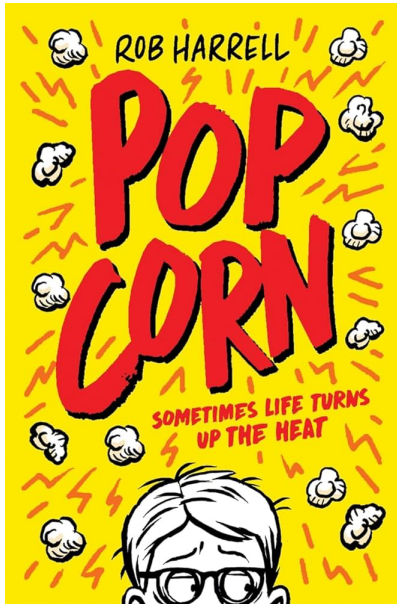


**Popcorn by Rob Harrell: Educational Resource Pack - 4x Lesson Plans and Ideas**

**Suitable for: Ages 11+ (Key Stage 3)**



**Explore themes of:**

- ✓ **Worrying and anxiety:** Explore the challenges of managing anxiety through Andrew's experiences. Understand how everyday struggles can feel overwhelming and learn strategies for finding calm and managing stress effectively.
- ✓ **Art as emotional expression:** Learn how art can be a powerful tool for showing emotions. Through Andrew's use of drawing and creativity, students will see how visual art can communicate feelings that are difficult to articulate with words.
- ✓ **Alzheimer's disease:** Raise awareness about Alzheimer's through Andrew's experiences with his grandmother. Highlight the challenges of memory loss, the importance of empathy and the need for greater support for those affected.
- ✓ **Resilience:** Investigate how Andrew's resilience helps him tackle daily challenges. Discover how determination, perseverance and adaptability are key to overcoming obstacles, even when the world seems against you.

**Subjects:** • English • Art and Design • PSHE

**ABOUT THE BOOK**

The beloved author of *Wink* is back with a hilarious and moving story about coping with anxiety on a day when everything is going wrong...

*Andrew's just trying to get through school photo day with one aim: a photo of him which his mum will like. But today of all days, the world seems out to get him.*

*There's a bully, the science experiment gone wrong, scary news about his grandmother, and someone else's juice snot (don't ask). Andrew struggles with anxiety, and the little kernel of worry in his stomach is getting hotter and hotter... Can he make it through the day without popping?*

**A heartfelt and laugh-out-loud-funny story about letting go of control and accepting help, interspersed with Rob Harrell's amazing spot art and comic panels that depict the real, difficult feelings of anxiety and OCD, as well as real tips for coping.**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR - ROB HARRELL**

Rob Harrell is the author/illustrator of *Wink* and the *Batpig* series, created the *Life of Zarf* series, the graphic novel *Monster on the Hill*, and also writes and draws the long-running daily comic strip *Adam@Home*, which appears in more than 140 papers worldwide. He created and drew the internationally syndicated comic strip *Big Top* until 2007. He lives with his pup in Indiana.



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#### **LESSON 2:**

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#### **LESSON 3:**

**EXTRACT 3: TENSE KID (from CHAPTER 2 - JONESY: pages 30-32 AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

ACTIVITY 3: ANXIETY THROUGH ART

ACTIVITY SHEET 3: CREATE YOUR COMIC CHARACTER

Objectives: Learn more about anxiety and its effects on mental and emotional well-being; explore and express their personal experiences with anxiety through the creation of a comic-style character.

