



# Lopini the Legend

By Feana Tu'akoi

• Reading • Writing • Thinking Skills • Dance • Social Studies

## Synopsis

When Lopini is replaced as kapa haka leader, he starts to spiral. It doesn't matter that he thinks it's a good idea, or that he agreed to the change in the first place. He's a hard-out perfectionist and this feels like a public failure.

Lopini's best mate, Fi, thinks he's overreacting. After all, he's so successful in everything he does that everyone at school calls him Lopini the Legend. But Lopini still freaks out whenever anything goes wrong and he hates it. He decides to practise failing, so he can get used to the feeling, in the hope that it won't be such a problem anymore. Lopini's dad is Tongan and a successful surgeon. He doesn't understand why Lopini would TRY to fail. Lopini's mum is Pākehā and an artist. She's a 'free spirit', who can see the creative possibilities.

Lopini comes up with a plan whereby he has to fail at least once a week; he has to volunteer for everything – even if it's outside his comfort zone – and go hard. Fi comes up with a number of tasks for him that she's sure he will fail at, so every week he has to pick an envelope and complete the task within.

Tasks range from racing someone without them realising, to putting on a dance performance at the local rest home, and many more. Lopini soon attracts the attention of a local journalist, who decides that his 'Daring to Do Good' would make a great story.

Lopini is so caught up in the drama that he doesn't notice what's going on with Fi and the problems she is having in her own homelife. He wrecks his friendship and has his biggest meltdown ever. He's finally a perfect failure.

Some basic strategies help Lopini see things as they really are, and he manages to sort things out with Fi. And when, as a result of the 'Daring to Do Good' publicity, the two friends are recruited to make a TV ad, they're tight again.

But being the perfectionist that he is, Lopini overthinks everything and practises so much that he can't even walk or talk naturally. Fi, on the other hand, proves to be a star. She tries to help him through, but he keeps mangling it.

Faced with nationwide humiliation, Lopini then focuses on Fi. He knows that this is *her* chance to shine and he's determined not to ruin it. The final version of the ad shows Lopini persevering even though he's struggling, Fi being a star, and both of them supporting each other.

When it's all over, Lopini realises that he's not worried about failing any more. He still hates it and the way it makes him feel, but he's had so much practice that he knows he can handle it. He decides to carry on taking chances and make his failures even more perfect!

## About the Author

**Feana Tu'akoi** is a writer of fiction and non-fiction, with a background in educational publishing. She has over 230 titles to her name, ranging from poems to plays to articles to books, and her work has appeared in anthologies, on radio and in most media forms. Her books for children have been translated into various languages, from Samoan to Spanish. She is the author of the highly successful *What Is A...?* science series for children, which is also available in te reo Māori. *Lopini the Legend*, Tu'akoi's junior fiction manuscript, won the 2022 Storylines Tom Fitzgibbon Award.

# Writing Style

Lopini and Fi, the main characters of *Lopini the Legend*, are so realistic they jump off the page. They look, sound and think like Year 8 children you might meet anywhere in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is a great strength of the book. They are believable, likeable and compelling, even more so because they are excellent role models.

Lopini is a popular over-achiever. The fact that he wants to do something about his fear of failure is commendable, and he takes action through goal-setting. The desire for self-improvement and the goal-setting to achieve it are positive behaviours, and his self-growth is touching.

Fi is also a fully developed character – no lack-lustre female sidekick here. She is an intelligent, perceptive, dedicated friend, but she's also true to herself. When it is her turn to shine, she takes it, at no cost to Lopini.

Readers will enjoy seeing characters and environments they recognise. Themes include friendship, role-taking, perseverance and self-improvement. The writing is fresh, zesty and well paced, with contemporary language, a humorous tone, and plot twists and turns. *Lopini the Legend* is an accessible read with 24 short chapters, and will bring pleasure to those aged 8 to 88.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

During the shared sessions, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and inferences and relate these to their own experiences or prior knowledge. Read the passages aloud with students reading along in their own copy, or reading by themselves. Depending on the students, use all or some of the questions below for discussion, comprehension checks and making connections.

### BEFORE YOU START:

Look at the cover and read the blurb.

- Where is the story set? How can you tell?
- Who are the main characters in the story?
- What do you think this story is about? Why do you think that?

