



THE *Accidental* PRIME MINISTER

Tom McLaughlin

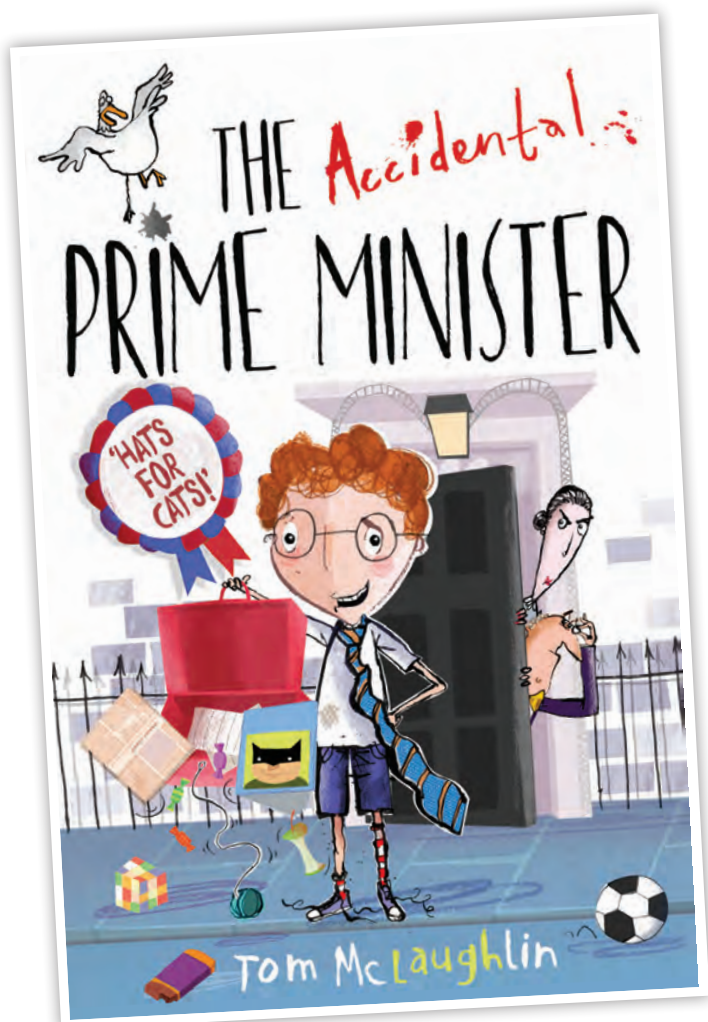


INTRODUCTION

When Joe tells a local news reporter exactly what he would do if he were leader of the country, the video goes viral and Joe's speech becomes famous all over the world!

Before long, people are calling for the current leader to resign and give someone else a go . . . and that's how an ordinary boy like Joe ended up with the most extraordinary job. Now the fun can really start . . .

'Hats for cats! Pet pigs for all! Banana shaped buses! Swimming pools on trains!'



A HILARIOUS STORY OF ONE BOY'S METEORIC RISE TO POWER!

This book is an enjoyable read which provides great talking points to spark off discussions about politics, citizenship, and elections. In the run-up to the 2015 General Election in May it will get children thinking and talking – and laughing!

TOM McLAUGHLIN

Before becoming a writer and illustrator Tom spent nine years working as political cartoonist for The Western Morning News 'thinking up silly jokes about even sillier politicians'.

Then, in 2004 Tom took the plunge into illustrating and writing his own books. Since then he has written and illustrated picture books as well as working on animated TV shows for Disney and Cartoon Network. *The Accidental Prime Minister* is his debut children's novel.

He lives in Devon.

