

Big Shoes to Fill

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A touching picture book about resilience, identity and familial love. Every morning when Ta'mkhulu helps Zinzo to shine his shoes, he reminds him that he has big shoes to fill. Zinzo wants to make his dads proud, even though they live far away in the city. His grandfather sets a great example by being kind and caring to everyone in the village. But when the children at school learn about Zinzo's unconventional family they are not kind to him at all. Can Zinzo show them that being different is nothing to be afraid of? Big Shoes to Fill is a proudly South African book that encourages acceptance, understanding and kindness towards the LGBTQI+ community. This picture book is not only a tribute to the unbreakable bonds of family, but also a celebration of the courage to stand tall in one's own shoes.

- 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

- Inclusivity
- Tolerance
- Kindness
- Empathy
- Family
- Identity

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?*

- *Who do you think the two people on the front cover are? What do you think they might be saying to one another?*
- *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 **Big Shoes to Fill**. Ask the children to share their thoughts about the title.
  - *What does it mean to have* **Big Shoes to Fill***?* (This is something people say when someone was so good at something, or extremely kind or brave, that the person who follows them or comes next has a big job to try and be just as good at it, or just as kind or brave as that person was.)
  - *What 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.
  - *What does* **Ta'mkhulu** *mean?* (Grandfather) *Look at the cover of the book. Who do you think* **Ta'mkhulu** *is and who do you think* **Zinzo** *is? How can you tell?*
  - *How does* **Ta'mkhulu** *set a good example in the story?*
  - *What does* **unconventional** *mean? What is* **unconventional** *about Zinzo's family?*
  - *Why do you think the children at school were unkind to Zinzo?*
  - *How do you think Zinzo will learn to* **stand tall** *in his own shoes?*

Reading aloud discussion points

- On pages 1–2 Zinzo and Ta'mkhulu get ready for the day.
  - *What does it mean for shoes to be* **shiny***? How does Zinzo have the* **shiniest shoes** *in the whole school?*
  - *Ta'mkhulu uses a* **soft cream cloth** *to shine Zinzo's shoes. What does Ta'mkhulu say this cloth collects? Look at your own shoes and all the places you have worn them. What memories do you think your shoes hold?*
  - *Look at the illustration on page 1. What does Zinzo eat for breakfast? What do you eat for breakfast?*
  - *Ta'Mkhulu calls Zinzo* **Mzukulwana***. What does this mean?* (Grandson) *What do you call your grandparents and what do they call you?*

- On pages 3–4 Zinzo wonders whose shoes he is supposed to fill.
  - *Whose shoes does Zinzo think he needs to fill if they are* **big shoes***?*
  - *Where do Zinzo's parents live?*
  - *Why do you think Zinzo feels sad about his parents living in* **the city***?*
  - *Describe the illustration of* **the city** *on page 4. What do you notice? How is* **the city** *different from the village?*
  - *Zinzo wants to make his parents feel* **proud***. What does it mean to make someone feel* **proud***? What have you done that has made you feel* **proud** *of yourself?*
  - *Who does Zinzo think can help him with making his parents feel* **proud***?*

- On pages 5–8 Zinzo thinks about all the things Ta'mkhulu does that make him kind and caring. He also thinks about how he could do these things too.
  - *What does Ta'mkhulu say to the* **shopkeeper** *when he visits?*

- *Look at the illustration on page 5. Describe what the* **shopkeeper** *has for sale in her shop.*
- *How does Ta'mkhulu help* **Mama uNande***?*
- *Look at the illustration on page 5. What types of vegetables does* **Mama uNande** *grow in her garden?*
- *How does Ta'mkhulu show kindness to* **Mthetho***?*
- *What does it mean to* **mumble***? What do you think* **Mthetho** *is mumbling to himself?*
- *Look at the illustration on page 6. What type of bird is* **Mthetho** *chasing?*
- *Describe what Ta'Mkhulu is doing on page 7. What has Zinzo learnt to say after hearing how Ta'mkhulu speaks to the shopkeeper?*
- *Look at the first illustration on page 8. What is the name of the special chair Zinzo is pushing? How is Zinzo pushing the* **wheelchair** *an example of offering* **help where help is needed***?*
- *Describe what is happening in the second illustration on page 8. What* **kind words** *do you think Zinzo uses with the fighting children?*

