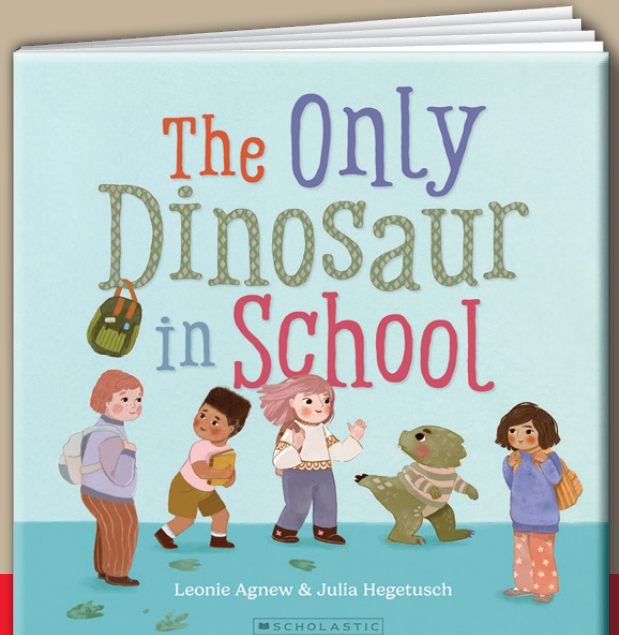


# The Only Dinosaur in School

By Leonie Agnew

Illustrated by Julia Hegetusch



• Reading • Writing • Art • Music

## Synopsis

Theo is the only dinosaur in a school full of human children—at least, that’s what he thinks. His parents love him just as he is, but when he worries about fitting in, they sew him a special disguise. At first, the costume helps Theo feel like he belongs. But it’s hard to hide his tail, his claws, and his dinosaur-sized appetite! When Theo’s zipper gets stuck, a new friend, Penelope, helps him—revealing his true dino self. But Penelope has a surprise of her own! Soon, Theo discovers he’s not the only one who’s different. Infact, everyone at school is hiding something unexpected. A fun, heartwarming story about being yourself and finding your tribe.

## About the Author

**Leonie Agnew** is a children’s writer and teacher. She won the Storylines Tom Fitzgibbon Award with her first book for Scholastic, *Super Finn*, which also won the Junior Fiction award, Best First Book and Children’s Choice awards at the NZ Children’s Book Awards in 2012. Leonie has written a number of other middle-grade fiction titles, including the Esther Glen award-winner *The Memory Thief*. She has also been the recipient of a writing residency at the University of Otago. She lives in Auckland, New Zealand. *The Only Dinosaur in School* is her first picture book.

## About the Illustrator

**Julia Hegetusch** was born in New Zealand but has spent much of her life living in Germany, growing up in a family of artists. She has formally and informally studied graphic design, photography, abstract and figurative art. It was during Covid that she discovered a love for illustration and narrative storytelling.

Julia works part-time as a childhood educator, which provides a great insight into the stories that children enjoy. In her free time, she enjoys walking in the mountains or forest, or on the beach. She currently resides in the Horowhenua with her partner and daughter. Her first book with Scholastic was 2024’s *Sleep is for Babies!*

# Writing and Illustration Style

*The Only Dinosaur in School* is a 32-page paperback picture book for children aged 3–7. The award-winning children’s author, Leonie Agnew, covers important topics, such as being inclusive and accepting differences, and writes in an imaginative and sympathetic way. Being a teacher herself, Leonie sets the story mainly in a school, a place in which children are faced with building friendships, accepting others and generally trying to fit in every single day. This story shows children how if everyone celebrates their own differences as well as the differences of others, then the world would be a more fun and joyous place. It also lets the readers know that things in life aren’t always what you think they are. The text is written in the third person past tense. The book’s final page is an unexpected surprise, but it’s a fun and satisfying way to wrap up this lovely story.

Julia Hegetusch’s love of illustration and storytelling shines through in this picture book. Her delightful characters and settings are created in warm, earthy, muted tones, and she approaches the book’s topics with empathy and charm. She takes the reader on a journey of self-discovery, conveying the different emotions of the characters. When Theo stops outside the school gates and says he’s not going in, she makes him the focal point of the illustration by shining the pinky peach morning rays of sun on him like a spotlight. When the sewing machine hums lullabies at night, the musical notes whimsically dance out of the window. Julia’s illustrations are a mix of vignettes, single pages and double pages. The type is set in Gelica Regular, with certain sentences set in a larger size. On the big reveal of pages 26–27 and 30–31, some of the type is set on curves to highlight the fun and freedom that comes with the characters finally being their true selves.

