

## These notes are for:

- Years 4, 5, 6 & 7
- Middle Years
- 8+ Years

## Key Learning Areas:

- English – Poetry/Verse Writing

## Example of:

- Prose Poetry
- Rhyming Poetry
- Junior Fiction
- Verse Novel
- First Person Narrative

## Experience of:

- Illness – Cancer
- Friendship
- Bullying
- Games - Dominoes

## Values addressed:

- Doing Your Best
- Care & Compassion
- Understanding
- Inclusion

## Suggested resources:

- Multiple copies of *Toppling*
- Multiple copies of *Pearl Verses the World* - for comparative study
- Set of dominoes

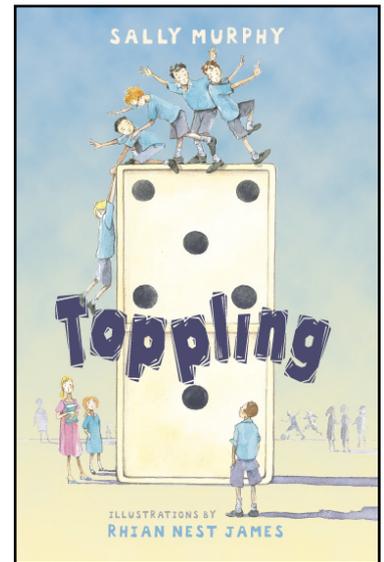
\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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## Toppling – Overview



### Toppling

By: Sally Murphy  
 Illus. By: Rhian Nest James  
 ISBN: 9781921529429  
 ARRP: \$15.95  
 NZRRP: \$ 17.99  
 No. of Pages: 128  
 March 2010

## Outline:

*Toppling* is a touching new verse novel from Sally Murphy and a fitting partner title to her first title with Walker Books, *Pearl Verses the World*.

John is obsessed with dominoes. But not with playing the traditional game, he is obsessed with toppling. He spends hours setting up spirals, ramps, patterns and lines of dominoes all for that satisfying toppling beginning with a small push in the right direction. Everything falls as it is meant to.

However, when John's friend Dom falls sick and is diagnosed with cancer, it is John and his friend's worlds that fall apart. Can they face Dom and support him through this uncomfortable illness? It's hard for all at first but John and his friends find a way to comfort Dom and laugh with him again.

## Author/Illus. Information:

**Sally Murphy** is a mother, wife, teacher, speaker, website manager, reviewer, and, of course, author. She was born in Perth and now lives in Corrigin, in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia. In 2001 she decided to dedicate herself to her dream of becoming a children's author and has now published 30 books. As well as writing for children Sally is also a children's book reviewer who runs the review site [www.aussiereviews.com](http://www.aussiereviews.com)

**Rhian Nest James** is the illustrator of the popular *Samurai Kids* series, also published by Walker Books. Rhian spent most of her school years avoiding the maths and P.E teachers by taking refuge in the art room. So it was a most natural progression, upon leaving school, that she attended the local Art College in Cardiff and then went on to study illustration at Exeter College of Art in England. Rhian has been a freelance illustraor since 1986 and has illustrated for all sorts of publications, including many picture books. She now lives with her husband in Sydney.

## How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

[www.walkerbooks.com.au](http://www.walkerbooks.com.au)



### Before reading *Toppling*:

- View the front cover of *Toppling*. How does the title type reflect the word? Think of other verbs and write these in a style that reflects the action. You can do this using pen and paper or try it using different fonts in a word processing program.
- Using only the cover, identify who are the author, illustrator and publisher.
- Read the blurb aloud. Ask students which different voices are used to create it? Who might these voices be? Do they think the book will be in the first person or third person?
- From the information on the blurb, who do you think Dominic is? How old do you think he is? Where is he from? Discuss your initial ideas about Dominic.

### Researching dominoes:

- Conduct research into the history of dominoes and answer the following questions.

Where did the game originate?  
 When did the game originate?  
 How do you play dominoes?  
 What are the rules?  
 What is domino toppling?

(Clue: there are some interesting facts on page 37 of *Toppling*)

- Create your own set of dominoes. Ask students to use the template provided (worksheet 1) and place the correct number of dots onto each tile.
- Set-up your own domino topple in class. How many dominoes can you topple? What interesting patterns and lines can you create?
- Visit [www.dominoartwork.com](http://www.dominoartwork.com) and view the pictures created using dominoes. There are plans to help you create your own portraits of famous politicians and artworks.

