

These notes are for:

- Years 4-8
- 9+yrs
- Upper Primary/Early Secondary

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Science
- HSIE/SOSE

Example of:

- Junior Fiction
- Past and Present
- Print Text

Experience of:

- Social Perspectives
- Translated Literature
- Reading & Writing
- The Environment
- Science & Nature

Values addressed:

- Honesty and Trustworthiness
- Responsibility
- Compassion
- Understanding & Tolerance

Themes:

- Survival
- Ecology
- Society & Nature
- History & Science

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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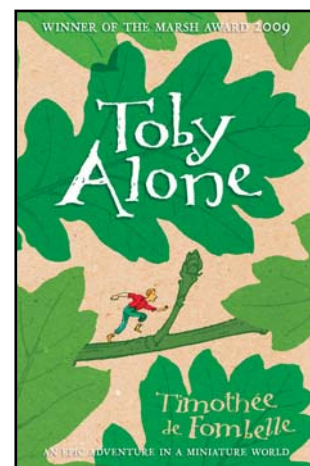
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Toby Alone - Overview

Toby Alone

By: Timothée de Fombelle
Illus. By: François Place
Translated By: Sarah Ardizzone
ISBN: 9781406307269
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NZRRP: \$19.99
No. of Pages: 400
Paperback August 2009



Outline:

Toby is just one and a half millimetres tall, and he's the most wanted person in his world, the great oak Tree. When Toby's father makes a ground-breaking discovery, he realises that exploiting it could do damage to their world. Refusing to reveal the secret to an enraged community, Toby's parents are imprisoned. Only Toby manages to escape, but for how long?

Toby Alone was originally written in French and has been translated into English by Sarah Ardizzone. It is a powerful story with a strong ecological message set in a captivating miniature world. The oak Tree, in which Toby lives, provides a metaphor for the structures of society and the world we live in. This book will encourage discussion about the environment, science, nature and survival. It has been translated into over 22 languages and is the winner of numerous awards including France's prestigious Prix Sorcières and, in translation, The Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation 2009 (UK), and Italy's Premio Andersen prize.

Author/Illus. Information:

Timothée de Fombelle is a popular French playwright and has recently achieved international success as an author of fiction with his stunning debut, *Tobie Lolness: La Vie Suspendue* ("Toby Alone") and its sequel *Les Yeux d'Elisha* ("Toby and the Secrets of the Tree"). Timothée has also worked as a teacher, and in 1990 set up his own theatre company. He lives with his family in Paris.

François Place is an acclaimed artist and a successful author in his own right. Since studying at the prestigious L'Ecole Estienne, he has created an impressive array of work, including the children's story *Les Derniers Géants* ("The Last Giants") and *Le Vieux Fou de Dessin* ("The Old Man Mad about Drawing").

Sarah Ardizzone (née Adams) is one of the most sought after translators working today. She has won several awards for her work, including the Marsh Award for Children's Literature in Translation, for *Eye of the Wolf* ("Loeil du Louop") by Daniel Pennac in 2005 and for *Toby Alone* in 2009. Sarah also promotes translation as a creative process in schools.

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

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Guided Reading Activities for *Toby Alone*:

Before Reading the Text

- *Toby Alone* has been described as a liliputian world. What does this mean? What is the definition of this word?
- The tree is a metaphor for the world that we live in. What is a metaphor? While reading *Toby Alone* make reference to the aspects of the tree that are similar to our own world. How is the tree a microscopic representation of the world we live in?

Chapters 1 & 2

- The first chapter of *Toby Alone* is a prologue to the story. How does this introduce us to the character Toby and where the story is set? Ask students to list the things that they have learnt from this chapter and the questions that might have arisen. What is the opposite of a prologue and what does it do?
- Who is telling this story? Is it a first, second or third person narrative? If this story was an entirely first person narrative how would the first chapter be written? Ask students to re-write a paragraph from the first chapter from Toby's perspective.
- Sim Lolness is a professor and understands more about the tree than anyone else. From Chapter 2 list the similarities and differences between the world we live in and the tree world that Toby and his family live in.
- Sim Lolness suggests that he "likes the idea of genealogical Tree, with each generation developing its own branch, touching closer to the sky" (p 21). How has the symbol of a tree been used to depict family genealogy before? What is your own family tree? How does each generation develop its own branch? With our knowledge of family trees, why is it ironic that Sim Lolness' peers should think this is a dangerous idea?
- Chapter 2 introduces us to Toby's parents. Create a character profile of Maya and Sim with the information that you can gather.
- When Sim Lolness invents the 'knitting machine' (p 25) the hand-knitted silk classes stop. Research different inventions and how they have made jobs which were done by hand, obsolete.
- Maya's grandmother is described as 'snobby' and having a lot of money. At times she seems greedy. She is from the Treetop and disapproves of the low branch. What is a social hierarchy? How does the attitude of Grandmother Alnorell depict these class distinctions? Do you think that social hierarchies exist in the world you live in? Are there problems associated with this?
- What is 'exile'? Define this word and what it means for the Lolness family.

