# EK BOOKS
# TEACHER NOTES & RESOURCES

**Title:** Isla's Family Tree
**Subtitle:**
**Author:** Katrina McKelvey
**Illustrator:** Prue Pittock
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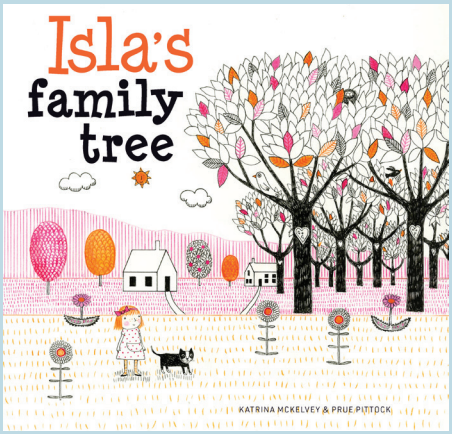
**Key Curriculum Areas:** English, HSIE, The Arts, PD/H/PE




## SYNOPSIS:

Isla isn't happy that her family is changing, so her mother creates a clever family tree with Isla to teach her how to accept that families always grow. Her mother hands her two new leaves, but Isla doesn't think they belong. 'There's no room left on our branch — it's full!' she says. Isla tries to make them fit somewhere, maybe with her cousins, at Aunty Violet and Aunty Jasmine's house, or at Aunty Daisy and Uncle Doug's. There's definitely no room on her own branch!

However, once she meets her new brothers, Isla has a change of heart. She falls in love and finds room for them after all — 'Our branch grew a little,' says Isla. 'Our family is never too full.'

The book explores important issues surrounding familial change and acceptance, while also providing a glimpse into a diverse family. Including adopted cousins and same-sex couples, it highlights that every family is normal. There are no rules about what a family looks like in a forest full of family trees.

## THEMES:

- Main idea – family trees (like real trees) keep growing and changing as families do.
- What is a family? What is a family tree?
- New siblings, relatives, twins, only children, grandparents, aunties, uncles, and cousins.
- Family structure and the different relationships within it: same-sex couples, adoption, and biological connections.
- Belonging (How do I fit into my family?) and connections.
- Adapting to change, families continuously changing and growing.
- Change can be hard sometimes – it may take time to be accepted.

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# TEACHER NOTES: Isla's Family Tree

## SELLING POINTS:

- An emotional story about family and how change can impact young ones as new members are introduced.
- This story is perfect for families who are introducing a new baby to a sibling.
- This story is perfect for classrooms who are: 1) studying how people connect together, 2) defining a family, 3) introducing the concept of a family trees, 4) learning about family histories 5) helping a student welcome a new brother or sister.
- The story can be linked to HSIE and PD/H/PE outcomes and many other parts of the curriculum.
- The ending highlights how Isla learns to accept and celebrate her changing family.
- The limited colour palette give a unique look – the cover will pop on the shelf.
- This story is a journey full of frustration, wonder, discovery, and love.
- This story points out that all families are normal, no matter how the members are connected.
- Helps children answer the question, 'What is a family?'
- Modern families are connected by love, not necessarily by bloodlines.
- Should pets be included in the family tree?

## AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

This story came to me when my son was five years old. My grandmother had passed just before Mother's Day in 2012 and I found it interesting that it was so complicated to explain to him how four generations connected together – and that was only a small part of our family. Around the same time, my sister-in-law was studying my husband's family tree. We had wonderful family discussions about his family history. Also at the same time, I found the TV show 'Who Do You Think You Are?' extremely interesting. I wrote down scribbles in 2012 and seriously started writing this manuscript in late 2014.

## WRITING STYLE:

I found it hard to turn this complicated concept into the simple story of Isla on a journey of discovery and acceptance while learning about family trees. I didn't want the story to be dominated by Isla's mama giving a lesson on what family is and how it works.

I tried to include a variety of relationships in Isla's family so that children who read this book are likely to make a connection to part of Isla's family. Any relationship in Isla's family is normal to her, just like any relationship in a child's family is normal to them. This is not a book to highlight difference; it's a book to highlight inclusion and connections.

I asked Prue to colour-code the leaves of Isla's family members so it's easier to keep track of who is who (did you notice?). Even I got confused at times – and I made them up!

I deliberately did not use technical language (such as generations, heritage, ancestors, inherited and so on) as this story can be used to start discussions about family types at school and at home, and can then lead to teaching a more formal way of recording family trees and histories.

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# TEACHER NOTES: Isla's Family Tree

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE:

The illustrations for Isla's family tree were created using ink, gouache and coloured pencils. I like the contrast of the black and white with a pop of colour, keeping the pages fresh and light.

