

TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Venita Dimos

WALKER BOOKS

About the Series

MINI AND MILO: THE BIG FLAPPY EARS

CREATORS: VENITA DIMOS AND NATASHIA CURTIN

ISBN 9781760656164 HARDBACK

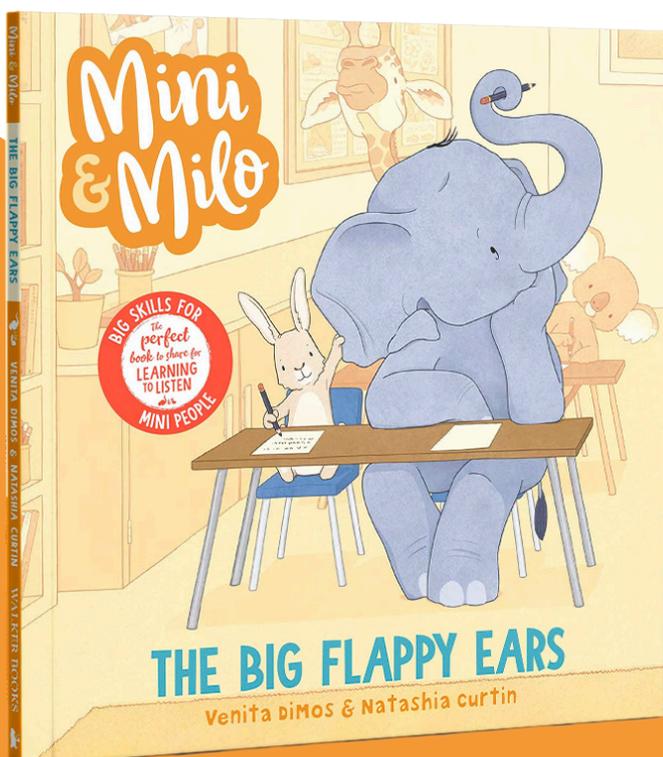
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Story-led, with humour and heart, this series follows the adventures of Mini the elephant and Milo the rabbit as they navigate friendship and all its ups and downs. Each book explores aspects of social and emotional intelligence, such as mindset, Self-Talk, listening, communicating about emotions and problem solving, with further books to come.

The books explore key life skills in a fun, humorous and imaginative way; with Mini the elephant finding a resolution for each problem through trial and error. This helps build young readers' confidence in problem solving.

The books reward repeated readings because of their humour, dynamic read-aloud texts and satisfying plot resolutions. The detailed illustrations supplement the texts and create a fully realised world for Mini.

They are ideal for early childhood settings, as well as classroom use up to Grade 3.



The perfect book to model and teach listening skills.

Mini's ears are bigger than big and huger than huge ... but she has a problem. They aren't very good at listening. When Mini misses out on the excursion, she realises that maybe her ears aren't the problem after all. It's not the size or shape of your ears that count, but using them!

THEMES INCLUDE:

- Listening and Communication • Friendship
- Problem Solving • School Life

These notes are designed for using the book in Grades 1-3 classrooms. They provide the following:

- Act as a guide for reading the book with a class;
- Offer detailed suggestions and scripts for exercises and games to develop listening skills, each of which is accompanied by reflective questions to work through at the end of the exercise. Worksheets and reflective questions are also provided (at the end of the document);
- Highlight other themes for discussion; and
- Link the book to curriculum focus areas such as reading comprehension, vocabulary and visual literacy.

About the Author:

Venita Dimos is an experienced Lawyer, Mediator and Neuroleadership coach. For over 20 years she has helped thousands of people solve complex problems and navigate difficult times in their lives. As a mother of three daughters, she is passionate about empowering children with the skills and resilience to navigate the inevitable curveballs that life throws at them. Venita's books explore key life skills in a fun, humorous and imaginative way. Her *Mini & Milo* series has been driven by the importance of teaching children emotional and social intelligence early on, so they arrive into adulthood armed with skills that support their future success and happiness.

Venita is an outright optimist, loves heartfelt conversations and has a penchant for all things chocolate.