Chapters 3 & 4

- How tall is Sim Lolness and how much does he weigh? What is a centigram? Define.
- Weevils are used to build homes in this society. How are animals used in our society for labour? Create a list of animals and the jobs that they do for humans.
- In Chapter 3 it describes the time of year and what the weather is like? From these clues, what hemisphere do you think this tree would be in if it is on our planet?
- What are some of the different books that Sim Lolness has written? What is the general theme of these books? Sim Lolness could be described as a naturalist. What is this and what is naturalism? Who is the famous naturalist of the 19th Century? What was his famous book and theory?
- Who do you think the grass people are? Where do they live? There are occasions in these chapters when the grass people are referred to negatively although Toby knows very little about them. Why is it important to not make assumptions about people before you have met them? Discuss.

Chapters 5 & 6

- What helps Sim Lolness think? What helps Toby think? What is it that helps you think? Do you need to have slept well or eaten well before you do assignments or homework? Make a list of the things that help you think.
- Identify the simile on page 56. What is Toby like as he moves along the branches? Come up with a simile to describe Toby's size.
- How does Toby distract the ants so that the hunters won't find him?
- What does the grub turn into in Chapter 5? Can you think of any other animals that mature from grubs to insects?
- Chapter 5 and 6 describe different points of time in Toby's life. Create a short timeline of some of the events in these chapters and when they happen.
- Read pages 68-69. How is the description of the tree being alive, similar to our own world? Sim Lolness thinks the tree is vulnerable and that it must be looked after. Is our world vulnerable? How can we look after it? Discuss.
- Sim Lolness has invented something amazing and is described as changing the history of the tree. What are some inventions that have changed the history of our world – for good and bad? Create a list of these and then research the history of one. Include where it came from, who invented it and why it was invented.

Guided Reading Activities for *Toby Alone*:

Chapters 7 & 8

- Sim Lolness describes everything as falling down. The sap travels down and if you were to jump you would travel down. How is this apparent in our world as well? Who was Sir Isaac Newton and what did he discover?
- Sim Lolness criticizes the tunnel that is being built through the tree. In what ways has land been cleared for progress in our world? What are some of the damaging effects of deforestation and mining? In groups research the effects of these practices on the environment. How can they be controlled and maintained to limit their impact?
- Toby describes to Elisha that his father had been punished for 'disimulation of capital information' and that he didn't know what this meant (p 91). Define these words and then discuss in class what you think this means. Why are the people angry? Why do you think Toby's father wants to keep this discovery from the people?
- What does 'vertiginous landscape' mean? (p 94).
- Several of the characters in Chapter 8 do and say things that are nasty or mean towards Toby. But the narrator explains the reason behind what they say or do. What does this tell you about mean, nasty or bullying people? How might it help to understand those who have been unkind to you?

Chapters 9 & 10

- How does Nils sacrifice himself for Toby and why? What does he use to trick them into believing he is Toby?
- On page 110 the narrator describes that Norz too would have been a hero if he could have just walked past the hunters that wronged him. Why is it sometimes harder to do the right thing – to not be angry or fight? How can being mentally stronger make someone a hero?
- What did Joe Mitch try to ban so that Sim Lolness couldn't publish his ideas? Why did he try to do this? What was right about Sim Lolness' predictions?
- Why does 'pinhead' hate Toby and his family so much? What did Sim Lolness do to him to make him want to exact revenge?

Chapters 11 & 12

- On page 137 Toby describes the importance of words in his life. What do words mean to you? How do words help you in your life? Write a minimum of four points as to how language is important to your everyday life.
- Read page 144 and some of the notebook entries of Rolok. Re-write these entries with correct spelling and grammar.
- Chapter 11 shows Toby's compassion towards other people. What is the example of his compassion in this chapter? How does this make Toby different to Joe Mitch's men?
- Who is Thing really? Why do they change his name to Thing? Who becomes the new Thing? Discuss names and how they help to give us our identity.

Chapters 13 & 14

- Read pages 160-161. What is the definition of 'solidarity'? Why would people listen to someone using this word? What is a democracy? Is this what Joe Mitch Arbor is creating? Why?
- How is Joe Mitch being named 'friendly neighbour' inconsistent with his actions? What would be a better name for him?
- What is it that stops Toby and Mano from falling? Why must they stay still?
- What are arthropods? Research and name some other arthropods.
- What does Mano's father do to the letters when he discovers that Mano has been lying to them?
- Where is Toby to be hidden?

