

TEACHERS' NOTES

TOO

Small

TOO



by
ATINUKE

illustrated by
ONYINYE IWU

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These notes have been written by the teachers at the CLPE to provide schools with ideas to develop comprehension and cross-curricular activities around this text. They build on our work supporting teachers to use quality texts throughout the reading curriculum. They encourage a deep reading of and reflection on the text, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, rather than in just one sitting. We hope you find them useful.

These notes have been written with children in Years 3 & 4 in mind but you will need to differentiate discussions and activities in line with the age and experience of your own children.

Before Reading:

- As you read through the book it would be helpful to use a group journal to organise and store discussions and responses to the text. The journal can be a place to capture reflections on the plot, characters and themes, as well as how the writer uses language for effect.
- As you read, you may also want to encourage the group to pause to consider words and phrases that may or may not be familiar to them and discuss and clarify their meanings and origins. These might include but will not be limited to **megacity, expressway, wrapper, Ankara, oyinbo, convoy, yam, stockfish, juju, jerry can, kerosene, pump**. Add these to a glossary, following up on new and unfamiliar vocabulary by using photographs and video sources to bring these words to life and support the pupils in understanding them in the context of these stories.

Reading aloud and key talking points:

Introducing the book

- Introduce the book by first sharing the front cover of the book with the children, reading aloud the title and discussing that and the illustration. *What do you know or think you know about this character, Tola? What do you think about her? Do you have any questions you would like to ask her?* You could make a note of the children's ideas around a copy of the cover, to capture their initial thoughts and ideas.
- Now share the back cover and read aloud the blurb. Discuss whether the children's initial ideas about Tola have been challenged or confirmed and why that might be. Do the children have any questions about what they have just heard? Explore how they think Tola feels about being 'small' encouraging the children to relate ideas to their own experiences. *What does the line **Tola proves that though she may be small ... she is mighty!** tell us about the story and about how she feels about being 'small'?*
- Take the time to share where Nigeria and then Lagos is on a map, either online or in an Atlas. This would be a fantastic opportunity to share Atinuke's book **Africa, Amazing Africa (Walker)**, paying specific attention to whether Nigeria sits on the West of the African continent and turning to the page which introduces Nigeria in more depth. The children may wish to explore Nigeria and the city of Lagos as part of an extended cross-curricular study alongside their enjoyment of **Too Small Tola**. Their growing understanding of the real setting would deepen their understanding of the fictional world in which Tola's stories are set.
- Explore the four images in each corner of the back cover and talk about who this might be and what relationship they might have to Tola. Invite the children to share their predictions. *What do you think a story with this title and featuring these characters might be about? What do you think might happen?*
- Open the book and look at the Contents page. Explain to the children that these could be the chapters



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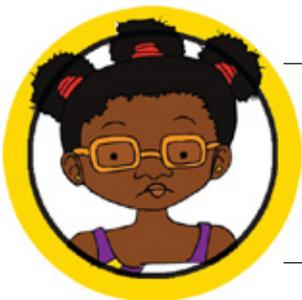
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in the overall story but they could also be read as individual short stories. Look at the title of each and the accompanying image and invite further questions and story predictions. (If the children have experienced Atinuke's **Anna Hibiscus** books, they might begin to make intertextual connections about the way in which her stories are presented and published.)

- You might want to explore the phrase **small but mighty** with the children. Look at the dedication by 'A' (Atinuke) on the Publication page **Dedicated to Lani-Grace who is also small but mighty**. *What does she mean? Have they heard or seen this phrase before?* They may have seen or heard it used as a slogan on clothing, for example, or in relation to a specific person, real or fictional. (They might have seen the similar phrase from Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew story, 'Though she be but small, she is mighty!') They might be interested to know that it was used by the Romans in the Latin language thousands of years ago. *Why would **Small but mighty** be a description that has lasted so long and is still used today? Why is it so important to people? Can the children think of stories – in books, on television or in films – in which the theme of being small but mighty is central?* You may wish to create a class collection of such stories in the reading area to enable the children to make these links collectively.