Visit her online at www.mediationcompany.com.au, LinkedIn and Instagram @venitadimos

About the Illustrator:

Natashia (pronounced NA-TAR-SHA) **curtin** is an upcoming illustrator who is developing a reputation for the charm and emotional clarity of her illustrations in books, including *Vernon the Penguin*.

Natashia grew up in a Yolngu township in the Northern Territory, and completed high school while living in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. She always had her nose in a book, or was drawing pictures – because computer games weren't invented yet, and it was stinky hot outside. She moved to Melbourne in the 1990s to study graphic design and learned how to live in a big city. While working as a graphic designer, Natashia met and married a lovely man, and they had two boys (who don't draw, because computer games were invented).

You can follow her on Instagram, Facebook or at natashiacurtin.com

Notes from Venita:

As a mother of three children, I can confirm that children don't come with built-in 'listening ears'!

I developed this book as I believe that effective listening is the cornerstone of healthy relationships. As a Family Mediator, I've observed countless instances where my clients expressed feeling unheard by their partner. Effective listening is a key communication skill that reduces conflict and builds connection, understanding and empathy in all our relationships.

Many people assume that listening comes naturally. However, there is a big difference between 'hearing' the words spoken and making a conscious effort to 'actively listen' - to understand, reflect upon and retain the message being communicated.

This book was driven by a deep passion to teach children good listening habits early on. This provides them with a strong foundation and helps them grow into adults who value and prioritise effective communication in their personal and professional relationships.

Active listening does NOT happen by chance! It is a learned skill that requires conscious practice and time to master. And what better way to learn it than with an irresistibly cute elephant and her cuddly rabbit friend?

Reviews:

"The Mini and Milo series is a must-have for home and school libraries, and I highly recommend The Big Flappy Ears."

Kids Book Review

"These are the feelings that we can't always put into words ... I think this is why this series is good for readers of all ages, to help us understand how we feel, how others feel, and how everyone navigates the world differently and understands the world differently."

Ashleigh Meikle

"Trial and error helps support decision making, while working together on a problem supports friendship and cooperative behaviour. The Mini and Milo series create situations where cooperation is at its centres and children reading will see that problems can be solved through cooperation and trying things out, particularly after asking a friend for help."

ReadPlus

"A gentle story told with warmth and empathy and delightful illustrations bursting with colour and energy will ensure children love spending time with this pair and learn plenty of things along the way. Problem solving, working together and how to be a supportive friend are at the heart of Mini and Milo's story."

A Word About Books

Teacher Notes

BEFORE READING - THE BOOK COVER

If this is the first Mini and Milo book you have read with your class, begin by pointing out the series name and book title.

The main characters in this book are called Mini and Milo. What does Mini mean? Based only on the cover, which character do you think would be called Mini? Mini is actually the elephant character. Are elephants small? Discuss this use of a joke/humour.

Alternatively, if you have read other Mini and Milo books with the class before, begin by reminding them about the characters on the front cover. Do they remember what happened to Mini in a previous book? Mini has a problem to solve in each book in the series – can they predict what the problem is in this book? Do they think Mini will be successful in solving it?

Looking at the cover illustration, can students tell where the characters are (in a classroom)? What do they think Milo (the rabbit), the giraffe and the koala are looking at? Why is Mini looking in a different direction and why is this a problem?

Brainstorm what we do with our ears.

Brainstorm why listening is important.

WHILE READING

Mini and Milo are best friends. Students who have read previous books in the series will remember this.

For students new to the series, the illustrations on the cover and preliminary pages highlight their friendship: sitting next to each other in the classroom with Milo holding Mini's ear, sheltering under the umbrella together, heading home together after school.

Look at the preliminary double page spread with the building and pedestrian crossing. Using the cover illustration classroom setting as a clue, what do students think this building is (a school).

As you read the first few pages of the book, pause and point out the different issues caused by Mini not listening properly, referring back to your class brainstorm about why we need to listen.

- Not doing what she is told
- Upsetting her friend
- Getting hurt/having an accident/making a mess

After reading the spread in which Mini is day-dreaming while Mr Snort explains about the excursion, ask students to predict what might happen as a consequence.

