all his creations with humour and emotion mixed with a digital twist. Ashley is the illustrator of many children's books, including the *Witch for a Week* series by Kaye Umansky and *The Magical Adventures of Whoops the Wonder Dog* by TV chef Glynn Purnell. This is the fourth book Ashley has illustrated for Sylvia and he is over the moon to be working on this new series together. He works from his studio office at home alongside his two cats Dusty and Bo.



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National Curriculum Objectives

ENGLISH

READING: COMPREHENSION

Develop positive attitudes to reading, and an understanding of what they read, by discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination.

Understand both the books that they can already read accurately and fluently and those that they listen to by drawing on what they already know or on background information and vocabulary provided by the teacher.

Understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by:

- identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning
- drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence.

ENGLISH

WRITING: COMPOSITION

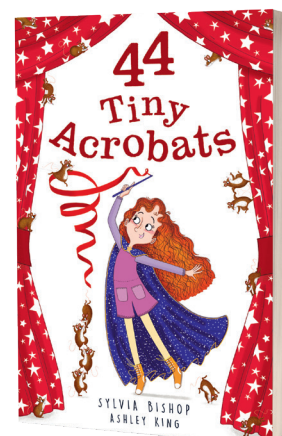
Discuss writing similar to that which they are planning to write in order to understand and learn from its structure, vocabulary and grammar.

Develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by writing narratives about personal experiences and those of others (real and fictional).

HISTORY

Learn about changes within living memory. Where appropriate, these should be used to reveal aspects of change in national life.

Know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day.





SCIENCE

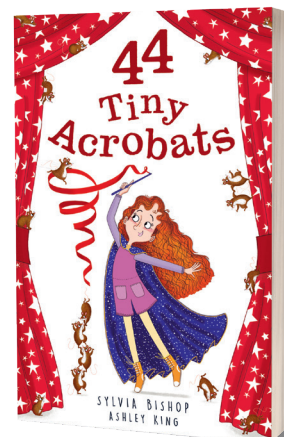
Explore and compare the differences between things that are living, dead, and things that have never been alive.

Recognize that living things produce offspring of the same kind, but normally offspring vary and are not identical to their parents.

PSHE

Deepen their understanding of good and not so good feelings, to extend their vocabulary to enable them to explain both the range and intensity of their feelings to others.

Recognize that they may experience conflicting emotions and when they might need to listen to their emotions or overcome them.



Lesson objectives and outcomes

LESSON ONE: THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN!

Objectives:

- To learn about the history and the origins of the modern circus
- To explore different performance roles in the circus

Outcomes: A class discussion about what the circus is and how the circus has changed over time; completed advertisements to display in the classroom to show the range of roles in a circus and the writing of a persuasive argument against the use of animals in a circus performance after learning more about animal rights.

LESSON TWO: FAMILY IS FOR LIFE

Objectives:

- To celebrate the skills passed on by grandmothers
- To consider that family life can sometimes be difficult

Outcomes: An introduction to family life to allow for greater understanding about the diversity of families; a consideration of how alike we can be to members of our family; and a scientific understanding about the concept of inheritance linked to playing inheritance pattern games.

LESSON THREE: GREEDY MONSTERS

Objectives:

- To explore decision-making and consequences concerning greed and how to avoid it
- To show how we should not be jealous or greedy regarding that which belongs to others

Outcomes: An observation of the things that matter most to children; a completed role on the wall activity to investigate a character's external appearance and internal thoughts from the book; and the writing of a balanced argument to evaluate the situation from both sides.



LESSON FOUR: IT'S A KIND OF MAGIC!

Objectives:

- To consider the true meaning of the word 'magic'.
- To write a set of clear instructions to explain a process to another person

Outcomes: A class discussion to learn more about the concept of magic and a completed non-chronological report about a significant "magical" person; an account of a time where they have experienced magic in real life; and the writing of a set of clear instructions about a magic trick.



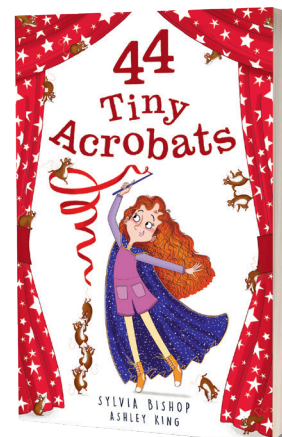
Lesson One: The Circus Comes to Town!