- On pages 9–10 Zinzo prepares for an oral at school on role models.
  - *What is a* **role model***? Name someone who is a* **role model** *to you.*
  - *Look at the illustration on page 9. Zinzo is making a* **poster** *of his* **favourite people***. Who are Zinzo's* **favourite people***? Who are your* **favourite people***?*
  - *What is Zinzo using to make his poster with Ta'mkhulu?*
  - *A* **speech** *is another word for an* **oral***. Zinzo practises his* **speech** *a lot. Look at the illustrations on page 10. Describe the three different places Zinzo practises his* **speech***.*
  - *Have you ever done an* **oral** *at school? What was it about?*

- On pages 11–14 Zinzo gets ready to go to school and present his speech.
  - *Look at the illustration of the clock on the wall. What time does Zinzo get ready to leave for school? What time do you leave for school in the morning?*
  - *What does Ta'mkhulu do while Zinzo practises his speech for the last time?*
  - *Ta'mkhulu gives Zinzo's speech* **ten out of ten***. What does it mean to get* **ten out of ten** *for something? How do you think Zinzo feels about getting* **ten out of ten** *from Ta'mkhulu? How can you tell?*
  - *Zinzo* **beamed with pride***. What does it mean to* **beam with pride***? What makes you* **beam with pride***?*
  - *Who does Zinzo wish was there for his* **special moment***?*
  - *Look at the illustration on page 13–14. What do you notice about the weather?*
  - *What does Ta'mkhulu remind Zinzo of as they wave goodbye to one another?*

- On pages 15–20 Zinzo tells his classmates about his heroes.
  - *Point out the illustration of Zinzo on page 15. Zinzo is* **sitting on the edge of his chair** *waiting for his turn to talk. What does it mean to* **sit on the edge of your chair***?*
  - *Describe the poster of Zinzo's family in the illustration on page 16.*
  - *What does Zinzo do with his shoes as he gets up to speak? What is Zinzo hoping to show by doing this?*
  - *Describe Zinzo's classmates' reactions to his speech on pages 17–18. Why do you think they respond this way?*
  - *What do you think* **Ms Peter** *is saying to the class in the illustration on page 18?*
  - *Why does Zinzo forget the words of his speech?*

- *What is making Zinzo feel* **scared** *and* **embarrassed***? Have you ever felt* **scared** *or* **embarrassed***? What happened to make you feel that way?*
- *Describe what is happening in the illustrations on pages 19–20.*
- *Where do you think Zinzo runs to?*

- On pages 21–23 Zinzo runs home crying and tells Ta'mkhulu what happened.
  - *Ta'mkhulu notices that Zinzo is missing something? What is it?*
  - *How does Ta'Mkhulu comfort Zinzo?*
  - *What reason does Ta'mkhulu give to explain why Zinzo's classmates laughed at him?*
  - *What does it mean for something to be* **uncommon***? Is it* **uncommon** *in your community for someone to have two fathers or two mothers? How would you treat a friend who had two fathers or two mothers?*
  - *Look at the illustration of Zinzo's* **dirty and torn** *socks on page 23. How did his socks get* **dirty and torn***?*
  - *What does it mean to* **let someone down***? Why did Zinzo think he had* **let Ta'mkhulu down***?*

- On pages 24–26 Ta'mkhulu shares some special memories with Zinzo.
  - *Ta'mkhulu pulls a* **battered tin box** *out from under his bed. What does it mean if something is* **battered***?*
  - *What is the first thing Ta'mkhulu takes out of the* **tin box***?*
  - *What is a* **pocket watch***?*
  - *Ta'mkhulu's father was the first in their village to do something. What was it?*
  - *Why did people* **stare and point** *at Ta'mkhulu's father?*
  - *When the chief gave Ta'mkhulu's father the* **pocket watch***, he said:* **"With time comes understanding**"*. What do you think this means?*
  - *What is the second thing Ta'mkhulu takes out of the* **tin box***?*
  - *Describe the* **colourful scarf** *Ta'mkhulu wraps around Zinzo on pages 25–26.*
  - *Who did the scarf belong to? Why did Zinzo's grandmother love the scarf? How did Ta'Mkhulu feel when he held the scarf?*
  - *How does Zinzo feel when Ta'Mkhulu wraps the scarf around his shoulders on page 26?*

