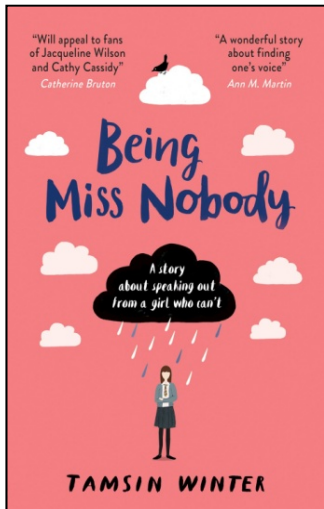


Being Miss Nobody

by Tamsin Winter

Reading Notes



Rosalind Banks is an eleven year-old girl who can't speak at all at school. She only talks with her family. She has selective mutism (SM), a condition which makes it impossible for her to say anything in certain situations. Her classmates think she is weird and she becomes the perfect target for bullying – someone who cannot fight back. So Rosalind starts an anonymous blog called Miss Nobody to expose the bullies at her school. But as her blog starts trending, things begin to spiral out of control.

As the author of this book, Tamsin Winter, says, '*Being Miss Nobody* explores the double-edged power of social media – how it's a brilliant way of expressing yourself, particularly when you find it impossible to do that in real life. But it can be easy to forget that the internet is real life too. Even if it doesn't feel that way sometimes.' This book is about finding your voice and speaking up. It's about family and friendship, and it's also about bullying and cyber-bullying, and how speaking up can put a stop to this.

For 11+ readers.

About the author, Tamsin Winter

Tamsin Winter grew up in a Northamptonshire village where she spent her childhood reading books and writing stories. She has a BA Honours in English literature and creative writing, and has taught English at secondary level for 15 years. In 2015 she was winner of the Emirates Festival of Literature writing prize. Tamsin lives in Leicestershire with her son. *Being Miss Nobody* is her first novel.

Visit Tamsin's website - bit.ly/2ugJxOY



Here are reading notes for teachers and book groups, with ideas for discussion and suggestions for further reading. Several of these ideas will work in both settings.

Key themes in *Being Miss Nobody* are selective mutism (SM), bullying, cyberbullying, and the pressures and anxieties which young people face at school and on line – themes which inspire discussion especially around issues of young people’s mental health and well-being, and the importance of staying safe on line.

For both schools and book groups

Booktalking

Introducing and reading the book

Look at the book cover and blurb, and talk about what you think this book might be like. Set the scene, and read aloud the first chapter to get into the story. Then read all the way through, either reading aloud to everyone together, or letting everyone read and experience the book for themselves. At the end allow some time for people to reflect on the story and think about their responses to it.

Talking about the book: some book-talk questions

Get everyone to share their first responses to this book. This could be with the whole class – or children could discuss in small groups, and then share key feelings and questions with everyone.

Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the writing. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers – everyone will all have their own feelings and opinions about the book, and the things they like, or don’t like.

Here are some questions you might use:

- 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?
- Did any parts make you laugh/cry? Which parts?
- What was the thing you most liked finding out from the book?
- Did you stop and start, or did you want to read it all through in one go?
- Has reading the book changed or affected you? At the end of the story did you I wished as if you'd shared a real experience?



Selective mutism (SM)

...I couldn't answer because my words got in a Massive Muddle and my throat was closed up. (p21)

Selective mutism is a condition where someone finds it impossible to speak in certain situations or to specific people. It often goes along with shyness or social anxiety. People with selective mutism stay silent even when this might cause them to be bullied, ignored, or punished.

- In *Being Miss Nobody* how does Rosalind describe what it's like when she just can't get her words out? Talk about the times when this happens and some of the similes and comparisons she uses to express this feeling.

