

# MEET THE TEAM

The Zen Tails series is based around nine characters, assembled into three groups: the teachers, the students and the fools. It is essential that the children understand the roles of each of these groups of characters and appreciate their significance. The following lessons are provided to facilitate an understanding of the role of the nine characters which appear in the Zen Tails series. You are free to use these lessons as needed by your class, but it is suggested that you take the class through at least three of the following lessons (one from each group) before commencing on the main body of the Zen Tails series.

## The Teachers

The teachers represent the enlightened ones. They have realised their true nature and live a life full of happiness, love and vitality. The three teachers represent the paths of love, knowledge and action respectively.

### Session I:

#### *Guru Walter Wombat – The Way of Love*



Guru Walter Wombat is the embodiment of love and devotion. He shows these qualities in every word, thought and action. Because of his love, Guru Walter Wombat instils a feeling of deep peace in everyone who meets him. He lives a serene, modest, stress-free life.

Ask the children what they understand by the words: “love” and “devotion”. The following points may help to stimulate discussion.

#### LOVE:

- The essence of love is meeting and treating the other person as yourself.
- In love, there is no separation, competition or rivalry.
- Love is the natural relationship between all people.

- Love involves care, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, kindness, generosity and selflessness.

## DEVOTION

- Devotion is the feeling of great loyalty, commitment and dedication to a person or thing. It can also show itself as enormous enthusiasm and fervour.
- Devotion means sticking by someone no matter what. It means not giving up when someone needs you and sacrificing your own welfare and comfort for the welfare of another.
- Ask the children what they are devoted to. How do they show that devotion? Point out that you need to work at devotion – that it doesn't just happen by itself. Devotion needs to be actively cultivated.
- Ask the children if they know anyone who is full of love.
- Tell the children about someone you know who is full of love – your mother or father perhaps or a dear friend. Describe how this person displays his or her love and what it is like when you are with him or her.

## Writing Exercise – The Most Loving Person I Know.

In this recount you will write about the most loving person you know. You will retell an incident which illustrates how loving he or she is.

# WRITING EXERCISE

Text Type: Recount (biographical)

In this recount you will write about the most loving person you know. You will retell an incident which illustrates how loving he or she is.

Title: The most loving person I know is

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Setting: (Who? When? Where? Describe the loving person and his or her qualities)

\_\_\_\_\_ is a very loving person.

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Events (Describe an incident which demonstrates this person's great love)

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Conclusion. (Describe how this incident ended up)

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## WORKED EXAMPLE

Title: The most loving person I know is

*my mother*

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Setting:

*My mother is a very loving person. Once I came home from school with my report card. I knew I wasn't very good. I sat down with my mother and father to discuss my school report. (Who? When? Where? Describe the loving person and his or her qualities)*

Events

*First we looked at the subjects I had done well in. Then my mother asked me about maths and science. She asked me how she could help me improve in those subjects. She wasn't angry with me for doing poorly. After that mum helped me with my maths homework and was always ready to answer questions about science.*

Conclusion.

*With mum's help my maths and science marks improved. They still aren't my best subjects but I enjoy them much more now. (Describe how this incident ended up)*

## Session 2:

### *Shri Shelly – The Way of Knowledge*



Shri Shelly has achieved enlightenment through the path of knowledge and is a font of practical wisdom. In spite of her slow moving demeanour, Shri Shelly has an uncanny ability to appear to be in several places at one time, along with a seemingly endless array of necessities contained within her shell. Her simple advice often has life changing effects on those who seek it.

Ask the children what they understand by the word “knowledge”. Discuss the different between information, theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge and wisdom.

- **Information:** This is the most elementary kind of knowledge. Information is a collection of reliable facts. They are useful to have, but they will not help very much on their own. For example, you may possess the factual information that certain foods contain an excessive amount of fat, and that an excessive amount of fat is bad for the body. That is correct information, but it may not stop you eating the harmful foods.
- **Theoretical knowledge:** This knowledge is information which has been understood a certain level but not experienced in one’s own life. In the example of the food, you may know in theory that eating too much fast food is bad for you, but until you have experienced it first hand, either in yourself or in one close to you, you may not really believe it.
- **Practical knowledge:** This is information and theoretical knowledge which has been out to the test of one’s own experience and found to be true. In the example of the food, if you have eaten too much junk food at one time and suffered the effects, you will have practical, first-hand knowledge of the subject and will be less likely to repeat the mis-

take. Such practical knowledge is very deep seated and cannot be undermined by others. No one will be able to convince you the junk food is good for you once you have experienced its ill effects for yourself.

- **Wisdom:** All three types of knowledge mentioned above, information, theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge are more or less specific, while wisdom is of a completely different order. It is a profound understanding of human nature and the laws of the universe which allows the wise man or woman to deal effectively and efficiently with all situations. Wisdom is born of many years of practical experience, responsibility, study, reflection and inquiry.