### Comprehension questions

- What language are the chapter headings? What purpose does this serve?
- What kind of person is Lopini? How can you tell? What kind of person is Fi? Choose a sentence for each character from 1 Taha to support your answers.
- Why does Lopini feel 'shamed'? Is he right to feel this way? What is a 'perfectionist'? (1 Taha)

- How did goal setting help Lopini? Why did he decide to volunteer at every opportunity? (2 Ua, p.11)
- How do you feel when you fail at something? Is failing absolute or can it mean different things in different situations and to different people? Have you ever not tried something new because you're worried about failing?
- Why do Lopini's mum and dad respond so differently to the idea of Lopini trying to fail? (2 Ua, pp.13–18)
- Why didn't Lopini pull out of being Tāwhirimātea? What adjective (describing word) could you use to describe Lopini now? (3 Tolu)
- Would you like to have played the part of Tāwhirimātea? Why/why not? (4 Fā)
- Why didn't Fi go and talk to Priscilla on Lopini's behalf? Was she being a good friend to Lopini or not? (4 Fā)
- What characteristics does Lopini have that led to his first two failures to fail? (4 Fā)
- Write a sentence from the text that tells you how Lopini feels when he gets turned down by Suni. (5 Nima, p.35)
- At the end of 6 Ono, Lopini's dad thinks Lopini's haircut is a complete fail but Lopini's mum loves it. Predict what you think will happen at the Op Shop Ball. (6 Ono)
- What language is 'pièce de résistance'? What does it mean? (7 Fitu, p.50)
- When Lopini fails his dance move he feels shamed, but he 'plastered a smile on his face, as if this was what he'd meant to do all along'. (7 Fitu, p.51) Would the kids still have gone 'nuts – stamping, whooping and cheering' if he hadn't done that? Why/why not?
- Why does Lopini decide to go with the envelope challenge when he really wants to quit? (8 Valu, p.57)
- Predict what will happen to Lopini after getting caught by Ms Pepper in the sushi shop. (10 Hongofulu, p.67) Read to the end of the chapter and compare your prediction with what really happened. Was your prediction close? What do you think will happen next?
- How does Fi react to being interviewed by Matt? What does this say about her? (11 Taha Taha, p.75)
- What do you think Fi's 'brilliant idea' might be? (11 Taha Taha, p.79)
- Look up 'ostentatiously' in the dictionary or online to find out what it means. What is another word (synonym) that the author could have used instead? (12 Taha Ua, p.83)
- How has Lopini's personal challenge grown to inspire others? Who was the first person he inspired? Who was an unexpected person who stepped up to support Lopini? What word (or words) are used to describe a person that others look up to?
- Why did Fi challenge Lopini on discounting the opinions of the rest home residents? What is a word that describes Lopini's attitude? (13 Taha Tolu, p.91)



