



### TEACHING NOTES and Activity Sheets,

**“Mending Lucille” by J.R.Poulter, illustrated by Sarah Davis, Hachette**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**J.R. Poulter**, born in Sydney and educated on the Gold Coast, gained an Arts Degree and library qualifications before working in the State Library of Queensland, as a book reviewer for Queensland Education, a research assistant and associate lecturer/academic editor at the University of Queensland, and has even worked in a circus. As J.R. McRae she writes and illustrates poetry and reviews books, music

and film. J.R. has published eight other books and teacher resources. She lives with her husband and five children in Queensland.

### **AUTHOR'S NOTES ON RESPONSE TO THE TEXT**

*'The response to this story, not just from teachers who can see its application with children, but from adults and teenagers who have experienced trauma, separation, family break up, loss/death of parent/carer has been extraordinary. Adults have broken down and howled (literally) and have told me they felt a sense of release from feelings long buried/pent up, for sometimes decades, through reading the story. They seem to immediately and spontaneously identify with the child.'*

*This story has been used beyond the classroom:*

- *as a tool for teachers, AVT Behaviour Management Teachers, counsellors, psychologists and social/welfare workers and psychiatrists.'*

*It has also be used:*

- *for counselling children experiencing loss of a parent/carer*
- *for helping children through the trauma of family break up*

*Specifically, it might help them to deal with:*

- **Loss and Grief** *Parents caught in a tragedy or an emotional upheaval involving a partner have a double crisis – they have their own emotional trauma, and they have the child or children who are the innocent onlookers, and are sometimes also the victims. Often it is assumed 'they are too young to understand,' or 'they will get over it, they're just children.' But children do sense drama in the home; they do feel the loss when a parent/carer dies or leaves for whatever reason, but they do not always know how to express their loss/grief, and the grieving/emotionally traumatised parent is often unable to reach out to the child and communicate with them at a level at which they will understand.*

### **AUTHOR'S NOTES ON CHARACTERS:**

#### ***The child***

*The child has no name – she is everyone who has experienced such a loss at a young age. The story, seen through her eyes, also reflects the child's world, the things that impact her and how she sees them – everything is from her perspective. There is no rationalisation; there are no reasons, just a series of impacting events that the child sews together in her mind to make her story of what happened. When she grows up she will elaborate with the complexities of an adult mentality and the benefit of hindsight. Now, she is a little girl who has lost her mother and needs to tell someone in her own way, her own story. That someone is you, the reader.*

#### ***The mother***

*The scenario surrounding the mother in Mending Lucille is deliberately vague – she has left, and she may have died; she may have walked out for unexplained reasons, but the result is the same for the child – Mummy is no longer there for me. Death is terrifying but there is closure. Abandonment has no closure.*

### **The father**

*The father in the story is caught in his own emotional cage, and he can't reach out to his little girl and help her at the level she needs. He tries to normalise their lives – he goes back to work on the road, and tries to get his daughter back to school. (The illustrator's use of the cage captures the locking in of emotion and the inability to break out of where he is emotionally to reach out to his child.)*

### **Chrissie**

*For every child in such circumstances there is, hopefully, a Chrissie – someone who can reach out to them, communicate at their level, comfort and help to heal. Chrissie is not the child's mother, nor does she try to be the child's mother, but she is there for the child and she understands. Through mending the doll Lucille she starts to mend the child. The mending thread is present throughout the story – an umbilical cord initially, then a lifeline, then the mending stitches.*

### **Lucille, the doll**

*Lucille is symbolically the torn life; the wounded heart of the child. Lucille is the only link with the missing mother – a damaged link. The mending of the doll parallels the mending of the child, enabling her to relate again to a female role model. The doll is also the child's link to a past which was secure, where life was predictable; where Mummy and Daddy were there; where life had a pattern that was predictable.*