Too Small Tola (pages 7-35)

- Now turn the page to reveal the next spread and the opening of the first story, **Too Small Tola**. Invite the children to share their initial impressions of what they see in the illustrations before reading aloud any of the text. Start with the page devoted to the block of flats in which Tola and her family live. They may spot Tola standing on the balcony of the fourth floor, comment on the washing hanging on lines and over balustrades. Perhaps the children live in similar housing and can talk about the features of blocks like this and what they might find in and around it. Turn the children's attention to Tola's family whom we met on the back cover and are now named. *What information is being shared about each of them and the relationship they share? How do they remind the children of their own families and friends?*
- Now read page 7 aloud, giving the children time to respond to what they can see and have heard in this introduction. *Is this what the children expected? Are there any words or phrases they don't understand? How does it make them feel?* Give the children an opportunity to share personal narratives or memories which help them to capture and empathise with this feeling. *Have the children ever felt **too-too small** like Tola? What happened? Who did it involve?*
- Continue to read aloud until ...**Da-po!**" at the end of page 9. Pause to discuss what the children have heard so far. What have they learned about Tola's family and their life? Give the children time to respond to the illustration. How does it add to their understanding? The children may notice immediately the cracks in the walls and relate this back to the description **run-down block of flats** in the story's introductory sentence that adds to the sense that the flat is in disrepair. They may connect this with the family not being well off and make links to other observations like Moji's **borrowed computer**.
- Invite the children to make connections between this family and their own. Perhaps they share the same interests or can relate to the interactions between different family members in this scene? Maybe they recognise the way the room is organised as similar to their own living room or have similar belongings or décor? As well as revisiting the text together, ensure that the children are given enough



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time to pore over the illustration, looking for the smaller details that may take them beyond their initial impressions. *What makes Tola's family special? What do they recognise in their own lives? What is different?* Mediate these discussions with sensitivity, taking into account the circumstances of your own children and wider society, ensuring that any limiting assumptions made are constructively explored and challenged if necessary. This early introduction to Tola and her family home may lead to a wider investigation in to the different homes in which families live, both in their own neighbourhood and in different localities across the world. It is worth checking that the books in your classroom reading area contain positive representations of all kinds of family homes, and protagonists are not just typified as living in a house with a garden.

- You may also want to revisit some of the concepts or figurative language that children may need clarifying, such as **faster than mosquitos pass on malaria** or **as angry as a soldier ant**. As well as allowing the children to become more familiar with the insects common to Nigeria, they could play around with similes of their own that would evoke the same response.
- Help the children to summarise what has happened so far in the story and to anticipate what they think will happen next.
- Read on to “...soon everyone will know where we are going.” Talk about what has just happened and why Grandmummy didn't answer Mama Business's question “**Where are you going?**” and then raced out of the building. *Why does she not want her to know where she is going? What will happen when everyone knows they are going to market? What might they want from Grandmummy and Tola?*
- Read on from page 13 until the end of page 15, **The long walk has made her tired**, without showing the children the illustration. Ask the children to talk about what they saw in their mind's eye as you read. Did anything stand out to them vividly or was any of it particularly memorable; the sights, sounds or even smells of the setting? Read it again and ask the children to sketch what they imagine Tola is experiencing and observing as she walks through the city to Mile 12 market. Encourage them to share and compare their drawings and revisit the text to look at the language that evoked their visualisation. Show them the illustration on page 14 and discuss which part of the journey they think this represents. The children could create illustrations from their sketches to add to this one. You could show them film clips of this area of Lagos to further evoke the atmosphere and experience of being there; Tola's sensory awareness and Grandmummy's excitement.
- You may also wish to explore some of the new language that the children will encounter in their reading, pausing to discuss and clarify meanings between words presented in Yoruba and English, making collections of these and relating this to children's own experiences of speaking other languages. You and the children may want to make Igbo integral to this language exploration. The language bank that you build throughout the text can then form the basis of a display of Yoruba words, a bilingual or multi-lingual dictionary, or a book-based game to support the children's retention and recall of new language learnt.
- Now turn the page and continuing reading aloud until “**Not at all,**” **Grandmummy lies.** on page 19.
- Return to the characterisation of Tola and her Grandmummy. What is Tola beginning to realise about being **small but** mighty? Why was it such a surprise for her to think of Grandmummy as small? To help



the children understand how Tola views her Grandmummy as well as how she feels about being seen as **too-too small** or **small but mighty** herself, create a Role on the Wall for each of the two characters. Draw around two children on large pieces of paper. On the outside of the outline, scribe anything that is known about the character; appearance, lifestyle, facts retrieved from the text relating to behaviour, what is done and said. On the inside, note the inferences being made about Tola's or Grandmummy's thought and feelings, personality and inner characteristics, for instance the children might say that Grandmummy is fierce because **when [she] is upset, soon everybody will be upset** or she is kind because she carried the heavy rice bag for Tola; that Tola is cheeky because she called her sister a name then ran away or that she is clever or mathematical because she can calculate the money and change in the shops.

