

**Title:** How to Hug a Cactus

**Author:** Emily S Smith

**Illustrator:** Aleksandra Szmidt

**Publisher:** Larrikin House

**Target Age Group:** 3-8 years

**Key Curriculum Areas:** English, The Arts, HASS, Technologies and Social & Emotional Learning (SEL).

## SYNOPSIS

How do you hug a cactus?  
I'd really like to know.  
You see, I love my cactus,  
And my hugs will help it grow.

A young girl explores the possibilities of hugging her most favourite plant, a cactus. With a little help from her family members and a gardening guru, she tries a number of solutions to help solve her prickly problem, all with varying degrees of success. How to Hug a Cactus is a story that will 'stick' with many readers.

## THEMES

Problem-solving, friendship, caring for nature, resilience, overcoming challenges, solutions, failure and resilience.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily S. Smith is a children's author, storyteller, book-lover and all-round nerd. She divides her time between writing for children, teaching in early childhood settings, and being the greatest aunt of all time (in her own opinion) to her nephews and niece. Emily is obsessed with language and its ability to connect people, create fantastical worlds, and explain ideas. She believes that words are magic and enjoys casting 'literacy spells'. Like a literary fairy-godmother who uses a pen for a wand, Emily wants to bring humour, fun and silliness into the lives and hearts of young children and their families.



## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR



Aleksandra grew up in a town in the south of Poland and currently resides in New Zealand. In Poland Aleksandra worked as a Graphic Designer but her move to New Zealand prompted her to pursue her dream of becoming a freelance illustrator. From her home studio Aleksandra creates one-of-a-kind artwork. She has a love for drawing animals and plants but prefers to draw magical things that detach from reality. She loves using both traditional and digital painting in her illustrations and often mixes them to create her art.

*Stories with Humour & Heart*

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## ACTIVITIES

### BEFORE READING

Questions to ask:

1. What do you think this story might be about?
2. Can you point out the following features of the book?  
(Spine, title, illustration, front page, back page, blurb, end papers).

### DURING READING

Recognising rhyming words - Ask students to put up their hand when they notice the rhyming words on a selected page. (ACELA1439) (ACELT1585)

Recognising alliteration - Ask students to put up their hand when they notice any alliteration used in the story. (ACELA1439) (ACELT1585)

Clap the rhythm - On a selected page, students clap their hands along to the beat of the words. (ACELT1585)

Questions to ask:

1. What do you think will happen next?
2. How do you think the main character will solve her problem?
3. Have you ever hugged a plant or a tree before?
4. Have you ever seen a cactus in real life?
5. What do you know about cactuses?
6. Can you make any connections to the story so far?  
(ACELT1575) (ACELY1646) (ACELT1582) (ACPPS020) (ACPPS004)

### AFTER READING

Questions to ask:

1. What did you enjoy most about the story?
2. What was your favourite solution? Why?  
(ACELY1646) (ACELT1581)



## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- 1. Cloze passages:** Choose a section of text and omit words. Students to fill in the blanks.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELA1435) (ACELA1434) (ACELA1786) (ACELY1650) (ACELA1447) (ACELA1448)
- 2. Character Profile:** Students draw the characters in the story and write their name underneath each picture.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELT1783) (ACAMAM054) (ACAMAM056) (ACAVAM108) (ACTDEP007) (ACELA1586)
- 3. Word Search:** Create a word search using words from the text.  
Curriculum links: (ACAMAM054) (ACAMAM056) (ACELY1663) (ACELA1586) (ACTDEP007) (ACELY1653)
- 4. Retell Activities:**
  - a. Create a table with the following headings: Setting (Where?) - Characters (Who?) - Problem (What?) - 1. In the beginning - 2. Next - 3. Then - 4. Finally - 5. Solution - 6. Lastly. Ask students to write or draw the order of events in the story.
  - b. Write short sentences which retell the story and jumble them up. Ask students to put them in the correct order.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELT1578) (ACAMAM054) (ACAMAM056) (ACELY1663) (ACELA1586) (ACTDEP007)
- 5. Acrostic Poem:** Students choose a character from the story and write an acrostic poem.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELY1651) (ACAMAM056)
- 6. Write a blurb:** Explore the existing blurb on the back cover. Explain the purpose of the blurb to the students and ask them to create their own blurb.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELY1651) (ACELA1586)
- 7. Mix and Match:** Connect the character and the solution to the problem using clues from the story.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELT1578) (ACELT1580) (ACELT1831) (ACELY1651) (ACAMAM054) (ACAMAM056) (ACTDEP007) (ACTDEK004) (ACHASSI001) (ACHASSI002)
- 8. Cactus - Information Poster:** Create a class poster about cactuses. Include some of the different types of cactus that are popular as house plants.  
Curriculum Links: (ACAMAM054) (ACELT1581) (ACELT1582) (ACHASSI001) (ACHASSI002) (ACHASSI003)
- 9. A hug from me to you - Craft activity :** Students create a personalised hug for someone, or something they care about.  
Curriculum Links: (ACAMAM054) (ACELT1581) (ACELT1582) (ACHASSI001) (ACHASSI002)
- 10. Grow your own cactus:** Students can grow their own cactuses and explore how to care for them.  
Curriculum Links: (ACELT1578) (ACELT1580) (ACELT1831) (ACELY1651) (ACAMAM054) (ACAMAM056) (ACTDEP007) (ACTDEK004) (ACHASSI001) (ACHASSI002)



**FURTHER INFORMATION & RESOURCES:**

Emily S Smith's Website: <https://www.emilyssmithauthor.com/>

Aleksandra Szmids Website: <https://www.aleksandraszmidt.com/>



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# A hug from me to you



## Steps

### Materials

A3 coloured card  
Pencil  
Card  
Scissors  
Glue  
Coloured pencils

1

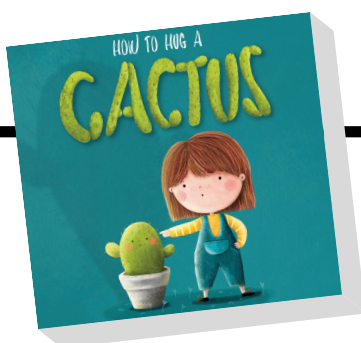
Measure and cut two 2cm strips along the length of a piece of A3 card. Cut out the helmet and paste onto the sheet of coloured card.

2


Fold the pieces backwards and forwards to create a concertina pattern. Glue the two strips beside the helmet above to create hugging arms.

3

Cut out the hands and glue them on to the ends of the arms. Draw a face inside the space helmet. Give your hug to someone you care about.

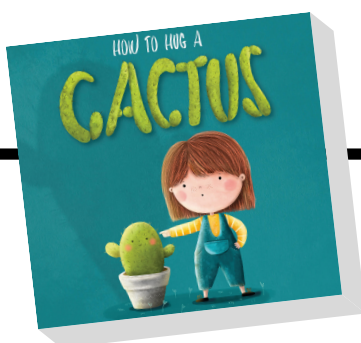


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**WRITTEN BY:** Emily S Smith  
Follow on: [www.emilyssmithauthor.com/](http://www.emilyssmithauthor.com/)  
**ILLUSTRATED BY:** Aleksandra Szmids  
Follow on:  @olishka\_art

# Mix and Match

Draw a line to match the character with their suggested solution



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