



## Tilly & Thandeka - The Star Siblings

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Illustrator: Cristy Zinn

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The Otto Foundation Children's Book Award

Chapter Book Shortlist

Tilly and Thandeka are two friends with a talent for solving mysteries. They know that having adventures means sticking together, thinking on your feet, being brave even if you are scared and most importantly, trusting your instincts when you meet someone suspicious.

Their third adventure finds Tilly and Thandeka getting rather good at solving mysteries, which is good as strange events have begun at the Coastal Observatory. Their detective skills are put to the ultimate test once again!

Dr Rani Patel's award-winning research on stars is at risk. Amidst the flickering lights of loadshedding, the girls navigate an astronomy holiday club, encounter a crew of mysterious cleaning ladies, a pair of squabbling siblings and an enormous coffee mug, but how are they connected? And more importantly, can they unveil the culprit behind the havoc before it's too late?

- Imaginary House

### Teaching notes

These notes have been written by the Otto Foundation to provide teachers and caregivers with ideas to develop text 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 4, 5, 6 and 7 readers in mind, but teachers and caregivers will need to adapt them to the age and experience of their readers.

### Themes

- Mystery
- Adventure
- Friendship
- Determination
- Family/Parents
- Science/Space

## Before reading the story

- Open the discussion by allowing the children to share their initial responses to the front cover of the book. Encourage the children 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 **Tilly & Thandeka – The Star Siblings**. Ask the children to share their thoughts on the book cover.
  - *What kind of book do you think this is going to be based on the title?*
  - *Who do you think **Tilly and Thandeka** are?*
  - *Who or what do you think **Star Siblings** might be?*
  - *What is the special name of the building on the cover? (an observatory) What do scientists explore from that type of building?*
  - *What do you think you might know about the two girls on the cover?*
  - *What do you think might happen to **Tilly and Thandeka** in this book?*
  - *Who might **Tilly and Thandeka** meet during the story?*
  - *What do you think **Tilly and Thandeka** are saying to each other on the cover?*
- Read the back cover blurb to the children. Explore how they might change their ideas about the story now that they have more information.
  - *How does reading the blurb change what you think might happen in the story?*

## Reading aloud discussion points

### Chapter One: Strange Incidents

- *The setting of this story is described as having **sugar cane hills, warm nights, sticky air, a tangled garden** and being near the **Indian Ocean**. Which Province of South Africa do you think this story is set in? What makes you think this?*
- *What is the name of Tilly's best friend?*
- *Tilly and Thandeka recently solved two mysteries. What were the names of the two mysteries they solved?*
- *Thandeka pointed out the **Southern Cross** to Tilly. What is the **Southern Cross**? What do people use the **Southern Cross** for?*
- *Look at the illustration on page 12. What do you think Tilly and Thandeka are discussing?*
- *What was Tilly's **Great Aunt** famous for?*
- *Who is **Professor Mchunu**?*
- ***Dr Rani Patel** and **Dr Vishal Patel** were **astronomers** visiting Tilly's Great Aunt and they worked at the **observatory**. What is an **astronomer**? What is an **observatory**?*
- *What was special about the new type of star Dr Rani had discovered?*
- *Dr Vishal was studying **comets**. What is a **comet**?*
- *What **strange events** had been happening at the observatory? Why do you think Tilly and Thandeka were interested in these **strange events**? Have you ever been involved in a **strange event**? Describe what happened?*

## Chapter Two: The Astronomers Day

- All of the lights went out because of **loadshedding**. What is **loadshedding**? What do you think is the most annoying thing about loadshedding?
- What excuse did Tilly and Thandeka make to visit the observatory?
- Tilly and Thandeka think that adults do not make it easy for children to have adventures. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
- Why did the astronomers at the observatory only arrive late in the afternoon and not first thing in the morning to do their work?
- Dr Vishal had a large mug with the saying “**I’m a star astronomer**” on it. What does it mean to be a **star astronomer**? What is the double meaning of this expression?
- Dr Rani and Dr Vishal had won a lot of science awards. Why did Tilly take a photo of the article about the award they were both **so stressed about at the moment**? Why do you think Dr Rani and Dr Vishal were feeling **stressed** about the award?
- Describe the different parts of the observatory Tilly and Thandeka got to explore on their tour. Tilly thought seeing the **telescope** was the most exciting part. What is a **telescope**? What part of an observatory would you like to explore?
- What did Dr Rani and Dr Vishal do that made Thandeka whisper: “**Yikes, you can really see they’re brother and sister.**” Why do you think Thandeka felt she had to whisper this?
- Dr Vishal explained Dr Rani was **under a lot of pressure**? What does it mean to be **under a lot of pressure**? Why was Dr Rani **under a lot of pressure**?
- Just as Tilly and Thandeka turned down the passage they heard a scream. Who do you think is screaming? What do you think has happened?