- What kind of things could be making it even harder for her to speak? – anxieties about her brother, for example, starting at a new school and not knowing anybody, and being in situations where everyone is looking at you.
- It is good if we can have a support network – people to talk to and who will listen and help when we have worries and difficulties. What are the strategies – and who are the people - that help Rosalind to find her voice?
- Think of your own support network – who is in it and who else might you add to it? Do you call on different people for different situations and different kinds of help?
- Think of the times when you don't say anything – when, like Rosalind, you find it difficult or impossible to speak up, and also when you *choose* not to say anything and think it's better to keep quiet. Discuss how you feel, and the possible reasons for how you react. What can be the negative – and the positive – results, of not saying anything

Staying safe online

In *Being Miss Nobody* - Rosalind uses the internet to say what she can't say out loud. Helped by her brother Sep she takes care to protect her identity. At first her blog has a positive effect – but then things start to go wrong.

Have a look at this Usborne book *Staying Safe Online* by Louie Stowell. It's a guide for young people which alerts you to the potential dangers and difficulties of the internet, and gives tips and tools to take control and protect yourself – plus quizzes and activities to help you learn and practise.



See also these Usborne Quicklinks about staying safe online: bit.ly/2ugK57w

In a recent government report* social media is highlighted as having a potentially detrimental effect on aspects of mental health such as self-esteem. The report recommends compulsory PSHE in schools, including teaching children how to assess and manage online risks and make informed choices about their social media use.

- *...it was like someone had stolen Miss Nobody's identity and turned her evil...It was an online hate-a-thon...(p326)*
miss nobody you are DEAD (p340)

In this story Crystal sets up a false web profile of Miss Nobody and sends threatening messages. Talk about cyberbullying and what you should do if it happens to you. What are trills, doxxing and hacking?

- **Passwords:** Lots of people use the names of their pets or their family as passwords, and even the word 'password'. This means their online activity could easily be hacked. Have a go at creating strong passwords – inventing a code using letters, numbers and symbols. The challenge is also to make it one you can remember but that no-one can guess!
- Talk about and make a list of all the things you should do to keep yourself safe online.

*Report from the government's Health and Education Committees *Children and young people's mental health – the role of education* – with recommendations for teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing

- bit.ly/2tQ5pQk



For teachers

Things to discuss

Bullying

...no matter what Craig did, no-one spoke up. (p96)

What do you think of the amount of bullying which goes on at Rosalind's school? Why do you think it is happening? Look at this situation from the points of view of the teachers, the bullies, and the people being bullied, and come up with reasons from each point of view.

Every school has an anti-bullying strategy. Talk about what your school does to prevent bullying – and what you should do if bullying does happen.

The Introduce Yourself Game (p92)

Rosalind's teacher uses this game for the class to introduce themselves; he calls it 'a bit of fun to break the ice' but it's no fun for Rosalind. Think of ways in which it could be done so that she could join in. What other warm-up/introductory games do people know? Try one of them out – e.g. talking about something in your pocket or bag which tells something about you and what you are like.

The Power of Words

That afternoon Octavia told me that just words can change the world. (p301)

Rosalind and her therapist are reading famous speeches and their effect on history. Here are quotes from two famous speeches – find out 'who, when, what, why' about each of them and talk about their impact.

- 'Blood, toil, tears and sweat' (Clue: £5 note)
- 'I have a dream'

Writing activity

Choose one of these, inspired by the writing Rosalind does in this story:

- Write a poem about 'Something Important' (See p89, poem about Seb)

- ‘Tell me about yourself’ (See p15)
- Look at the ‘#/hashtag’ chapter headings in this book and how they summarise each chapter – e.g. *#tiny sound* *#alittlebirdtoldme*
Choose a favourite book which has only chapter numbers and think up simple #/hashtag headings for each chapter.

Libraries - and books

- Why do you think Rosalind feels most safe and happy in the library?
- Talk about all the resources and activities in a school library and a public library – design a poster to promote your school library around the school.

For book groups

See too the sections on booktalking, selective mutism, and staying safe on line.