## Shared Learning and Discussion Points

Read the story aloud and have students read alongside you or follow along as you read. Use some of the questions provided to help guide the students and promote more in-depth discussions. Ask questions that encourage the students to make connections to their everyday lives and make sense of the world around them. Prior to reading, ask the students as they read along to think about how Theo acts at the beginning of the story and then how he changes by the end. Have them focus on how Theo learns to celebrate his uniqueness.

### ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back cover.

- How would you feel if you were the only dinosaur at a school for humans?
- What do you think the other children might be thinking when they see Theo?
- How do you react if you see someone who is different to you at school? Do you stare, talk to them or move away? What do you think makes you react the way you do?
- Do you like to stand out or fit in at school? Why?
- Have you had to move house and start a new school? What makes it hard to be the new student in the class?
- If you see someone knocking things over, how do you react?
- What does the author mean when she asks if Theo might find some wild and surprising friends to play with?

### COMPREHENSION:

- On the title page, the dinosaur is eating a paintbrush. On page 3, there is a teddy with some stuffing falling out. What does this tell you about the dinosaur? (p.3)
- The dinosaur’s parents are humans. They accept their dinosaur baby. What kind of people does this make them? (p.3)
- Do you think the parents should teach Theo to use a spoon? Why do they do this? (p.4)
- The parents teach Theo to say important words. What important words would you teach Theo that are different to the ones that the author has written? (p.4)
- Why do parents encourage children to eat whatever is on their plate? (p.5)
- Why is the word *never* in italics? (p.5)
- Why does Theo sometimes need sticking plasters when he brushes his teeth? Do you brush your teeth the way your parents or caregiver taught you? (p.5)
- Do you sometimes feel different from other kids just like Theo? How do you solve this? What could the other children, parents and grandparent in the story do to help Theo feel included? (pp.6–7)
- Mum is going to think of some way to solve Theo’s problem. What ideas do you have? (p.6)
- Without looking at and reading page 9, what do you think Mum is making on the sewing machine? Is your mum or another adult you live with good at solving problems? Why do you think they are so good at doing that? (p.8)



- Look at the word *unique*. It has the beginning *uni-*, which means *one*. Other words with this beginning are *unicorn*, which has one horn, and *unicycle*, which has one wheel. If the word *unique* means *only one of its kind*, what other words could the author have used instead? (p.9)
- Point out the word *uniform*. Ask the students what they notice about it. Explain that this has the same prefix as *unique*, and that it means *one form*. What do you think this means when the word *unique* describes the uniform? (p.9)
- Point out the word *zipped* on page 9 and then point to the word *zoomed*. Explain that the author chose words that start with the letter z because they sound good together. Ask the students what other words the author could use that mean *zoomed*. If the students have trouble with this, write a list of words on a large sheet of paper or the blackboard, such as *raced*, *hurried*, *rushed*, *sprinted*, *ran* and so on. A thesaurus is useful for this. (p.9)
- What do you think of the human costume? Do you think Mum's idea is a good one? Why or why not? (p.9)
- Talk about the words *flipped* and *flopped*. What do you notice about these two words? Why is Theo's stomach doing that and what emotions is he feeling? (p.10)
- Do you remember a time when you thought everyone was staring at you? What were you doing at the time? (p.10)
- What do you notice about Penelope's name badge? Do you have a nickname? How did you get your special name? (p.11)
- Is it a good idea to have a buddy when you're new to a place? Why or why not? (p.11)
- Theo is trying to be someone he's not, so things keep going wrong, such as his tail escaping from his costume. What advice would you give Theo? (pp.12–13)
- What kind of person is Penelope? How do you know that? What do you think Miss Mayberry is thinking about her new pupil? (pp.14–15)
- The author tells us that the caretaker is not happy with Theo's watery antics. What happens if someone does something that he or she is not meant to do in your school? How would you deal with this situation? (p.16)
- What do you think Theo's parents would think if they saw him bathing in his "small lake"? (p.16)
- What is Penelope doing when she *watches* and *wonders*? What do you think Penelope is thinking when she sees Theo eat some of his lunchbox? Would you be scared, curious or surprised? (p.17)
- What does *not amused* mean? What other word means the same thing? (p.18)
- Do you think the duty teacher thinks that Theo makes things up or is living in some kind of imaginary world? Explain your answer. (pp.18–19)
- What is it like when you tell the truth but no one believes you? How do you feel? (p.19)
- People cry for different reasons. They might be sad, angry, frustrated, fearful or even happy. Why is Theo crying? (p.20)
- Why is Penelope the only one who does not smile at Theo? (p.20)
- How do you think it feels for Theo when the real Theo appears? (pp.22–23)
- Do you think his rumbling roar is to scare the others or simply just an announcement to say "this is me"? Explain your answer. (pp.22–23)
- What do you notice about some of the words in the last sentence on page 23? Read them aloud. How do they sound? (p.23)
- What different parts of your face do you use when you *gasp* and *gape*? (p.24)
- Penelope is a hippo under her human costume. Did you expect this to happen? Why is it nice for Theo to have this occur? (p.25)
- Look at the words *romping* and *stomping*. What are these words called? Why do authors use rhyming words? (p.26)
- What do you notice about the other words on pages 26–27, such as *terrific twosome*, *flattened flower beds*, *stampeded down slides* and *rioting and rollicking*? Have the children read them aloud so that they can hear how words that start with the same letter sound. (pp.26–27)
- What do you think Theo is starting to realise when he sees that there are no other dinosaurs at his school? Is this a positive or negative thing? Explain your answer. (p.28)
- Look at page 29. A child is unzipping a human costume to reveal a fox underneath. How do you think Theo feels when he sees this? (p.29)
- The author says that there are *shimmering lizards*. If you want to write a word that starts with the same letter as *lizards* and describes the lizards, what would you put? Look at the illustration for a clue. (pp.30–31)
- On pages 30–31, all the creatures look happy and playful and are celebrating their uniqueness. How does this make you feel? Do you celebrate your special qualities? What are they? (pp.30–31)
- What do you think the words *All different*, *all together* mean? Do you think the illustration shows this well? Why? (p.31)
- How do you think the author will end the story? Remind the students that there are many ways to end a story and that everyone in the class might possibly choose a different way to end it. (p.31)
- Was your prediction the same as the author's ending? How was it a surprise to find out that the teachers wear human costumes too? (p.32)