- On pages 27–30 we find out more about Zinzo's fathers and why they live in the city.
  - *Look at the illustration on page 28. Who do you think the two men and small boy in the photograph are?*
  - *When was the photograph of Zinzo with his* **Daddy and Papa** *taken?*
  - *Why do you think the people in the village were upset when they learnt about Zinzo's fathers' love for each other?*
  - *What unkind thing did the people in the village do to Zinzo's father? Why do you think they acted this way?*
  - *What did the* **chief** *do to try and support Zinzo's fathers? What agreement did the* **community** *eventually make to allow Zinzo's fathers to visit? Does Zinzo think this is fair? Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?*
  - *Ta'mkhulu explains to Zinzo:* **"People are afraid of things that they don't understand."** *What do you think the* **community** *does not understand about Zinzo's fathers?*
  - *Look at the illustration of Ta'mkhulu and Zinzo on page 30. What two things are happening in the illustration that bring Zinzo comfort? How do you wish things could be different for Zinzo's family?*

- On pages 31–32 Ta'mkhulu explores another box with Zinzo.
  - *What type of box does Ta'mkhulu give Zinzo?*
  - *Why is Zinzo confused by the box?*
  - *Ta'mkhulu explains that he does not want Zinzo to fill his shoes or his fathers' shoes, he wants him to* **fill his own shoes.** *What does it mean for Zinzo to* **fill his own shoes***?*
  - *Ta'Mkhulu wants Zinzo to fill his box with* **treasures** *that inspire him to be the best version of himself. What* **treasures** *would you put into a box to inspire you to be the* **best version of yourself?**
  - *Look closely at the second picture on page 32. Name the objects inside the box.* (shell, leaf, letter, whistle, key and toy car). *Why do you think these objects are* **treasures** *to Zinzo?*

- On pages 33–36 Zinzo goes back to school to do his speech.
  - *Zinzo walks into the classroom feeling* **determined***. What does it mean to feel* **determined***? What do you think Zinzo is* **determined** *to do? What is something you are* **determined** *to do?*
  - *How does Zinzo describe his dads?*
  - *Zinzo explains that he is proud of his dads living* **truthfully***, even if their* **honesty** *is* **strange** *to others. How are Zinzo's dads an example of* **living truthfully** *and being* **honest***? Why is this* **strange** *to others?*
  - *Why does Zinzo say he has* **big shoes to fill***?*
  - *Do you think Zinzo's classmates will react differently to his speech this time? Why or why not?*
  - *What does* **Kwande** *think about Zinzo having two dads?*
  - *What do you think might have happened to* **Kwande's** *dad?*
  - *What does Zinzo say to* **Kwande** *to comfort her?*

- On page 37 Zinzo and Kwande walk home together.
  - *Describe the illustration on page 37. What is happening? What do you notice?*
  - *What does Zinzo find for his box of treasures on the way home?*
  - *Zinzo will use the feather to remind him of* **tolerance** *and* **friendship***. Give an example of* **tolerance** *from this story. Give an example of* **friendship** *from this story.*
  - *Zinzo is excited to get home and tell Ta'mkhulu about the* **memories that settled on his shoes that day***. What do you think Zinzo will tell Ta'mkhulu when he gets home?*

Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Ask the children:
  - *What did you like most about this story?*
  - *What is something you have learnt from reading this story?*
  - *If you were writing this story, what would happen to Zinzo's family next?*
  - *Who do you think should read this story next and why would you recommend it to them?*

Activity ideas for after reading the story

- Ask your children to draw their families. Display their drawings and discuss how many different types of families there are.

- Ta'Mkhulu makes a habit of being kind and caring. Have a discussion with your children about the different ways in which they can be kind and caring in their own family, community or school.

- There are many examples of being the best version of yourself in this story:

  - Saying please and thank you
  - Helping your community
  - Being kind
  - Being honest
  - Being tolerant

  Ask your children to choose one of these examples and to commit to supporting one another in trying to be the best versions of themselves.

- Display a shoe box and ask your children to draw a treasure that inspires them to be the best versions of themselves. Fill the shoebox with their 'treasures' and encourage them to explore and discuss these treasures with one another.

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