Tell the class about a person you consider to be wise (or at least a person of great understanding). Tell them about the advice he or she has given you and how it has helped you at a crucial time in your life.

Discuss why Shri Shelly has so many things in her shell. The shell represents the infinite store of practical knowledge available to the wise man or woman. Usually a storeroom will become empty as things are taken out, but the store-house of knowledge is different. The more knowledge is shared with others, the more there is to give.

## **Writing Exercise – Learning from Experience.**

Tell the students they are going to write a recount of an incident in their lives from which they gained some practical knowledge. The students should think back over their lives and consider an incident which taught them something of practical value.

# WRITING EXERCISE

Text Type: Recount (biographical)

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: (Who? When? Where?)

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Events: (Describe the incident.)

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Conclusion: (What did you learn from the incident?)

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## WORKED EXAMPLE

Title:

Setting: (Who? When? Where?)

*One afternoon I was riding my bike home from school. My father had been onto me to repair the brakes but I thought I knew better. I liked the run-down appearance of my trusty old bike.*

Events: (Describe the incident.)

*I rode along the road, my bicycle bumping and scraping as the pedals turned. At the top of the long steep hill which lead to my house I paused and remembered my father's words. No, I thought, the brakes are fine. I set off down the hill, pedalling faster and faster, enjoying the sensation of speed. Suddenly one of the hand brakes broke away from the handlebar and jammed itself into the spokes of the front wheel. I went flying over the handle bars and landed face first into the newly tarred road. It hurt.*

Conclusion: (What did you learn from the incident?)

*From this incident I learned, rather painfully, that it is important attend to details, to maintain one's possessions and to listen to one's father - lessons which have stayed with me to this day.*



### Session 3:

#### *St Bernard – The Way of Action*



St Bernhard has reached enlightenment through the path of action, honour and duty. He encourages his students to enjoy life to the full through a generous yet disciplined response to all occasions and a positive attitude to all situations. He is a master of the martial arts with exceptional abilities, yet he seeks neither fame nor fortune.

Ask the students what they understand by the words, “duty”, “responsibility” and “honour”.

Explain to the class that doing one’s duty involves doing what you know you ought to do. Generally speaking, in most situations, it is very clear what we ought to do. For a student in class, it is his duty is to listen, work hard and learn as much as possible. On the soccer field, the player’s duty is to play to the full extent of her ability, to play by the rules, to win with humility or to loose graciously.

### Writing Exercise

Discuss the following situations and ask the students to fill in the table

SITUATION	MY DUTY
At home before school	
At the dinner table	
In the playground	
In class	
Visiting my grandparents	
At the movies	
With a distressed friend	

Discuss with the children what gets in the way of doing one's duty. Discuss the "I don't want to" factor and the role of peer pressure when it comes to doing the right thing. Discuss the concept of *full participation*, of not holding anything back, and discuss what makes us hold back. It may be helpful to mention facts such as criticism, laziness and timidity.

## Writing Exercise

Explain to the children that they are going to write a narrative in which there are two main characters, one who does her duty in a particular situation and one who does not. Outline the following scenario to the class:

*There were once two children, Emma and Clara. They both took on a morning paper round to earn some extra pocket money. Emma was diligent girl who always did her duty while Clara occasionally shirked. Write a story describing the different manner in which the two girls performed their jobs and the consequences which followed.*

Suggested plotlines: Emma turned up on time, collected her papers, delivered them carefully to all the correct houses, rolled the papers neatly and placed them carefully in the letter boxes, ensuring they did not blow away etc.

Clara missed her run once in a while, occasionally dumped the papers in a nearby creek, skipped houses if she was running out of time, placed the papers any old how so they blew away in the wind.

Emma is rewarded with a promotion and a bonus from her boss and some nice present from grateful families on her run, while Clara is sacked and finds it difficult to get another casual job.

# W R I T I N G   E X E R C I S E

Text Type: Recount (biographical)

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Orientation (who? when? where? Describe Emma and Clara)

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Middle (Describe how Emma and Clara perform their jobs)

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End (What happens to Emma and Clara? )

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## The Students

The students are on the path to enlightenment, but still have many hurdles to overcome. They each have a teacher (or Guru) whose guidance they follow. They try to display good qualities, but sometime forget what they have been taught.

**Session 1:** Bruno Beagle - fearlessness

**Session 2:** Pierre Potamus – compassion

**Session 3:** Gilbert B. Beaver - studiousness

## The Fools

The fools have turned their backs on a better life and have created separate selfish identities. They have mischievous attributes, but even the fools, when graced by the influence of the enlightened masters, experience freedom.

**Session 1:** Fur Ball - laziness

**Session 2:** Monkey – agitation

**Session 3:** Grizzel Bear - anger