



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Mid to upper primary
(ages 7–12)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, The Arts
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** N/A

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Exploring family dynamics
- Learning about music and musical genres
- Understanding psychosomatic disorders
- Learning about creative writing

THEMES

- Music
- Happiness
- Family
- Individuality
- New experiences
- Friendship

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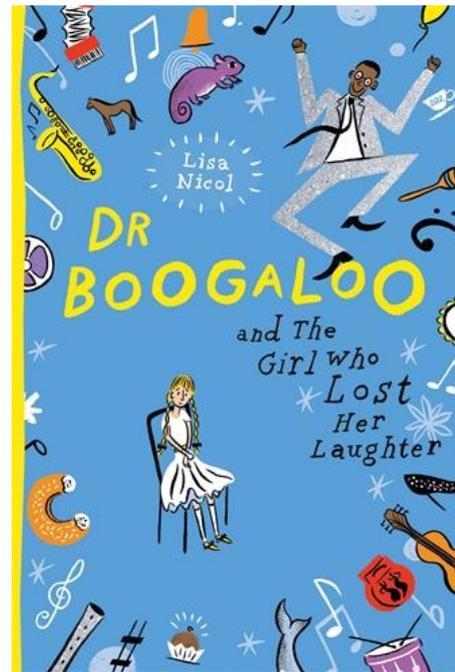
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Dr Boogaloo and the Girl Who Lost Her Laughter

Lisa Nicol

PLOT SUMMARY

Enchanting, timeless and surprising – this extraordinary novel will touch the hearts (and ears) of children and adults alike.

Dr Boogaloo was no ordinary doctor. Not at all like the one you might visit if you had a sore tummy. No, Dr Boogaloo was a very different type of doctor. He treated folks who suffered from rather unusual complaints. And how did he treat them? Why, with the most powerful medicine known to mankind . . . Music!

Blue was no ordinary girl. For starters, her name was Blue. But what was truly extraordinary about Blue was the fact that she hadn't laughed for 712 days. Not a hee hee, a ho ho or even a tiny tee hee.

According to Dr Boogaloo, music can cure anything. (Of course, you need the right dose of the right music. No point listening to a jive if you're in need of some boogie-woogie, and you can't just substitute a toot for a blow!) But no laughter was definitely a case for alarm.

Can Dr Boogaloo compose a cure before Blue loses her laughter forever?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Nicol is a writer and documentary-maker. Working across film, television, radio and print, Lisa's work has been broadcast on ABC TV, pay TV networks and Radio National. She has been published by all the major broadsheets. Her documentary about Australian poet Benjamin Frater won a Silver medal at the 2012 New York Festivals International Radio Awards. Her documentary *Wide Open Sky* about a children's choir in outback NSW won the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the 2015 Sydney Film Festival and gained a national cinema release. *Dr Boogaloo and The Girl Who Lost Her Laughter* is Lisa's second book for children.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Lisa says:

To tell you the truth, I can't remember the exact moment the idea for *Dr Boogaloo* came to me. A character called Toots-a-boogaloo appeared in an early unpublished book I wrote about a girl with ginormous hands. She was joined by a cast of strange misfits. In fact some of them found their way to The Boogaloo Family Clinic for Musical Cures – the Ipsy Twins with their fast growing noses. The potty-mouthed Dan Mutter. In that book, Toots was actually made of instruments:

'For his teeth were piano keys, his bottom a bongo drum, and his belly was a banjo you could pick or slide or strum.'

And everywhere he went he made music – which sounds great but he actually found it quite exhausting and sometimes annoying!

So, while I was probably thinking about what to cook for dinner, from somewhere deep in my mind *Dr Boogaloo* clambered out again. But this time he wasn't made of instruments. Instead, he was a doctor who used music to fix people. And he'd also found himself a wife!

It probably comes as no surprise but I'm a very big lover of music. And I wholeheartedly believe music is medicinal. I think this is because humans are musical creatures. It is an essential part of who we are. (Even the medical profession is catching on. Music helps people who've lost their memory remember things. It speeds up recovery and reduces pain.) I can't play an instrument so all my love of music is bottled up inside me. I think this book is an expression of that love.

Before I started writing I knew *Dr Boogaloo* was about to be faced with a problem case he didn't know how to fix. While I didn't know what or rather who the problem case would be, I did know what would fix it. The saddest music in all the world. Which comes I think

from personal experience. When I feel bad, I don't listen to happy music. I listen to sad music. And when I've finished listening to sad music (and sometimes having a weep!), I feel much, much, much, much, much, much, MUCH better. My favourite sad music is played by a three-piece Australian band called The Dirty Three who are more than a little similar to the band in the tunnel.

