

The Wrong Shoes

by Tom Percival

Educational Resource



CONTENTS

About *The Wrong Shoes*

Curriculum Areas, About the Author.....1

Classroom Discussion Topics, Activities and Lesson Plans

Discussion Topics.....2

Activities.....3

Lesson Plan #1.....4

Lesson Plan #2.....6

THEMES

Poverty
Friendship
Bullying

Empathy and diversity
Identity and belonging

The Education Hub

For more Educational Resources, and free downloadable activities head to:
<https://www.simonandschuster.com.au/p/education-hub>

A beautiful and sensitive exploration of the experience of child poverty from leading author/illustrator, Tom Percival, for fans of *Boy at the Back of the Class* and *Julia and the Shark*.

Will has the wrong shoes – he's always known it but doesn't know how to change it. Navigating the difficulties of home and school when you feel you stick out is tough, but finding confidence with the help and empathy of friends can be all you need to see the way.

Curriculum Areas

Learning areas:

- English
- The Humanities (Civics and Citizenship)
- Health and Physical Education

Capabilities:

- Ethical capability
- Personal and social

About the Author

Tom Percival is an author/illustrator who lives in Stroud with his family and *The Best Dog in the World* (apologies if you happen to think that your dog is *The Best Dog in the World*). A lot of his books explore social connections, community, equality and emotional growth, but he also makes room to write a bit of pure escapist fun once in a while. When he's not making books he enjoys walking and running around the countryside with either his family, or *The Best Dog in the World*, and *sometimes* ALL of them at once. He also makes music and enjoys taking photographs.

Discussion Topics

- The novel opens with the line: "This is no fairy tale." Discuss what you think this means.
- What is your first impression of Will? If you could use three words to sum up his character, what would they be?
- How does Will react to Chris Tucker's bullying? Do you think he should have done something differently?
- During the assembly, Will is reflecting on how he will never get an award because he doesn't take part in any extracurricular activities. Why is that?
- Will uses a lot of metaphors when he describes his feelings, such as: "That sudden gasp of breath, as if you've just smashed through thin ice on a frozen river and your body temperature drops several degrees." What is a metaphor, and how effectively are they used throughout this novel? Can you find any more examples?
- Discuss why you think Kalia defends Will and Cameron against Chris Tucker. Give several possible reasons.
- Why is Will so upset when Cameron offers him his old trainers? Do you think he is overreacting?
- Why does Will lie to his dad about his fight with Cameron? Reflect on why Will might be trying to protect his dad from the truth.
- How do Will and his dad use humour to deal with the challenges they face, including poverty?
- When he goes for a late-night walk, Will sees a large silver owl. He decides not to tell anyone about it. What do you think the owl symbolises?
- Will uses art to distract him. It's an activity that seems to make his problems fade into the background. What are the positive and negative aspects of using something like art to escape real life?
- What do you think Will means when he says: "It's a dangerous thing, hope." What does that line indicate about his frame of mind in that moment?
- Describe what Will sees under the bridge with Chris Tucker, Si and his mates. What do you think they are planning, and why is it left open to interpretation at the end of the chapter? Does it work to build suspense?
- What does Will think about his Mum's boyfriend, Greg, when he first appears in the novel? What does Greg do to make Will change his opinion about him?
- Reflect on the chapter where Kalia's family help Will. What do they make him realise about his situation?
- How do Will and Cameron make amends after their fight? Why is Cameron's friendship so important to Will? Do you think Will deserved Cameron's forgiveness?
- What is the catalyst for Will destroying his owl painting? What does it lead to?
- How does Will feel after he steals the headphones? Was it what you expected, based on what you know about his character and his circumstances?
- Why did Will confess the truth to his dad? What was the outcome?
- How has Will changed by the end of the novel? What has he learned about himself and the people around him?

Activities

- Before you read the novel, make some predictions about the story based on the title and cover. What do you think it is about? Revisit your reflections after you've finished reading. Were your assumptions correct?
- Research child poverty in Australia. How widespread is the problem? How is poverty defined in Australia? What charities exist to help this issue?
- Choose a chapter in the book and rewrite it from the perspective of a character other than Will. How does it change the story?
- Describe how Will is different from his best friend, Cameron. Do you think they are unlikely friends? Make a list of the things that make their friendship work.
- How do you think the ending of the novel would be different if Will agreed to take the money and continue stealing? Analyse why he made the decision not to.
- "Kindness is weird. It can feel like being knocked off balance – especially unexpected kindness." Reflect on a time when someone was unexpectedly kind to you. How did it make you feel? Take turns sharing examples of kindness with your class.
- Write a paragraph about one of the minor characters, such as Mr Prince or Lani. Add in your own background details to flesh out the character further. What do they look like? What do they enjoy doing? And finally, do they know more about Will's situation than he realises?
- Define "pity". What does it mean to pity someone? Why don't Will and his Dad like anyone feeling sorry for them? How does it make their situation even worse?
- Analyse why the author chose the title of this novel. Try to come up with some alternative titles. Share them with your class, and vote on the best one.
- As a class, brainstorm the main themes of the novel. Discuss why it is important for young people to read a story like this one. Can you think of any other novels with similar themes?