See Tom's '**A dyslexic author's writing tips for dyslexic kids**' at the end of these notes. And have a look at what he says about enjoying stories with children the whole day through!

http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/feb/21/why-stories-arent-just-for-bedtime-tom-mclaughlin?CMP=share_btn_tw



The Accidental Prime Minister artwork © Tom McLaughlin



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FOR TEACHERS AND READING GROUPS

Reading and talking about *The Accidental Prime Minister*

INTRODUCING THE BOOK

Look at the cover and the blurb, set the scene, and read aloud the first chapter to introduce the book—and maybe one or two tasters further on to attract people into the story.

Then read the book all the way through, either reading aloud to everyone together, or letting people read and experience the book for themselves.

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK: SOME BOOK-TALK QUESTIONS

Get everyone to share their first responses to the book. This could be with the whole group—or children could discuss in small groups, and then share their main feelings and questions with everyone.

Then explore further what people think about the story. Encourage lots of discussion—there are no wrong answers!

- How did you feel when reading this book? And when you'd finished it?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which ones?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Were there any parts you didn't make sense of?
- If you gave up on this book can you say why?
- What were the funniest bits for you?
- Talk about anything you learned from reading this book.
- Are there things you'd now like to find out more about?
- What single word (or two!) describes this book for you?



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THE ACCIDENTAL PRIME MINISTER —AND UK POLITICS: THINGS TO TALK ABOUT

If the Prime Minister came to your school what question/s would you ask?

'I wanted to ask a question about the park' . . . He normally liked to sit quietly . . . but he knew this could be his only chance to save his mum's job.' (p16)

Do you have a local problem which needs some action? (e.g. a threat to close your local library.)

Talk about this in pairs/small groups & write down your questions, then discuss the issue as a whole group.

Collect all the questions—there may be one you could actually send to the Prime Minister or to a local MP or councillor.

Do photographs always show the truth?

'It was such a good picture. I couldn't resist sending it to all the papers.'

'But it makes me look bad, like I was laughing at other people's misfortune. I wasn't doing that, you know I wasn't!' (p160)

Violetta uses a photograph to discredit Joe: talk about the ways in which photos may be used or manipulated to get messages across. Do you think a picture paints a thousand words?

The right to vote

Who is eligible to vote in a UK General Election? Talk about the right to vote, and how women in Britain didn't get the same voting rights as men (i.e. to vote at 21) until 1928. In 1969 the UK voting age was lowered to 18, and it's now being proposed that the age be lowered to 16. What do people think about this?

Getting involved

'Grown-ups have had their turn at running the country—why not let us kids have a go?' (p25)

Talk about ways in which young people could get involved in government and making things happen, e.g. through the school council, or local councils. Here's an example of a young activist petitioning against library cuts in Cornwall: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cornwall-29052002>

Promoting your party

'I wouldn't waffle on about how bad the other lot had been, I'd sort stuff out.' (p25)

In the run up to an election, watch some of the party political broadcasts, and look at election leaflets to see how local candidates are promoting themselves. See how often they a) say what they will do if they win or b) criticise their opponents. Talk about which candidates you prefer, and why.



THE Accidental PRIME MINISTER



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ACTIVITIES

THE ACCIDENTAL PRIME MINISTER WORDSEARCH

See if you can find these names and words from the book, in the squares below—across, down, up, and from right to left.

