

Neo's Invisible Blanket

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Neo loves adventures, but sometimes he feels a little scared. Luckily his sister, Thandi, is strong and brave and she has a clever plan to make Neo feel safe. She gives him a special blanket – an invisible blanket. And it works! He's not even afraid of the tallest tree in the garden anymore. But will the invisible blanket help when Neo has to go to a new school … and participate in the swimming gala?

An inspiring story about being brave an believing in yourself.

- Pan Macmillan

Teaching notes

These notes have been written by the Otto Foundation to provide teachers and caregivers with ideas to develop reading comprehension and support literacy skills. They encourage deep reading of the text and illustrations, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, not just one sitting.

These notes have been written with Grade R, 1, 2 and 3 readers in mind, but teachers and caregivers will need to adapt them to the age and experience of their readers.

Themes

- Self-belief
- Imagination
- Bravery / Courage
- Sibling support
- Empathy
- Overcoming anxieties

Before reading the story

- Open up the discussion by allowing the children to share their initial responses to the front cover of the book. Encourage them to discuss what they see and their responses to it.
  - *What do you notice about the cover illustration?*
  - *What does the cover illustration make you think about?*
  - *How does the cover illustration make you feel?*
  - *What do you like most about the cover illustration?*

- Explain that the title of the book is **Neo's Invisible Blanket**. Ask the children to share their thoughts about the title.
  - *What does it mean if something is invisible?*
  - *What is the name of the boy on the cover holding the invisible blanket?*

- *What do you notice about the illustration of the invisible blanket on the cover of the book?*
- *How do you think Neo feels when he holds his invisible blanket?*
- *What do you think Neo might do with the invisible blanket in the story?*
- *What else do you think might happen in this story?*

- Read the back cover blurb aloud. Explore how the children may change their ideas about the story now that they have more information.
  - *How does this change what you thought might happen in the story?*
  - *How do you think Neo's invisible blanket helps him feel brave?*
  - *Do you think the invisible blanket will help him feel brave about going to a new school?*
  - *What is a swimming gala?*
  - *What would you say to a friend if they needed to be brave?*
  - *What does it mean to believe in yourself?*

Reading aloud discussion points

- On pages 1–2 we meet Neo and learn about his love for **adventure** and **playing outside** with the children.
  - *Neo loves* **adventures**. *Describe the* **adventures** *Neo is enjoying in the illustrations on pages 1–2.*
  - *What types of* **adventures** *do you enjoy?*
  - *What is the name of the tool Neo is using to look at the ladybug? (a magnifying glass) What is a magnifying glass used for? If you could look at any insect through a magnifying glass what would you look at?*
  - *Neo loves* **playing outside**. *What do you like to do when you* **play outside***?*

- On pages 3–4 we meet Neo's **brave and strong** sister.
  - *Why do you think Neo sometimes feels* **a little scared***? Have you ever felt* **a little scared***? What made you feel this way?*
  - *How do you think Neo feels when he comes into his sister's room? Why do you think this?*
  - *What do you think makes Neo's sister feel* **brave and strong***? What makes you feel* **brave and strong***?*
  - *Look carefully at the illustration on pages 3–4. What has Neo's sister decorated the wall of her bedroom with? (the Solar System) Which planets can you name from the Solar System?*
  - *What type of pet does Neo's sister have?*

- On pages 5–10 we find out more about Neo's sister.
  - *What is Neo's sister's name?*
  - *Look at the illustration on page 5 and describe some of the things* **Thandi** *does that makes her* **brave and strong**.
  - *What do you think Thandi says to Neo that makes him feel safe?*
  - *Thandi tells Neo she has* **something special** *for him. Look at the illustration on page 7. How do you think Thandi's cat feels about Thandi giving Neo* **something special***? What do you think the* **something special** *is?*

- *Why does Neo laugh when there is nothing in Thandi's hands? Would you laugh if someone told you they had* **something special** *for you but their hands were empty?*
- *Why are Thandi's hands empty even though she is giving Neo a gift?*
- *What special gift does Thandi give Neo?*
- *What does Neo have to do in order to know that the* **invisible blanket** *is there?*
- *Look at the illustration on page 10. What creatures does Neo imagine his* **invisible blanket** *will keep him safe from?*
- *Do you think Neo's* **invisible blanket** *will keep him safe? Why or why not?*

- On pages 11–14 Neo uses his invisible blanket.
  - *What is the challenge Neo sets for himself? Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?*
  - *What does Neo do before he starts climbing the* **tallest tree***?*
  - *How do you think Neo feels as he climbs higher and higher?*
  - *If you had an* **invisible blanket***, what brave activity would you use it for?*
  - *Look at the illustration of Thandi on page 14. What do you think she is saying to Neo?*

- On pages 15–18 Neo starts at a new school and feels scared again.
  - *Why do you think Neo no longer feels brave when he starts at his new school?*
  - *Look at the illustration on page 15. How does Neo imagine his new school will be?*
  - *How does Neo's body feel about going to a new school?*
  - *Who is someone in your life who would give you a big hug and remind you to be brave if you were feeling scared?*
  - *Who comes with Neo to support him as he starts at his new school?*
  - *Look at the illustration on page 18 of the children on the playground at Neo's new school. Do you think Neo is having fun and making new friends? Why do you think this?*
  - *What would you say to welcome someone who was new to your school?*