### **The bird**

*The found, injured bird symbolises the heavy, grounding, flightless effect of grief – it is also a pervading, present symbol of the flight of the mother. Again, it is the spirit, first wounded and then beginning to mend and reach then soar again! The letting go of the bird is release for the child too – a new beginning. The bird is present throughout the story, symbolising the psychological stages and emotional landscape the child is travelling through.*

### **The Noskis**

*This old couple represent stability that has gone (Mrs Noski's hip) and the inability for the child to move forward because of the unresolved grief/sense of loss. The Noskis part in looking after the bird and in its restoration and release symbolises the return of the stability and security of 'family' in the broader sense to the child's life.*

### **The girl bully**

*Although the child does not need any more traumas, they come, in the shape of a return to her education at a new school where a bully awaits her and where the precious link with mother, her security, is threatened in a new and terrible way.*

## **The truck**

*The journey of the broken family unit (father and child) to recovery is symbolised by the truck. It is a long and difficult journey for father/parent/carer and child, and the attempt to provide a degree of normalcy (return to school, new doll offer) interrupts the journey with near disastrous results – the child is just not ready. (The illustrator's inclusion of a crinkled map in the background symbolises the cracks appearing in the fabric of the child's life, in what is left of her 'family'. It is also, figuratively, the crinkled tissue we weep into.)'*

### **AUTHOR'S NOTES ON CURRICULUM TOPICS:**

**1. HPE (personal development)** *Using a dolls' house and small people, create the typical family scenario – two parents and one or more children – have one of the dolls disappear and have the children talk about*

- *what might have happened*
- *what this will mean to the family (no mum – who cares for the kids; no dad, who brings the income in or visa versa)*
- *what do they think the children feel*
- *has something like this ever happened to them – not just of a parent but loss of friend, pet, relative, or disaster such as loss of home etc*
- *has something like this happened to anyone they know – friend or relative; how could they help*
- *have they read/seen something like this on the news or in a magazine or at the movies?*
- *Suggested viewing –*
  - *The Parent Trap [Disney – either version*  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120783/> 1998 starring Lindsay Lohan or <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0055277/> 19 with Hayley Mills ];
  - *Lilo & Stitch [*<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0275847/> ]

*Discuss the 'family' scenarios in these films- parental divorce and remarriage; orphans(?) with big sister parenting little sister.*

- *In these days of varied family configurations, there are numerous Disney cartoons that make a useful platform for discussion. Disney, generally, creates some interesting 'family' scenarios – Mickey and Minnie have no children, just nephews – Morty and Ferdie -*  
<http://www.cmpense.org/English151C/A%20BIOLOGICAL%20HOMAGE%20O%20MICKEY%20MOUSE.html> ; Donald and Daisy, similarly, have no children but three nephews - Huey, Dewey and Louie[  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0046593/epcast> Season 6, Episode 23: This Is Your Life Donald Duck 11 March 1960]. Cinderella has a stepmother. Princess Jasmine, Nemo, Ariel, Bambi, and Pocahontas have no mother.

**2. English/The Arts** *Encourage the children to illustrate how they feel /would feel in such a situation as is described in the story – they may use cutouts, drawings, words, or colours and symbols.*

**3. The Arts/SOSE** *Have the children build a cardboard doll house and people it with cut out characters – this is a good approach for children from multicultural backgrounds for whom a typical home may differ from the typically western home. Discuss in class why they have built the house the way they built it, why they have*

*included certain items and who lives in the house. Discuss why some family homes are different to ours and why this might be.*

**4. The Arts/English/HPE [personal development]** *Make masks in class representing members of the family portrayed in the story – mother, father, child, Chrissie:*

- *children pick the character they want to act out, using their own original script/story and wearing that mask and then discuss why/reflect on why they picked that mask and chose to write that script/story*
- *children make a mask in art that represents one of the main characters in the story and show in their mask how the character is feeling – in a journal, they reflect on why they picked that character and why they showed them feeling that particular emotion (e.g. the father may be sad – his wife has left/died, or he may be happy – he has married Chrissie*