After reading the manuscript, I tried to picture the look of the pages and the characters before settling on the look of Isla and her family. This involved spending a lot of time with the story playing repeatedly in my head ... sometimes at 3am in the morning!

I asked my publisher if I could change Katrina's chocolate milk to strawberry milk to match the colours I had chosen for this story. She said yes as she liked strawberry milk better anyway. Can you spot hidden things in the illustrations (for example: messages in bunting, birds, a soccer ball, golf clubs, a unicorn)? Watch out for the cat!

## AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

### Katrina McKelvey, Author

Katrina McKelvey is a children's author, former primary school teacher, wife, and mother to two tweenagers and a cocker spaniel. She's written many children's picture books and educational reads including *No Baths Week*, *Up to Something*, *Isla's Family Tree* (coming in April 2020), and *Chasing Rainbows* (coming in August 2020). She's highly involved in CBCA, SCBWI, literary conferences and festivals, and loves visiting schools. She's left-handed, loves tea and rollercoasters, and is addicted to mint chocolate. While in lockdown in Disney World a few years ago, she survived Hurricane Gene (category 5) by eating awful brownies. Come for a visit: www.katrinamckelvey.com

### Prue Pittock, Illustrator

Prue Pittock has the best job in the world: she's an artist who loves illustrating! Her studio has a big box of coloured pencils, ink, paint and lots of light. Together with this, she has a special imagination and passion to turn a great story into a great picture book. Her other loves are bush walks, dogs, rabbits, horses, big cats and pavlova.

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# TEACHER NOTES: Isla's Family Tree

## INTERVIEW:

### AUTHOR

#### What is the inspiration for this story?

The idea began when I had difficulty explaining to my son how all the members of our family connected together after my grandmother passed. He was five years old. And our family is not that big and complicated – imagine how difficult it would be for a larger family!

#### What was the most rewarding part of this project?

This was a very difficult story to keep simple. The concept of a family tree is complicated – and so is the definition of a family. I was very relieved and proud when my publisher was ready to back my story. Then I saw how Prue lifted my story to a whole new level. I was speechless. Illustrators are so clever. And she did it with only four colours!

#### What was the most challenging part of this project?

I often got myself confused as to who was who, despite trying to make Isla's family as simple as possible. That's one reason why the leaves are colour coded.

Also, the waiting! It took just over five years from writing the first draft on my computer to holding the book in my hands. The waiting included many rewrites and analysing feedback so I could make the story the best it could be.

### ILLUSTRATOR

#### What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.

The illustrations for Isla's family tree were created using ink, gouache and coloured pencils. I like the contrast of the black and white with a pop of colour, keeping the pages fresh and light. After reading the manuscript, I tried to picture the look of the pages and the characters before settling on the look of Isla and her family. This involved a lot time with the story being played repeatedly in my head ... sometimes at 3am in the morning!

#### What was the most rewarding part of this project?

After many months in the studio, finally holding the actual book resulting from a special collaboration is a fantastic feeling.
It is a great honour to bring an author's story to life in pictures.
(From Kat to Prue: It was an honour to have you love my story so much that you wanted to illustrate it.)

#### What was the most challenging part of this project?

Illustrating a picture book is a huge project. I work in the traditional method without any digital assistance and making sure I have a consistent look to all characters is vital. If a muck up a spread, it is literally back to the drawing board to start again.

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# TEACHER NOTES: Isla's Family Tree

## ENGLISH

### Before reading:

- Look at the cover. What can you find?
- Who are the characters?
- What could this book be about?
- How do the colours make you feel?
- Now read the blurb. What else have you learnt about the story?
- Visit Katrina McKelvey's YouTube channel and watch the trailer for this book: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgfVHAHyIHP14oeEkGl2jtA?view_as=subscriber
- What else have you learnt about the story?
- Now read the book and find out if you were correct.

### After reading:

- What is the story about?
- Does it have a beginning, a middle, and an end?
- What is the complication? How is it resolved? Would you have resolved it like Isla? What would happen if Mama did say 'yes' to her brothers living with Aunty Daisy?
- What are the story elements? (Characters, Setting, Plot, Conflict, Resolution, Time)
- Have you ever talked about how your family members connect together? Discuss.
- Come up with a new ending to this story. What if the babies did go and live with their other relatives?
- Write a poem that reflects your family.
- Can you write this story from Mama's point of view?
- Why is there a cat in the story?
- What is a metaphor? What is a simile? How do these connect to this story? 'Families are like trees …'
- The characters' names are all plants. Can you think of more? How does Uncles Doug's name fit in? (Hint: you may need to change the spelling – author joke).
- Why did the author call Mum 'Mama'? (International appeal). Does everyone in the class call their mums 'mum'? List the other names.