- On pages 19–2 Neo goes to his new classroom and meets his new classmates.
  - *What* **story** *would you tell if your teacher asked you to tell a story?*
  - *Why does Neo feel shy about telling his* **story***?*
  - *What does Neo do to feel brave enough to share his* **story***?*
  - *Look at the illustration at the top of page 20. What do you think happened in the* **story** *Neo told his classmates?*
  - *What other activities does Neo's* **invisible blanket** *help him feel brave about at his new school?*
  - *If you had an* **invisible blanket** *at school, which activities would you use it for to feel braver?*

- On pages 23–30 Neo is chosen to take part in a swimming gala.
  - *What happens at a* **swimming gala***?*
  - *How do you think Neo feels about being chosen to take part in the* **swimming gala***?*
  - *What is a* **pavilion***?*
  - *What are the three things that make Neo feel scared at the* **swimming gala***?*
  - *Look at the illustration on pages 23–24 and act out the cheering crowds. How would you feel if you were Neo in that situation? Why would you feel that way?*
  - *What advice does Thandi give Neo which helps him feel brave at the* **swimming gala***?*

- *Look at the illustration of Neo about to dive into the pool on page 26. How do you think Neo is feeling? What makes you think this?*
- *What does the crowd shout as Neo swims his race?*
- *Neo smiles* **proudly** *at the end of his race. What does it mean to feel* **proud***? What is something you feel* **proud** *of yourself for?*
- *Do you think Neo will need his* **invisible blanket** *again? Why or why not?*

Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Ask the children:
  - *What did you like most about this story?*
  - *If you were writing this story, what would happen to Neo next?*
  - *What did you learn from reading this story?*
  - *Is there anything about this story that reminds you of your own life? If so, what?*
  - *What is something you like to do to make yourself feel brave when you are feeling scared or nervous?*
  - *Who would you most like to read* **Neo's Invisible Blanket** *with? Why?*
  - *Who do you think should read this story next and why would you recommend it to them?*

Activity ideas for after reading the story

- Create an 'invisible blanket' as a class. Give each child a small square to decorate and combine all the squares into a 'invisible blanket' display. Use glitter or glitter glue where possible to add a special element to the display.

- Ask the children to complete the sentence: "I feel brave and strong when _____." and write down their brave moments to showcase for display.

- Download the Feelings Poster from the Otto Foundation resource page. Use the characters from the Feelings Poster to explore different feelings with your class.

- Brainstorm ideas with the children about which trusted caregivers they can speak to if they need support when feeling scared.

Please see the following pages for Grade specific CAPS aligned skills covered in these teaching notes.

CAPS skills covered in teaching notes

Listening and speaking

Grade R

- Listen to stories
- Listen and respond to simple questions
- Listen without interrupting
- Talk about pictures
- Participate in discussion and asks questions
- Ask questions
- Give explanations

Reading

Grade R

- Use pictures to predict what a story is about
- Predict what will happen in a story through pictures
- Recognise and point out common objects in pictures
- Interpret pictures
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Pretend to read
- Make links to own experience when reading with teacher
- Discuss and describe characters in a story
- Describe characters in stories and give opinion
- Answer questions based on the story read

Listening and speaking

Grade 1

- Listen to and express feelings about a story
- Listen without interrupting, taking turns to speak and asking questions of clarification
- Respond to pictures
- Listen to stories with interest and enjoyment, drawing on a picture to show understanding
- Listens for the detail in stories
- Talk about personal experiences and feelings
- Answer closed and open-ended questions
- Participate in discussions

Reading

Grade 1

- Develop book handling skills (holding the book and turning pages correctly)
- Uses book cover to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Discuss a story identifying main idea and characters
- Ask questions related to a story told and read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Give an opinion on what was read
- Answer open-ended questions based on text read
- Interpret information from pictures

Listening and speaking

Grade 2

- Listen to stories and answer higher-order questions
- Listen to a story with enjoyment and answer questions related to the story
- Listen to stories for a longer period with enjoyment
- Listen without interrupting showing respect for the speaker
- Use ever increasing vocabulary when answering questions
- Understand and use appropriate language in context
- Ask questions and comments on what was heard
- Talk about personal experience
- Express feelings about a story

Reading

Grade 2

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Use the cover of a book to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Identify key details in what was read, such as main characters and setting
- Express whether a story was liked and justify response
- Express personal response to a text read
- Give opinion on what was read
- Answer open ended questions based on text
- Answer higher order questions based on text read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Describe main ideas in a text
- Identify key details in what was read

- Answer closed and open-ended questions and justify answers
- Participate in discussions, asking and answering questions and suggesting ideas
- Discuss different cultures represented in a story

Listening and speaking

Grade 3

- Listen for main ideas and detail in stories
- Listen to story for cause and effect
- Ask questions for clarification
- Express feelings and opinions about text and gives reasons
- Talk about personal experiences
- Answer open-ended questions and justify answer
- Answer higher order questions based on text
- Participate in discussion
- Engage in conversation as a social skill, accepting and respecting the way others speak
- Listen without interrupting

Reading

Grade 3

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Discuss main idea, characters, plot and 'problem' in a text
- Answer a range of higher order questions based on text
- Express whether a story was liked and justify answer
- Interpret information from pictures
- Use illustrations in text to increase understanding