Questions:

- What is a circus?
- Have you ever visited a circus?
- Are circuses good or bad?

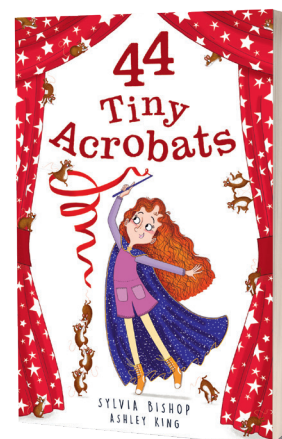
Task One: Ask the children if they have ever read a book or seen a movie with a circus in it. Have you ever been to the circus? Talk about the things children may have seen if they have visited a circus, such as a big top tent and the performers. Do they remember any of the acts? How did watching the performances make them feel? Ask them to describe what it may be like to be one of the performers in a circus. For those that have not visited the circus, show pictures of circuses and relate it to recent films they may have seen featuring circuses like *Dumbo* and *The Greatest Showman*. Explain that the circus as we know it has not always existed. The modern circus evolved, or developed, over time. Discuss how the circus started as equestrian (horse) shows displayed in permanent buildings and that other acts were added over time, including acrobats and clowns. Eventually exotic animal collections, called menageries, joined the circus. Circuses began to travel and were no longer confined to a permanent building. Share that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, travelling circuses were one of the most popular entertainments available and very important people would come from far and wide to watch them. Explain that travelling circuses still exist today, moving from town to town and from country to country, though most circuses now no longer include exotic animals. Draw a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the features of a circus from the nineteenth century and a modern-day circus. Put the similarities between the circuses in the middle where the circles overlap.

Task Two: Ask children to think about a time they worked together with other people as a team. Use this as an opportunity to explain that it also takes many people working together to operate a circus. Talk about the kind of roles they see being performed at the circus such as trapeze artist, tightrope walker, clown, or ringmaster. Describe some of the skills and attributes needed to be a performer such as enthusiasm, a sense of humour and collaboration. Design a poster recruiting a range of performers to your class circus.



Encourage children to use exciting language and features of an advertisement to make the jobs sound interesting enough to attract candidates. Once they are all complete, display the adverts around the classroom so that children can learn about a variety of jobs in the circus. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of working in a travelling circus.

Task Three: Ask children to close their eyes and imagine that they are going to the circus. If necessary, lead them through the senses of the tastes, sights, touches, smells and sounds that they may experience. How many students imagined animals in the circus? Relate this to the forty-four mice who perform in the book. Recap how in Task One, we learned that modern circuses should no longer include exotic animals in their performances such as elephants, big cats like lions and tigers, and zebras. Pose the question, 'Are circuses an appropriate environment for wild animals?' Discuss the reasons for and against. Explain how from January 2020 in England, the use of wild animals in circuses is banned under the Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019 but sometimes this does still happen. Ask the children to write a short persuasive argument against the use of forced performances by animals in circuses for entertainment, showing their understanding of the need for animal rights.



Lesson Two: Family is for Life

Questions:


- Who is in your family?
- What do you do with your family?
- What things have been passed on in your family?

Task One: Introduce the subject of families. Explain that a family can be described as a group of people, living together, usually related to each other, who love one another. Ask some children to share how many people live in their family (be very aware of the different cultures represented, of broken homes, looked after children and single-parent homes, etc.). Relate this to the members of Betsy's family included in the book and the things they like to do together. Ask the children about what their families like doing together. Allow time to share their favourite activities. Explain that family life can often be very busy. Both parents may go out to work. Sometimes they have work to do in the evenings. Children belong to different clubs and parents have to get them there and collect them. And then there is homework! Sometimes we don't have the time to do things together that we enjoy. Ask the children to write a short paragraph describing an activity that they like to do with their families. Display a gallery of these in the classroom.

Extension: Encourage children to suggest or organize an activity at home with their families for them to do together. They could take pictures of this activity and bring them into school to show.