#### **LESSON 4:**

**EXTRACT 4A: A MISERABLE START (from CHAPTER 5 - AFTER MATH: pages 60-62);**

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ACTIVITY 4: A DAY OF DISASTERS

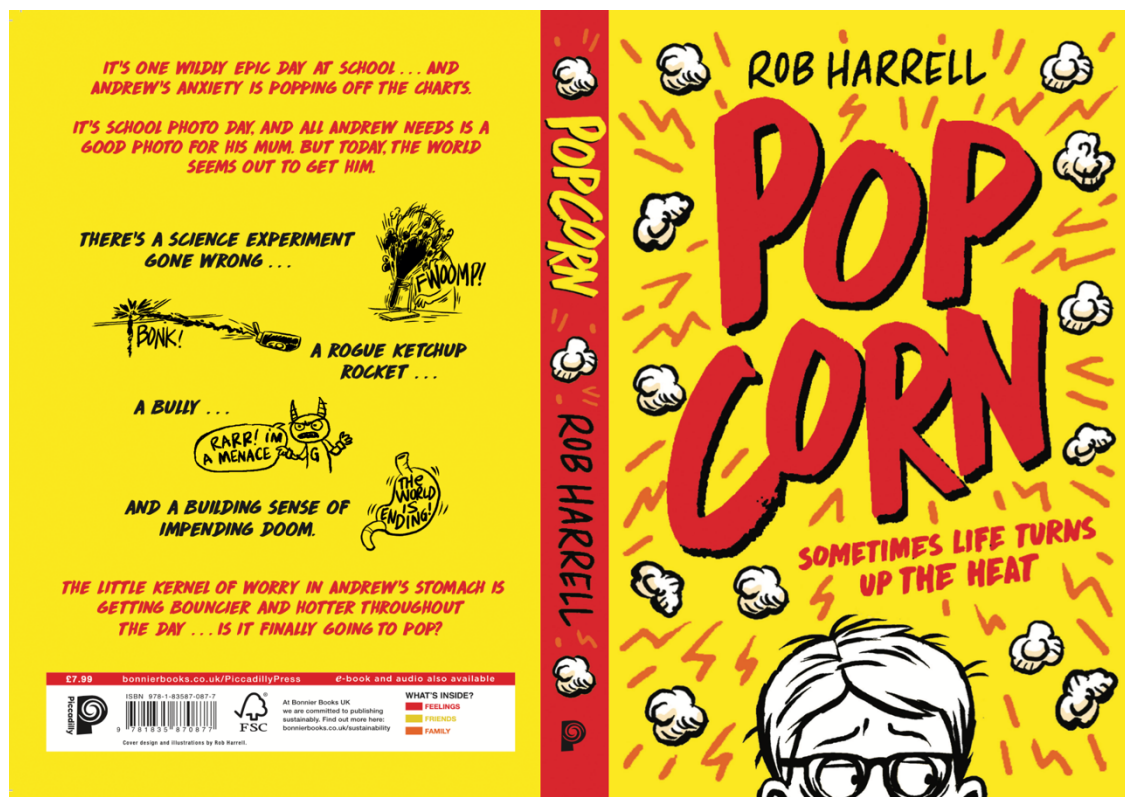
ACTIVITY SHEET 4: PLOT PLANNER

Objectives: Reflect on and recognise examples of resilience in life situations and stories; write a short story about a day when everything goes wrong for a fictional character, highlighting their resilience.



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND INNOVATIVE IDEAS  
NATIONAL CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES (KEY STAGE 3)

PRE-READING: COVER, BLURB AND INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Look closely at the front cover of the book. What do you think is the most interesting part of the cover?
2. Who wrote this book? Have you read any of their other books? If so, what did you think of them?  
Did you know they also illustrated and designed the cover of Popcorn?
3. Does the cover of 'Popcorn' make you want to read the book? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think the book is called 'Popcorn'? What might the title suggest about the story?
  5. What do you think the tagline "Sometimes life turns up the heat" means?  
How might it relate to what happens in the story?
  6. The cover shows popcorn popping around the boy's head.  
What do you think this image could represent about his thoughts or feelings?
  7. How would you describe Andrew, the boy you see on the cover?  
Choose three adjectives and explain what clues from the cover and the blurb led you to your choices.
  8. Read the blurb. How does it make you feel about the story?  
Does it seem like the story will be funny, serious or a mix of both?
  9. What do you think could happen to Andrew in the story?  
How might he change and what might he discover about himself or his anxiety by the end?
10. Have you ever had a day where everything seemed to go wrong, like Andrew's?  
How did you feel and what did you do to get through it?

