



RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA READING GUIDES

The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness by Colin Thompson

Random House Australia

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Reading Level: 6+

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SYNOPSIS

George lives with his grandmother and a big empty space where his mother and father should be.

One Friday on his way home from school, George visits the animal shelter. There, in the very last cage, is Jeremy, a sad dog who looks as lost and lonely as George feels.

When Jeremy comes home to live with George and his granny, their whole lives change, and they learn that when it comes to love, it's quality not quantity that counts . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in London in 1942, Colin Thompson has worked as a silk-screen printer, graphic designer, stage manager and BBC documentary maker and a potter.

Since he started writing and illustrating children's books in 1992, Colin has had more than 45 books published. He has received several awards, including an Aurealis Award for the novel *How to Live Forever* and the CBC Picture Book of the Year in 2006 for *The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley*. He has been shortlisted for many other awards, including the Astrid Lindgren Award – the most prestigious children's literature prize in the world.

Colin lives in Bellingen, Australia. He is currently writing and illustrating more titles in the Floods series and illustrating another picture book, *Free to a Good Home* (which is NOT about a cat or a dog!). He is also writing a sequel to the novel *How to Live Forever* called *The Second Forever*. A full-colour Floods picture book *Floods Family Files* was published in 2007. *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* is his most recent picture book.

WRITING STYLE

Colin says:

'As you write, you develop your own rhythm, but it isn't something I ever think about, so it's rather difficult to write anything about the writing style in this book. I just sit there and do it, but I can say that I never plan anything and when I start a story I hardly ever know how it's all going to end.'

THEMES

- Orphans
- Grandparents
- Love
- Loss
- Animal adoption
- Loneliness

DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

Colin says:

'I grew up as an only child without a father and lived with my grandparents who, like George's in this story, were kind but lived on another planet. I was very lonely a lot of the time and my best friend was my cat, Tigger. Being alone so much I escaped into books and my imagination.'

- How do you think it would be to grow up as the only child in a house full of much older people? How do you think it would be for a child growing up without a dad (or a mum)?
- If you spent as much time on your own as George does, how would it make you feel towards other people?
- How important would it be to have a cat or a dog in your life, and how would that be different from having a brother or sister?
- George and his grandmother create different types of substitute leg for Jeremy the three-legged dog. Can you write about, draw or make other types of leg could Jeremy use?
- Jeremy is much happier after he goes to live with George and his grandmother. What are some of the things about your own home and family that a dog such as Jeremy might like?

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