

# Timmy Failure: Crack the Case Competition

A National Literacy Trust resource

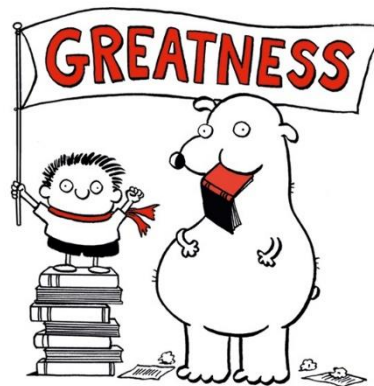
## Timmy Failure Strikes Again

With the release of his latest adventure, *Sanitized for Your Protection*, Timmy is once again caught up in shenanigans of epic proportions. This time, on a road trip to Chicago, he manages (in his usual misguided way) to crack yet another case whilst causing mayhem, trashing hotel rooms, sacking his polar bear business partner and even flirting with a touch of romance. (Please don't tell him we mentioned the "r" word...)

Now he is ready for a new challenge.

A new client. A new case. And of course, a new opportunity to display greatness.

Taking inspiration from the litany of solved crimes and crazy characters throughout the Timmy Failure series, the challenge is to write and illustrate the next installment in Timmy's glittering career.



This resource aims to support integration of the Crack the Case Competition into either a one-off creative writing opportunity or a narrative unit for Key Stage 2 pupils to give them: a clear purpose and audience for their work; a chance to develop their story writing; and the sheer joy of immersion into the mad, hilarious world of Timmy and his friends.

The emphasis on the Key Stage 2 curriculum, not only on writing for purpose and audience, but also on the entire writing process, is a welcome one and enables time to be spent on planning, drafting, editing and proof reading. Further opportunities to extend the work into wider areas of the curriculum for an extended, literacy based Timmy Failure topic can be found in the accompanying resource Timmy Takes Over.

## Some are born great ...

First we need to immerse pupils in Timmy's world.

Timmy's world is the world of detectives. It's not easy being the founder, president and CEO of the best detective agency in the world, as pupils will find out. Invite your pupils to become detectives in training. Perhaps start experientially with clues appearing in the classroom ... a red scarf (distinctive of course), a magnifying glass, a polar bear toy, even

Rice Krispie Treats or a Sherlock Holmes hat. Can pupils pick up the clues to lead them to Timmy Failure?

If they are new to the series it is great to start with the books as a class reader. Hugely accessible, funny and with short chapters, they are perfect for this. Encourage pupils to start their own detective log just like Timmy to note down characters, cases and details as you go. Introduce pupils to each book with the individual book trailers and the detective agency infomercials found on the Timmy Failure website: <http://www.timmyfailure.com/fail-safe-videos>. Pupils can use their competition bookmarks when working on their logs.

The 'greatness' of Timmy, our quirky main character, is key. Completing character mind maps are a good way of pulling together all the small details you need to know. Use Stephan Pastis's online guidance on how to draw Timmy: <http://www.timmyfailure.com/fail-safe-videos/> Then with Timmy at the centre of the page, map around him all the possible facts and details you can gather, from his distinctive red scarf to the use of his favourite word ... *mendacity*. Continue to add to the map as you explore the books further.

## Hanging on the telephone ...

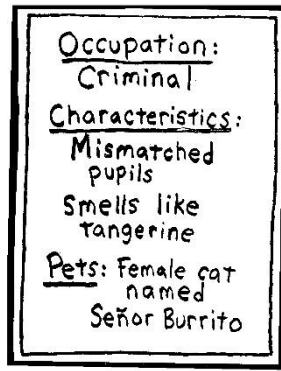
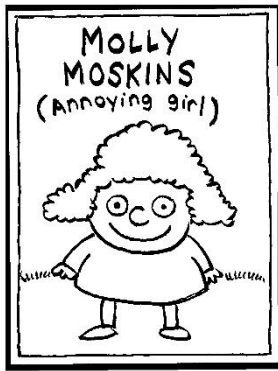
Explain the competition to the pupils. Perhaps create a desk in the corner of the classroom on which your own Timmyline phone sits, because this time when Timmy answers it, the new client, the new case, will be up to them. If you really want to immerse pupils, they could transform a part of the classroom into the corporate headquarters of Total Failure, Inc. complete with adverts, posters and endorsements from satisfied clients. You might want to add some detective gadgetry. They could even make their own Garbanzo Man, the agency's bizarre mascot and his sidekick Rambling Rabbit – don't ask!

## The usual suspects ...

Each book introduces new clients, classmates and employees but there are also the usual suspects who come back again and again. From Timmy's best friend, the studious Charles "Rollo" Tookus to his arch-enemy Corrina Corrina.

A good starting point is the Cast of Characters page here: <http://www.timmyfailure.com/the-books/cast-of-characters/>

Perhaps as Timmy does in Book 3: *We Meet Again* pupils can create baseball cards of all the main characters.



Here is Molly Moskins’s card. You can add other details: height, weight, hobbies, family members, etc.