And as soon as I thought about the cure, I immediately knew the problem. And along came Blue . . . a little girl who couldn't laugh . . . and then we were off. While the Doctor had been travelling with me for some time, I feel like I only got to know Blue when she arrived at the Clinic. She took a while to reveal herself. I guess she'd had a hard time. And she's not much of a complainer. But I'm so fond of her now. She has a very quiet strength. I think that girl will go places!

And while I don't have 19 bathrooms, I do have a cleaner called Luz! And she's from the Philippines. Luz is amazing. She's raised two boys all on her own. Her encouraging parenting advice inspires and helps me to be a better mother. I think everyone needs a Luz in their lives, especially when you have a mother like Blue has!

Questions and Activities

- What type of music do you like to listen to?
- How do different types of music make you feel?
- Have you ever heard of music fixing a problem?
- Make a list of all the different types of music and/or instruments you can think of – this is a great activity to do as a class both before and after reading the story.
- Play some songs or pieces of music and write down how they make you feel.

WRITING STYLE

Lisa Nicol's writing style in *Dr Boogaloo and The Girl Who Lost Her Laughter* is heavily descriptive and weaves humorous and colloquial sentences with more evocative passages. Written in the third person with small interludes where the narrator speaks directly to the reader, there is a sense of immediacy to the events – as if the narrator is telling them just after they have happened.

'As the doomsayers say, all good things must come to an end. And for the first time, in more than three hundred years, the unthinkable was just about to happen.' (p. 7)

'Thursday the twenty-ninth of May started like any other day. Dr Boogaloo and his wife, Bessie (I'll introduce you in three shakes of a tambourine), were having breakfast in their cottage behind the clinic.' (p. 9)



Lisa employs lots of similes and metaphors throughout the text to conjure visual and aural imagery for the reader.

'With a fairy-floss cloud of mandarin-orange hair exploding out from under her striped beanie, Bessie was like a rainbow caught up inside a tornado – a firecracker of colour and sound!' (p. 38)

'Bessie and Blue rode into town. Music streamed out behind them like confetti.' (p. 43)

Examples of onomatopoeia are present throughout the text which, along with the subject matter, give the story a musical quality. Often, the onomatopoeic words or phrases are capitalised and highlighted in a different font which emphasises them as well as helping to punctuate lengthier descriptions or sentences.

'Around the room, five small children popped and fizzed like lemonade bubbles while their mother – goldfish eyes bulging, hair electric – twitched and grimaced in her chair.' (p. 2)

'A bulbous blob of green snot the size of an olive flew from his finger and landed SPLATTT on the red door.' (p. 53)

The tone of the novel switches between laugh-out-loud funny and softly poignant. These moods are conveyed to the reader by the descriptive and evocative nature of the sentences and dialogue.

The distinctive vernacular of certain characters, such as Mrs Taylor and Luz and Tracee, the Filipino cleaners, also enhances the humour in their characters.

"SOMEONE GET ME OFF THIS SHIP OF FOOLS!" screamed Mrs Taylor. **"CARROTS WON'T GROW IN A BLOODY BATH! AND BESIDES, HOW ARE WE GOING TO WASH ALL THAT DIRT OFF NOW THAT YOU'VE TURNED OUR BATH INTO A VEGIE GARDEN?"** (p. 159)

"Oooh, like secret agent? Like Jane Bond?" said Luz, with an attempt at a sexy shoulder roll and pout. **"Tell me plan!"**

"Well, you know how my mum looks at you but never really sees you?"

"Yeah! She call me Tracee half the time," said Luz, **"and I so much better-looking, it stupid."**

"Depend if you like old-style pork or fresh chicken," said Tracee. (p. 148)

Hyperbole is used in the case of Blue's mother – both in her dialogue and the way she is described by the narrator.

'Blue's mother wiped away her tears with a white silk handkerchief and gave the Doctor a creepy kind of smile.'

'Her teeth glowed lightbulb-white after one too many whitening treatments.' (p. 16)

'Anyway, my sense of humour is all in order. I'm hilarious. And my laugh is gorgeous. You could bottle it and sell it to those poor refugees who are having such a tough time lately, locked up on those tiny islands in the middle of nowhere so no one can hear them cry.' (p. 115)

Dr Boogaloo and the Girl Who Lost Her Laughter is unique in the way it mixes realistic characters and scenarios with fantastical elements and almost magical occurrences. In this way, the writing style is akin to that of classic children's storytellers such as Roald Dahl whose works often feature amazing occurrences in realistic settings.