Things to discuss

Empathy

Empathy is about being able to imagine yourself in someone else’s situation and understand what they might be thinking and how they feel. We can do this when we are reading, especially fiction, and in *Being Miss Nobody* we can identify strongly with Rosalind as she tells her story and also with the other characters as she describes what they say and do.

Discuss the benefits you can get from feeling empathy with characters in a book, for example a deeper understanding of people and their actions, or a difference in how you feel and act about something in real life. Relate this to other fiction you have read.

Being shy – and times when we can't talk

I always feel very nervous and scared if I have to go anywhere there will be lots of people...(p19)... I don't like standing up in front of people. (p20)

These are two of the situations which Rosalind finds really hard. Do you feel like this sometimes? What kind of things do you do to try to deal with it? Talk about other times when you find it difficult to say anything. If you met someone with SM how would you communicate and help them feel ok? In the book which people do this with Rosalind – and which people make it even harder for her to speak?

When you're worried

When I feel worried...I do calligraphy and it helps the panic in my head go away a bit. (p32) ...a good thing for me to do ...is to Write Down My Fears...(p202)

Collect a list together of all the things people in your group do which can help when you feel worried: maybe deep breaths or counting to 100, talking to someone - or having a treat.

Look at the ways in which Rosalind's family and friends help her to speak up about being Miss Nobody and talk about how you can use positive messages to build your confidence – for example ***'Write Down My Fears' (p202)*** Try this yourselves, thinking of a situation where you feel anxious or afraid - e.g. starting at a new school. As Rosalind does, make a list of all the worrying things, and then balance these with a list of positive things, to build your confidence.



Seb's illness

And I felt Brilliant until Dad came to get me and told me Seb couldn't come home yet. (p228)

How does Seb's illness affect his family? What do they each do to help him and themselves deal with how they are feeling?

Rosalind's blog

Project Meteor had taken its first casualties! (p188)

What are the good results of being Miss Nobody – for Rosalind and for other people? And what are the negatives?

Inspiration

'If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be' (p132)

Talk about this quote from the writer Maya Angelou – and about how Rosalind's Dad says ***'This Family Just Doesn't Do Normal' (p27)*** Rosalind is unsure if this is a good or bad thing – what do you think?

Do you have a saying which inspires or helps you?

Find out more about Maya Angelou and read some of her poetry.
(See More reading ideas)

Dreams - and wishes!

Already I felt like I was in a dream...A good dream that feels warm and safe and magical. (p213)

Talk about good dreams which you have had – and also dreams and wishes about what you would like to do. Have a look at this blog by Tamsin Winter about her next book!

bit.ly/2uqFsbz



More reading ideas

| AUTHOR | TITLE | PUBLISHER | ISBN |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------|----------------|
| Rachel Carter | <i>Ethan's Voice</i> <i>Selective mutism (SM)</i> | Scholastic | 978-1407135502 |
| Cathy Cassidy | <i>Sweet Honey</i> <i>Being safe online</i> | Puffin | 978-0141341637 |
| Sarah Lean | <i>A Dog Called Homeless SM</i> | HarperCollins | 978-0007455034 |
| Piers Torday | <i>The Last Wild SM</i> | Quercus | 978-1780878300 |
| Holly Webb | <i>Sink or Swim – BFFs series</i> <i>Friendship</i> | Stripes | 978-1847152381 |
| Jacqueline Wilson | <i>Bad Girls</i> <i>Bullying</i> | Yearling | 978-0440867623 |
| Jacqueline Wilson | <i>The Butterfly Club</i> <i>Bullying – and Friendship</i> | Corgi | 978-0552569934 |
| And | | | |
| Maya Angelou | <i>Poetry for Young People</i> | Sterling | 978-1454903291 |
| Dominique Demers & Tony Ross | <i>The Mysterious Librarian</i> | Alma Books | 978-1846884153 |
| Margaret Mahy | <i>The Great Piratical Rumbustification & the Librarian and the Robbers</i> | David R Godine | 978-1567921694 |