- Read on from **Grandmummy's phone beeps.** until page 28, **They rest by a window selling cold soft drinks.** Pause, as the character do, to recollect all that has happened since they arrived at the market. *What kinds of things have they bought for themselves and what have they bought at the request of family and neighbours?*
- Take some time to consider this part of the story more deeply. What do the children think about these requests and how much Tola and Grandmummy are doing for everyone else? How does it make them feel about everyone involved? Would you help all these people? Why? Why not? Why did she not want to help Mr Obi with his television but she did agree to buy nappies for Mrs Abdul and Baby Jide? What is the difference? As well as helping their family and neighbours, how did Tola and Grandmummy help each other over the course of their shopping trip? And who else helped them? Support the children to revisit the text and illustrations to justify their ideas. How do you think it made them feel to help others? How do you know?
- Revisit each of the Roles on the Wall to record the children's new insights into the two characters; their actions and what it says about their personality and characteristics as well as Tola's shifting feelings about herself and her Grandmummy.
- Now read aloud until the end of the story on page 35.
- Allow the children to begin to explore their responses to the whole story through book talk with the help of what Aidan Chambers calls 'the four basic questions.' These questions give children accessible starting points for discussion:
 - Tell me...
 - Was there anything you liked about this story?
 - Was there anything that you particularly disliked...?
 - Was there anything that puzzled you?
 - Were there any patterns ... any connections that you noticed? Did it remind you of anything else you've read or seen?
- The openness of these questions unlike the more interrogative 'Why?' question encourages every child to feel that they have something to say. It allows everyone to take part in arriving at a shared view



without the fear of the 'wrong' answer.

- Invite the children to compare their initial story predictions to what actually happened. *Is it what they expected? Why? Why not?*
- Return to Tola's Role on the Wall, and consider what they could add now. This gives you an opportunity to summarise the important stages of the story. Reflect on how her attitude about being small has changed since fearing **she is far too small to carry shopping** (page 8) at the start of the story. *What has happened to change her mind? Why does her Grandmummy think she should be called **Too Strong Tola** at the end? What has Tola done to deserve this title? How does Tola feel about herself now? Why do you think she should feel proud of herself?*
- Think about Grandmummy's role in Tola's story. *How did she help Tola? Do you have someone like this in your own life?* Revisit Grandmummy's Role on the Wall and talk about what the children think and feel about her. Draw attention to how much she ended up helping other people after racing away from Mama Business at the beginning of the story. *What does this say about her?*
- Consider the theme of being kind and helpful more generally with the children, drawing on children's personal experiences before prompting more evaluative thinking:
 - Why is it important to be considerate of others? How does being helpful to others make a difference? How do other people help you? Are you ever kind? How does it make us feel to be kind to others?
 - Should you always be kind? What would happen if we never helped anyone? Should we always put other people before ourselves?
 - Why do you think Atinuke chose to write this story? Who do you think would like this story? Why? You could also look at the illustrations and how Onyinye Iwu has helped to tell the story.
- Leave multiple copies of the book in the book corner for the children to revisit and re-read in independent reading time, by themselves or socially in a group.

Small but Mighty (pages 36-63)

- In this story, we learn more about Tola's block of flats, her neighbours and how it is to live there. It deals with themes of managing adversity and the power of a collective and community in standing up to bullying. You will want to pause for reflection as you read aloud to discuss unfamiliar vocabulary and meanings, specific to Tola's life and world. Continue to mediate these discussions with sensitivity, taking into account the circumstances of your own children and wider society, ensuring that any limiting assumptions made are constructively explored and challenged, if necessary. Revisit books like Atinuke's **Africa Amazing Africa** to help demonstrate the diversity within and between the countries of Africa or the Anna Hibiscus stories in which this protagonist enjoys significantly more privilege than Tola, as well as other texts that support understanding of the African Diaspora. In the third story **Easter and Eid**, we are introduced to a wider range of people across Lagos which will give rise to the opportunity to deepen children's understanding further.
- Begin by allowing the children to be drawn in to this world by responding to illustrations on pages 36

