



# EK BOOKS TEACHER NOTES & RESOURCES

**Title:** Growing Pains  
**Author:** Alison McLennan  
**Illustrator:** Melissa Johns  
**Publisher:** EK Books  
**Price:** ANZ \$24.99 | USA \$18.99 | CA \$24.99 | UK £10.99  
**ISBN:** 9781925820522  
**Publication date:** April 2021  
**Audience age:** 4-8 years  
**Key Curriculum Areas:** English, Science, Health and Physical Education, Visual Arts



## SYNOPSIS:

When Finn's family plant a tree in the back yard, he feels responsible for it and worries the tree is cold, hungry or lonely. He tries to share his breakfast with the tree, offers it his scarf, and spends the afternoon keeping it company. Just after going to bed, his nightlight goes out and Finn is plunged into darkness. It occurs to him that his tree is outside in the dark, every night!

When he sees the tree is standing tall and brave in the moonlight and doesn't seem afraid, Finn is inspired to be brave as well. Finn's kindness and curiosity end up helping him to overcome his fear of the dark.

## THEMES:

Kindness. Curiosity. Empathy. Caring for the environment. Overcoming your fears

## SELLING POINTS:

- An easily relatable way for parents to introduce the importance of caring for the environment to young children.
- Focuses on the important emotional intelligence (EQ) tools of kindness and empathy.
- Gently encourages children to overcome their fears.
- The illustrator uses recycled elements to create her artworks, tying in with the environmentally aware themes of the story.

## WRITING STYLE:

Lyrical prose.

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE:

Collage illustration, utilising recycled teabags, serviettes, gift wrapping and paper coffee cups. To finish off the pieces, mixed media is added to each collage.



### AUTHOR MOTIVATION

On a visit to California when my kids were little, my son, who is very empathetic, was very curious and worried about the many homeless people we saw. When my husband gave him \$10 to spend on a souvenir, he instead gave it to one of these people. This act of kindness stayed with me, and I think it's what inspired me to write *Growing Pains*. In the story, Finn shows curiosity about, and kindness towards, a tree. For me, the tree can easily represent a homeless person, a new kid at school from another culture, or an elderly person in a nursing home. When we're curious about people and make the effort to get to know them, new friendships are born, understanding and acceptance grows, and the world becomes a better place. In the story, Finn overcomes his fear of the dark. In real life, people can lose their fear of other people. I also think Finn's care and concern for this one tree is representative of how most children feel about the environment as a whole. The young generation care deeply about nature and saving the world, and I like the idea of encouraging child activism.

### AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

**Alison McLennan** grew up on the sunny beaches of Queensland's Gold Coast, before moving to Brisbane, where she attended university and raised her family. She was a terrible creative writer as a child but an enthusiastic volunteer in her school library. When not writing children's books, she's busy prancing on the stage in musical theatre productions, or curled up reading a book with her cat, Honey.

**Melissa Johns** is an artist and illustrator from beautiful Northeast Victoria, who creates using recycled materials. Her passion is children's artwork and education, particularly with regard to environmental awareness. Her whimsical illustrative style has a vintage feel due to the recycled teabags used in every piece, and the textures and details that go into each illustration define her style. This is Melissa's second children's picture book. Melissa and her husband are raising twin 14 year old sons who think they are 18, and the two cutest Jack Russells in Australia.



### INTERVIEW:

#### AUTHOR

##### **What is the inspiration for this story?**

*Growing Pains* was inspired by the curiosity and empathy of my son.

##### **What was the most rewarding part of this project?**

Seeing the illustrations for the first time was one of the most exciting days of my life. Watching the story come to life with Melissa's illustrations was a real thrill because she captured what I had imagined perfectly. I can't wait to share the finished product with children, parents and teachers.

##### **What was the most challenging part of this project?**

The final rewrite was nerve-racking for me, because I knew it came down to getting a single sentence just right in order for the story to be perfect.

