



# HOLD ME CLOSER

## DAVID LEVITHAN

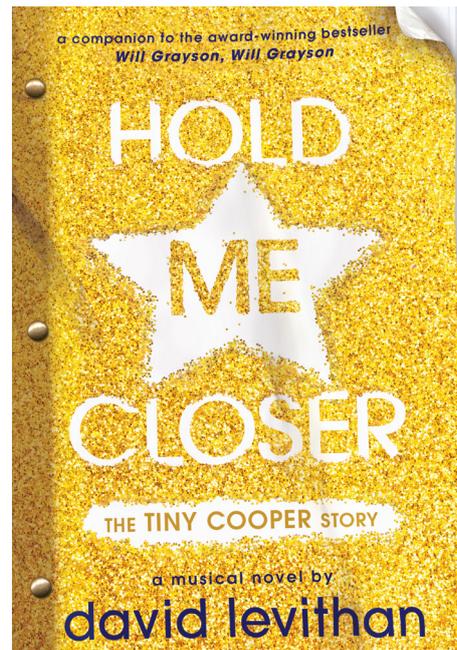
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**RECOMMENDED AGE:**  
YEARS 10–12\*

\*Contains mature themes



### Text's Teaching Notes for the Australian Curriculum

- ▶ Text's teaching notes are designed for teachers to explore the novel in line with the *Australian Curriculum: English*.
- ▶ Questions are divided into stages: from pre-reading to post-reading and include suggested tasks for assessment.
- ▶ An ACARA coding system connects each task to the *Australian Curriculum: English*. It includes links to strands, modes, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.
- ▶ Refer to the legend below and the accompanying [Australian Curriculum: English Scope and Sequence reference chart](#) to decipher these codes.
- ▶ Students can record their responses in writing through reading journals, online discussions or verbally in classroom discussions.

<b>Strands</b>	LA – Language LT – Literature LY – Literacy
<b>Modes</b>	W – Writing L – Listening R – Reading
<b>General capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Literacy</li> <li> Ethical behaviour</li> <li> Intercultural understanding</li> <li> Personal and social capability</li> <li> Critical and creative thinking</li> <li> Numeracy</li> <li> Information and communication technology</li> </ul>
<b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Sustainability</li> <li> Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia</li> <li> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</li> </ul>

### SYNOPSIS

*Hold me Closer* is a musical / novel based on Levithan's earlier novel *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. Tiny Cooper's narration of his own musical is both humorous and touching. From his fully grown entrance on stage at birth through to the rollercoaster ride of his relationships at high school, Tiny Cooper reveals the insecurities, desires and life lessons that many teenagers will relate to. Tiny's big personality is amplified by Levithan's choice to tell his story in musical. The stage directions, from Tiny himself, create an intimacy between audience and narrator that makes you feel as though you're sitting in a theatre watching the scenes unfold live. While the novel contains some mature themes, it raises issues that are both relevant and challenging.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Levithan is an award-winning and *New York Times* bestselling author of young adult books, including *Boy Meets Boy*, *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist* (with Rachel Cohn), *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (with John Green) and *The Realm of Possibility*. He lives in New Jersey and spends his days in New York, editing and publishing other people's books.

Website: <http://www.davidlevithan.com/>



**BEFORE READING**

1. *Hold Me Closer* is a companion novel to David Levithan’s earlier novel *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. Read *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* and explore the potential for other stories. What companion texts would you create? **R LY LT** (ACELY1754) (ACELT1629) 🎓 ⚙️
2. If you were to depict our life, what creative form would you chose? Tiny Cooper chooses a musical. Would you choose a book, a painting, or a song? **W S LT** (ACELT1814) ⚙️ 🧑🏫
3. What are the usual characteristics of a musical? Do some research, watch some musicals from different eras (you will find clips online or you might like to go to the theatre or have been involved in a school musical). In your research, pay particular attention to the script of each musical, what detail does a script involve? **W LT** (ACELT1643) ⚙️ 🧑🏫
4. If you were depicted on stage, what personal features would you like highlighted and what would you play down? **W LT** (ACELT1814) ⚙️

**WHILE READING**

1. After reading the ‘Introductory notes by Tiny Cooper’, what do we expect from his musical? Consider how the Introduction defines the tone of the musical. **R LT** (ACELT1637) 🎓 ⚙️
2. Tiny’s voice comes across clearly in the stage directions. He is quite specific about how the musical should look. What are some of the added details he includes and why do you think they are added? For example, Tiny specifies a ‘big spotlight’. What does that tell us about Tiny? **R LT** (ACELT1637) 🧑🏫 ⚙️
3. Tiny arrives in the world fully grown. What do this tell us about him? **R LT** (ACELT1637) ⚙️
4. The musical is full of intertextual references to other musicals. See how many of these you can list. What does this tell us about Tiny? What does each musical reference and its placement suggest? **W R LT** (ACELT1774) ⚙️
5. Consider the metaphor of football as a religion. What does it tell you about Tiny’s family? Are there similar metaphors in the book? **R LT** (ACELT1637) 🎓 ⚙️
6. Match the reference with the musical. What is the original line or context?