**LESSON 1****EXTRACT 1A: MY GRANDMOTHER G****(from CHAPTER 1 - FINAL PREPARATIONS: pages 3 and 12)**

*My grandmother, G, shuffles into the room in her neon-pink housecoat. She's been living with us for the past year and a half or so. She stops in the middle of the kitchen and looks around, confused. Her graying hair looks like she got in a fight with her pillows.*

*There's a knock on the apartment door as it swings open. "Halloooooo?" It's my best friend, Jonesy, and her mom, Mika (my mom's best friend). They step in as my mom shushes Jonesy.*

*"Shh shh shh. I'm hoping she's going back to sleep." Meaning G.*

*Mika has a stack of Peoples and Us Weeklys under her arm. She's going to watch G for the day while my mom goes to work. (I should have said: My grandma has Alzheimer's disease and it's gotten pretty bad, pretty fast—some days she forgets who we are or why she lives here. And she kind of likes to wander. That's part of why my mom needs this new big job—so we can get her more help.)*

**EXTRACT 1B: FADING AWAY****(from CHAPTER 1.5: pages 15-22)**

*Hold on.*

*I feel like I brushed over the whole "my grandma has Alzheimer's" thing—and it's something I need to go into. Because it's pretty awful.*

*So, this is Chapter 1.5, okay. My book, my rules. G—I've always called her G 'cause she liked that "better than Grandma or Grammy or Gee Goo"—has been a gigantic part of my life for as long as I can remember, and lately she's just sort of . . . fading away.*

*I mean, she's still there, right in front of us, but a lot of the things that made her who she was are drifting away.*

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Based on the descriptions in both extracts, what can we learn about G? What is her relationship to Andrew? How long has she been living with him? Why might she be living with his family?
2. Can you describe in your own words what it means if someone looks like they've "gotten into a fight with their pillows"?
3. In the first extract, how do G's actions, such as being confused or wandering, reveal what she is going through? What could these behaviours suggest about the challenges she is facing?
4. Andrew explains that G has Alzheimer's. Are you aware of what Alzheimer's disease is? Have you ever known someone who has experienced it?
5. Why does Andrew think his mom needs the new job so much? In what ways might this new job potentially improve the care G receives and make a difference in the family's daily life?
6. What is the name of Andrew's best friend and what is your first impression of her?
7. Who is Mika? How does her involvement show the support system that has been set up for G?
8. Why does Andrew call his grandmother "G"? What names do you use for your grandparents?
9. What does Andrew's description of G as "fading away" tell us about how Alzheimer's affects a person's sense of who they are?
10. How do you think Andrew feels about what is happening with G? What clues in the text help you understand his emotions? Do you think he is worried or perhaps overwhelmed by the situation?