AJAY

PARK

REPORTERS

VIOLETTA CRUMP

PERKINS

DOWNING STREET

PARLIAMENT

POLITICIAN

YOUTUBE

JET PACK

SUMMIT

SILLINESS

W	K	R	A	P	K	H	F	D	V	Q	P	L	U	J	G
O	Q	A	X	V	N	X	S	N	I	K	R	E	P	X	B
X	C	J	L	O	U	T	E	Q	O	Z	Y	I	A	C	C
M	X	V	S	S	E	N	I	L	L	I	S	J	R	B	V
A	C	B	M	B	C	X	A	D	E	A	Q	M	E	T	K
P	A	R	L	I	A	M	E	N	T	X	S	L	K	U	J
O	J	K	K	H	O	F	S	Z	T	C	R	M	X	M	H
L	A	J	C	A	Z	Y	R	X	A	B	E	C	Y	P	D
I	Y	O	U	T	U	B	E	X	C	R	T	F	R	A	B
T	X	L	D	M	G	N	E	V	R	W	R	D	W	R	X
I	C	F	D	N	E	E	R	G	U	Q	O	L	Q	L	Z
C	B	X	A	Z	S	A	D	F	M	Z	P	H	Z	I	Q
I	M	B	X	V	B	K	C	A	P	T	E	J	X	A	W
A	Z	C	B	M	Y	R	W	Q	Z	C	R	U	O	M	V
N	D	O	W	N	I	N	G	S	T	R	E	E	T	E	M
W	S	N	I	S	Y	L	D	A	B	D	O	V	X	N	V
S	C	B	M	N	F	S	W	Y	S	U	M	M	I	T	Y



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ACTIVITIES

QUIZ: ABOUT THE UK GOVERNMENT

- 1. The Prime Minister is**
 - a. A clergyman
 - b. Head of the government
 - c. A painter and decorator
- 2. The Secretaries of State are in charge of**
 - a. Computers and stationery
 - b. Government departments, e.g. Department of Education
 - c. Taking the minutes of meetings
- 3. The Cabinet is**
 - a. The place where all the laws are filed
 - b. The place where dinner plates are kept
 - c. The Prime Minister and all the Secretaries of State
- 4. Parliament is the place where**
 - a. HP Sauce is made
 - b. The Secretaries of State live
 - c. Politicians meet to decide laws and make decisions for the country
- 5. A coalition government is**
 - a. Where two or more political parties join together to run the country
 - b. A government of coal miners
 - c. Where members of parliament share computers
- 6. A General Election is held**
 - a. At least every 10 years
 - b. At least every 5 years
 - c. Every 4 years
- 7. The Prime Minister's official residence is**
 - a. 10 Downing Street
 - b. Buckingham Palace
 - c. Chequers
- 8. Big Ben is**
 - a. The leader of the members of Parliament
 - b. The tallest member of Parliament
 - c. The clock tower of the Houses of Parliament
- 9. A Bill is**
 - a. A proposed new law
 - b. The cost of fixing Big Ben
 - c. Anyone in Parliament called William
- 10. A summit meeting is**
 - a. A meeting of heads of state
 - b. A meeting of mathematicians
 - c. A meeting at the top of a mountain

Here's a research checklist for finding out more about the people and things in the quiz.

RESEARCH CHECKLIST	HOW BRITAIN IS GOVERNED
	Write short notes or a sentence about what you find out for each of these
PARLIAMENT	
A GENERAL ELECTION	
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT	
HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW	
PRIME MINISTER	
CABINET	
COALITION GOVERNMENT	
SECRETARIES OF STATE	
SUMMIT MEETING	
BIG BEN	
DOWNING STREET	



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ACTIVITIES

WRITE AND PRESENT A MANIFESTO

Before a General Election each political party publishes its **manifesto**. This is where they set out what they believe in and what they propose to do if they get elected to power, e.g. what laws they will introduce; or changes to taxes.

Here's what Joe says he wants to make happen now he is Prime Minister:

'One thing I promise you is that it won't be dull, and I shall do my best by this country and its people!

... I say we have a fancy dress day at least once a week

... I think we should have one day a month where the teachers get to be the pupils and the pupils get to be the teachers.

***... And last but not least I want to save the park by my house ... not just that one but all the parks.'* (pp81, 102)**

Imagine you are standing for election—you need to tell people what you would do if you were elected, and try to persuade them to vote for you.

What would you put in your manifesto?

Here's a template and some top tips on how to write a manifesto.

When you've written your manifesto you need to present it to everyone!