Questions and Activities

- How would you describe *Dr Boogaloo and The Girl Who Lost Her Laughter*? E.g. is it a funny story, a sad story, or a combination of different things?
- What do you think about Blue's parents? If you were Blue, how would you feel about some of the things they do and say to her?
- Dr Boogaloo is described in the story as looking *'not unlike a brand-new pencil'*. Can you think of a different object to compare him to? Use this to compose a simile about him.
- Find the definition of onomatopoeia and then write a list of onomatopoeic words that you find in the book. Add any other examples you can think of.

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Exploring family dynamics

Blue's family is an example of an unusual family dynamic and there is a strong contrast between her family and the Taylor family.

Questions and Activities

- What are some of the differences between Blue's family and the Taylor family?
- What are some other examples of different family types or dynamics?
- Create a mind map with the word 'Family' at the centre. Around it, write words that you associate with the idea of family.



Learning about music and musical genres

Throughout the story, lots of different music genres, instruments and musicians are introduced to the reader. There are even subtle musical references such as the names of the Boogaloo's dogs, Fats and Dizzie, which allude to the famous jazz musicians Fats Navarro and Dizzy Gillespie.

Questions and Activities

- What types of music do you like to listen to? What types of music do your parents listen to? Is there a big difference between what is popular in the two groups?
- Do some surveys in your class about music. E.g. How many people play a musical instrument? How many people take singing lessons or sing in a band or choir? How many people would listen to music every day?
- Research either Fats Navarro or Dizzy Gillespie and write one or two paragraphs about them.
- Create your own musical instrument! Draw a picture of a musical instrument that you think Dr Boogaloo would benefit from by having in his collection. Give it a name and describe what type of problems it might fix. Be as creative as you can.

Understanding psychosomatic disorders

Blue's No Laughing Syndrome could be seen as an example of a psychosomatic disorder – a physical disorder which is caused by or notably influenced by the emotional state of the patient. In Blue's case, her inability to laugh might come from the fact that she feels different to her parents or isn't allowed to behave the way a child normally would.

Questions and Activities

- Have you ever heard of a feeling or state of mind creating a physical problem? E.g. Feeling anxious and getting shaky hands.
- Pick either stress, nerves or sadness and write down some physical symptoms that might occur with these emotions.

Learning about creative writing

Dr Boogaloo and the Girl Who Lost Her Laughter is an example of a highly creative and original piece of writing. The author employs various literary devices and techniques to create memorable characters and experiences.

Questions and Activities

- What is your favourite thing about the writing in the story?

- Think of a problem like the one's Dr Boogaloo is faced with in his clinic and write a short scene between him and a patient using descriptive language, similes and onomatopoeia.

KEY QUOTES

1. *'Not being able to laugh was hard to describe to people who could. Things still looked funny. And sounded funny. But they didn't feel funny anymore. It was as if a cocoon was ever so slowly being wrapped around her. With each and every layer, the world became a little bit more muffled and distant.'* (p. 36) Imagine you lost the ability to laugh, how would you describe it?
2. *'You can't feel the music without listening to it. But you can listen without feeling it. That's a very important distinction.'* (p. 97) What do you think Dr Boogaloo means by this? Try listening to a piece of music and really 'feeling' it. Afterwards, write down some of the things you thought or felt.
3. *'Before the Boogaloos, music was just something they played at assembly through tinny speakers. But now, it was something entirely different. It was a huge new world that had opened up. It felt like a wilderness on the inside, a place Blue could escape to and roam around in.'* (p. 122) Other than listening to music, is there an activity or something you do that makes you feel like a new world has opened up?
4. *'Although Blue still struggled to understand many things about her parents, it made her feel so good to make them happy again. They were just people after all. And there aren't any perfect people. Not any. Blue decided loving each other just the way we are is all any of us can try our best to do.'* (p. 177) Were you surprised at the end with Blue's feelings about her parents? What are some adjectives you would use to describe Blue's character?

THEMES

- **Music:** The theme of music is the undercurrent of *Dr Boogaloo and The Girl Who Lost Her Laughter*. Throughout the story, various genres of music and types of musical instruments are introduced to the reader. Musical genres are linked to certain feelings and described as having the potential to remedy various human ailments and feelings. Although Dr Boogaloo struggles to find a musical cure for Blue, it is still apparent that Blue's introduction to music is helping her to feel happier, widening her world view and introducing her to new experiences and new friends.