## Chapter Three: The Missing Data

- Dr Rani was staring at her computing screen saying: “**No, no, no!**”. Why was Dr Rani saying this?
- Thandeka asked what **analysing data** means. How does Professor Mchunu explain this to her?
- What did Dr Rani discover about the power supply to her computer?
- Dr Rani thinks someone has **sabotaged** her work. What does **sabotage** mean? Who do you think might want to **sabotage** her work? Why would they want to do this?
- Why do you think Dr Rani was so upset about losing the data she was analysing?
- Who did Dr Vishal try to blame for the sabotage? Do you think this blame was fair? Why or why not?
- What does Tilly find most important when solving a mystery?
- Do you think it is wise of Tilly and Thandeka to follow **the shadow** they saw disappear around the corner? Why or why not? Who do you think **the shadow** might be?

## Chapter Four: A Jealous Professor

- Tilly could **feel her pulse drumming**. What does it mean if your **pulse is drumming**?
- Why do you think Tilly’s **pulse is drumming**? Have you ever had a **drumming pulse**? What happened to make you feel this way?
- What did Tilly do to try to calm herself? What would you have told Tilly to do to calm herself?
- Tilly assumed that anyone sneaking around the observatory during the day would be **up to no good**. Do you agree with Tilly? Why or why not?

- How did you feel when Tilly and Thandeka discovered the shadow they were following was Dr Vishal? Why did you feel this way?
- Explain why Dr Vishal said he was checking the observatory doors.
- Dr Vishal tells Tilly and Thandeka that **Professor Brighton** might want to stop Dr Rani from finishing her research. What reason did he give for this?
- Tilly noticed that Dr Vishal was starting to look more **dishevelled**. What does **dishevelled** mean?
- Dr Vishal suggested that perhaps **the cleaners** had been an **accomplice** to sabotaging Dr Rani's work. What does it mean if someone is an **accomplice**?
- What is one of the **golden rules** of adventures according to Tilly and Thandeka? What other **golden rules** do you know?
- Look at the illustration of the three cleaning ladies on page 40. Describe the illustration. How do you think the team of cleaning ladies were feeling? Why do you think they felt this way?
- What is the name of the owner of the cleaning service?
- Do you think it was fair of **Princess** to feel frustrated about being accused of **leaving doors open** and being an **accomplice**? Why or why not?
- What important information about **Professor Brighton** does **Princess** share?
- Tilly felt that **Professor Brighton** has **motive** and **opportunity**. What does **motive** mean? What were **Professors Brighton's** possible **motive** and **opportunity** according to Tilly?

#### Chapter Five: A Sky Full of Questions

- Describe Tilly's Great Aunt's lounge.
- Tilly liked the **fascinating artefacts** in her Great Aunt's lounge. What does it mean if something is **fascinating**? What is an **artefact**? What kind of **artefact** would you find **fascinating**? Why?
- What happened to Tilly's parents?
- Tilly describes a **lonely ache** in her chest when she thinks about her parents. Why do you think she feels this way? Have you ever felt a **lonely ache**? What happened to make you feel this way?
- Tilly has a **constellation of memories** about being with her parents. What is a **constellation**?
- What is the biggest mystery Tilly wishes she could solve?
- Describe the conversation Tilly overheard that Dr Rani had with her mum. Why do you think Dr Rani was so nervous speaking to her mum?
- Look at the illustration on page 45. What do you think Dr Rani is thinking? Why do you think that?
- Dr Rani explained to Tilly that she felt her mum was **disappointed in her**, not **disappointed for her**. What is the difference in being **disappointed in someone** compared to being **disappointed for someone**?
- How does Dr Rani explain what **Professor Brighton** is like to Tilly?
- What is a **suspect**? Do you think **Professor Brighton** should be a **suspect** in Tilly's mystery? Why or why not?