teacher toolkit

 SCHOLASTIC

- Why can't Lopini see in himself what other people see? (13 Taha Tolu, p.92)
- Predict what Ms Pepper will say about the flash mob when she sees the video. (13 Taha Tolu, p.93)
- Why does Lopini forget to check what is wrong with Fi? What is he focused on? (14 Taha Fā, p.96) When he does check in with her on p.96-97, does he go about it the right way? Why/why not?
- Do you agree that 'Lopini was in the right. Fi was in the wrong'? Why/why not? (14 Taha Fā, p.99)
- How does 'considering the evidence' help Lopini with his meltdown? (15 Taha Nima, p.106)
- Why did 'just deciding to do something' make Lopini feel better? (15 Taha Nima, p.111)
- Why did Lopini think that getting in trouble with Ms Pepper would be worth it? (16 Taha Ono, p.115)
- Is Ms Pepper as scary as Lopini thought? Why/why not?
- Why hadn't Fi told Lopini about her problems?
- What does Fi mean when she says, 'Just goes to show – you never can tell'? (18 Taha Valu, p.128)
- Who is the real brains behind Lopini's stunts and the Dare to Do Good group? Who gets the credit? Is this fair? Why/why not?
- Why are Lopini and Fi a good match as friends?
- Lopini could see that Mr Ngata 'had massive mana'. What does this mean? Choose a piece of text from 19 Taha Hiva, p.134 to support your answer.
- Why did Lopini 'man up' and tell Mr Ngata that he hadn't been trying to help the community? Would you have done this? Why/why not? Fi agreed, 'We were trying to help ourselves', but actually she had been helping Lopini. Why did she back Lopini to Mr Ngata? (19 Taha Hiva, p.135)
- Lopini spends days preparing to film the Ngata ad while Fi organises the Dare to Do Good group and the flash mob. What does this tell you about them? (19 Taha Hiva, p.137)
- Was Lopini right in thinking 'If it went wrong, he'd never be able to face anyone, ever again'? Why/why not? (20 Ua Noa, p.141)
- Select a short piece of text from 20 Ua Noa that shows Lopini's character development. How has he changed?
- Why is Lopini talking too fast? (21 Ua Taha, p.150)
- Would you have said, 'I don't want to do the ad without him' if you were Fi? Why/why not? (21 Ua Taha, p.152)
- How has Lopini helped others see the legend that Fi has been all along? (22 Uo Ua, p.156-157)
- What was Lopini's big realisation? (22 Uo Ua, p.158)
- Why doesn't Lopini feel ashamed when he tells his friends that he failed at making the ad? How do their reactions help him? (23 Ua Tolu, p.159-160)
- What does Lopini mean by 'Getting things wrong is part of my long-term success strategy'? (23 Ua Tolu, p.163)
- Do you agree with the statement 'If you're not succeeding, you're learning'? How can making mistakes be an important part of learning? (23 Ua Tolu, p.164)
- How did the ad uphold both Fi and Lopini's mana, despite showing Lopini failing? (24 Ua Fa, p.168)
- Is being a 'perfect failure' possible? Why/why not? Why would Lopini rather be a perfect failure than a legend? (24 Ua Fa, p.171-172)
- Lopini earned respect from Tyson, Hemi, Suni and Matua Ānaru, amongst others, for putting himself into potentially embarrassing situations. Why did they support him?
- What are two themes of *Lopini the Legend*?

## Activities

### ACTIVITY 1: WHO IS LOPINI?

Work in pairs to come up with at least five adjectives to describe Lopini at the beginning of the book (ākonga A) and five adjectives to describe him later in the book (ākonga B). Students might like to make charts basing their adjectives on the text from the book or Lopini's actions, like the example below. Compare the two charts. What caused Lopini's character development? What did he have to overcome? Write a paragraph using your adjectives to describe Lopini and what happens to make him grow and change throughout the book.

TEXT/ACTIONS	ADJECTIVE
"Wow," growled Lopini. "Thanks a lot." He hunched his shoulders and glared at her.' (p.2)	grumpy/dramatic
'He usually only did stuff he knew he could do well.' (p.6)	perfectionist

### ACTIVITY 2: ORGANISE A FLASH MOB

As a class, plan, practise and present a flash mob event in hui or assembly. Remember that to be successful, it's important that the audience doesn't know what is about to happen, although the adult in charge of hui/assembly and the person in charge of the music will need to know what is happening and when. You'll need lots of time to practise, so planning is needed to make sure you're ready for the big event.

### ACTIVITY 3: BE A GOAL SETTER

Lopini's superpower is goal-setting. What's a goal you could set for yourself? Remember to break your goal into small steps and make it SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed.

### ACTIVITY 4: WHAT'S YOUR SUPERPOWER?

What is something you are really good at? It could be anything from goal setting, supporting your friends or being polite, to playing rugby, creative writing or drawing cartoons. Make a poster to tell everyone about your superpower. Include a title, self-portrait and a caption describing your superpower. Add labels to your poster of adjectives that describe you, e.g., 'organised' or 'creative'.

### ACTIVITY 5: ORGANISE A DARE TO DO GOOD GROUP

Organise your own Dare to Do Good group. You'll need an adult to be involved for safety and permission from your school. Think about the types of things you're prepared to do, e.g. picking up rubbish at your school, cleaning up around a local stream or putting on a performance at a rest home. Everyone will need a permission slip signed by their parents. As a group, make up rules that need to be followed. Ask if you can advertise your Dare to Do Good group in the school newsletter, asking your community for job suggestions. Lastly, remember to have fun while you're doing good in your community!

### ACTIVITY 6: RESEARCH LOCAL LEGENDS

Find out about your local legends, both current and from the past. Who are the people in your community, iwi or hapu who are awesome role models? What do they do that makes them special? How did they get to where they are today? What characteristics do they have that make others look up to them? E.g. are they good leaders, do they work hard, do they show perseverance? Present your findings as a report, a speech or on Google Slides.

Written by Frances McBeath