



# Barrington Stoke

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES



## THE SMALL THINGS

Lisa Thompson

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## PART 1 SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

### SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

This resource has been produced to provide ideas for guiding young readers through Lisa Thompson's **The Small Things**, a brilliant short novel with powerful themes. The guide is written to be used after reading the full text in order to discuss the book and its overarching themes as a whole.

A synopsis is followed by quotes from the book with suggestions for discussion points designed to help young readers engage with the complex topics the book covers. The questions assigned to each quote are intended to further understanding of the text and provide opportunities for classroom discussion. There are also suggestions for creative exercises and a brief author biography.

We hope you enjoy using these resources with your class.

Lisa Thompson's **The Small Things** is the story of Anna, who has been given a special task at school: to partner up with the new girl, Ellie. But it's not as simple as it sounds - Ellie can't come to school because she's unwell, so she attends class using a robot, which her classmates call 'Ellie-bot.'

Anna can't understand why the teacher has picked her to hang out with Ellie. At school, she feels left out. Her friends Nia, Erin and Shavina have lots of fun hobbies and interests, like swimming and skiing and going to dance classes. But Anna doesn't go on any exciting trips outside of school - she knows her parents can't afford it. She never has anything to talk about with her friends. Next to them, she feels so small.

One morning when Ellie asks Anna a question, a little white lie pops out. Then one lie turns into another, and suddenly Anna is stuck in a web of stories about a fantasy life she wishes she had. But the pretence can't last forever. When the web starts to fall apart, Anna is scared that she will lose Ellie's friendship for good...

**The Small Things** is written in a gentle, accessible style whilst remaining a powerful story that covers a wide array of thought-provoking topics. This book is perfect for classroom discussions as it will help children to engage with and begin to understand the complexities of friendship, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and the importance of honesty and appreciating the everyday.

## PART 2

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO DEVELOP READING STRATEGIES

*There were three reasons why I didn't want to get out of the car.*

*Nia Gibson, Shavina Bates and Erin Smith.*

*Nia, Shavina and Erin were lovely. They weren't nasty to me in any way and I guess I'd call them my friends – even if I was on the edge of the group [...] There was nothing wrong with Nia, Shavina or Erin at all. They just made me feel so small. [page 2–3]*

**Explore Anna's worries and difficulties at school:**

- What do you think Anna means by feeling 'small'?
- Why do you think Anna struggles to feel accepted by her friends?
- Do you think that Anna's own feelings about herself impact this?
- Do you ever feel like Anna does about school?



*“Hey, Ellie. Would you like to see the library now?” I said to the tiny round camera.*

*Nia scrunched up her nose.*

*“The library?” she said. “I’m sure you’d rather see something more exciting, wouldn’t you Ellie?” She turned Ellie-bot so the camera faced her.*

*[...] It was probably for the best. Miss Burnell should have chosen Nia to look after Ellie in the first place. But thinking that didn’t stop the feeling I had inside. I felt like I was deflating, just like a burst balloon. All of the air seeped out until I was very, very small indeed. [page 34–36]*

### **Discuss Anna’s thoughts in this scene:**

- How do you think Nia’s words made Anna feel? Why?
  - What language does the author use to show us this?
  - What other images could be used to describe the same feelings?
  - Can you find any other examples in the book where Anna feels this way? Pick out three examples to share.
  - How do you think conversations like this affect the way that Anna sees herself?
- 

*“That’s why I made it all up.” I went on. “About going to the ice-cream parlour and the ten-pin bowling. And about the ice-skating and football training. The truth is, I don’t go to any clubs like everyone else does. My family can’t afford it. I made those things up as I was worried I didn’t have anything interesting to tell you.”*

*Ellie looked down at the book she was holding, then back at me.*

*“Why couldn’t you just be honest?” she said. “I don’t care about if you can ice-skate or not.”*  
**[page 92]**

### **Explore Anna and Ellie’s friendship:**

- Why do you think it doesn’t matter to Ellie whether Anna has exciting hobbies like ice-skating?
- What do Anna and Ellie have in common?
- How is Anna’s friendship with Ellie different to her friendships with Nia, Erin and Shavina?