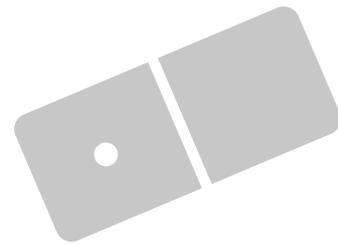
### Chapter 1:

- Do you have any hobbies? Create a class chart of favourite hobbies and games to play. Do you and your classmates share any similar interests? Choose the top 6 hobbies/games and have students, in groups, research one of these. They should present their findings to the class visually – either using a poster display or a PowerPoint presentation.

Students should address the following questions:

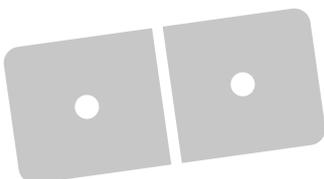
What do you need for the hobby or to play the game?  
 What skills are required?  
 How long does it take?  
 History of the hobby/game?  
 Why would you recommend it?

- Read page 15. Ask students to write a similar description of one of their friends or a family member. What do they like/dislike? What are their interests? What are their characteristics? Include a drawing of you and your friend at the end of the report.
- Why is John best mates with Dominic? Ask students to write a list of what they think makes a good friend.



### Chapter 2:

- Miss Timms gives the students the option to do a project on anything they like “as long as it’s not x-rated or dangerous”. Ask students to think about what they would like to do a project on and then write a brief description about why they want to do their project on that topic and what they might learn about it.

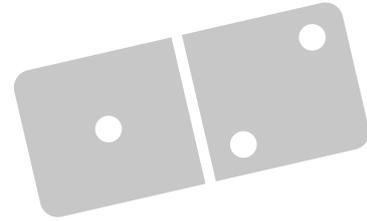


- John’s friend Dominic vomits in the classroom. Ky reacts badly to the situation and at recess makes fun of Dominic. Discuss Ky’s reaction in the class. Why do you think he behaves like this? What do you think is appropriate behaviour in a situation such as this?
- “Dom’s face is as white as the dots on my dominoes” (pg 32). This is a metaphor. Ask students to come up with a list of metaphors to describe physical attributes e.g. fingers as thin as spaghetti, eyes as big as saucers, a mouth as wide as the ocean.



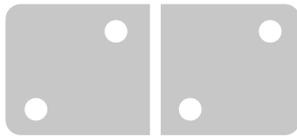
### Chapter 3:

- John researches his topic on the internet and finds out some interesting facts about domino toppling. Ask students to write about a topic that interests them on small piece of paper (you may like to set a theme for this topic, such as, animals or countries). When students have written their topic on the piece of paper ask each of them to fold the paper and place it in a hat or container. Then have students draw a topic from the hat. Each student can then research this topic using books or computers and find a similar list of facts to what John did. Ask students to share their findings with the class.
- Are you ever asked “what did you do at school today” when you get home? Towards the end of the day ask students to prepare a numbered and sequential list of what they did at school that day.



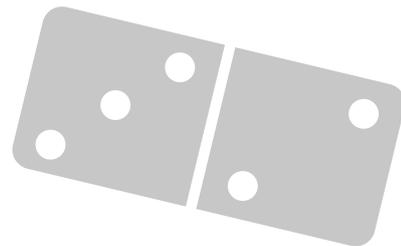
### Chapter 4:

- Do you have a serious face? Ask students to draw or write down the different expressions that they might have in one day.
- When Miss Timms tells the students that Dominic is in hospital they start guessing as to why he might be there. Have a class discussion about the different reasons that someone might need to go to hospital. What types of hospitals are there? Who might take you to the hospital?



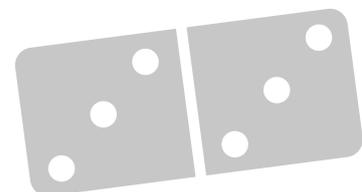
### Chapter 5:

- John says that when kids know something they “blurt it out”, but when adults know something “you can see them worrying about how to say it”. Why is it important to sometimes think about things before you say them? How could someone get hurt by what you say? In what situations should you be sensitive? Discuss.
- How does it make John feel when his Mum tells him that Dominic has cancer? Have you ever known someone that has cancer or was very ill? How did this make you feel? In a personal journal write your feelings about a situation such as this and the emotions that you felt.
- What is cancer? Ask students to briefly discuss cancer. What do they already know about it? You may like to limit this to a type of cancer, such as skin cancer or lung cancer and how it might be prevented.