## Chapter Six: Suspect Number One

- Thandeka enjoyed playing games on her tablet. If you have access to a tablet, what games do you enjoy playing? Why do you find these games fun?
- What is a **border collie**? What is the name of the **border collie** at Tilly's Great Aunt's house?
- Tilly calls Thandeka **Tee** as a **nickname**. What does it mean to have a **nickname**? Do you have an **nickname**? If so, what is it?
- Summarise the conversation Tilly and Thandeka had about their investigation so far.
- Thandeka discovered Dr Rani had won an award the previous year and was described as a **rising star**. What does it mean to be a **rising star**? What is the double meaning to this expression?
- Look at the illustration on page 54. What do you notice about the scientists expressions? How do you think they're feeling about Dr Rani winning the award? Why do you think it is sometimes hard for people to celebrate the success of others?
- Thandeka describes Professor Brighton's expression in the illustration on page 54 as a **death stare**. What is a **death stare**? Why would Professor Brighton be giving Dr Rani a **death stare**?
- What did Tilly and Thandeka feel the biggest challenge of solving a mystery was?
- What idea does Thandeka have as the **perfect cover** for their investigation? What is a **perfect cover**? Why do Tilly and Thandeka need a **perfect cover** to visit the observatory?

## Chapter Seven: Undercover Holiday Club

- Tilly and Thandeka attended the **Young Astronomers Holiday Club** at the observatory. What would you expect to happen at the **Young Astronomers Holiday Club**? Is this a holiday club that you would like to attend? Why or why not?
- Summarise what Dr Vishal's talk at the holiday club was about.
- One of the children attending the holiday club asked Dr Vishal a question that **tripped him up**. What does it mean if a question **trips you up**? Why do you think the question about Dr Rani's discovery **tripped Dr Vishal up**?
- Thandeka **rolled her eyes**. What does it mean if you **roll your eyes** at someone? Why did Thandeka **roll her eyes** at Dr Vishal?
- What do you think it was like for Dr Vishal and Dr Rani to grow up together? Why do you think this?
- Tilly and Thandeka snuck out of the holiday club and overheard a conversation between Professor Brighton and her assistant. What important clues do Tilly and Thandeka overhear?
- Thandeka felt that they had overheard an **admission of guilt**. What is an **admission of guilt**? What did Professor Brighton say that made Thandeka think it was an **admission of guilt**? Do you think this was an **admission of guilt**? Why or why not?
- Tilly and Thandeka wanted **evidence** to put Professor Brighton at the **scene of the crime**. What does **evidence** mean? What **evidence** do you think Tilly and Thandeka should be looking for? Where is the **scene of the crime** in this mystery?
- What was the **big word** used in the text to describe how Tilly and Thandeka try to do things without being noticed? (**surreptitiously**)
- What were the two techniques Tilly and Thandeka used when they wanted to sneak around without being noticed?
- What did Tilly and Thandeka use as their **cover** in order to sneak around?

- Why do you think Tilly and Thandeka were disappointed that Professor Brighton was only making tea when they spied on her in the staff kitchen?

### Chapter Eight: Princess's Cleaning Crew

- There was an **awkward silence** when Tilly and Thandeka were found by Princess. What is an **awkward silence**? Why do you think there was an **awkward silence** when Tilly and Thandeka were found by Princess?
- Do you think Tilly made the right choice by telling Princess the truth? What would you have done in this situation? Why?
- Princess recommended that her cleaning crew **joins forces** with Tilly and Thandeka to solve the mystery. What does it mean to **join forces**? What would the benefits of Tilly and Thandeka **joining forces** with the cleaning crew be?
- Look at the illustration on page 69. What do you notice about the storage room? Why is it different to an ordinary storage room? What in the illustration shows you that Princess is using this as her **command centre**. Are you surprised that Princess and her crew are also trying to solve the mystery? Why or why not?
- Describe what Princess and her crew had been doing in their investigations.
- What important evidence did Princess have that made Tilly and Thandeka feel they had found who had **sabotaged** Dr Rani?
- What is a **valuable lesson**? What **valuable lesson** had Princess and her crew taught Tilly and Thandeka for solving future mysteries? Have you ever learnt a **valuable lesson**? What was it?
- Why was what Dr Vishal had written on the piece of paper Princess found in his waste-paper bin so important to Tilly?