Have students heard the expression/idiom “open your ears” before? What do they think it means?

What does “Stop and Listen” mean? Why is it important to stop (or pause) before listening? (So you are less distracted by other things and ready to tune in, you can focus on the person's face and expressions. The exercises below have more on this important “Stop and Listen” step.)

Ask students to explain what has happened on the final page (Mini is not wearing a hat, because she hasn't realised the fancy hat parade is on). Discuss with students that learning to listen can be hard, and sometimes we'll continue to be distracted or forget to focus. We need to keep trying.

DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS

About Active Listening

There are three steps to active listening, which can be explained to kids as 'Eyes, Ears and Think'. These can be turned into an easy-to-remember 'jingle'. For example:

"Eyes, Ears Think, - Don't forget to blink!" or "Eyes, Ears Think", Mini's favourite colour is pink!"

Step 1. Eyes

STOP - what you're doing.

LOOK - at the person who is speaking. Make eye contact to show you're paying attention.

Keep your body still and get ready to tune in and listen!

Focus on the speaker's face and expressions.

Step 2. Ears

LISTEN - Turn on Your Listening Ears!

PAUSE - your voice and your body!

1. Put your voice on pause - wait your turn to speak.
2. Keep your body still.
3. Listen carefully!
4. Let others finish what they're saying. Your turn will come!

Step 3. Think

THINK, REPEAT & ASK

THINK - What is the speaker trying to say? Be like a curious detective! What did they say? What did they mean?

REPEAT back what you heard. This helps you remember and shows you were listening.

ASK questions - if you're unsure what the other person said, ask them to repeat it. Don't ever assume you know what they meant to say! Check with them to be sure.

The above three steps are also outlined in printables at the end of these notes.

A template worksheet is included (see *template 1*): have students fill in the names of each step next to the visual prompts (Ears, Eyes, Think) and colour the sheet.

Listening Exercise 1: Mini Sound Detective

The objective of this exercise is to develop focus and listening skills by encouraging students to sit silently and become sound detectives, identifying and reflecting on sounds inside and outside the classroom. It encourages quiet focus and curiosity. The reflection questions at the end of the exercise promote self-awareness and emphasise the importance of active listening skills.

A template worksheet is included (see *template 2*) at the end of these notes, on which students can write or draw about what they hear. Alternatively, you could ask for verbal responses as a group (students put up their hand and name one or two things they hear).

Script

Mini is a Sound Detective on a mission! She wants to uncover all the hidden sounds inside and outside your classroom. Can you help her by becoming a Mini Sound Detective? Get ready to sit silently, open your ears wide and use your listening skills to solve the sound mysteries!

1. Close your eyes for a moment and take three deep breaths to relax yourself.
2. Open your ears wide – pretend they are like a detective’s magnifying glass! Listen carefully for any sounds inside the classroom.

[Pause for 1-2 minutes before speaking again, and ask students to either write or draw something that they heard in the first box on their worksheet, OR put up their hand to tell you something they have heard.]

3. Now, we are going to shift our attention to outside the classroom. Close your eyes for a moment and take three deep breaths to relax yourself
4. Open your ears wide – pretend they are like a detective’s magnifying glass! Listen carefully for any sounds coming from outside the classroom walls.

[Pause for 1-2 minutes before speaking again, and ask students to either write or draw something that they heard in the second box on their worksheet OR put up their hand to tell you something they have heard.]

Reflection/discussion:

Congratulations Sound Detectives! By sitting silently and listening carefully, you discovered sounds you wouldn’t have noticed before.

Keep sharpening your listening skills!

1. “How did sitting silently and closing your eyes at the beginning of the activity help you become a better Sound Detective?”
2. “Do you think you normally hear all these sounds when you’re busy doing other things?”
3. “What was the most challenging part of sitting silently and listening for you?”
4. “What’s one thing you’ll remember from this activity that will help you become a better listener in the future?”

Listening Exercise 2: Listen and Draw

This activity enhances listening skills and attention, by instructing students to draw a picture, based on verbal instructions only. Students will develop their ability to listen carefully, follow verbal instructions accurately, and apply their interpretation to create unique drawings. The reflection questions at the end of the exercise can reinforce the importance of active listening and following verbal instructions accurately. They could also spark discussion about the importance of accurate communication and asking questions if communication is unclear – the students all heard the same words but perhaps interpreted them differently.