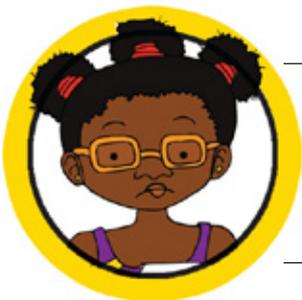


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and 37. *What is happening? How are the three siblings feeling?* Draw attention to the fan – *what do they notice about it?* Now read aloud until page 39, **They use a jug to pour the water over themselves.** Gather the children’s initial responses to this description of Tola’s home. Refer back to the image on pages 8-9 to support the children’s visualisation. In order to gain a better sense of the space and how the flat sits within the block; how the family might interact with their neighbours – the children could draw or even build a small world model of the rooms described using whatever recycled materials they have to hand. Support the children to revisit the text, identifying the descriptions that help them to imagine and recreate the features and overall look of each room.

- Now read aloud from When **Tola tries to flush the toilet...** on page 39 up to, **But Tola’s family does not.** Revisit the line *It is one of those mornings when Grandmummy tells them to count their blessings. Do Tola, Moji and Dapo agree with Grandmummy? What do the children think of this idea of counting blessings? Has anyone ever told them to count their blessings?* Invite the children to reflect on the things in life that they find difficult. Model this yourself and be prepared to share a few small things that you find hard or annoying or irritating; sharing how talking about difficulties to people that listen can sometimes help even if there is no solution. Now, with the children, reflect on and share what you and they feel grateful for. Again, model how this can be bigger things like a special friendship or love of their family, things they get that others may not such as warm clothes or a cosy bed or things that they might not otherwise notice as a blessing without pausing to reflect, such as the view outside their window or the warmth of the sun. You might extend this by providing each child with a plain notebook in which they could keep a daily record of their feelings using emojis, words or drawings to express themselves as well as something that they count as a blessing that day.
- Read on from **Grandmummy works hard selling groundnuts** – pausing to discuss vocabulary and meanings – until **And other people in the queue laugh too.** Invite the children to discuss what is happening and share their immediate responses to this. *How does it make them feel? How do they think Tola is feeling; or Mrs Shaky-Shaky? What would you like to say to Moji and everyone else in the queue? What could they say to Tola?* You could revisit the illustration on pages 48-49 with the children and help the children to organise themselves into a silent tableau, frozen in position in role as one of the characters. Encourage them to look closely at the body position, facial expression and gaze of their chosen character to help them recreate the scene and evoke the emotion being portrayed by their character. You could tap the children on the shoulder and ask them to voice their thoughts in role. Perhaps not everyone laughed or even felt comfortable laughing at Tola. Why might this be? The children could create thought bubbles and write their voiced thoughts inside, displaying it around a copy of the illustration. The children might like to draw on their deeper understanding to write a short note of reassurance to Tola or they might want to write a note or advice to Moji or the neighbours.
- Now, read the story until the end. Pause to discuss the book using Aidan Chambers’ open-ended book talk prompts as you did after finishing the first story.
- Then extend the discussion to develop the children’s inferential and evaluative understanding further. Why has Atinuke written this story; what does she want us to think about? How does it relate to our own lives and not just to Tola’s? If you had to tell someone else about this story, what would you say is most important? Why is it called **Small but Mighty**? Help the children to summarise the story in one

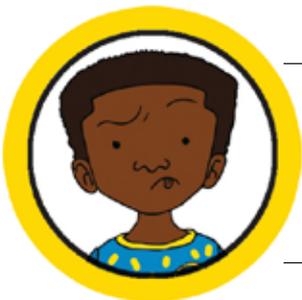


or two sentences, revisiting the text and illustrations. This will help the children get to the heart of the story; its human themes of courage and collective strength.

- You might engage the children in some creative story writing, drawing on some of the key events or themes in the story. To support their ideas, encourage the children to make connections to their own lives, for example, they may have had a morning go wrong too; been frustrated that something is broken or uncomfortable; helped someone that needed them; felt they have been misunderstood; worried about being late; felt protected by people around them; or even had to deal with a bully. They could start with the title **Small but Mighty** and see where that leads them, using the basic shapes of Tola's story to develop their own with a different character or set in a different place. Allow the children time to think about and develop their main character before plotting out the shape of their story in words or pictures, talking it through with you or a response partner before drafting it in writing. Encourage the children to read their story aloud to check it makes sense and flows before publishing it in handmade books that could be displayed in the reading area for everyone to enjoy.

