

# Developing written language with *Little J & Big Cuz*

Saint Augustine's School

MOSSMAN, QUEENSLAND



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Special thanks to Jo Brookes, Teacher, and Paul Rayner, Principal.

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19 Prospect Hill Road, Camberwell, Victoria, 3124, Australia

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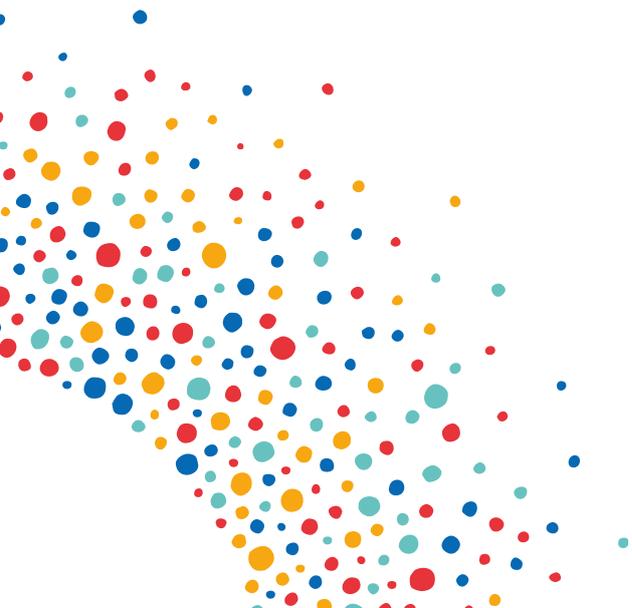
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## St Augustine's School

MOSSMAN, QUEENSLAND

### Context

St Augustine's School is a Catholic primary school located in the town of Mossman in Far North Queensland. The school opened in 1934 and was originally run by the Sisters of Mercy. It is now a Diocesan school under the umbrella of the Catholic Education Office in the Cairns Diocese.

As at June 2018, the school had a student population of 183 students, coming from Mossman and Port Douglas, which is about 11 kilometres south of Mossman. There are 18 students in the school who identify as Indigenous. The school has 10 classes from Prep to Year 6. The school teaches the *Australian Curriculum* (Version 8) and includes the *Queensland Essential Learnings*. The *Essential Learnings* identify what should be taught and what is important for students to have opportunities to know, understand and be able to do. The *Essential Learnings* are a common part of the curriculum across all Queensland schools, and are specified for each of the key learning areas, at four different year-level junctures (end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).

**"Jo used four episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* over six weeks as part of her English, geography and health program."**

## TEACHING JUNIOR PRIMARY CHILDREN

Jo Brooks is the Prep class teacher at St Augustine's School, and she incorporated the *Little J & Big Cuz* television series into her teaching and learning program. Jo is an early career teacher who commenced her teaching career at St Augustine's three years ago. Her Prep class has 21 students of whom five identify as being Indigenous; four as Aboriginal and one as a Torres Strait Islander. She had not previously used *Little J & Big Cuz* as part of her teaching and learning program, but found that six students had seen one or more episodes on NITV. None of these students were Indigenous.

Jo used four episodes of *Little J & Big Cuz* over six weeks as part of her English, geography and health program (taught as Social Emotional Learning in Queensland Catholic Education schools). The four episodes viewed were 'Lucky undies', 'Wombat rex', 'New tricks' and 'Right under your nose'. She used these episodes as stimulus materials for the students to assist with their conversations and writing.

In Social Emotional Learning there is a strong emphasis on mindfulness and kindness to each other. The *Little J & Big Cuz* series was seen as supporting both these aspects of the Social Emotional Learning curriculum through the story lines and the relationships between the characters.

Jo thought the length of each episode was about right for her students, and the muted colours were not jarring, and as such, the students were engaged by the episodes rather than being 'hyped up'.

On two occasions parent helpers were present when Jo incorporated 'Lucky undies' and 'New tricks' into her classroom activities. These parents were not aware of the television series *Little J & Big Cuz*. Their responses were very positive and they were 'enthralled'.

## SUPPORTING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

In her English program, Jo was focusing on the development of both oral and written language. To develop students' written language, she used the episodes as a writing stimulus. The class watched an episode, which Jo then used to prompt discussion about the characters, plot and setting. Students then wrote their own stories based on the characters and/or plot in that episode. Their questions about 'Lucky undies' led to stories about the resilience and the growth mindset required to keep trying in order to be successful.