- **Happiness:** Blue's mother is desperate to find a cure for Blue's No Laughing Syndrome, however she never wonders about the root cause of Blue's problem. Blue is not necessarily depicted as an unhappy child, however there is no doubt that her happiness is linked to the disappearance of her laughter. In spending time with the Boogaloos Blue finds things that make her happier than she has been in a long time – riding the iBike with Bessie, swimming with Leonard, listening to music in the Reel-to-Reel room.

'Blue felt different. Somehow the whole world looked different. Blue was sure her heart must have snapped on a pair of wings and ridden high above the clouds just the way Bessie had told her. She thought that finally she understood what the Doctor had meant when he talked about the difference between listening and feeling.' (p. 141)

- **Family:** Blue's family is portrayed as being quite unusual. As well as being an only child, her father is often away on extended business trips and her mother seems more preoccupied with decorating their house than spending time with Blue. In this family, Blue is somewhat of an outsider with different interests and sensitivities to her parents.

'At moments like this, Blue felt as though she'd been born into the wrong family.' (p. 28)

These differences and the comments of her parents lead to Blue feeling like she is a disappointment to her family – a feeling which only increases when her No Laughing treatment does not immediately work. Despite these differences between Blue and her parents, ultimately Blue still loves them and wants to make them happy. At the end of the novel, Blue is shown to be very forgiving of her parents' treatment of her. She still believes in the importance of family and understands that no one is perfect. (See Key Quote 4)

- **Individuality:** Leading on from the dynamic of Blue's family and her status as an outsider in this trio, Blue can be seen as quite an individual. Her interests include stamp collecting and gymnastics, and she loves animals. Where her mother is loud and critical, Blue is quiet and compassionate.

The Boogaloos, with their love of exotic and rare instruments and musical genres, are also an example of individuality. They are seen to celebrate the unusual and express their individuality through their appearances and welcoming natures. Bessie mentions to Blue that *'no two instruments are the same'* (p. 80) and that this is what gives each one such different healing powers.

- **New experiences:** Blue's time at the Boogaloo Family Clinic of Musical Cures opens her up to a multitude of new experiences. Often Blue is unsure of herself and hesitates about leaping in, however, time and again we see her open herself up to the situations and come out the other side with a newfound confidence and broader world view.

'Blue had to make a decision. It wasn't really about what her mum would or wouldn't let her do. That was just an excuse. If Blue really wanted her laughter back, she knew she had to get in that water. To summon her courage, she tried to imagine herself surrounded by her old friends in fits of laughter. If she was honest, she couldn't even remember what laughter felt like anymore.'

"All right. I'll do it." (p. 111)

In listening to music and spending time in the company of the Boogaloos, Blue also experiences many new things. (See Key Quote 3)

At the end of the story, Blue has built up the courage to initiate new things such as sneaking out of the house to visit the clinic and inviting the Taylor kids over to play.

- **Friendship:** The reader learns that as Blue's laughter disappeared so did her friends. As an only child of parents who are frequently away, Blue's friendship circle is limited to her household's staff – Tracee, Luz and Melvin – but widens to include Dr Boogaloo and Bessie when she visits the Boogaloo Family Clinic of Musical Cures. Blue soon rejoices in her newfound friendship with Dr Boogaloo and Bessie.

'Strangely, Blue had almost got used to suffering from No Laughing Syndrome. But she didn't know how she was going to get used to not seeing the Boogaloos. Being at the clinic had been the best two weeks of her life.' (p. 151)

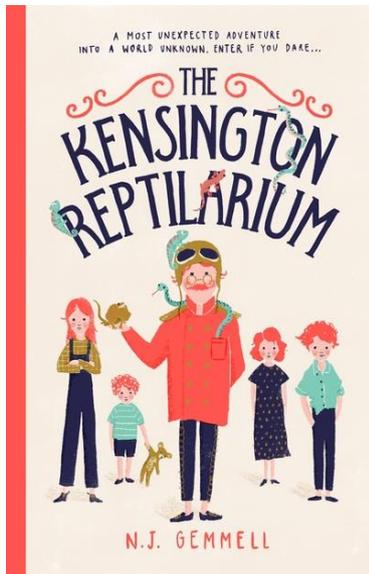
Blue is often described as looking at or listening to the antics of the Taylor family next door. While her mother abhors their noise and raucous behaviour, Blue finds it comforting and as the story progresses, we understand that she would like to be a part of it.

'Blue would have liked to join them, even though the sausages resembled the charcoal sticks they used in art class. She shut her bedroom window. "I guess it's dinner alone again for me tonight."' (p. 69)

Although Blue doesn't specifically bemoan her lack of friends, at the end of the novel when she invites the Taylor kids over to her house and they start hanging out, her joy at the friendship is apparent.