Here are some top tips for making your manifesto speech

1. Be clear and concise—3 mins max
2. Prepare and practise what you are going to say
3. Believe in what you say!
4. Speak directly to your audience

My Manifesto

TOP TIPS

1. **Make it clear and punchy**
2. **Keep it simple so people will remember it**
3. **Say who you are and what you believe in, e.g. 'green' issues; or fun!**
4. **Make a clear list of what you plan to do and the changes you would make.**
5. **What are the benefits of your plans?**
6. **Don't go on about your opponents—your manifesto is about you!**



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ACTIVITIES

WRITE AND PRESENT A MANIFESTO

Have a slogan to catch attention
—and put it on your rosette

Joe's is *'Hats for Cats!'*

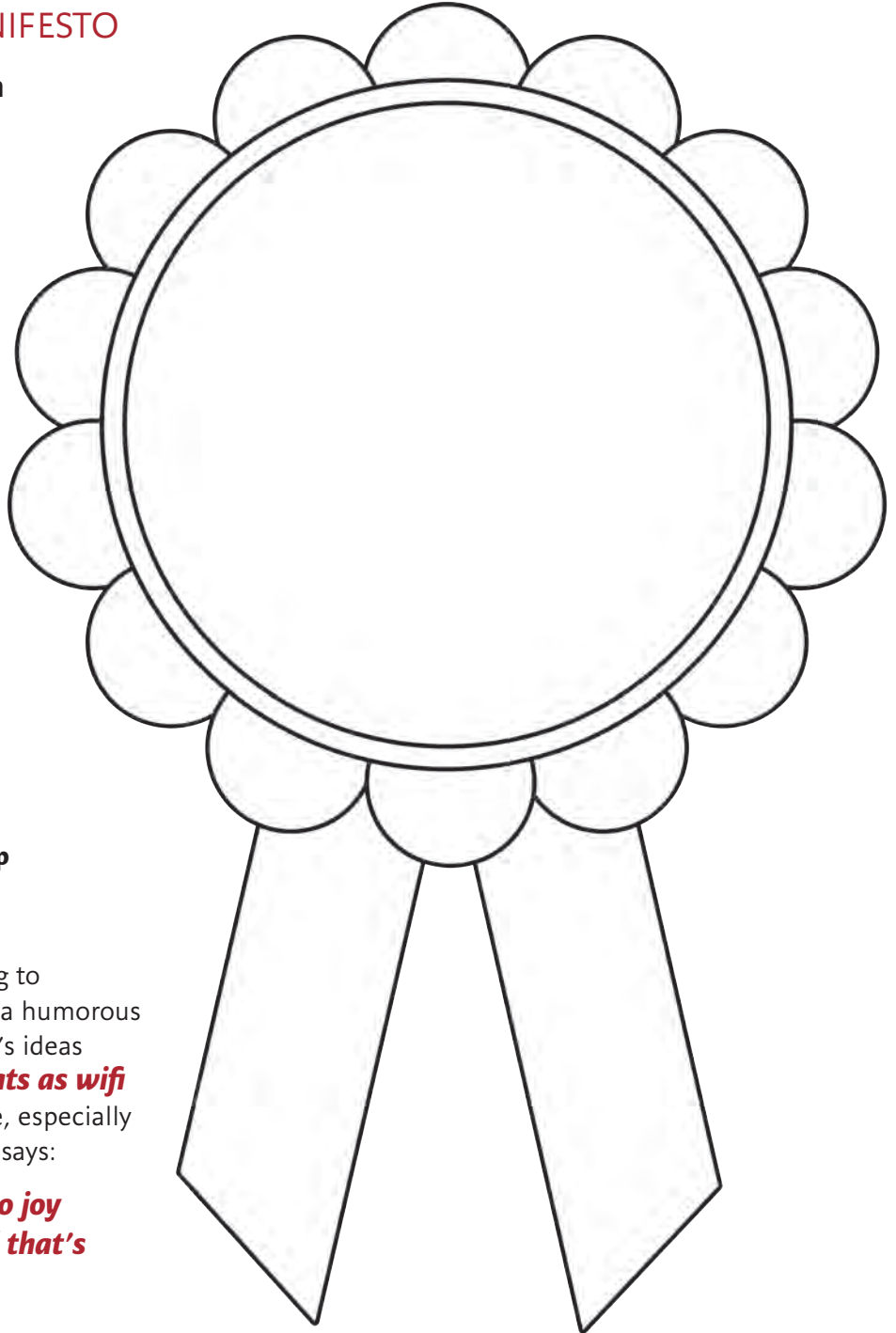


'Fun for Everyone' would also
have made a good slogan for Joe!