‘Hello, my name is Tiny Cooper. What’s yours?’ P.10	<i>Damn Yankees</i> (1955)
‘You decide what Lola wants in this case. And that’s what she’ll get.’ P.72	<i>Grease</i> (1978)

‘Tiny looks around the stage, as if he’s just stepped outside the shtetl and is about to ask the immortal question, “Papa, can you hear me?”’ P.78	<i>West Side Story</i> (1957)
‘...gang warfare on the West Side.’ P.83	<i>Gypsy</i> (1959)
‘The tempo slowed in an ‘it turned colder’ sort of way’ P.132	<i>Yentl</i> (1983)

- R LT** (ACELT1629) ⚙️
7. On page 22, Tiny describes how he feels about joining his parent’s ‘religion’ (‘I fell into my parent’s religion ...mostly by example.’) What do you notice about the sentences and pace in this passage? Why do you think Levithan writes the scene this way? **R LA** (ACELA1557) ⚙️
  8. What does Tiny mean when he suggests that he was in a ‘glass closet’. (P.47) **R LT** (ACELT1630) 🎓 ⚙️
  9. Which aspect of the play do you believe are true and what has Tiny exaggerated or manipulated to be idealistic? **R LA** (ACELA1553) ⚙️
  10. Consider Tiny’s parents’ reaction when he tells them he is gay. What does their response tell you about how they feel? **R LT** (ACELT1639) ⚙️ 🧑🏫
  11. What is the significance of Oscar Wilde’s ghost appearing in the musical? Research Oscar Wilde and consider why he was chosen over other writers. **W LT** (ACELT1629) ⚙️
  12. How is humour used to convey a more serious message? **R LT** (ACELT1630) ⚙️
  13. What is implied by Tiny’s realisation that ‘there seemed to be more gay kids in our high school than there were minutes in Miss Saigon?’ (P.134) **R LT** (ACELT1635) 🧑🏫 ⚙️
  14. ‘Not because he’s necessarily right. But because he genuinely thinks he is. And most of the time, that’s more important.’ (P.171) How important is perspective in this story? Is it more important to believe that you are right? **R LT** (ACELT1643) 🎓 ⚙️
  15. In Act II, Scene II, Tiny tells Will about a place he goes to that makes him happy (Super Target, in Tiny’s case). Describe your place of happiness. What makes it a happy place? Why do you think it is important to have such a place? **R LT** (ACELT1635) ⚙️
  16. Tiny describes ‘Sleeping Beauty’ as a metaphor for love. What other metaphors can you create to depict love? See how many you can come up with and explain them. **R LT** (ACELT1615) ⚙️
  17. Tiny introduces us to the word ‘weltschmerz’: ‘the depression you feel when the world as it is does not line up with the world as you think it should be.’



Find evidence in the novel that suggests that this is Tiny's view of the world. **R LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️

18. Is Tiny's advice to 'Let yourself fall!' good advice? Does he follow that advice himself? **R LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️
19. 'We diminuendo in our doubt, but then we crescendo into understanding together.' (P.198) Explain your understanding of the closing lines of the musical. **R LY (ACELY1721)** ⚙️
20. Write a review of the novel. Include reference to some of the aspects of the novel that might make this challenging for readers. Consider its value as a literary text (What makes it worthy of reading?) **R W LT (ACELT1634) (ACELT1626)** ⚙️

**AFTER READING**

**Character**

1. What are your first impressions of Tiny Cooper in the first scene and what creates this? **R LY (ACELY1744)** ⚙️
2. As an outside observer, determine what are challenges Tiny faces and how does he deal with them? **R LT (ACELT1619)** ⚙️
3. How do we know Tiny's feeling about other characters in the play? Consider both the direct comments and also the more subtle indications. **R LY (ACELY1744)** 🎧
4. What indications are there that Tiny likes to be the centre of attention. Find examples in the musical. **R S LT (ACELT1621)** ⚙️ 👤
5. What devices are used by the author to create individual characters? (Consider the naming of boyfriends.) **R LA (ACELA1569)** ⚙️ 🎧
6. How does Phil Wrayson differ from other characters (excluding Tiny) in the musical? Why do you think his role differs? **R LT (ACELT1619)** ⚙️