A template worksheet is included (see *template 3*) for drawing.

Note: The script below is to create a drawing that resembles a big ice cream cone with multiple scoops.

However, you could *simplify the activity for younger students* by asking them to create a straight-forward arrangement of just three shapes, for example ‘draw a triangle, now draw a square next to it, now draw a circle above the square’.

Script:

Welcome to Mini's Drawing Mystery! Just like detectives solve mysteries, we're going to use our ears and pencils to solve a special drawing mystery. Are you ready to follow the clues and draw something amazing?

1. Open your ears wide – pretend they are like a detective's magnifying glass! Listen carefully to the special clues and draw something amazing on your worksheet.
2. [Option as above: simplify these instructions, and leave out the statement about Mini's favourite thing to eat.] Milo wants to buy Mini her favourite thing to eat, let's see if we can discover what it is! Draw: Two circles the same size side-by-side and touching each other – then one triangle under the two circles – then one circle on top of the two circles – then one smaller circle on top of the smallest circle.
3. Reveal your drawing! When everyone has finished, hold up your drawing! (Can anyone say what Mini's favourite thing to eat is? – an icecream) Take a look around - are the pictures all the same or very different?

Congratulations Drawing Detectives! By sitting silently and listening carefully, you created an amazing drawing just from listening! Keep practicing your listening skills!

Reflection/discussion

1. "What similarities and what differences did you notice in everyone else's drawings?"
 2. "Did you find it easy or hard to follow verbal instructions and create your drawing?"
 3. "Were there times where you felt unsure about what to draw?"
4. "What other times can you think of when it's important for you to be a good listener?"
 5. "Why is it important to be a good listener in school, at home, or when spending time with friends?"

Listening Exercise 3: Re-tell My Story

(suits more advanced students who are more confident with writing and reading aloud)

This activity improves active listening and communication skills through collaborative storytelling. Through the process of writing, sharing, and reinterpreting stories, students will practice effective communication. This activity also promotes cooperation and teaches the importance of asking questions for clarification.

Students work in pairs, sitting together. Each student will need a sheet of paper to write their own one-paragraph story, and a second sheet to draw or write their interpretation of their partner's story. Set timings for each step based on your knowledge of your students' confidence with writing.

Ask each student to write their own one-paragraph story about something either Mini or Milo does. It can be an adventure, a funny moment or anything they like!

After writing is complete, one of the students reads their story aloud to their partner. Their partner then 'retells' the story, either by drawing what happened or writing their own version, keeping as close to the original story as they can.

Students may not read their partner's story, but they may ask as many questions as they like to clarify what happened in the story.

Once the 'retell' is complete, students swap roles and the other story is read aloud.

Reflection questions at the end of the exercise:

1. "How did it feel to listen to your partner's story and create a drawing or rewrite?"
2. "What was hard about this activity? What was fun?"
3. "Did you ask questions to help you better understand the other person's story? Did they? How did it help?"
4. "What differences were there between the original story and the drawing/rewrite?"
5. "Can you think of other situations where good listening and asking questions can help us be better communicators?"

Listening Game I: Mini Says

This adaptation of the classic "Simon Says" aims to enhance students' listening skills, ability to follow instructions, and attention to detail.

The activity promotes active listening and improves students' ability to follow spoken directions and distinguish between commands that begin with "Mini says" and those that don't.

Reflective questions are provided to encourage children to think about their experiences during the "Mini Says" game and connect them to the value of active listening in various situations.

Select one student to be "Mini" for the first round. [Suggestion: have them wear some Elephant ears for a bit of fun!] After a few rounds, switch roles, and let another student be "Mini."

Script/Student instructions:

Welcome to "Mini Says"! Get ready to have fun while sharpening your listening skills.

Follow Mini's instructions carefully, but remember, you must only follow commands that start with "Mini says." Listening carefully to the command is crucial!