Writing and presenting a manifesto
would make a great **classroom or group
competition**—with everyone voting on
the best one.

You could have serious themes, relating to
current real-life issues—or maybe take a humorous
approach. In fact although some of Joe's ideas
are funny and seem impossible (e.g. *cats as wifi
hubs*) maybe they're not so impossible, especially
trying to bring people more fun. As he says:

*'...to live in a world with no fun, no joy
and no laughter, and no joy – well that's
no world at all.'* (p197)





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ACTIVITIES

HAVE A DEBATE

Imagine you are members of Parliament having a debate—discussing a proposed new law, or something important for the country. You need to have:

- A **proposal** or proposition, e.g. *'... jelly should be free on the NHS'* (p101)
- A **proposer** to make a speech with arguments to support this proposal
- An **opposer** to make a speech giving the arguments against this idea
- Someone to second the proposer, adding to their argument
- Someone to second the opposer, with more arguments against.
- The rest of the class or group **asking questions**, to make sure everyone understands both points of view
- **A vote**—for and against the proposal.

Here are some more ideas for your debate proposal, taken from what Joe says in *The Accidental Prime Minister!*

- *There should be one day a month where the children get to be in charge of the teachers*
- *Everyone should have as much fun as possible*
- *In parks there should be special swings and roundabouts for grown-ups*

TIPS FOR DEBATING

- Research your facts thoroughly—for both sides of the argument
- Make some notes to prepare your speech, but just refer to them, don't read them out like an essay
- Make your points clearly, with persuasive arguments
- Be confident in your speech and body language
- Listen carefully to the opposing arguments



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ACTIVITIES

WHO WOULD YOU VOTE FOR?!

Here are some well-known story book characters and a list of their manifesto slogans. Match up each slogan with the character you think is most likely to be arguing for this.

STORY CHARACTER
WINNIE THE WITCH
PADDINGTON
BARRY LOSER
DENNIS THE MENACE
CAT IN THE HAT
WINNIE THE POOH
CHARLIE BUCKET

MANIFESTO SLOGAN
A chocolate factory in every town!
Free honey for all!
Hats for cats!
Magic is magic!
Put marmalade in burgers!
Vote for World Menacing Day!
Losers can win!

Which character would you vote for to be your local member of Parliament? Why?

Think of some more book characters and make up manifesto slogans for them.

Here is a list of some **UK political parties** with key slogans from their websites. Find out more about what each party says it stands for.

POLITICAL PARTY
CONSERVATIVES
LABOUR
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
GREEN PARTY
UKIP (UK INDEPENDENCE PARTY)

WHAT THEY SAY
Securing a better future
The party of the many —not just a powerful few
Working to build a stronger economy in a fairer society
We believe in The Common Good
A patriotic party that promotes independence