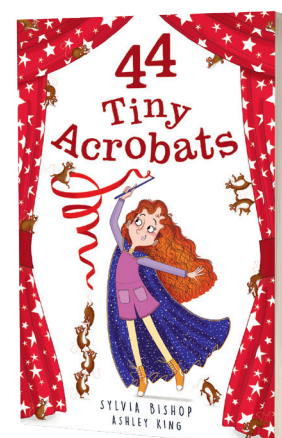
Task Two: Recap the members of families from Task One. Highlight the role of the grandmother (being sensitive towards those who may not have grandmothers). Identify the involvement grandmothers have in some children's family life. Explain to children that sometimes grandmothers (as do grandfathers) step in and look after their grandchildren if parents need to work. Read the chapter 'Our Ninth Act: The Untold Adventures of Beryl Bow' again to understand more about the character of Betsy's grandmother. Focus on the sentence "*That's why you two are so alike*" on page 141. Discuss with children about how we can be so alike to other members of our family in appearance, attitude or aptitude. Ask children to consider a member of their family and begin to identify any skills that they have taught them and for which they are grateful. It may be an artistic, musical or sporting skill or it may be a personal quality.





Task Three: Revisit how we can be alike to our family members. Explain to children how there is a scientific name for the passing down of characteristics from one generation to the next and that this is known as inheritance. Talk more about the key characteristics that you inherit from your parents, like your eye colour, skin colour and height and the things that you don't such as hairstyle, scars and ear piercings. Describe more about the quirky and unique things that can be determined from your parents such as the ability to roll your tongue, whether you are left or right handed or footed and your blood group. To demonstrate some of these, play a range of inheritance pattern games such as seeing if you can roll your tongue and clasping your hands together without thinking about it and seeing which thumb is on top.

Extension: Ask children to try out some of these activities at home with their families and discover from which family members they may have inherited different characteristics from.



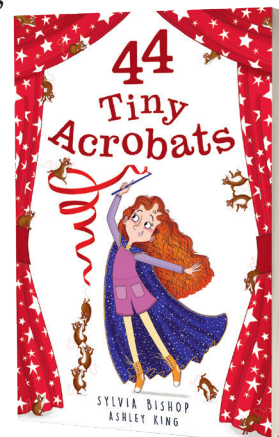
Lesson Three: Greedy Monsters

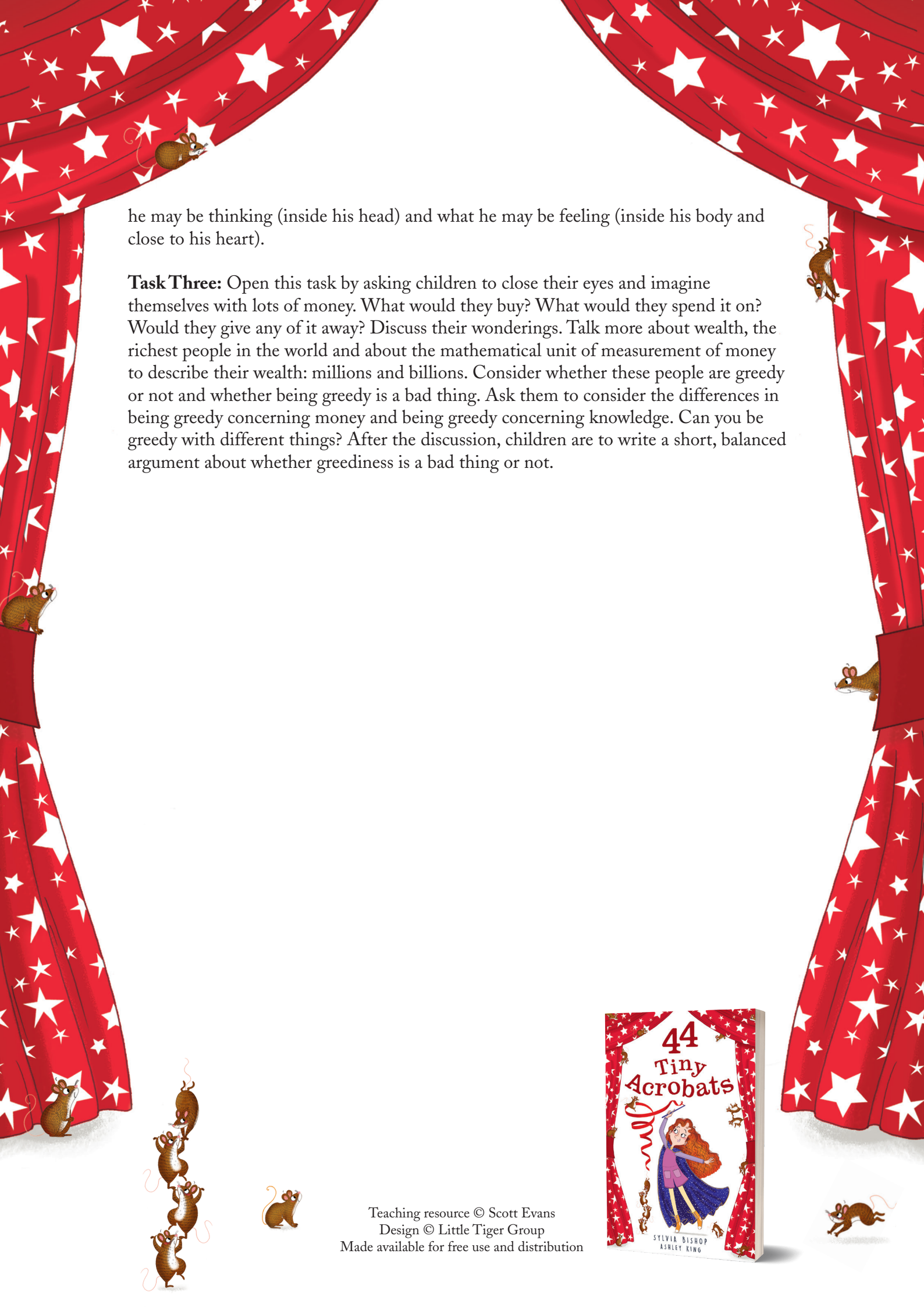
Questions:

- What is the most important thing?
- What does it mean to be greedy? Is being greedy a bad thing?
- Does money buy happiness?

Task One: Ask children what they think is the most important thing in the world. Take suggestions and split the board into two columns. Do not put headings on the columns but separate the suggestions into tangible, material objects and intangible, abstract nouns. When children mention an object like their games console, clothes or money, write it on the object side. When children mention things like kindness, love or respect, write it on the noun side. Share with children the differences between these two things and how some people place importance on objects that they can touch whereas some people place importance on things that they feel. Relate this to the world and the characters in the book such as Mr Chester Fry, the circus owner. Discuss how he likes to make as much money as possible and that he is shown to be greedy in the book because he always wants more money without thinking about the consequences, particularly in regard to his circus performers. Consider the most important things in our world and share them as a class, including what the adults in the room think. You may want to do a survey of adults in your school. After the conversation, some children may want to change their mind or some children may keep the same answer. Emphasize that there is no wrong answer and that it's just to see what people prioritize.

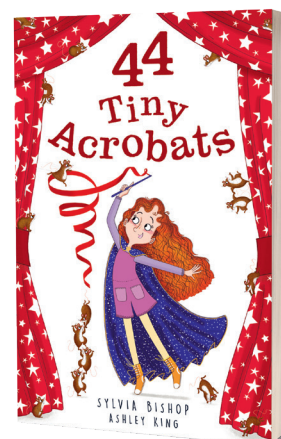
Task Two: Begin this task by reading from a book that shows a greedy character such as *Mr Greedy* from the Mr Men series by Roger Hargreaves. After reading, ask the children to share if they have ever been greedy and why. Discuss their range of answers. They may link to food or objects. Using their suggestions, explain how most of us will have been greedy at one time or another. Use other fictional examples like Augustus Gloop in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to exemplify this. Talk again about the character of Mr Chester Fry, the circus owner, from the book and discuss what type of character he is. As a class, begin to form a role on the wall to describe Mr Fry's character. On the outside, write down adjectives to describe his external appearance. On the inside, in the relevant body parts, write down words, phrases and vocabulary to describe what





he may be thinking (inside his head) and what he may be feeling (inside his body and close to his heart).

Task Three: Open this task by asking children to close their eyes and imagine themselves with lots of money. What would they buy? What would they spend it on? Would they give any of it away? Discuss their wonderings. Talk more about wealth, the richest people in the world and about the mathematical unit of measurement of money to describe their wealth: millions and billions. Consider whether these people are greedy or not and whether being greedy is a bad thing. Ask them to consider the differences in being greedy concerning money and being greedy concerning knowledge. Can you be greedy with different things? After the discussion, children are to write a short, balanced argument about whether greediness is a bad thing or not.