## HSIE:

- Ask students to investigate some basic family history. Start with their parents. Where were they born and when? Use a range of communication forms (oral, graphic, written, role play and digital technologies).
- List all the different names students use to refer to grandparents. What were Isla's? Why are there different names? (Cultural, traditional, made up).
- What are genetic/family traits? What were the obvious ones in Isla's family? (Red hair).
- Do you need to be married to make a family? Does everyone need to be connected biologically?
- Design a class display of family portraits. Some children may need to display more than one photo. Do pets get included?

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## PD/H/PE

- As a class, discuss the definition of a family. Talk about the different types of relationships within the families in the class group. Discuss terms like cousins, aunties, uncles, grandparents, step siblings, half siblings, adopted siblings, great-grandparents.
- Make a class collage of terms/adjectives used to describe a family.
  An example from Katrina's dedication on the imprint page:
  A family is anyone who shares unconditional love with one another. So be crazy, play, dream, and grow with your family and pets – and always remember to love, learn, and laugh together.
- How do twins 'happen'? Are there any twins in the class? Or in the school?
- Why is Mama's lap disappearing?
- Where were you born? Not everyone is born in a hospital.
- How do pets' behaviour change when babies are brought home? How did Isla's cat behave?
- Discuss the relationship between Mama and Isla.
- Discuss the relationship between Isla and her brothers.
- Discuss Isla's feelings of disappointment and frustration.
- What happens to the family tree when someone dies? Or divorces? Or remarries?
- Would this be all of Isla's family? Who else could be in it?

## THE ARTS

### VISUAL ARTS

- What are the parts of a tree? How do these parts link to a family?
  - Trunk – strength (grandparents).
  - Branches – show connections (children of grandparents – often child's parents and it grows as they start their families).
  - Leaves – these are connected to their parent's branch (each family member is a leaf).
- Children can draw their family members as a collage. Then progress to a tree shape. Do they know how all the members fit together? They may need to do two trees, one for each side of the family. They may need to do more and make a family forest. This may need to be researched at home first. Here are some ideas to help: https://www.pinterest.com.au/katrinamckelvey/family-trees/
- Complete Isla's Family Tree worksheet. Can you remember which branch everyone belongs to? Colour-code your leaves.

### DRAMA

- Role-play the feelings Isla experiences during the story.
- Role-play reporters interviewing Isla after her brothers come home from hospital.
- Re-enact the story in pairs. Show feelings/emotions, action, plot, and be in character!

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# TEACHER NOTES: Isla's Family Tree

## MUSIC

- What music/songs reflect the different moods in the story?
- What song would be played before the babies arrive? And what about after the babies arrive?
- Do you know any music you could play to a baby while it goes to sleep?

## SOME RESOURCES

- Katrina's Family Tree Craft Board on Pinterest: https://www.pinterest.com.au/katrinamckelvey/family-trees/
- Katrina's website: www.katrinamckelvey.com
- Katrina's Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/katrinamckelvey/
- Prue's website: www.pruepittockillustrations.com.au
- Prue's Instagram: www.instagram.com/p.pittock

## GLOSSARY:

Family, ancestors, genealogy, siblings, genes, grandparents, parents, relatives, cousins, siblings, archives, autobiography, biography, census, descendant, emigrate, fraternal, maternal, generation, immigrant, maiden name, paternal, spouse, surname, ethnic, blended, extended, research, interview, birth certificate, nationality, cultural, niece, nephew, aunt, uncle,

## RESEARCH TOOLS:

Local libraries, relatives, websites, census records, gravestones, death certificates, Births Deaths and Marriages, newspapers, obituaries, archives, photos, birth certificates, marriage certificates, personal diaries and letters, oral histories.

## ORGANISATIONS:

**The Australasian Federation of Family History Organisations (AFFHO):** http://affho.org
**The National Library of Australia (NLA):** https://www.nla.gov.au/research-guides/family-history
**National Archives of Australia (NAA):** http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/family-history/
**Society of Australian Genealogists (SAG):** https://www.sag.org.au
**National Family History Month (AUS) – August:** https://www.rahs.org.au/national-family-history-month/
**Find My Past (AUS):** https://www.findmypast.com.au
**Ancestry:** https://www.ancestry.com.au

**INTERNATIONAL FAMILY DAY – FRIDAY 15 May:** https://www.un.org/en/events/familyday/
**NATIONAL FAMILIES WEEK (AUSTRALIA) 15-21 MAY:** https://nfw.org.au

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## ISLA'S BRANCHES:

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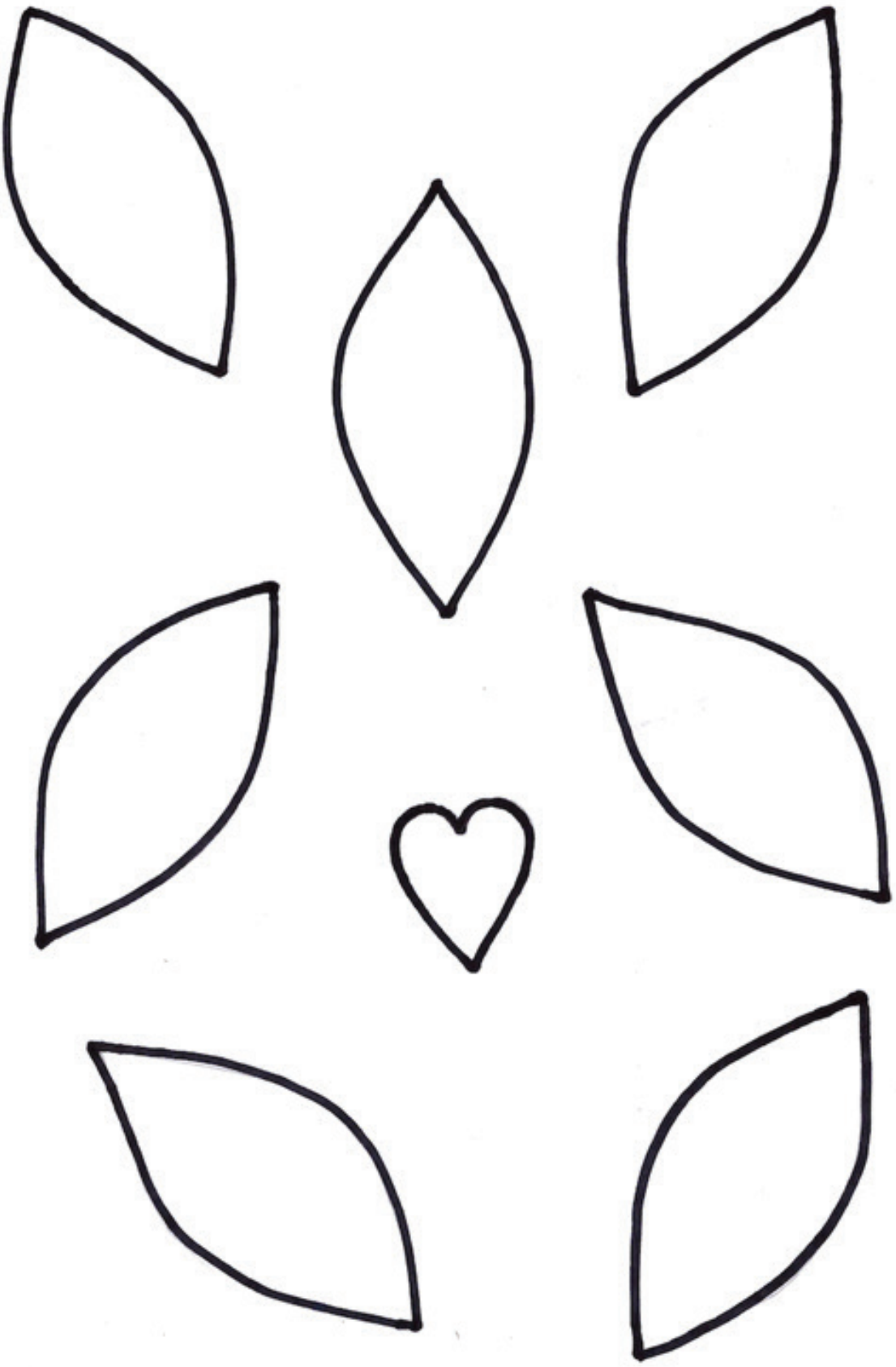
## ISLA'S LEAVES:



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## ISLA'S TREE:

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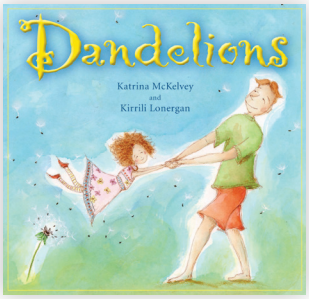


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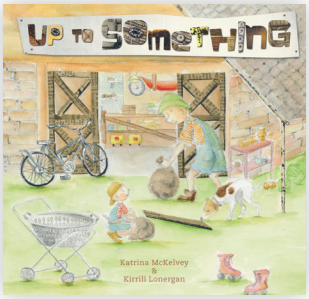


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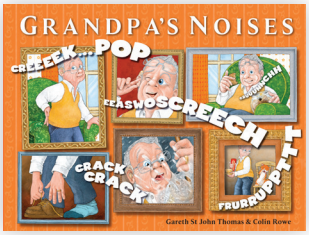


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