Lesson Plan #1

Lesson overview:

In this lesson, students will research child poverty in Australia using reliable resources. They will share this information to gain a better understanding of the topic, and what can be done to improve the situation for future generations. They will present their information in both written and oral formats.

Key Objectives

- Understanding the impact of child poverty
- Developing empathy for those in difficult situations
- Locating and collecting information and data from online sources
- Learning to identify reliable sources

You will need:

- A copy of *The Wrong Shoes*
- A whiteboard and some markers
- Access to the internet
- Materials for creating a poster, or digital tools such as PowerPoint or Canva

Part one: Group Discussion

Have students discuss in small groups, or as a whole class, what they think “poverty” means. What are some of the things that might cause poverty?

Read aloud pages 11-14 and then 24-27 of *The Wrong Shoes*. Ask students to make some assumptions about what Will’s circumstances are, based on the description of his shoes and his classmates’ awards at assembly.

Ask students to brainstorm what they think some of the effects of poverty on children might be. Create a list on the whiteboard.

Show students a short video that describes poverty, such as this one from World Vision Australia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXpm7xDRWk4>

Do students think child poverty is currently an issue in Australia? Why or why not? Encourage students to think critically and use any prior knowledge they have on the topic, including what they may experience and see in their every day lives. This may be a sensitive issue for some, so proceed with caution.

Lesson Plan #1

Part Two: Independent Research

Let students know they will be conducting research about child poverty online. Encourage students to only use reliable sources to find their information. Have a discussion about what makes a source reliable, using the CRAAP Test (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose).

Ask students to start researching child poverty online. They should be looking for answers to questions such as:

- What defines poverty?
- How widespread is child poverty in Australia?
- What causes poverty?
- What are the effects of poverty, especially on children?
- What charities exist in Australia to combat child poverty?
- Why can't poverty be solved immediately?
- What groups of people are most affected by poverty?
- How does child poverty in Australia compare to other countries around the world?

Part Three: Presentation

Students should choose 6-7 facts about poverty that they have discovered in their research.

In pairs, have students decide how they would like to present this information in a written format. It could be an infographic, poster, PowerPoint, or anything else. It should be engaging, accessible, and well-edited.

Make sure students have referenced the information they are presenting by creating a Bibliography or Reference List that is visible on their presentation.

Once they have finished their work, ask them to describe their presentation verbally to the class. Ask them to share the fact that surprised them the most, and why. Students should identify where they got their information from and what made it a reliable source.

Optional Extension Activity:

Have students brainstorm ideas for a school-based fundraiser for a charity that works with children living in poverty. Encourage them to consider ways they could also raise awareness of the issue within their community. Ask them to present their proposal to the Principal or School Council, to see if they can go ahead with the project.

Lesson Plan #2

Lesson overview:

In this lesson, students will discuss the merits of honesty and loyalty, and how they apply to friendships. They will use this knowledge to write a creative text aiming to persuade readers to always tell the truth.

Key Objectives

- Understanding the importance of honesty
- Developing an appreciation for genuine friendship
- Learning to write creatively and persuasively about an assigned topic

You will need:

- A copy of *The Wrong Shoes*
- A whiteboard and some markers
- Something for writing with: pens and paper, or computers

Part one: Group Brainstorm

Have students brainstorm in pairs or groups to come up with a list of ways to be a good friend. One person should scribe the conversation into a mind map.

Get students to choose the thing they think is the most important. A volunteer from each group or pair should share their idea with the class.

Ask students to have a conversation in pairs or groups about whether a friendship can exist without honesty. You may like to split the class in half and get them to debate the topic more formally.

Part two: Creative Writing Warm Up

On a small piece of paper, have students write down a setting (shopping centre, beach, the moon, etc.). On another, have them write down a character (teenage boy, police officer, someone who is always late, etc.) One another, have them write down a source of conflict (a bad temper, the sun exploding, gum on your shoe).

Put the pieces of paper into three different boxes, mix them up, and ask students to take one from each box. Now they should write a paragraph using all three of their prompts.

Lesson Plan #2

Part three: Planning Time

Individually, ask students to think of three scenarios where someone is dishonest in a friendship. How is the dishonesty discovered? What are the possible outcomes? Encourage them to think outside the box.

Ask them to choose their best scenario and use dot points, a storyboard, or another planning technique to plot out a short story. Who are the main characters? Where is the story set? What is the source of conflict?

Let them know that the intention of their creative writing should be to subtly persuade the reader to always be honest. Does that change their story idea at all?

Part three: Creative Writing

Give students time to write their piece and edit their work. They should swap their story with a peer and have them give feedback and suggest further edits.

When the stories are complete, collate them into a digital magazine and share them with parents and the school community. Perhaps your school library could have the short story collection available to borrow!

Optional Extension Activity:

Read pages 51-64 of *The Wrong Shoes*. Ask students to reflect on the following: Are there any times in life where it is better to lie, rather than tell the truth? Have students write a page or two on this difficult question, giving some examples, and concluding with their personal thoughts on the topic.