1. Mini is the leader, and will give you instructions. The instructions can be fun and active, like

"Mini says touch your toes" or "Mini says hop on one foot."

2. You need to listen carefully and only follow commands that start with "Mini says." For example, if Mini says:

"Mini says clap your hands," you should clap your hands.

If Mini says, "Touch your nose," you should not do it because there was no "Mini says" at the beginning.

3. Watch out for tricks! Sometimes, Mini might try to trick you by giving a command without saying "Mini says."

If you follow an instruction without "Mini says" at the beginning, you're out for that round.

Reflective Questions at the end of the game:

1. "Did you notice that everyone had to listen to Mini to play the game?"
2. "How did it feel when you listened carefully and got to stay in the game?"
3. "What happened when you didn't listen to 'Mini Says'?"
4. "Why is listening important?"
5. "What is something fun you learned about listening today while playing 'Mini Says'?"

Listening Game 2: Mini Secret Whispers

This game encourages fun and engagement while practicing essential listening and cognitive skills. The activity aims to enhance students' ability to listen attentively, convey information accurately, and maintain focus during communication.

Reflective questions are provided, to help young children reflect on the importance of active listening and good communication in all aspects of their lives, including when playing games.

Sit children in a circle or have them line up. The teacher whispers a simple statement to the first child - see examples of statements provided below, or use a statement of your choice.

The first child then whispers it to the next child, and so on. Then the last person in the circle/line comes to the front and says the sentence aloud and everyone sees if it changed along the way!

Introduction Script

Mini has a big secret about Milo, and she wants to share it, but she can only whisper it to one person at a time. That person has to pass it on, like a magical secret chain. What happens when a secret travels from one friend to another? Let's find out by playing "Mini Secret Whispers"!

Suggested 'Secret Whispers':

- "Milo saw the stars in the sky."
- "Milo eats spaghetti in sauce."
- "Milo's blue balloon flies high."
- "Milo loves smelling small flowers."
- "Milo sent Mini a silly message."
- "Milo loves hopping in green grass."
- "Milo's crunchy cookies taste yummy."
- "Milo ate red apples and orange carrots."
- "Milo played in the park until dark."

Reflective questions at the end of the game:

1. "What was the secret at the beginning, and how did it change when it reached the end?"
2. "Why do you think the secret changed as it passed from person to person?"
3. "Why is it important to listen carefully when someone talks to you - especially if it's a secret?"
4. "What will you remember about the 'Mini Secret Whispers' game and how it's important to listen carefully?"
5. "What can you do to be a better listener in the future, both in games and in everyday life?"

OTHER DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

Vocab and Language

Words about listening

Review some of the words to do with listening and sounds that are in the book or were part of the listening exercises. (Students could suggest additional words, too.) Listening examples: ear, sound, noise, listen, speak, loud, noisy, soft, quiet. Active listening examples: face, look, expressions, pause, think, repeat, attention.

Suggestion: Draw a large elephant ear on your whiteboard and decorate it with the words. Or, print an elephant ear shape on paper for students to decorate.

The text

What do these words mean?

- Anticipation
- Epiphany
- Velvety

What feelings do they evoke; how do these phrases make students feel:

- Mini's trunk is swaying with anticipation.
- Mini has an Elephant Epiphany. (This is an example of alliteration.)
- Milo's icream is velvety, double fudge, triple chocolate. (Students could brainstorm other adjectives for icecream, such as cold, creamy, silky, milky, soft.)

Visual literacy and observing characters

Natashia Curtin's illustrations in *The Big Flappy Ears* expand on the text, telling us more about the characters and supplementing the narrative. For example, through the illustrations we learn more about what happens to Mini when she gets left behind at school.

The illustrations also reveal the final form of Mini's reminder to herself: a sign that stands on her desk and says "Stop and Listen".

Mini

After reading *The Big Flappy Ears*, ask students to think of some adjectives to describe Mini. Then, encourage them to look at the illustrations closely to find out more about what Mini likes and make a short list (she plays basketball, likes popcorn and computer games, loves ice cream, is friends with Milo).