### Chapter Nine: A Scrap of Paper

- What do you think was the important question Tilly wanted to ask Dr Vishal?
- Why do you think Tilly felt she needed to **take a deep breath** when she entered Dr Vishal's office? What other moments can you think of when it might be a good idea to **take a deep breath**?
- What is a **comforting memory**? What are some of the **comforting memories** Tilly had of her parents?
- Tilly got a **lump in her throat** when thinking of her parents. What does it mean if you get a **lump in your throat**?
- What do you think Tilly was hoping to find in Dr Vishal's office?
- Why did Tilly start to doubt Princess's evidence gathering methods?
- What discovery did Tilly make that meant she needed to rush to the awards presentation?
- When Tilly arrived at the awards presentation she said to her Great Aunt: "**It's not Professor Brighton! We got it wrong!**". Who do you think sabotaged Dr Rani if it was not Professor Brighton? Why do you think this?
- Describe the scene as Tilly burst into the awards presentation. What do you think Thandeka had said? Why was Professor Brighton looking angry?
- Do you think Tilly was brave to admit she was wrong? Why is it sometimes hard to admit when you are wrong?
- Tilly and Thandeka had **read the clues wrong**. What does it mean **to read the clues wrong** in a mystery? How had Tilly and Thandeka **read the clues wrong**?

- Who did Tilly think had sabotaged Dr Rani? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?
- Tilly's Great Aunt said that she would support Tilly if she had evidence. What evidence did Tilly share to prove Dr Vishal had sabotaged Dr Rani?
- How do you think Dr Rani felt learning her own brother had sabotaged her?
- Why did Tilly and Thandeka feel like the grown-ups were not being very grown-up at all?

### Chapter Ten: Jupiter

- How did the Young Astronomers Club celebrate the end of the holiday club?
- Tilly asked Thandeka what she thought would happen to Dr Rani and Dr Vishal. What do you think will happen next between the brother and sister scientists? Why do you think this?
- What announcement did Professor Brighton make to the Young Astronomers Club?
- What colour was Jupiter when the children looked at it through the telescope?
- Do you think Dr Vishal was genuinely happy for his sister? Why or why not?
- Do you think Tilly and Great Aunt will be able to solve the mystery of Tilly's missing parents? If you were Tilly what would be the next clue you followed to find your missing parents?
- Look at the illustration on page 91. What is the name of the object Tilly is looking into space with? If you could look into space using a telescope what is the one thing you would most want to see and why?

### Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Explore with your children:
  - Who would you rather be in this story, Tilly or Thandeka? Why?
  - Is there anything you particularly liked or disliked about this story?
  - Has anything that happened in this book ever happened to you?
  - What is something you have learnt from this story?
  - If the author asked you what could be improved in the book, what would you say?
  - What would you tell your friends about this book?
  - What do you think the title of the next Tilly and Thandeka mystery should be?

### Activity ideas for after reading the story

- Read the glossary on pages 6 - 7 with your children. Put your children into groups, giving them each one definition to research further. Ask each group to present their findings.

Glossary words:

- Observatory
- Star
- Cosmos
- Celestial
- Comet
- Loadshedding

- Ask your children to use the [paper dolls template](#) from Nicole Rimensberger's website to recreate their favourite scene between Tilly and Thandeka from the story.
- Nicole Rimensberger has written two other Tilly and Thandeka adventures:
  - Tilly & Thandeka: The Crown of Ancient Ghana
  - Tilly & Thandeka: The Butterfly Spy

Read the description of these two titles available at the back of Tilly & Thandeka: The Star Siblings, to your children.

Brainstorm ideas about these books with your children.

- *What do you think the mystery in these stories might be?*
  - *Who are the main characters?*
  - *Where is the story set?*
- Ask your children what other adventure or mystery stories they might recommend to a friend?