A theme explored in 'Wombat rex' was investigation and inquiry. This theme proved to be a great stimulus for the students to talk about 'finding out', and to write imaginative stories about exploring, which they then shared with their peers.



St Augustine's Primary School, Mossman, Queensland.

## TEACHING POINTS

Jo found that all of the episodes generated a great deal of conversation among her class members. The students loved watching and talking about the episodes. These discussions opened up the opportunity for lots of conversations and language teaching points. These points included developing students' vocabularies so that they could use new words in their conversations and writing. Jo also used these activities as opportunities to develop students' sentence structures.

In addition, Jo developed a number of extension activities based on the episodes, such as asking the students to draw as well as write about what they watched. She also used 'elbow buddies', where students in pairs took turns to tell each other about each episode they watched.

Jo found many incidental teaching points emerge from the series such as teaching about different family units. The students could relate to the stories. The students really liked the character Nanna and talked about how she always wore a beanie. They considered Uncle Mick to be 'totally cool' and he became a key character for the class.

The students talked about the different environments in the television series compared to the tropical rainforests and sugar cane growth around their school in Mossman. Jo used the different environments in the series: the school, house, beach and desert as further teaching points. Her approach enabled the students to describe what they saw in the different episodes and make comparisons with their school, houses and the beaches with which they were familiar. The students also thought that the backyard of

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Nanna's house, with its sofa and mattress, was a great place to play, and some said they would like their backyards to be like Nanna's.

### ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Jo indicated that a great strength of the series was its support for oral language development. She reported that she could use it to support the teaching of phonics, new words and sounds. She saw this support of oral language development as beneficial for several of the Indigenous students in her class whose 'at home' language is either Creole or their clan's language, where the language structure and pronunciation are very different to Standard Australian English.

### SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

The theme of 'Lucky undies' fits in with the school's *Second Steps and Growth Mindset* program for emotional wellbeing. The episode demonstrated important aspects of the Social Emotional Learning curriculum including showing respect for others and taking turns. The class was very excited when Little J was successful in the basketball game in this episode and gave a cheer.

The students were also very interested in the science experiment. It led to the class wanting to make slime. The school has an Under 8s Day, and on that day, the Prep class introduced slime making to other students.

This aspect of students wanting to share what they learnt or saw in an episode is also exemplified by the outcomes from watching 'New tricks'. This episode introduced students to the concept of what is a circus. Only five students had prior knowledge of circuses. Learning about circuses led the class to want to investigate what circuses are and do. The students learnt about the different acts likely to be performed at a circus. During play time, the Prep class students were then observed sharing what they had learnt about circuses with the Year 1 and 2 students. This was entirely student initiated.

### LITTLE J & BIG CUZ TEACHING RESOURCES AND INTERACTIVE STUDENT MATERIALS

Jo referred to the teaching resources for the development of her program, and read through them to use as a stimulus for her teaching, rather than as direct teaching materials per se. She mainly referred to the resources concerning early childhood language development.

Jo found the teaching resources a particular strength of the *Little J & Big Cuz* series. She found them to be a valuable resource for her teaching and that the materials provided her with engaging language development resources to which the students could relate.



St Augustine's Prep class watching an episode of *Little J and Big Cuz*

She indicated that the resources for her Prep class are pitched at the right level. She also indicated that it was possible to make links to other curriculum areas such as science and geography. Jo plans to use the series for geography and to continue its use for language development.

In addition, Jo reported that the interactive *Little J & Big Cuz* games were useful and enjoyed by the students. The students were able to play the games on the school handheld tablet devices. As part of language development, Jo used the *Scene Builder* game to help prompt story writing and oral storytelling. The games were easy for the students to access, as there were no login details or passwords required. Some students with external internet access played the games at home.

## Conclusion

Queensland teacher Jo Brooks found a valuable teaching resource in the *Little J & Big Cuz* series. This resource engaged her Prep class. It led to student directed conversations and to diverse student initiated learning activities. As a language development resource with the possibility of planned and incidental links to other curriculum areas, Jo plans for *Little J & Big Cuz* to have an ongoing role in the Prep program at St Augustine's.

**"The resources for her Prep class are pitched at the right level."**



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