*"A lot had happened over the past few days and I had done a lot of thinking, especially about what Mum had said about forgetting to be me.*

*I sat on my bed and looked at my desk. The heart collage I'd started was still propped up against the wall. Some of the pieces were a bit wonky, but it really didn't look too bad on the whole.*

*Under my bed I had a small plastic tub filled with a few art materials next to a pile of old magazines. I put them all on my desk and sat down in my chair. I was going to finish it."* [page 83–84]

**Examine the quotes above:**

- Can you pick out any other quotes from the book where Anna is thinking about her collage?
  - Look at the language the author uses to describe the collage. What does this tell us about how Anna feels about it?
  - How has her attitude towards it changed throughout the story?
  - Why do you think this is?
- What do you think Anna's collage symbolises in the book?

**Think about Anna as a character:**

- Do you think that Anna has changed over the course of the story? In what way?
- What do you think she has learned?
- Why do you think Miss Burnell paired Anna with Ellie at the beginning of the book?





*“...a small thing could be watching a blackbird bathing in a puddle,” Ellie said, “or the delicious smell you get when you mix up the ingredients for a cake, or reading something in a book that is so interesting it makes you smile. That’s what I mean about the small things.” [page 94]*

**Think about the ‘small things’ that Ellie is describing:**

- Why might someone in Ellie’s position really appreciate the ‘small things’?
- Do you think it is important to appreciate little everyday things, as well as more exciting and unusual ones? Why?
- Think about your own life:
  - Are there any small things that you might take for granted and sometimes forget to enjoy? What about eating your favourite foods, or playing a game, or seeing animals and green spaces when you’re out and about?
  - How would you feel if suddenly they weren’t there?
  - What can we do to make sure that we don’t stop appreciating these things?

*The Small Things* was inspired by the [No Isolation](#) project, which helps to provide robots just like Ellie-bot for children who can’t attend school in person, due to long-term illness. To learn more about the project and the ideas behind the book, watch our [video interview with Lisa Thompson](#).

As a group, discuss how you think Ellie feels about being able to return to school using her robot. What would you miss most about school if you were at home? How do you think having her robot helps Ellie while she is recovering?



## **PART 3**      **CREATIVE EXERCISES**

### **Write about a ‘small thing’ in your life that makes you happy**

*It could be a place that you like to visit, an activity you like doing with your family, or maybe something to do with one of your hobbies – think about how Ellie likes the smell of her baking, or how relaxed Anna feels when she works on her art.*

*What everyday things are most important to you?*

### **Write about returning to school**

*Think back to a time when you started back at school after a long time away. Were you excited or nervous? What were you looking forward to? Did anything seem different, or feel strange? What part of the day do you remember the best?*

### **Create a collage like Anna’s**

*You can choose any theme you wish – you might like to make a collage about your friends, or your family, or a memory that’s important to you. Think about what your artwork is about and how you can show that in your design.*

*Use as many materials as you like and be as creative as you can! When it’s finished, you might even want to give it to someone special as a gift, just like Anna does.*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

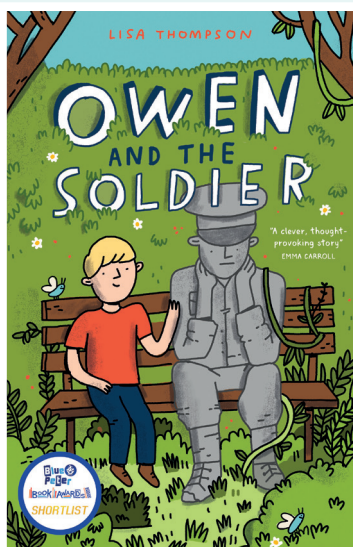


Lisa Thompson is the acclaimed and bestselling author of several books for children including the Carnegie Medal and Branford Boase nominated *The Goldfish Boy* and the Blue Peter Book Award shortlisted *Owen and the Soldier*. Lisa's other bestselling titles include *The Light Jar*, *The Day I was Erased* and *The House of Clouds*.



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