**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 4

- Predict what a text could be about
- Identify characters
- Name characters correctly
- Listen for main message and specific details
- Describe events
- Identify specific details
- Discuss main ideas and specific details
- Express feelings in relation to events
- Express thoughts and feelings about a story/characters/setting or theme of a text
- Relate to own life experiences
- Answer oral questions based on the text
- Participate in group discussions
- Take turns to speak
- Share ideas, opinions and participate in the discussion
- Ask relevant questions
- Keep to the topic
- Maintain discussions
- Respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect

### Reading and viewing

#### Grade 4

- Pre reading: Make predictions for the title and cover of the text
- Predict from title and discuss related themes/content
- Make predictions
- Identify and explain central events
- Identify and comment on the plot, setting and characters
- Discuss characters
- Give reasons for the actions of characters
- Give and explain own feelings about the text
- Express emotional response to text read
- Identify and discuss values in the text
- Use reading strategies: Make predictions and use contextual cues
- Use contextual cues to make meaning
- Discuss message/moral of the story
- Reflect on text read
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- Use reading comprehension strategies: Visualisation and making connections
- Determine the impact of visual techniques
- Discuss new vocabulary from the text
- Understand vocabulary

### Listening and speaking

#### Grade 5

- Make predictions
- Describe events
- Identify and explain cause and effect
- Comment on social, moral and cultural values
- Ask critical questions
- Express and justify own opinion with reasons
- Use information from the text in response to questions
- Identify main ideas and specific details
- Identify central idea, plot, setting and characters
- Relate text content to own life
- Discuss and give own opinion
- Express thoughts and feelings about the storyline
- Participate in group discussions
- Ask relevant questions
- Justify own opinion
- Maintain discussion
- Take turns to speak
- Respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect

### Reading and viewing

#### Grade 5

- Pre reading: Predict from title and pictures and discuss related themes/content
- Comment on choice of pictures in text
- Share ideas and offers opinion using speculation
- Use reading strategies: Contextual clues and prior knowledge
- Discuss characters
- Give reason for actions of characters
- Discuss the central idea, plot, characters and setting
- Discuss cause and effect in the story
- Identify and discuss feelings expressed in text
- Express own feelings and opinion
- Identify and explain how central events and characters relate to own life
- Infer the meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- Discuss new vocabulary from text

## Listening and speaking

### Grade 6

- Predict what will happen in a story
- Discuss main ideas and specific details
- Identify themes
- Discuss characters
- Discuss plot, conflict and setting
- Discuss messages in text
- Discuss responses to text
- Discuss social, moral and cultural values in text
- Relate ideas to own life experiences
- Ask relevant questions and respond appropriately
- Stay on topic
- Explain logically
- Interact positively during group discussions
- Respond to others' ideas with empathy and respect

## Reading and viewing

### Grade 6

- Pre reading: Make predictions based on title and/or graphics and related themes/content
- Make predictions about the text
- Ask questions about the text
- Make inferences about the text
- Visualise parts of the text
- Identify and explain the central idea
- Interpret and discuss the text
- Discuss plot, theme, setting and characters
- Discuss suspense and twist
- Critically discusses cultural and social values in the text
- Relate events and characters to own life
- Show understanding of the text and relationship to own life
- Identify and discuss feelings expressed in text
- Express emotional response to texts read
- Identify different perspectives
- Give own perspective based on evidence in the text
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar words and images
- Invent or describe preferred results or endings

## Listening and speaking

### Grade 7

- Make predictions from cover page and blurb
- Confirm predictions
- Identify main and supporting ideas
- Make inferences
- Share ideas and experiences to show understanding of concepts
- Share ideas and opinions
- Identify characters
- Identify main and supporting ideas
- Use appropriate language
- Answer questions

## Reading and viewing

### Grade 7

- Make predictions
- Make connections
- Identify key features of a text such as characters, plot, setting, conflict, theme and message
- Discuss main ideas and themes
- Discuss fact or opinion in text
- Infer meaning of unfamiliar words
- Infer meaning and conclusions
- Visualise parts of the text
- Identify formal/informal language in the text
- Answer questions based on text