Pupils can use the video lessons to draw the characters or copy them from the books. Don’t forget that at least one illustration is required in the competition entry so this is all good practice.

Pupils can include as many of the existing characters as they like in their story, so it would be useful to get to know them.

## It's a mystery, it's a mystery...

Now thoughts begin to turn to the new story, a new case for Timmy to “solve”. First it would be great to look at some of the previous cases for ideas to help your pupils plan their own. They could compile case files for these using a simple format like this one:

Now with a feeling for the type of madcap case we’re after, pupils need to explore their own ideas for the new case. Could it be something lost, stolen, sabotaged, vandalised or even kidnapped? Play around with ideas using drama and games:

**First on the scene:** Give each group the name of an invented case, for example, “The Case of the Squashed Jelly”. Working in pairs, ask one child to imagine he/she is Timmy and has been called to the “crime scene” to interview the other pupil in the pair, a key witness who was first on the scene. To solve the crime, Timmy needs to know what the witness saw when he/she arrived on the scene. Ask pupils to role-play this interview. As a class, brainstorm the types of questions Timmy would ask. Given the author’s style of writing, encourage pupils to use their imaginations and sense of humour to full effect. They may want to write a script or notes. Ask some pairs to act out their interviews for the rest of the class.

<b>Case file Number 2:</b> The Case of the Dead Hamster
<b>Scene of the crime:</b> Max Hodge’s Bedroom
<b>Client:</b> Max Hodge
<b>Victim:</b> Max’s hamster
<b>Type of Crime:</b> Homicide
<b>Witnesses:</b> Max Hodge
<b>Suspects:</b> None
<b>Evidence:</b> 1. Motionless hamster in hamster cage 2. Scratched
<b>Outcome:</b> Unsolved

**Fortunately, Unfortunately:** This game will help pupils to develop their ideas for a plot with twists and turns. Give pupils an example with two sentences, one starting with “fortunately” and the other with “unfortunately”, for example:

- Fortunately Timmy found some evidence - a banana skin. Unfortunately Total decided to eat it.
- Fortunately the missing chihuahua was returned safely. Unfortunately he had been dressed as a ballet dancer.

Then ask the pupils to come up with their own “Fortunately and Unfortunately” sentences. Make a list of their sentences and encourage the pupils to collect the ideas they like best.

**Solving their crimes:** Pupils may find it easy to think of a “crime”, but more challenging to imagine how Timmy is going to solve it and the problems he might face along the way. To support pupils with this aspect of their story, you might like to organise the following activity. As a class, brainstorm all the different evidence that detectives use to solve crimes, for example: fingerprints; CCTV footage; eavesdropping on someone’s conversation; a witness statement; objects left by the suspect at the scene; objects found at the suspect’s house.

You can then brainstorm the problems and solutions that Timmy might encounter with this evidence, for example: he loses it and then finds it again; it gets stolen, but the thief feels guilty and gives it back. Once, as a class, you are happy with the ideas you have, you could play the “Fortunately, Unfortunately, Fortunately” game in groups of three. The first person describes the evidence which is discovered (fortunately), the second the problem with the evidence (unfortunately) and the third the resolution (fortunately).

**Object crimes:** Place a number of everyday objects on each group’s table and ask each pupil to choose one. Challenge them to think of and describe a “crime” based on the object and how Timmy solves it.

## I have a cunning plan...

Stephan Pastis can really weave a plot (or two) together, but with just 500 words to play with pupils may decide that one is quite enough! Use a blank case file format to help pupils begin to plan their case. Let them choose planning tools like storyboarding or Post-it note planning, where just one key sentence on each Post-it can be added to a flipchart, discussed, played around with, moved and easily changed to get the plot just right.

For each element of the case file, explore great examples from the Timmy Failure books as a starting point for pupils’ own ideas.

**Scene of the Crime:** Here are a few Timmy locations to get you started. But of course he may be on holiday when that Timmyline rings, and he is after all an international sleuth, so your crime scene could be absolutely anywhere (just as long as your client is prepared to pay travel expenses!).



**Clients, witnesses, suspects:** Whilst involving the usual suspects, here is the perfect place to create your own new cast of Timmy Failure characters. In the books, when that Timmyline rings, often a new character appears. Think of Angel de Manzanar Naranjas and the Miracle Report, or Toody Tululu and that missing YIP YAP money or poor old Gunnar and his brother Gabe (aka The Slob) with their missing candy.

Encourage pupils to create a profile for their new characters complete with backstory or add them to the baseball cards list.

## With a little help from my friends...

Don't forget those supporting characters who might just be commandeered into temporary employment by Timmy to help solve the crime (in fact they often solve the crime in spite of Timmy). Depending on how Total the polar bear is feeling, homesick for the Artic or sacked for incompetence, you may want to appoint new agents.



Timmy has recruited his best friend Rollo, his Great-Aunt Colander and even the dreaded Molly Moskins (aka Tangerine Girl) into the agency. I'd like to see the biker librarian Flo in action or Doorman Dave, who may just have hidden talents, I suspect.



With all the key ingredients in place just one thing remains...is that the Timmyline ringing?