The caretaker/cleaner

Look for the caretaker/cleaner pig character who appears on several pages of the book. What is he/she doing (seeing Mini in the classroom, taking Mini to the school office, going down the hall with a trolley of cleaning supplies, looking annoyed about the mess Mini has made of the cleaning supplies, sweeping up sticky notes)? Have students write some sentences about this.

Older students could write from the pig's point of view.

Cover design

If you have read other books in the series with the class before, ask them to look at the covers of all the books together. What do they notice about the background of the illustrations and the characters? What effect does it have to see Mini and Milo in full colour, and the backgrounds in a single colour?

Visual arts – Your school environment

Review the illustrations which show us the school environment (the double page spread in the preliminary pages shows the school building and pedestrian crossing; there are also illustrations of the classroom, the corridor and the school office) and those that depict teachers and support staff at school (Mr Snort, the cleaner/caretaker, the pedestrian crossing guard, the school office staffer). Students could use these as inspiration for an artwork depicting one part of your school and one staff member from the school.

Humour

The messages in the Mini and Milo books are conveyed with wonderful humour. Return to the discussion about the humour in Mini's name – she is definitely not small! Can students identify other humorous elements in the story – anything else they found funny? Can they say why it is funny? In *The Big Flappy Ears*, a great deal of the humour is contained in the illustrations, so encourage students to look closely at what is going on in every page. For example:

- The almost slapstick, physical humour of Mini's fall, pegging her ears open, vacuuming her ears and getting sticky notes stuck to her classmates).

- The absurdity of aliens eating icecream or a giraffe with a small umbrella on its head.
- Some of the interactions between characters, including the way other students have to crane around Mini at book reading time.
- Other jokes that extend the humour of the narrative, like when Milo measures Mini's bulging tummy with a long tape measure after measuring her ears with just a ruler.

Discussion - Excursions

The Big Flappy Ears could also be used as a stimulus for talking or writing about recent or upcoming school excursions; visiting the museum and/or school activities like Fancy Hat Day.

Tracing the plot and Trial-and-Error problem-solving

(This suits classes which have read more than one book in the series)

After reading two or three books in the series, point out to the class that in each of the stories, Mini has a problem, and she tries various ideas to solve that problem – sometimes with help from someone else – before reaching a final solution.

Can students recall some of the things Mini tried?

“Problem and solution” is a common plot device. Older students might be able to think of other picture books or novels which use this device.

Mini's problem-solving efforts also provide a great model for kids, and can encourage them to develop resilience.

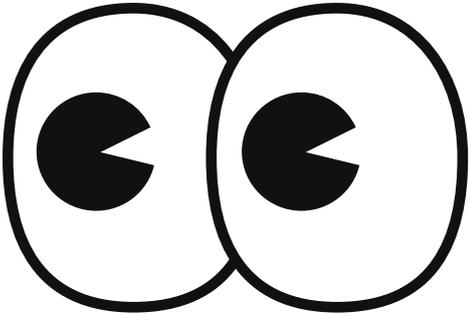
Discuss that if you have a problem, sometimes the first thing you do to try to solve it doesn't work. That's OK and it's always worth trying again. Trying several things before you find the solution that works best is sometimes called 'trial and error'.

Review one or two of the stories and make a list of the ideas Mini tries, and whether someone else helps her. You could do this verbally with the full group, or older students could create a list or table. For example, in *The Teeny Tiny Voice*, Mini tries to distract herself and tries to run away, before she settles on creating rules for the Voice. In *The Big Flappy Ears*, she tries pinning her ears open, cleaning her ears out, writing sticky notes.... Sometimes we see Milo helping her, and Mr Snort provides a suggestion.

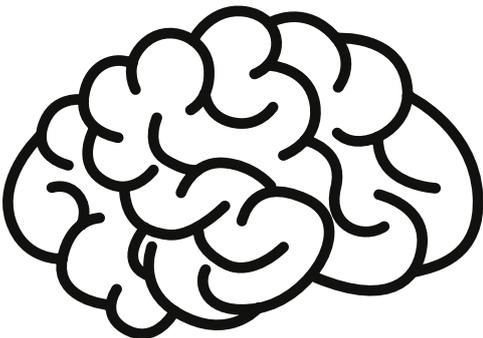


1. Mini and Milo: Active Listening

Fill in the names of each step next to the visual prompts and colour in!