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



The Kensington Reptilarium
by N.J. Gemmell

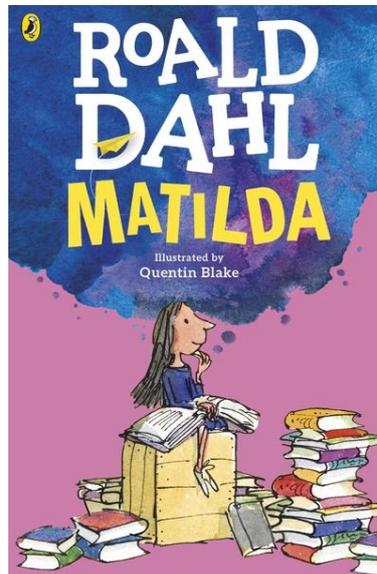
Why this story? A great example of children having eye-opening experiences in new places.

The Caddy kids are home alone and they're having the best time ever. Until a stranger arrives with news . . .

This is the story of how four loud, grubby urchins from the Australian outback find themselves in London for the first peacetime Christmas after years of war.

But their new guardian hates children. He prefers the company of the hundreds of snakes in his house – the Kensington Reptilarium.

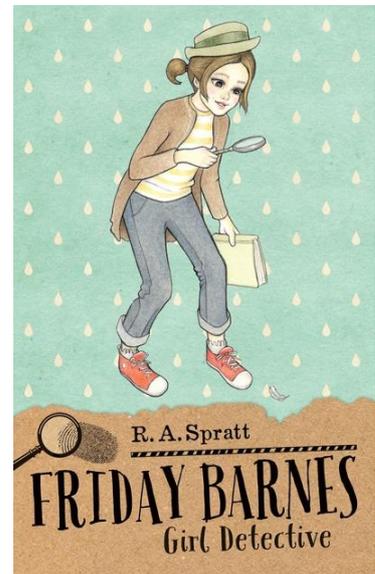
Fate lends Kick, Scruff, Bert and Pin a helping hand when outraged citizens call for the Reptilarium to be shut down. With the police about to descend, can the Caddy kids warm Uncle Basti's heart – and have their Christmas wishes granted – before it's too late?



Matilda
by Roald Dahl

Why this story? Like Blue, Matilda doesn't feel like she fits in with her family.

Matilda Wormwood's father thinks she's a little scab. Matilda's mother spends all afternoon playing bingo. And Matilda's headmistress Miss Trunchbull? Well, she's the worst of all. She is a big bully, who thinks all her pupils are rotten and locks them in the dreaded Chokey. As for Matilda, she's an extraordinary little girl with a magical mind – and now she's had enough. So all these grown-ups had better watch out, because Matilda is going to teach them a lesson they'll never forget.



Friday Barnes: Girl Detective
by R.A. Spratt

Why this story? It celebrates difference with humour and irreverence.

When girl detective Friday Barnes solves a bank robbery she uses the reward money to send herself to the most exclusive boarding school in the country, Highcrest Academy.

On arrival, Friday is shocked to discover the respectable school is actually a hotbed of crime. She's soon investigating everything from disappearing homework to the Yeti running around the school swamp. That's when she's not dealing with her own problem – Ian Wainscott, the handsomest boy in school, who inexplicably hates Friday and loves nasty pranks.

Can Friday solve Highcrest Academy's many strange mysteries, including the biggest mystery of all – what's the point of high school?

Teachers' resources available.



WORKSHEET: MUSICAL GENRES

As Blue discovers, there are lots of different musical genres. Using your own knowledge and the internet, research the definitions of the genres listed below. Can you also give examples of famous artists or songs for each genre?

MUSIC GENRE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
FOLK	The traditional music of the people in a country or region. Also, a type of popular music that is based on traditional music and that does not use electric instruments.	Bob Dylan, Cat Stevens
JAZZ		
ROCK		
COUNTRY		
BLUES		
CLASSICAL		
HIP HOP		
HEAVY METAL		
POP		
TECHNO		



WORKSHEET: ADJECTIVES

Think about the characters listed below and come up with 3-5 adjectives which describe them.

CHARACTER	ADJECTIVES
BLUE	
DR BOOGALOO	
BESSIE	
BLUE'S MUM	
BLUE'S DAD	
MELVIN	
TRACEE and LUZ	
MRS TAYLOR	
THE TAYLOR CHILDREN	



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Matilda	Roald Dahl	9780141365466	1-4	\$16.99		
Friday Barnes: Girl Detective	R.A. Spratt	9781742759623	3-6	\$15.99		
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