# Activities

## ACTIVITY 1: SOUND WORDS

When Theo bathes in the “small lake” on page 16, the words *Splish, splash!* feature on a curve near the illustration. These two words are onomatopoeic words. Onomatopoeia is the use of a word that sounds like the thing it stands for. Other examples of these sound words are *stomp, crash, pop, buzz, sizzle, clink* and *drip*. Take some other actions that are mentioned in the book and design some fun-looking onomatopoeic words using coloured markers, crayons or paint. You could describe when Theo eats some knives, brushes his teeth, knocks over the art supplies, breaks a chair, as well as when the frog makes a noise as it sits on the lily pad in the pond.

## ACTIVITY 2: A DINOSAUR'S LUNCHBOX

The author says that dinosaurs have huge appetites and that they eat things that humans wouldn't eat, such as knives and tablecloths! On page 17, we see in and beside Theo's lunchbox a bunch of grapes, an orange and a pink donut. Theo's dad says that Theo isn't allowed to eat the school cat, even though he's starving still. Draw some yummy things that Theo could eat if he could have anything he likes for lunch (apart from the school cat, of course!). You could include things such as a spoon, a fork and a knife for him to munch on.

## ACTIVITY 3: A LOVELY LULLABY

On page 8, the author says that the sewing machine “hummed lullabies”. This is figurative language. The sewing machine doesn't actually hum lullabies, but it's a lovely way of saying that the machine hums and buzzes away as it works to sew a human costume while Theo falls asleep in bed. As a class, with help and guidance from your teacher, come up with a lullaby that the sewing machine might hum and sing. For example, you could write something such as:

*Fall asleep, dream so deep, little dinosaur.  
Happy Theo, sleepy Theo, snore, snore, snore.*

## ACTIVITY 4: THE DINOSAUR REVEAL

The big reveal of the real Theo on pages 22–23 tells the readers what Theo looks like and how he acts. He has purple claws and silver scales, and he thrashes his thorny tail and gives a rumbling roar. Imagine that you're the author and the illustrator of this page. Draw your dinosaur roaring or bursting out of its human costume. Think about what your dinosaur would look like. What colour would its claws, scales and tail be? Does it have horns on its head? Give your dinosaur a human name as well. Then think of the words that you'd write as your dinosaur bursts out of the costume. Once you have practised saying the new text aloud, present your picture and words to the rest of the class.

## ACTIVITY 5: DESCRIBE THAT!

There are many different animals (and robots) on pages 30–31. For some of them, the author uses adjectives to describe them, such as *rampaging robots, fearless foxes* and *shimmering lizards*. An adjective is a word that describes a noun (a chair is a noun) or a pronoun (*I, you, he, she, it, we* and *they* are some pronouns). Think up some adjectives that could describe the tigers, unicorns and wombats on pages 30–31. Then think of some adjectives that could describe the robots, foxes and lizards that are different to the ones that the author used. Work in pairs or alone, then share your work with the rest of the class.

## ACTIVITY 6: THIS IS ME

Theo learns by the end of the story to accept himself and be proud of his individuality. Choose a character from pages 30–31 and celebrate how you are different to the rest of the animals. Begin with the sentence starter *This is me*. Then share some things that make you unique. For instance, the unicorn could say: *This is me. I look like a horse, but I'm small and mighty. I have a horn on my head. It's called an alicorn.* You can work in pairs or in groups. Present your work to the other students.

Written by Janine Scott