MINI'S FAVOURITE COLOUR IS

PINK

2. Mini Sound Detective

**Help Mini uncover all the hidden sounds
inside and outside your classroom!**

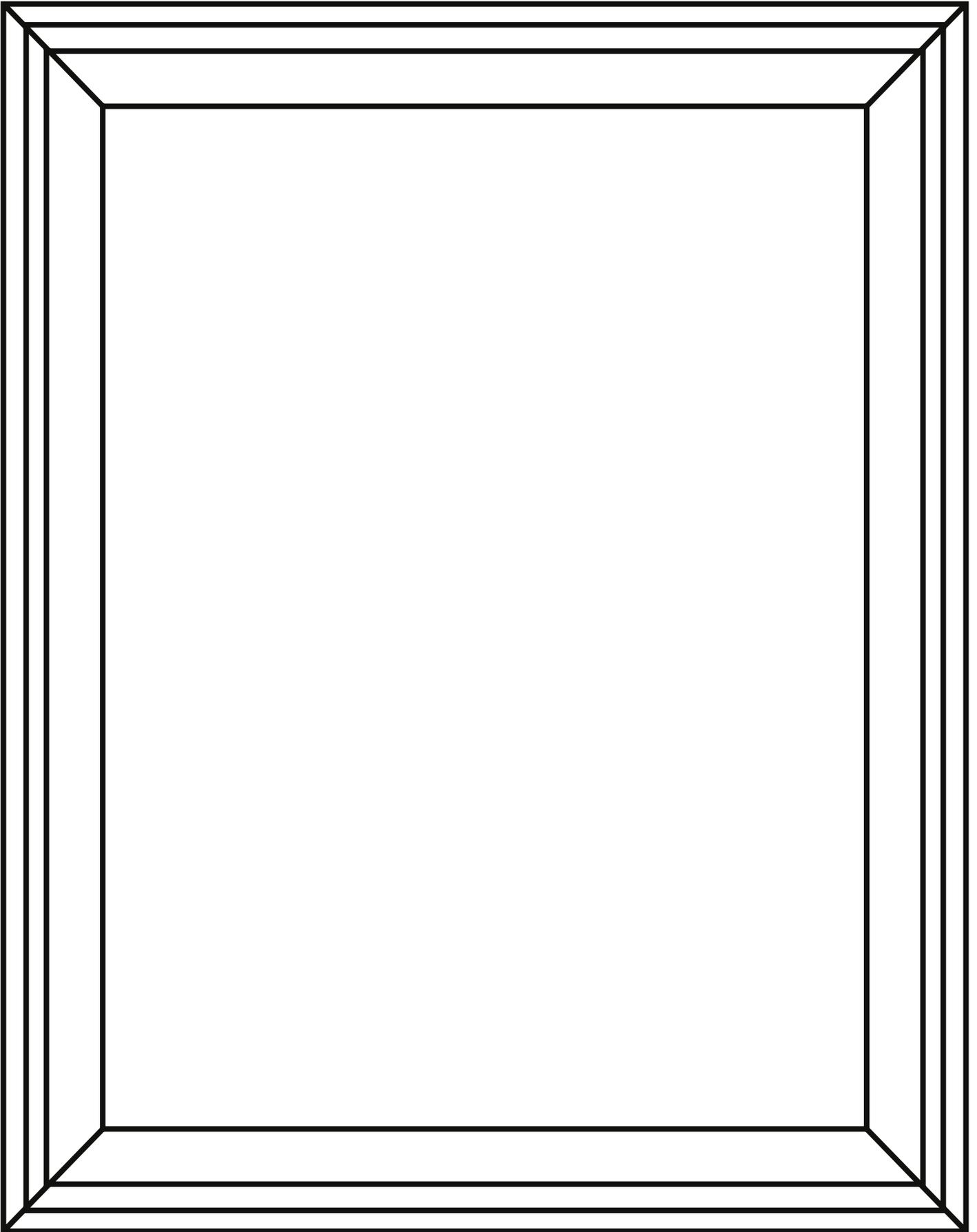
Write or draw a sound you heard inside the classroom.