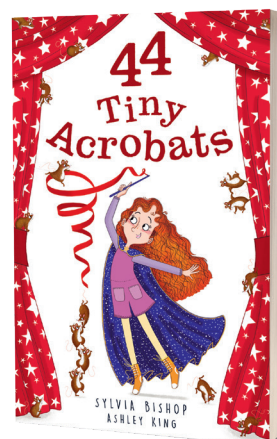
Lesson Four: It's a Kind of Magic!

Questions:

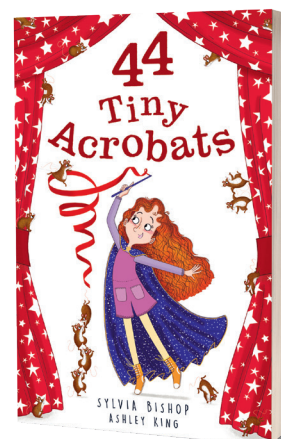
- What is magic?
- Is magic real?
- Can everyone do magic?

Task One: Gather children on the carpet in a group and dim the classroom lights. If you are able to do one, perform a magic trick. If you don't have a trick, watch an appropriate magic trick online. Use this as an opportunity to further the conversation to talk about magic and illusions and the sense of amazement and wonder they create. Mention a variety of well-known magic tricks such as making people and things appear and disappear; producing things out of seemingly impossible places, such as a rabbit out of a hat; 'sawing' someone in half; making someone levitate; turning something into something else and others that you or the children may know about. Using a wide range of resources in the classroom such as books and the internet, research the history of magic including magic tricks, famous magicians and the Magic Circle. After researching, children are to write a short fact file or non-chronological report about a famous figure associated with magic. This could be a figure who is fictional or non-fictional.

Task Two: Recap the conversations about magic that were had in Task One. Describe the feelings that people experience when witnessing a magic trick from awe and wonder to shock and surprise. Discuss whether or not children think that magic is real. Ask the children if there is such a thing as 'real-life magic'? Talk about 'real-life magic': that wonderful feeling when something happens that you had thought was impossible. Give some examples: you get picked for a sports team, which a few months ago had seemed impossible; someone is ill and then, amazingly and against the odds, they get better; something you've been dreading and worrying about, like a test, turns out to be good – you even enjoy it! These are 'real-life magic'; not tricks but events that give you the same feeling of surprise and wonder that a good trick does. Ask the children to write about a time where they have experienced 'real-life magic' in their lives. Encourage them to explore why they thought the event was seemingly impossible to begin with, why they think circumstances changed and how they felt after the event.



Task Three: Go back over some of the famous magic tricks discussed in Task One. Talk to the children about how it takes patience, skill and determination to learn and perform a magic trick. Can they think of other tasks that require these qualities? Explain to the children that they are going to have a go at performing magic. Search the internet for a range of simple magic tricks with instructions and illustrations and set up a carousel of magic tricks for the children to experiment with. Which do they find easiest? Which are more difficult? Why? Complete a chart to evaluate the magic tricks based on level of difficulty and providing supporting reasons. Can any children master any of the magic tricks? If so, ask them to demonstrate to a small group or the class. For those children that manage to master a magic trick, ask them to write clear instructions to perform it. Think about the language and vocabulary used in order to make the instructions as easy to follow as possible. You may want to record videos to accompany them.



Further ideas and activities

- Read more books that feature magic and circuses such as *Leon and the Place Between* by Angela McAllister and Grahame Baker-Smith; *Molly's Circus* by Esther Kent and *Nell and the Circus of Dreams* by Nell Gifford and Briony May Smith.
- Teach the children some circus skills in P.E. including gymnastics, juggling and ball skills.
- Look at different circus performers and discuss what movements they do. Find a video of circus performers and show the class examples of pushes and pulls. Get the children to sort different circus acts into pushes and pulls and try and explain how to speed up or slow down the process. **Extension:** Look at a tightrope walker and investigate balanced forces. How do they stay level when walking across the tightrope?
- Set up a circus role play area within your classroom and recreate Fry and Sons' Circus of Wonders from the book to encourage free play and imagination. Make your own ticket-selling booth and performance area with stage and audience seating.
- Write a story based in a circus where one of the animals escapes because it has had enough of performing in the circus!