#### ILLUSTRATOR

##### **What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.**

Recycled papers are the predominant media used; recycled teabags are used in all my artworks and illustrations, and added to these are the outside of coffee cups, wrapping paper, gift bags and serviettes. Once all of the paper pieces have been collaged in place, I then add the finer details.

##### **What was the most rewarding part of this project?**

Using my imagination to tell the author's story and seeing it come alive page by page. I adored Finn's thought process and liked creating illustrations to match Alison's gorgeous words.

##### **What was the most challenging part of this project?**

What I found most challenging was the formatting and flow of the artwork. As my pieces take several weeks to complete, I sometimes find it difficult to maintain the flow of images from page to page, especially if they are not created in the order of the story.

This book was particularly challenging when the characters' thoughts and actions would duplicate over four pages, but each themed section required a new spark of imagination to keep each page visually interesting for young minds.

## TEACHER ACTIVITIES/NOTES:

### Discussion Notes and Activities:

N.B. These questions and activities can be adapted to suit the experience and ability of students.

#### Before Reading

- Look at the cover of Growing Pains. What do you see?
- What do you think the child is doing? What does it make you wonder about?
- Why do you think the book is called Growing Pains? What might this story be about?
- Have you felt growing pains? Do you think other living things feel pain? What about trees?
- Is it important to look after nature? What are some ways to care for living things?

#### During Reading

- Why do you think Finn wonders if the tree is cold? Hungry? Lonely? Hurting?
- Do you think Finn is helping the tree?

#### After Reading

- What was the main idea of the story?
- What was the important message?
- How did Finn's feelings change throughout the story?
- How did Finn help the tree? Did the tree help Finn? How?
- How did Mum help Finn feel better?
- What do you like about the illustrations? What do you notice about the use of materials? Why do you think the illustrator chose to create the pictures this way?
- Feelings can be both physical and emotional. What did Finn learn about 'feelings'? What kind of feelings are easier/harder to manage?
- What are some words you can use to describe Finn?
- Is it useful to have someone/something to talk to/care for when you have worries, even if they don't talk back? Why?
- Think about the last kind thing you did for someone/something else. What did you do? How did it make you feel?
- What are some ways we can teach others to care for our world?



## ACTIVITIES:

### ENGLISH

#### Foundation Curriculum Links

*Literature and context:* Discuss how authors create characters using language and images ([ACELT1581](#))

*Creating literature:* Innovate on familiar texts through play ([ACELT1831](#))

*Interpreting, analysing, evaluating:* Use comprehension strategies to understand and discuss texts listened to, viewed or read independently ([ACELY1650](#))

*Creating texts:* Create short texts to explore, record and report ideas and events using familiar words and beginning writing knowledge ([ACELY1651](#))

#### Years 1 and 2 Curriculum Links

*Responding to literature:* Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students' own experiences ([ACELT1582](#))

Compare opinions about characters, events and settings in and between texts ([ACELT1589](#))

*Creating literature:* Innovate on familiar texts by experimenting with character, setting or plot ([ACELT1833](#))

*Texts in context:* Discuss different texts on a similar topic, identifying similarities and differences between the texts ([ACELY1665](#))

*Interpreting, analysing, evaluating:* Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning about key events, ideas and information in texts that they listen to, view and read by drawing on growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features ([ACELY1660](#))

*Creating texts:* Create short imaginative, informative and persuasive texts using growing knowledge of text structures and language features for familiar and some less familiar audiences, selecting print and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose ([ACELY1671](#))

### **Adjective-Noun-Verb Word Association:**

- Create a table to sort the adjective (describing word), noun (name of object) and verb (action word) with the terms used in *Growing Pains*. Illustrate each group.
  - Include: *cold-scarf-wrapped / hungry-toast-nibbling / lonely-friend-sat / painful-comfort-rub / dark-nightlight-braved*