Easter and Eid (pages 64-95)

- In the third and last story in the book, we are introduced to the wider cityscape of Lagos and – alongside Tola – we meet more of the people that live there. We are given the opportunity to reflect on and celebrate what unites us as well as what makes us different.
- Start by sharing the first illustration on page 64 and giving the children time to talk about their first impressions and then what they notice when looking at it more closely. Pin up a copy of this image alongside the two other images that lead us in to the previous two story worlds, on pages 6 and 36. *How do these two images connect to the stories they know? What does this new illustration tell us about the story we might expect?* The children could collaborate to create a large-scale, illustrated map of Lagos, using their own research on the city as well as drawing on the clues provided by Atinuke and Onyinye Iwu in these stories. *What physical, human and environmental features would we find in and around Lagos? Who lives there and how do they live?*
- Now read aloud the title and discuss what the children know about both Easter and Eid and what further predictions the children have about this new story. Perhaps they and their family enjoy either of the two celebrations themselves or know someone that does? Perhaps they celebrate both? Perhaps they enjoy a different celebration; religious or non-religious? *What happens and who does it involve? What do they look forward to most about it?* Scribe the children's ideas on to post-it notes, organising them into categories like 'beliefs', 'customs', 'dress', 'food', etc. Review the information and discuss with the children what is unique about each celebration and what is similar; and why that might be.
- Now read aloud the whole story, pausing to respond to the illustrations as well as to discuss new vocabulary and concepts. You might want to pause at pivotal moments in the story – such as when Mr Abdul was not able to do his job after his accident – to engage in some role play or debate and discussion, allowing the children to deepen their understanding of the story dilemmas.
- After reading the whole story, invite the children to share their initial responses using Aidan Chambers' open-ended Booktalk prompts, as before. Again, discuss what the children are learning through this story about Tola but also the wider world and human behaviour more generally. Encourage them to



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revisit and re-read the story and the illustrations, drawing on them to support their ideas. *If they were to tell someone else about this story, what would they say? What would be the most important thing to include? Who do you think would enjoy or benefit from reading this story?*

- The children could add Tola and the cast of characters in this book to their cityscape, bringing it to life with known, albeit fictional, people.
- After reading all three stories, invite the children to respond to the book as a whole, drawing out their reader preferences and encouraging them to make personal and intertextual connections. *Does **Too Small Tola** remind you of any other stories you know in books or on television or films or even in real life? How? Which stories do they like best and why? Do you have a favourite scene you could share? Do you have a favourite character? Would you like to meet Tola? Does she remind you of anyone you know? Does this book make you want to read more about Tola or other books written by Atinuke or illustrated by Onyinye Iwu? Why? What is appealing about the stories or pictures?* Share with the children other titles by the author and illustrator if you haven't already.
- Revisit the **Contents** page and reflect on the illustrations assigned to each story. What else might the illustrator have chosen? Invite the children to create a new Contents page with their own small image that they think connects well to each of the story.
- Read the blurb and consider what else one might say about this book to tempt other children to read it. Can they summarise the book in no more than two or three sentences so that they share what is important and appealing about this book without giving too much away?

After reading, you could also:

- The children could find out more about Atinuke as an oral storyteller as well as an author by visiting her [website](#) or even enjoying a school visit from her! Create a display of her books for the children to revisit and enjoy together. You can also find out about Onyinye Iwu on her [website](#) and make accessible her books for the children to explore.
- Review your book stock with the children both in the classroom and across the school. Do the books reflect the realities of the children in your school community and in society more widely? You can find guidance for this by reading [CLPE's Reflecting Realities research report](#), illustrated by Onyinye Iwu. You may also want to engage KS2 children and colleagues in using CLPE's [teaching notes](#) for your free school copy of **Happy Here: Ten Stories from Black Authors and Illustrators** in which Onyinye Iwu features.
- Give an opportunity for the children to write a personal narrative about a time they have felt anxious, frustrated, misunderstood, overcome a fear or felt proud.
- Discuss with the children what they have learnt from reading this book and these three stories. The children may be inspired to learn more about any aspect of the stories, either subject specific - like wanting to find out about Nigeria or different homes or water - or related to the human themes of kindness, determination, self-belief, courage. They may be inspired to find out more of their own heritage or that within their own community. Provide quality texts, books and multimodal, time and support to facilitate wider research into these interests. *How could we share this information with other people? Atinuke has written stories for children. Could we write our own stories, poems or perhaps make*