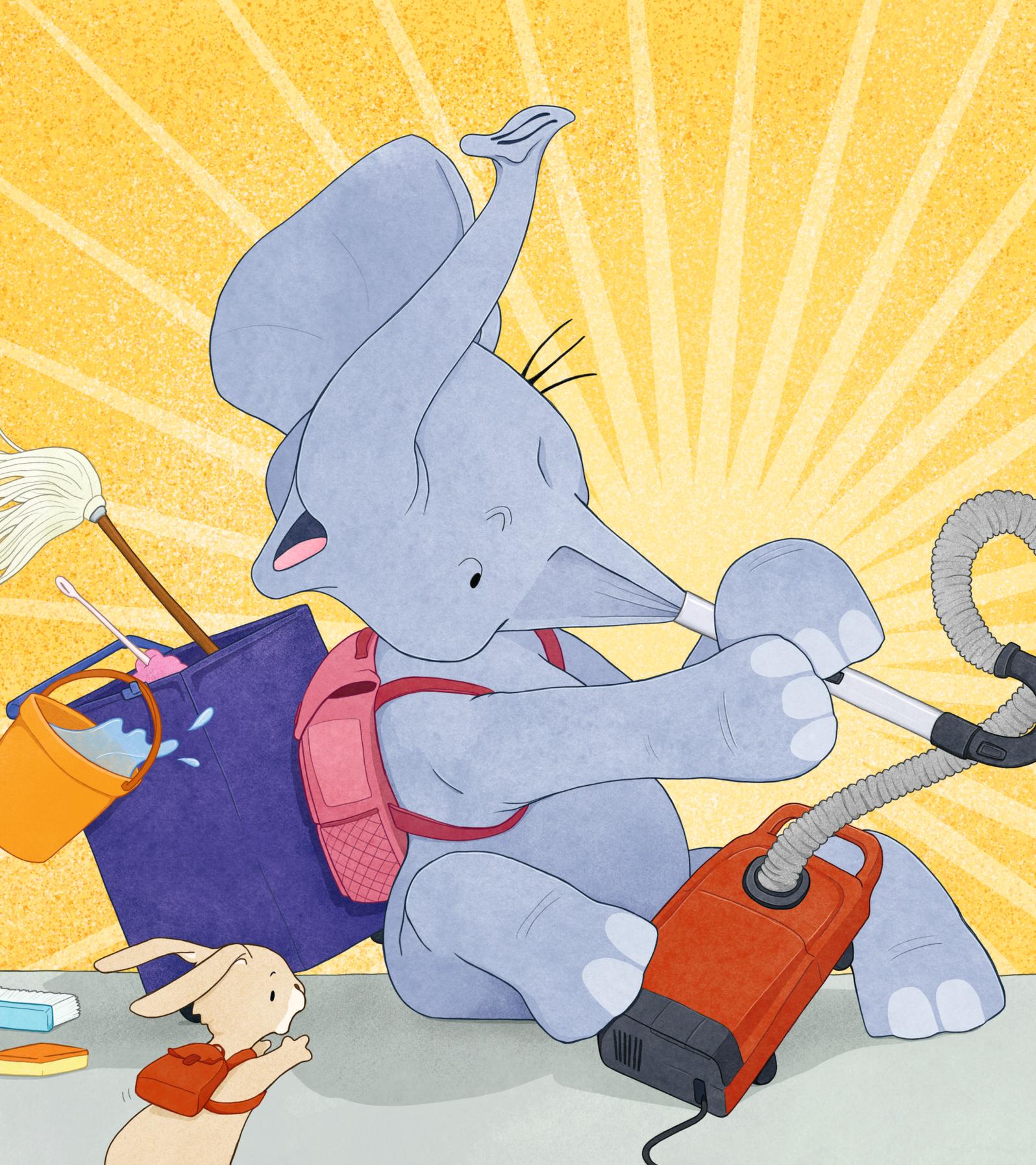


Write or draw a sound you heard outside the classroom.



3. Mini's Listen and Draw





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