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MORE READING

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	ISBN
Picture Books By Tom McLaughlin	<i>The Diabolical Mr Tiddles</i>	Simon & Schuster	9781847388803
	<i>The Story Machine</i>	Bloomsbury	9781408839348
MORE FUNNY FICTION ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE SORTING THINGS OUT . . .			
David Baddiel	<i>The Parent Agency</i>	HarperCollins	9780007554492
Pete Johnson	<i>How to Train Your Parents</i>	Yearling	9780440864394
Jo Nesbo	<i>Dr Proctor's Fart Powder</i>	Simon & Schuster	9781471125447
David Walliams	<i>Gangsta Granny</i>	HarperCollins	9780007371464
NON-FICTION ABOUT UK POLITICS			
Terry Deay	<i>Potty Politics</i>	Scholastic (out of print)	9780439013802
Adam Hibbert	<i>How to Be Prime Minister</i>	OUP (out of print)	9780199107971
Eleanor Levenson	<i>The Election</i>	Fisherton	9780993077302
Andrew Marr	<i>Who's in Charge?</i>	Doring Kindersley	9781409351016
SUFFRAGETTES			
Carol Drinkwater	<i>Suffragette (My Story)</i>	Scholastic	9781407120720
Jacqueline Wilson	<i>Opal Plumstead</i>	Doubleday	9780857531094

SOME WEBSITES TO EXPLORE

Useful information about UK government:

<http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/government.html>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6999499.stm

www.gov.uk/government/history/10-downing-street

Political parties:

www.conservatives.com

www.labour.org.uk

www.libdems.org.uk

www.greenparty.org.uk

www.ukip.org



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ANSWERS

WORDSEARCH:

W	K	R	A	P	K	H	F	D	V	Q	P	L	U	J	G
O	Q	A	X	V	N	X	S	N	I	K	R	E	P	X	B
X	C	J	L	O	U	T	E	Q	O	Z	Y	I	A	C	C
M	X	V	S	S	E	N	I	L	L	I	S	J	R	B	V
A	C	B	M	B	C	X	A	D	E	A	Q	M	E	T	K
P	A	R	L	I	A	M	E	N	T	X	S	L	K	U	J
O	J	K	K	H	O	F	S	Z	T	C	R	M	X	M	H
L	A	J	C	A	Z	Y	R	X	A	B	E	C	Y	P	D
I	Y	O	U	T	U	B	E	X	C	R	T	F	R	A	B
T	X	L	D	M	G	N	E	V	R	W	R	D	W	R	X
I	C	F	D	N	E	E	R	G	U	Q	O	L	Q	L	Z
C	B	X	A	Z	S	A	D	F	M	Z	P	H	Z	I	Q
I	M	B	X	V	B	K	C	A	P	T	E	J	X	A	W
A	Z	C	B	M	Y	R	W	Q	Z	C	R	U	O	M	V
N	D	O	W	N	I	N	G	S	T	R	E	E	T	E	M
W	S	N	I	S	Y	L	D	A	B	D	O	V	X	N	V
S	C	B	M	N	F	S	W	Y	S	U	M	M	I	T	Y

QUIZ:

1. b 2. b 3. c 4. c 5. a 6. b 7. a & c 8. c 9. a 10. a



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WRITING TIPS FROM TOM McLAUGHLIN

FROM GUARDIAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

<http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/jan/22/a-dyslexic-authors-writing-tips-for-dyslexic-kids>

A dyslexic author's writing tips for dyslexic kids

Tom McLaughlin, who has always had a weird relationship with words, offers his supportive and beautiful writing tips to dyslexic children everywhere (and those who know them).

'Would you like to do a piece offering some writing tips for dyslexic children they said. Sure, I said, I mean, how hard can it be? Then it dawned on me, isn't that like asking someone who's colour blind for decorating advice?'

TIP 1: SOMETIMES THE THINGS WE STRUGGLE WITH CAN BE THE MOST REWARDING. ALTHOUGH I'VE ONLY JUST STARTED THIS ARTICLE, SO LET'S NOT PAT OURSELVES ON THE BACK JUST YET.

I'll level with you, I have a weird relationship with words, mostly I love them, but sometimes, just sometimes they drive me round the bend. Between them falling out of people's brains and landing on the page, something happens, they become lost or begin to dance around on the paper.

TIP 2: NEVER BE AFRAID TO THINK VISUALLY.