**Style and Structure**

1. Why do you believe David Levithan chose a musical to tell Tiny's story? **R LT (ACELT1642)** ⚙️
2. How is the line between writer and character blurred in the novel? Consider the use of narrative in your response. **R LT (ACELT1643)** ⚙️ 🎧
3. What influence does the introduction have on the way that we respond to the rest of the musical? **R LT (ACELT1642)** ⚙️
4. How does Levithan build a relationship between Tiny and his audience? **R LT (ACELT1642)** ⚙️ 🎧
5. Explore the connection between Tiny's mood and the songs in the musical? Use the songs to create a

graph of the tone in the musical. **R LT (ACELT1630)** ⚙️

6. Remember the research you did on features of a musical? Consider how this musical fits with musical tradition and how it breaks tradition. **R LT (ACELT1643)** ⚙️ 🎧
7. What is the traditional role of the chorus in theatre? Who makes up the chorus in Tiny's musical? Why? **W LT (ACELT1643)** ⚙️ 🎧
8. What does Tiny's depiction of his life tell us about the advantages of autobiographical writing? **R LT (ACELT1636)** 🎧
9. 'If anyone is going to object to this musical, they will have left the theatre at this point. Which is fine.' (P.12) Consider the effect of this line in a musical? What makes it unexpected and how does it prepare the audience for the rest of the musical? **LT (ACELT1643)** ⚙️

**THEMES**

Use the following statements to explore themes from the novel. Find evidence from the novel to support your ideas.

**Love and sexuality**

1. Tiny falls in love easily and whole heartedly. How do we know this and what are the consequences? **R W LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤
2. Tiny declares his sexuality to the audience early in the book, but doesn't open up to his family and friends until later. How does that effect the way he is viewed in the musical? **R W LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤
3. What challenges, if any, does Tiny face because of his sexuality? **R W LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤
4. What is Tiny's message about love? **R LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤
5. David Levithan creates characters who are very open about their sexuality and occasionally challenge audiences in this respect. What message does this convey? What do you think Levithan's intentions are? **R LT (ACELT1812)** ⚙️ 👤
6. Phil says 'It's not all about romance, Tiny. There are other kinds of love.' What that kinds of love do you think he is referring to? Which sort of love do you believe is more important? **R LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤

**Body image and self-belief**

1. What are Tiny's insecurities and how are these evident? **R W LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤
2. Which aspects of Tiny's life can he control and which are externally influenced? **R W LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤
3. Describe how Tiny's confidence changes throughout the musical. What influences those changes? **R W LT (ACELT1635)** ⚙️ 👤



4. What role do other characters play in the way that Tiny sees himself? Choose three other characters and find evidence that supports your view. **R LT** (ACELT1635)
5. How does Tiny Cooper see himself? Compile a list of words that he uses in relation to himself. What words are used by others to describe Tiny? Which do you believe to be accurate? What might compromise this judgement? **R LA** (ACELA1561)

**Relationships and family**

1. How would you describe Tiny’s family and their relationship with him? **R W LT** (ACELT1635)
2. Tiny declares that he has two families. What are they and what role does each play in creating ‘Tiny’ the character? **R W LT** (ACELT1635)
3. Which relationships in Tiny’s life do you think are based on reality and which are part of his dream? **R LT** (ACELT1812)
4. The musical suggests that all relationships are unique. How is this idea presented? **R LT** (ACELT1626)
5. While Tiny is not always flattering about his ex-boyfriends, they are all important in creating the person he becomes. Discuss the role that each plays. **R LT** (ACELT1635)

**RESPONDING**

1. ‘Because what is life if not a series of loud and quiet.’ Explore the loud and quiet moments in *Hold Me Closer* and explain what creates them. **R W LT** (ACELT1635)
2. Tiny uses song titles to map his life. Make your own list of song titles to explore your life. Choose one and write the lyrics, or perhaps write a verse for each. **R W LT** (ACELT1632)
3. Choose a scene from the musical and stage it for your peers. Consider the staging tips that Tiny suggests, but also add some of your own elements. **R W S LT** (ACELT1632)
4. Tiny describes his musical as ‘a one-man show that happens to have lots of other people in it.’ (P.7). What role do the other characters play? Does Tiny’s description do them justice? **R W LT** (ACELT1635)
5. ‘When people say love is blind, they act like that’s a good thing. But some people find their way around in the darkness a little better than others.’ (P.143) How difficult is it for Tiny to find his way? **R W LT** (ACELT1635)
6. Write a comparison between *Hold Me Closer* and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. What messages do they share? What features do they have in common? You could also consider comparing other David Levithan

- novels to this one and write an exploration of his style and themes. **W LY** (ACELY1753) (ACELY1752)
7. Tiny’s story is no different from any other story of young love. What lessons can we learn from the highs and lows of Tiny’s life? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
8. While Tiny’s musical is humorous and touching, it is far from reality. Do you agree? **R LT** (ACELT1635)
9. Tiny doesn’t reveal what Will’s story is as he says that it is not his story to tell. Write your own version of Will’s story from Will’s point of view. Consider using song lyrics to fit with the style of the novel. **W LT** (ACELT1626)
10. ‘I was born big-boned and happily gay but I’ve learned so much more along the way’ (P.195) What lessons do you believe Tiny has learned? **R LT** (ACELT1635)