### **Synonyms:**

- Find the words in the book that have similar meanings (synonyms). Can you add to the list? These could be presented on a tree template.
  - Terms include: *cold-shivered-freezing / eat-nibbling-hungry / pain-aching-hurting / scared-panicky-frightened*

## Comprehension:

- Through writing and discussion, answer comprehension questions relating to the story, such as:
  - o Knowledge: Who was in the story? What was the problem? Where did Finn find a scarf? When did Finn's nightlight go out?
  - o Comprehension: Retell the story in your own words. What was the main idea? What are the differences between Finn and the tree?
  - o Application: How is Finn's behaviour an example of kindness? Why was overcoming his fear of the dark significant? What is another instance of 'growth' in the story?
  - o Analysis: How does the way the tree eats compare with the way Finn eats? Draw a diagram of Finn's body parts, and a diagram of the tree's parts.
  - o Synthesis: Predict how Finn might overcome fears in the future. What other ideas can you think of for caring for nature? What might happen if Finn's growing pains got worse?
  - o Evaluation: Do you agree with the ways Finn cared for the tree? What is the most important thing the story is teaching us? Rank Finn's behaviours in order from most important to least.

## Exploring Texts:

- Read other narrative and non-fiction stories about trees. For example, *The Giving Tree*, or *Last Tree in the City*. How do these books compare?

## Creative Writing:

- Write a story or create a role play using dialogue between a character and a tree. Think about the setting, characters, problem, resolution and conclusion.

## Information Report:

- Research a type of tree and write a report about it. Be sure to include a heading, sub-heading, captions, pictures, diagrams, photos, map, etc.

## Procedural Text:

- Brainstorm ideas for writing an instructional piece, such as 'How to care for a tree', 'Ways to show kindness', 'How to cure growing pains'.

## Recounting:

- Write about a time (or plan for a time) to show kindness to a living being (plant, person or animal). What did you do? What were you thinking / feeling? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

## Thinking Tools:

- X-Chart (Looks Like, Feels Like, Sounds Like, Thinks Like)
- De Bono's Six Thinking Hats: Red (fears, feelings, intuition), White (information, facts), Yellow (benefits, positive thinking), Blue (big picture, focus, learnings), Green (creative thinking, alternatives), Black (risks, problems, obstacles)

## SCIENCE

### Foundation to Year 2 Curriculum Links

*Science Understanding – Biological sciences:* Living things have basic needs, including food and water ([ACSSU002](#))

Living things grow, change and have offspring similar to themselves ([ACSSU030](#))

*Science as a Human Endeavour – Nature and development of science:* Science involves observing, asking questions about, and describing changes in, objects and events ([ACSHE013](#))

*Use and influence of science:* People use science in their daily lives, including when caring for their environment and living things ([ACSHE035](#))

*Science Inquiry Skills – Questioning and predicting:* Pose and respond to questions, and make predictions about familiar objects and events ([AC SIS024](#))

*Planning and conducting:* Participate in guided investigations and make observations using the senses ([AC SIS011](#))

*Processing and analysing data and information:* Use a range of methods to sort information, including drawings and provided tables and through discussion, compare observations with predictions ([AC SIS040](#))

*Communicating:* Represent and communicate observations and ideas in a variety of ways ([AC SIS029](#))

### Environment – Tree study:

- Notice the bark, the limbs, the leaves, the animals and insects that live there, fruit or flowers, holes made by birds or insects, knots and exposed roots. Take photos, draw pictures and diagrams, make leaf rubbings.

### Leaf Science:

- Place different kinds of leaves in different bowls of water, submerged. Leave for several hours. What do you observe? Talk about the process of photosynthesis (converting sunlight into energy) and the releasing of oxygen.