It's like I'm seeing them for the first time. The strange thing is this comes and goes. I have good days and bad. One minute I can be reading the most complicated thing in the world, I feel like I'm surfing along on every sentence, the next minute, I struggle to read the most simple of picture books to a child. Sometimes one I've actually written myself. I know, it's embarrassing.

TIP 3: TRY NOT TO GET ANNOYED AND THROW A BOOK/CUSTARD PIE/TANTRUM AT ANYONE WHO CORRECTS YOUR READING*.

**That one's more of a general life-style tip.*

Despite all this, as a kid I loved stories, I loved jokes, and I loved TV (an author is allowed to say that out loud, right?) I used to read the same books over-and-over again. I still do that. I mean you wouldn't listen to an album once right?

TIP 4: DON'T BE AFRAID TO SURROUND YOURSELF BY WHAT YOU LOVE.

I'm going to say something that's going to shock you now. You might want to sit down, no, go on, really sit down. Spelling isn't important. It really isn't, people get hung up on it. Being able to spell has nothing to do with being a good writer. Being able to know how a car engine works, doesn't make you a racing driver. It's about having something to say. It's about feeling the wind in your hair.



THE *Accidental* PRIME MINISTER

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TIP 5: IF ANYONE GOES AT YOUR WORK WITH A RED PEN, GRAB IT OFF THEM, SNAP IT IN TWO AND THROW IT OUT OF THE WINDOW, THEN ASK THEM TO READ WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN, RATHER THAN CORRECT IT. CORRECTIONS CAN COME LATER, WHEN YOU HAVE BOUGHT THEM A NEW RED PEN.

Give poetry a try. What I hear you cry?! I know some of you think that poetry is lame, but it's not. If someone as cool and bad ass as me likes it, then it's okay for you to like it too. Poetry can be anything, it can be an emotion, and idea, a joke, a thought. Whatever pops into your head.

TIP 6: POETRY OFTEN WORKS TO A STRUCTURE, YOU KNOW THAT A CERTAIN LINE RHYMES WITH ANOTHER, IT MAKES YOU THINK ABOUT WORDS. IT'S LIKE THE FOUNDATIONS OF A HOUSE ARE LAID OUT IN FRONT OF YOU, AND YOU HAVE TO ADD THE WALLS AND ROOF.

If you're not feeling particularly wordy some days, write without any. Use pictures. Comic strips are stories, they have a beginning, middle and end, they just don't need any words.

TIP 7: DON'T BE SCARED OF A BLANK PIECE OF PAPER, IT'S THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD. AT SOME POINT EVERYTHING STARTED OUT AS A BLANK PIECE OF PAPER, FROM YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK TO THE COMPUTER I'M TYPING ON, THEY ALL STARTED OUT AS NOTHING AND BECAME SOMETHING.

You should never be afraid to talk about being dyslexic, whenever I tell people, they're mostly interested, and I get asked all kinds of question. In fact the more I talk about it, the more it feels like I'm getting to know myself a little bit more.

TIP 8: LEARN ABOUT WHAT DYSLEXIA IS, READ ABOUT IT, YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF GOING 'I TOTALLY DO THAT!' QUITE A LOT. THERE ARE MANY OTHERS LIKE YOU, ALL OF THEM PROBABLY HAVE FELT ISOLATED, STUPID, LIKE THEY DIDN'T BELONG AT SOME POINT TOO.

Don't ever worry about being wrong or getting things mixed up. I'm going to shock you again now, but teachers are pretty lovely, I know they hide it well, but they are. They will always help.

TIP 9: WRITING IS ABOUT YOU, THEY ARE YOUR THOUGHTS, THE THINGS YOU HAVE TO SAY, AND THOSE CAN NEVER BE WRONG.

Being dyslexic is who you are, and who you are is brilliant.

TIP 10: STOP READING THIS AND GO WRITE SOMETHING AMAZING.

See Tom's book *The Story Machine*, a story about the power of drawing and story telling.