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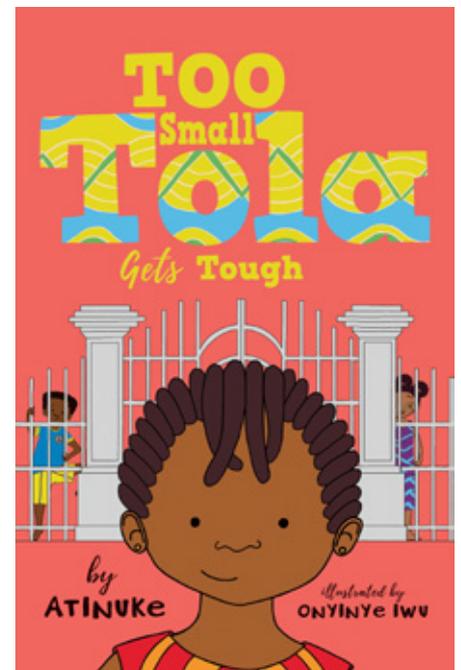
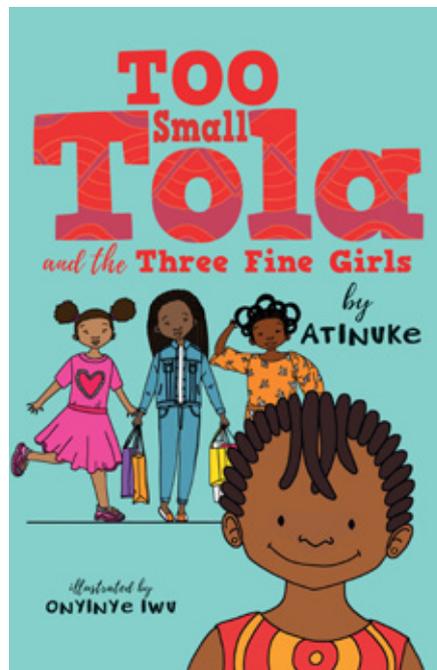
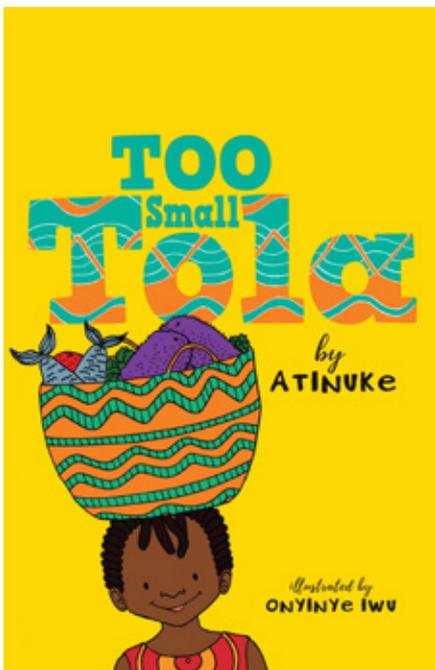
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an information book?

- Provide an opportunity to write another story for Tola, drawing on the children's knowledge of her character, that of her neighbours and her relationship with them, and the story setting created in and around her block of flats. *What challenges would she encounter? How could she overcome these? What do you want your reader to learn from this story?*

Other suggested titles to further support the exploration of themes arising from the book:

- *Too Small Tola and the Three Fine Girls* by Atinuke, illustrated by Onyinye Iwu (Walker)
- *Anna Hibiscus* (series) by Atinuke, illustrated by Lauren Tobia (Walker)
- *The No.1 Car Spotter* (Series), by Atinuke, illustrated by Warwick Johnson-Cadwell (Walker)
- *Africa Amazing Africa* by Atinuke, illustrated by Mounni Feddag (Walker)
- *My Skin, Your Skin, Let's Talk about Racism* by Lauren Henry-Allain MBE, illustrated by Onyinye Iwu (Ladybird)
- *Hey You! An Empowering Celebration of Growing up Black* by Dapo Adeola, illustrated by Onyinye Iwu et al (Puffin)
- *Happy in Our Skin* by Fran Manushkin, illustrated by Lauren Tobia (Walker)
- *Ruby's Worry* by Tom Percival (Bloomsbury)
- *Between Tick and Tock* by Louise Greig (Egmont)
- *A Book of Feelings* by Amanda McCardie, illustrated by Salvatore Rubbino (Walker)



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