



**TEACHER NOTES**  
**Agatha and Marie Antoinette**  
Written and illustrated by Anna Pignataro

**SYNOPSIS (PLOT)**

Agatha is VERY excited – her cousin Marie Antoinette has come to stay at her house! Agatha thinks that Marie Antoinette is just WONDERFUL – she has beautiful shoes, wears a lovely blue beret and EVEN lives in a fancy apartment in Paris where she eats chocolate for breakfast.

When Agatha brings Marie Antoinette to kindergarten, everyone agrees that Marie Antoinette is just wonderful too. Miss Tibble says Marie Antoinette's drawing of her home is beautiful. George lets Marie Antoinette win at musical chairs. And at lunchtime Yoko sits next to Marie Antoinette instead of Agatha.

Agatha gets a bad feeling in her tummy and soon the bad feeling gets worse, especially when her mother and father fuss over Marie Antoinette all weekend. Agatha becomes sure that everyone loves Marie Antoinette more than they love her! Uh-oh!

Soon, the bad feeling bursts out when Marie Antoinette breaks Agatha's favourite toy, Sidney. Agatha yells at Marie Antoinette and says she wishes she never came to visit. Marie Antoinette cries and says she hugged Sidney too tight because she misses her mama. Agatha hugs Marie Antoinette and the bad feelings go away. When it's time to go home, Agatha makes Marie Antoinette her own toy, and Marie Antoinette gives Agatha her own blue beret.

**THEMES**

**Jealousy/rivalry**

As a pre-schooler, Agatha is very excited that her cousin Marie Antoinette is coming to stay at her house. Marie Antoinette is the same age as Agatha and she can't wait to have a playmate visit! While Agatha delights in her cousin – and her beautiful shoes and blue beret and lovely pink tutu – she also can't help but feel that Marie Antoinette is 'taking over' her space physically in the classroom, on the bench at lunchtime and at home in her bed and on her favourite armchair. Marie Antoinette is different and new to the friends at kindergarten and even George (who in past books has taunted Agatha) allows Marie Antoinette to win at musical chairs. While it is only inferred, Marie Antoinette – the cosmopolitan cousin – is drawing all the attention away from Agatha and Agatha finds it overwhelming. It is only in the final pages – after lashing out at Marie Antoinette – that Agatha and her cousin come to a feeling of acceptance and understanding. There is room for everyone in every group or family, and everyone has their struggles (Marie Antoinette is not perfect nor is she trying to take Agatha's place or steal the affections of her friends, teacher and parents – instead, Marie Antoinette is gravely unhappy and homesick because she misses her mama.)

**Change**

*Agatha and Marie Antoinette* explores change and disruption – we don't know why Marie Antoinette has come to stay at her cousin Agatha's house (we can only assume there has

been an event at home where Marie Antoinette needs to go on holiday alone. And, it is a big holiday – Marie Antoinette has visited her cousin, aunt and uncle all the way from Paris. Perhaps Marie Antoinette’s mother is unwell, having a new baby, or away for work). The target audience may be able to relate to this feeling of change, disruption and displacement from Marie Antoinette’s perspective (being sent away) or from Agatha’s (having another person in the family home, and changing the everyday dynamic there – including no longer being the centre of her parents’ attention).

### **Family Relationships.**

*Agatha and Marie Antoinette* explores what it means to be part of a family and that family has many forms. Agatha lives with her mum and dad, and possibly Marie Antoinette lives alone with her mum. We don’t know, but there is an extended family at work here – Marie Antoinette is a cousin from a far flung place, and, we may assume, Agatha’s family are lending a helping hand by opening their home for Marie Antoinette to stay. However, from Agatha’s perspective, her cousin seems in some way ‘independent’ – she has travelled alone from far away and somewhere that does seem exotic. Agatha is thrown when Marie Antoinette becomes the focus of her parents and worries that everyone loves her cousin more than they love her. By the end of the story, Agatha is able to look outward and has gained empathy for her cousin. Marie Antoinette is very homesick and she wishes she was at home.

### **Difference**

The book illustrates how every child, family and home is different, and that there is truly a place for everyone. It also encourages young readers to look beyond the surface of a seemingly ‘perfect person’ to understand that every person has a unique perspective, story and challenges.

### **Acceptance**

By making Marie Antoinette a soft toy that resembles her own toy Sidney, Agatha heals the rift between them with love and care. Marie Antoinette meets her halfway by giving Agatha a blue beret that resembles her own. Both girls have an insight into each other’s lives and gain empathy into the other’s experience.

### **Living circumstances**

Agatha and Marie Antoinette are two cousins the same age with different lifestyles – Agatha lives in a big house with her mum and dad, while Marie Antoinette lives in a fancy apartment with her mother. Both girls have grown up differently, and yet both have the same needs to belong and feel loved. Neither experience is better – just different.

## **WRITING STYLE**

Anna Pignataro’s writing style is economical and impactful. The sparse text allows the reader to reflect on their own emotions and experiences and how they might feel in such a situation. The illustrations bridge this sparseness and build a strong sense of foreboding, vulnerability and ultimately a feeling of resolution and release. The story touches deftly on highly emotional issues – jealousy, displacement and sharing – in an accessible and positive way.