### Chapter 6:

- John doesn't feel like going to school and doesn't feel better when he wakes up in the morning. Have a class discussion about John's feelings. What different emotions do you think John is feeling? What can you do when you feel like this?
- Miss Timms suggests that maybe the boys would like to speak to the school counsellor? What does a counsellor do? Ask students to write down what they think a counsellor does and how they might help the boys in this situation.
- Ask the students to make their own “get-well” card for Dom. What do they think is an appropriate message to write on the card?

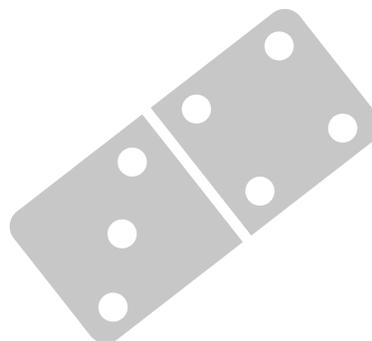


## Chapter 7

- “Hospitals smell like sickness and flowers and roast dinner and medicine and the stuff you use to scrub toilets” (pg 80)

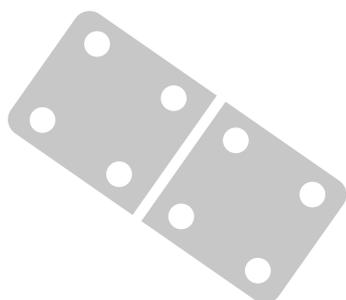
Ask students to write about a place they are familiar with, modelling the above text. What does their home smell like, their classroom, the car?

- How does Dom break the silence in the hospital? With students discuss the phrase “laughter is the best medicine”.



## Chapter 8

- When the boys see Dom in the hospital, they describe him as “a stranger”. Dom looks different because of his illness, but he quickly puts his friends at ease and they are laughing and talking together. Discuss with students why it is important not to judge a person on the way they look.

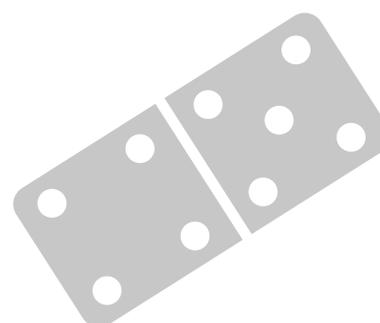


## Chapter 9

- “Dom is allowed home between chemo sessions”. What is “chemo” and how has this affected Dom’s appearance.
- Dom sometimes feels so sick that he wishes he was dead. What are the things that Dom thinks about and does to make himself feel different? Ask students to write a list of the things and people that make them happy.
- John yells at his sister, “there is no one else to yell at”, he thinks. Why would Dom feel like yelling? Can students discuss any alternatives for John to release his feelings?

## Chapter 10

- Ask students to read the description of John’s speech in Chapter 10. Ask them to re-write the speech in bullet form, marking where the beginning, middle and conclusion are.
- What is Ky’s speech about? How does Ky sharing this personal story show a different side to him? John yelled at his sister when he was upset and frustrated, do you think Ky was a bully because he was upset?
- What do the boy’s do to make Dom feel more welcome at school? How is this a great act of friendship? Ask students to write down the best thing a friend has ever done for them. What makes a great friend?



## After reading *Toppling*:

- Read the author and illustrator note at the back of the book. What was Sally Murphy interested in that led her to writing this story? What was Rhian Nest James’ most enjoyable part of illustrating this book?
- Write a review of *Toppling*. Include comments about who you think should read the book and why?
- Read *Pearl Verses the World*, also by Sally Murphy and write about the similarities and differences between these works.



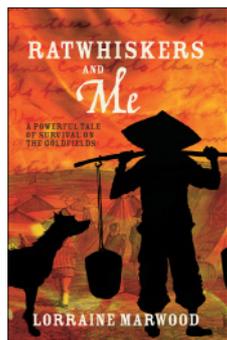
**Make your own dominoes! Put the right number of dots on each domino and cut-out to play.**

Required numbers:

6 & 6, 6 & 5, 6 & 4, 6 & 3, 6 & 2, 6 & 1, 6 & 0, 5 & 5,  
5 & 4, 5 & 3, 5 & 2, 5 & 1, 5 & 0, 4 & 4, 4 & 3, 4 & 2,  
4 & 1, 4 & 0, 3 & 3, 3 & 2, 3 & 1, 3 & 0, 2 & 2, 2 & 1,  
2 & 0, 1 & 1, 1 & 0, 0 & 0



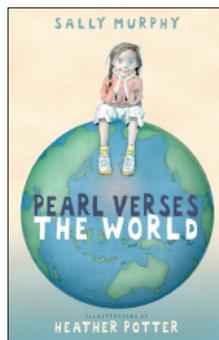
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