Chapter 15

- Why do the Olmech's decide to give Toby up? In what other ways has greed affected characters in this story? What does it mean to be greedy?
- How does Toby figure out that the Olmech's will give him up?
- After reading Part One write a brief summary of the situations that Toby has been through and how this has changed his character. How has his faith in human beings changed? How has he grown up? What do you think will happen next? Will Elisha give him up?

Chapters 16 & 17

- Read page 204. Toby describes a metaphor of a pudding for the situation that the Olmechs have put themselves in. What is this? If you had to create a recipe for life what would you include? Would it be sweet, savoury, spicy or plain? Write your own recipe metaphor for how you would like your life to be. It may help to think of your favourite food for this task.
- The Neighbourhood Committees are sending out 'alarmist' messages about the Grass People. Elisha explains that it is not always best to believe everything you hear. Do you agree with this? Look at advertising in newspapers and popular magazines, do you think everything in these is correct? What is propaganda and how is it meant to change our perspectives?
- Toby draws a picture of a flower on the wall of his cave. Why does he do this? How are pictures used to tell stories as well? Toby continues to draw, why does he do this? What does he draw? Draw your world as you know it.
- What is the advice that Toby remembers from Grandmother Alnorell? What does this mean and how does Toby use it? What does he decide to do to keep himself alive?

Guided Reading Activities for *Toby Alone*:

Chapters 18 & 19

- Find the cautionary saying that is used on page 228 to describe Toby's mother's darker side. What does this saying mean? Can you think of any other sayings that you have heard before that are used to caution?
- Read pages 230-231. What are some of the changes that have happened to the tree in the six years that the Lolness family has been away? Are there any similarities between this and the Earth? In class, discuss global warming and how these pages reflect this.
- Draw a picture of the tree stone. Why is this precious to the tree? Do you think it would be precious if you found it? How can some things be precious to one person and not to another? Why should we respect other people's things even if they don't seem important to us? Discuss.
- What is priceless to you? Make a list of the things in your life that you couldn't put a price on.

Chapters 20 & 21

- What is the clue that Toby uses to figure out where he needs to go?
- How has fear changed Leo Blue's ideas of friendship and his attitude towards Toby? How has the stereotype of The Grass People affected Leo Blue?
- Where are Toby's parents being held? What is Toby's plan to get them out?
- Where is the tree stone hidden?

Chapters 22 & 23

- Do you think that Gus Alzan gives his daughter the punishment she deserves? How would you describe Bernie? How can punishment, rules and boundaries be helpful to a person and in what circumstances?
- Clot tells Gus that Bernie needs a friend. How are friends useful? How do your friends help you? Write a brief paragraph on one of your friends and why they are special to you.
- Who is Bubble really? What do you think she is planning?
- What does Elisha blackmail Bernie with? What does it mean to blackmail somebody?
- What is a chrysalis? What emerges from a chrysalis? Do you think that Bernie will be any different when she emerges

from hers?

Chapters 24 & 25

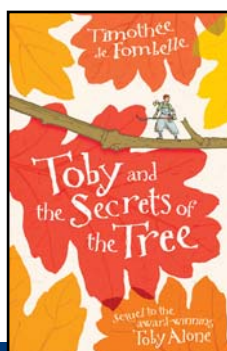
- How does Toby escape the wax?
- Sim Lolness observes birds in the trees and writes his observations in a notebook. Observe an animal in a habitat around you. Where does this animal live? What does it eat? What does it look like?
- Sim Lolness is obsessed "with life beyond the tree" (p 338). Do you think that life exists beyond the earth? Write a brief paragraph on what you think is out in space.
- What is grief? Read page 345. How does grief affect Toby on this page and throughout the previous chapter? What can we do to help us cope with grief?
- What does nomadic mean? Research a nomadic culture of the world.
- Toby meets The Grass People for the first time. Do you think that the propaganda about them has been correct?

Chapters 26 & 27

- Toby is learning about a different world/landscape to that of the tree. How has the landscape changed? Think about where you live. How far do you need to go from your home for the landscape to change? E.g. become hills, bush, desert, water.
- What is the creature that Toby encounters in Chapter 26? Do you have a pet? Imagine you are Toby's size and draw or describe your pet from this vantage point. Be sure to explain how big it is.
- Read page 366. Ilaya "wears a mask of hatred". What does this mean? Do you have any masks that you wear when you feel sad, happy, angry?
- Read the "Grass proverb" on page 372. What is a proverb? What does this proverb imply? Research proverbs and where they come from.

Chapter 28

- Read page 384. Pol Colleen is describing what has happened to the tree. He mentions that "The weevils were wiped out in an epidemic". What is an epidemic? Have any epidemics ever occurred in the world?
- After reading Chapter 28, speculate about what will happen in the next adventure of Toby Lolness. Write a brief description of how the tree might look when he returns.



Toby and the Secrets of the Tree

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NZRRP: \$29.99
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Can't wait for the next book!
Get the sequel to *Toby Alone*,
Toby and the Secrets of the Tree.