## **AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

Anna writes about emotions and issues experienced in her own childhood. She is inspired by the little everyday things, her family, people she meets, the weather and nature. Anna hopes her work inspires children to follow their dreams and believe anything is possible.

NOTE: *Agatha and Marie Antoinette* was assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

## **AUTHOR /ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND**

Anna Pignataro has created more than sixty books for children. Her first picture book won the Crichton Award for Book Illustration and many of her books have been shortlisted and have received Notable Book Commendations from The Children's Book Council.

*Agatha and Marie Antoinette* is the third book in the much-loved and award-winning Agatha series. Previous titles are: *Being Agatha* and *Agatha and the Dark*.

## **RECENT AWARDS FOR AGATHA BOOKS**

- 2017 Australian Family Therapist Award for Children's Literature Shortlist: *Agatha and the Dark*
- 2017 CBCA Awards Longlist Early Childhood Notable: *Agatha and the Dark*
- 2017 New Work Grant Australia Council For The Arts: *Agatha and Marie Antoinette*
- 2016 WA Premiers Book Awards Shortlist: *Being Agatha*
- 2016 Australian Book Industry Awards Longlist: *Being Agatha*

## **EDITORIAL COMMENT**

*Agatha and Marie Antoinette* is a story about overcoming jealousy and finding understanding. It explores deeper themes of love, family, rivalry and a firm sense of identity and place. Particularly important in *Agatha and Marie Antoinette* is the undercurrent of building (and foreboding) emotion. It helps young readers identify uncomfortable and conflicting feelings – jealousy is described as a stormy feeling in Agatha's tummy. Importantly, there is a resolution in this story, where both Agatha and Marie Antoinette reveal their perspectives and gain empathy into that of their cousin.

## **STUDY NOTES**

### **Discussion Points After Reading**

*Pages 4 & 5, 6 & 7*

- What type of things does Agatha share with her cousin?
- What won't Agatha share with her cousin – why won't she share it?
- Are Agatha and Marie Antoinette dressed the same or differently?
- How are they different?
- What does Marie Antoinette bring with her for her visit?
- Why does Agatha think Marie Antoinette is wonderful?

*Pages 8 & 9, 10 & 11*

- What happens when Agatha brings Marie Antoinette to her kindergarten?
- Are the children and Miss Tibble interested in Marie Antoinette? What might the children think is interesting about Marie Antoinette?
- Look at the illustration. What happens when Marie talks about where she lives?
- How is Marie Antoinette's home and life different to Agatha's?

*Page 12 & 13, 14 & 15*

- What do the children like to eat for breakfast? Do any of the children eat an unusual breakfast? Do you think they are telling the truth about what they eat for breakfast? If not, why not?
- What does Marie Antoinette's home look like? How is it different to Agatha's? How is it similar to Agatha's?
- What game does George let Agatha win? Why do you think he lets her win? Is it a good feeling when someone lets you win a game? Why or why not?

*Pages 16 & 17, 18 & 19*

- What happens at playtime?
- What happens at lunchtime?
- What happens at home time?
- Why do you think Agatha has a bad feeling in her tummy?
- How does Marie Antoinette make Agatha feel now? Does the illustration give us a clue?

*Pages 20 & 21, 22 & 23*

- How do Agatha's parents treat Marie Antoinette?
- What does Agatha imagine is happening?
- The illustrator has drawn a bad feeling on page 23. What does it look like? Can we really see our feelings?

*Pages 24 & 25*

- What happens when Agatha finds her toy broken on the floor?

- How does the illustrator draw Agatha's bad feeling on the page?
- How does Agatha look? How does Marie Antoinette look? Is Agatha really bigger than Marie Antoinette?

*Page 26 & 27*

- Why does Marie Antoinette start to cry?
- How does Agatha help Marie Antoinette?
- What does Agatha notice after she helps Marie Antoinette?

*Page 28 & 29*

- There are no words on this page. What do the illustrations show us? What is Agatha doing? Does she look different from earlier pages in the book?

*Page 30, 31 and 32*

- What happens when it is time for Marie Antoinette to go home? What does Agatha give Marie Antoinette?
- Earlier, Agatha thought there was not enough room for her and Marie Antoinette on the armchair. Is there enough room now? Is this because the chair is bigger or is there another reason that there is enough room?
- What does Marie Antoinette give Agatha?

**Activities**

1. Look carefully at the illustration style. The illustrator Anna Pignataro uses different methods of collage to create her pictures, with different materials and textures. Can you create a collage of your favourite character in Agatha and Marie Antoinette?

2. Discuss the different characters in the book – Agatha, Marie Antoinette, George, Yoko, May and Miss Tibble. Children can create a character profile for a character of their choice.

3. Compare pages 21, 23 and 25 where we see Agatha's bad feeling. The illustrator has drawn the bad feeling like a black wisp of smoke that gets darker and bigger and thicker. Agatha describes the bad feeling as rolling around her tummy like a storm. We can't really see or smell our bad feelings, but we can try to imagine what they might be like. Create a Y chart of these bad feelings showing "Agatha Smells, Agatha Feels, Agatha Sees." Then, create a Y chart of a good feeling. Draw this good feeling as "Agatha Smells, Agatha Feels, Agatha Sees."

4. Agatha makes Marie Antoinette a special toy that looks just like her favourite toy, Sidney. Make your own special toy that looks like your favourite toy to give a friend.