### Seasons:

- Study the effects on trees from the changing seasons. Differentiate the meanings between the tree categories: deciduous and evergreen.
  - o Explore why leaves change colour from Summer to Autumn by separating the colours (breaking down the chlorophyll) with rubbing alcohol and hot water (energy).
  - o For a Spring STEM activity, observe the changes of a growing seed by planting seeds in jars or eggshells.
  - o Discover the secrets of Winter trees by researching the trees' reabsorption of nutrients from their leaves, severing the connection between the tree and leaf. Find out about decomposition and how this enriches the soil. Predict and observe changes over time using leaf, fruit and vegetable matter and soil. Discuss what is happening and what kinds of critters can be seen.



## HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

### Foundation to Year 2 Curriculum Links

*Being healthy, safe and active:* Name parts of the body and describe how their body is growing and changing ([ACPPS002](#))

Practise strategies they can use when they feel uncomfortable, unsafe or need help with a task, problem or situation ([ACPPS017](#))

*Communicating and interacting for health and wellbeing:* Practise personal and social skills to interact positively with others ([ACPPS004](#))

Identify and describe emotional responses people may experience in different situations ([ACPPS005](#))

Describe ways to include others to make them feel they belong ([ACPPS019](#))

### **Tips for Overcoming Fear of the Dark:**

- Name objects in the room with the lights on.
- Use a soft glowing nightlight.
- Validate the child's fears. Discuss what is scaring them and ways to make it less scary.
- Have fun with shadows – make shadow puppets with your hands or create stick puppet shapes.

### **Acts of Kindness:**

- Brainstorm different ways to show kindness, from giving a compliment, to sharing with someone else, or caring for a living being.
- Create a kindness tree by writing acts of kindness on leaves and displaying on branches. Children could pick one to do each day.
- Provide food and water for the wildlife and flora around your home. Extra water for hot days, extra food for cold days.
- Donate clothes, toys, food or money to people and animals in need.

## VISUAL ARTS

### Foundation to Year 2 Curriculum Links

Use and experiment with different materials, techniques, technologies and processes to make artworks ([ACAVAM107](#))

Create and display artworks to communicate ideas to an audience ([ACAVAM108](#))

### **Recycled Paper Collage:**

- Look carefully at the illustrations in Growing Pains. What sort of materials can you see?
- Utilise a range of recycled paper and materials to create a collage, including old magazines, newspaper, coloured and patterned paper, cardboard, and so on. Recreate a page from the book, or design your own.



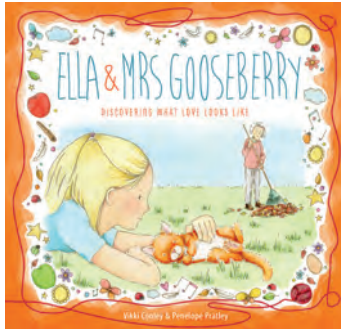


### Leaf Art:

- Draw a large leaf shape on paper, including the veins. Using a selection of media, including oil pastels and watercolours, design each section of the veins with textures, patterns and multiple colours. Examples of leaf art can be found at: <https://thecraftyclassroom.com/crafts/fall-leaf-art-projects-for-kids>



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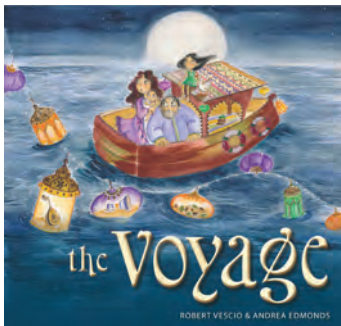
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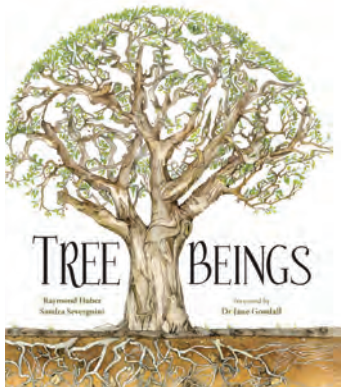


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