

Teacher's Notes



Minty Mae Gray and the Strangely Good Day

Written by Fifi Box

Illustrated by Freda Chiu

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

3+-aged readers (grades 1-2)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English
- General capabilities:
 - ACELA1787
 - ACELA1453
 - ACELT1582

THEMES

- Body image
- Confidence
- Self-love
- Acceptance
- Art and beauty

SYNOPSIS

Minty Mae Gray is having a terrible day. Thanks to comments made by a girl in her class, Minty Mae sits in her room believing that there's something wrong with the way she looks.

But when one of her drawings – a pink spotty unicorn – comes to life and asks her to make her look more ordinary, Minty starts to wonder whether being ordinary is such a good thing after all.

With her newly ordinary unicorn friend, Minty dives into the art world where she meets famous painters and their subjects – Vincent Van Gogh, Mona Lisa, Frida Kahlo and Venus. All of them ask Minty to fix something about their body. But to Minty, there's nothing to fix! Through her new friends, Minty starts to realise that looking the same as everyone else won't bring happiness – but celebrating the things that make each of us different might!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fifi Box is one of the most popular radio and television personalities in Australia. She's a host of Fox FM's stellar breakfast show, *Fifi, Fev and Nick*, and a regular guest host on Network Ten's prime-time show, *The Project*. Fifi also appears on *Have You Been Paying Attention?*, and she featured on Seven's *Dancing With the Stars* in 2007. Fifi makes her return to the dance floor in 2021 as part of *Dancing With the Stars All Stars*. On top of her radio and TV work, Fifi has also shared experiences from her own life in a weekly opinion column for News Limited's Sunday magazine.

When her daughter Beatrix Belle was born in April 2013, Fifi featured on the cover of a weekly magazine sans makeup. She has since gone on to become an advocate for women who want to challenge society's extreme beauty standards and embrace their natural beauty. In 2019, Fifi gave birth to her second daughter, Daisy Belle Box. Fifi has won the admiration of women across Australia for speaking candidly about her experience conceiving via IVF and her struggles with Hyperemesis Gravidarum (HG) throughout her pregnancy, along with her experiences as a single mother.

Fifi lives in Melbourne with her two daughters and dog, Lizzie.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Freda Chiu is a Sydney-based freelance illustrator and educator at The University of Technology Sydney. She currently works across a range of applications, including book and editorial illustration, festival graphics and public art. Her clients include Allen and Unwin, Puffin Books UK, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Penguin Random House, Emerging Writers Festival, Google, Sony and Vice. Her illustrations have been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, and she runs regular illustration and comic workshops for kids.

She is inspired by her love of children's picture books, indie comics, horror movies and funny stories. When Freda isn't scribbling away to meet deadlines, she enjoys reading news and books of all sorts to find inspiration. She also takes great pride in her ever-growing children's picture book collection.

THEMES

Self-acceptance and body positivity are at the heart of this book, although these themes might be used as a starting point for a number of discussions around confidence and creativity, and the way our words make other people feel. *Minty Mae Gray and the Surprisingly Good Day* might be used to create a safe space for discussions about:

- Different body types and the fact that all bodies are good bodies
- The way we feel about ourselves, and the way our words make other people feel
- The things we do to express our creativity and unique personality
- The way that we can celebrate ourselves and everyone around us so that everyone feels confident and happy



WRITING STYLE

With its simple rhyme and straightforward language, *Minty Mae Gray and the Surprisingly Good Day* will easily grab the attention of its young readers, and discusses body image and self-confidence using words and phrases that its audience will connect with and understand. Fifi Box uses end rhymes and internal rhymes, so readers might like to underline the rhymes as they find them and discuss the rhyming structure.

In class, you might discuss the kinds of words and phrases the characters use to show negative self-talk and body image. Are they phrases that the readers are familiar with in their own lives? How does it make them feel?

COMPREHENSION

- What made Minty Mae feel bad about herself?
- What things do the characters in the book dislike about themselves?
- What does Minty Mae say to make them feel better?
- When Minty Mae looks in the mirror, what does she see? Is this how she really looks?
- How are Minty Mae's feelings about herself different at the end of the book to the beginning? What has changed to make her feel this way?
- Is it better to be the same as other people, or to be unique? Why?
- Which artworks and artists does Minty Mae meet in the book? What are they famous for?
- What kind of art makes you happy?

WRITING EXERCISE

Think of a time that you felt bad about yourself. Imagine that Minty Mae has arrived at your house to make you feel better – what would she say?

Challenge – try to write your scene in rhyme!

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Frida Chiu's illustration style brings together a number of styles and techniques in a colourful explosion. Her illustrations support the messages of acceptance and unique flair that lie at the heart of the book because the pictures are hand-drawn, creative interpretations of the characters and objects, with some of the colouring going outside of the lines and different shapes and patterns brightening the backgrounds.

Her illustrations offer readers the chance to think about why we say that some things are good or bad, and to experiment with their own creative self-expression.



CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Minty Mae's unicorn friend is beautiful because she created it using her creativity and imagination. Draw your own imaginary friend – make them a combination of all of your flair and favourite things!
- Write a list of the good things that make you unique (and stick it to your mirror just in case you ever need reminding)
- Sometimes we feel good because we have our friends. Write a letter to one of your friends and tell them your favourite thing about them. Draw a picture to accompany it.
- Look up one of the artists in the book and draw a picture of yourself in their style.

FURTHER READING

'All Bodies Are Good Bodies' by Charlotte Barkla

'Love Your Body' by Jessica Sanders