### ACTIVITY 1: RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT ALZHEIMER'S

- Start by sharing the extracts with the students, including reading Chapter 1.5 together. This provides Andrew's personal perspective on his grandmother's experiences with Alzheimer's disease.
- After this, discuss the character of G from the book. Explore her role in the story, her behaviour and interactions and how her illness is portrayed through the text.
- Ask students if they are aware of Alzheimer's disease and assess their level of understanding. Some might have direct experience with the condition, while others may only have heard about it.
- Explain that Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurological disorder (a type of illness affecting the brain and nervous system) that causes brain cells to degenerate (break down) and die, leading to a continuous decline in cognitive functions (mental abilities such as memory and thinking).
  - Describe some of the key symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, including:
    - Memory Loss: Forgetting recent events or new information.
    - Confusion: Getting lost or forgetting where they are and who others are.
    - Communication Issues: Trouble finding the right words or understanding others.
    - Behaviour Changes: Mood swings, shifts in personality, and difficulties with daily tasks.
- Students could use the activity sheet to identify and find examples from the two extracts, Chapter 1.5 or the rest of the book where G's behaviour shows some of the key symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.
- Highlight that there are varying stages of the disease, that the exact cause isn't fully known and that doctors diagnose it through memory tests, brain scans and asking about the person's medical history.
- Refer back to the book and point out how Alzheimer's makes it hard for people to do everyday activities, manage their personal lives and it also affects their relationships with family and friends.
- Explain that, while there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease at present, treatments and ongoing care can help manage symptoms. Emphasise that Alzheimer's affects not only the person with the disease but also their loved ones, and requires their patience and support as they navigate its challenges.
- Allocate some time afterwards to answer any questions that students may have and remind them that it is important to approach discussions about Alzheimer's with sensitivity and respect.
- Tell students that, now that they have a better understanding of Alzheimer's disease, it's time for them to spread this knowledge and use it to help educate their peers by creating an awareness campaign.
- Outline the various formats students can use. Options could include creating posters, designing presentations, writing reports, developing social media content and more.
- Divide students into small groups or pairs to encourage collaboration and allow time for them to create their campaign materials. Provide necessary supplies or digital tools, depending on their chosen format.
- Once finished, consider ways to extend the campaign beyond the classroom, such as putting posters in shared spaces, presenting to peers or collaborating with organisations like the Alzheimer's Society.

## ACTIVITY SHEET 1: SPOTTING SYMPTOMS IN THE STORY

### Instructions:

Read the two extracts and Chapter 1.5 of the book carefully.  
Find examples of G's behaviour that correspond to each symptom of Alzheimer's disease listed below.  
Match each symptom with a specific example from the text by writing the example in the space provided.

### Memory Loss

Example from the text: " \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ "

### Confusion

Example from the text: " \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ "

### Communication Issues

Example from the text: " \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ "

### Behaviour Changes

Example from the text: " \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ "

## LESSON 2

### **EXTRACT 2A: REMEMBER YOU FOREVER**

**(from CHAPTER 1 - FINAL PREPARATIONS: pages 4-5)**

*“Doesn’t Andrew look nice, Mom? You always said looking nice for school photos was super important. It’s Picture Day!”*

*At the words Picture Day, my grandmother’s face lights up a bit—like the old G I used to know. She holds up a finger and croaks a quiet “Oh, yes, yes, yes.” Then she hurries (as much as she can) out of the room.*

*That’s the most excitement we’ve seen from G in weeks. “You can’t take the teacher out of the lady,” my mom says. “She used to get so worked up over school photos. Said ‘Those photos are how people will remember you forever.’ She wasn’t completely wrong, either. Somebody I went to school with friend-requested me the other day. I had no idea who she was until I got out my yearbook, and BOOM. Her school photo brought it all back.”*

### **EXTRACT 2B: WHOLE GLORIOUS MESS**

**(from CHAPTER 21 - PICTURE TIME: pages 268-269)**

*The photographer takes his last photo of Danny, turns, and calls out. “Next!”*

*Jonesy smiles and pushes me forward. I step into the well-lit area.*

*The photographer sees me, and his face drops. He looks me up and down—the whole glorious mess.*

*I pull my shoulders back. “You know what? I’ve never been more sure of anything. Let’s do this.”*

*He nods his head, then chuckles and steps out of the way. “Well, if you say so. Step right up. Hop on that stool.” I do. After giving him my name and confirming the spelling, he heads behind the camera. He gets a good look at me through the lens and pokes his head back up.*

*“You’re sure?”*

*“Absolutely.”*

*“You, um . . . you want a comb?”*

*“Nope. As is.” This gets a laugh from the photographer and some of the students.*

*He makes some final adjustments. “Well, this is one for the books.”*

*You have no idea, I think.*

*Then I throw my shoulders back and give the biggest, goofiest grin I can manage without my face hurting too bad.*

*I take a deep breath.*

*And then another.*

*And then the camera clicks.*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

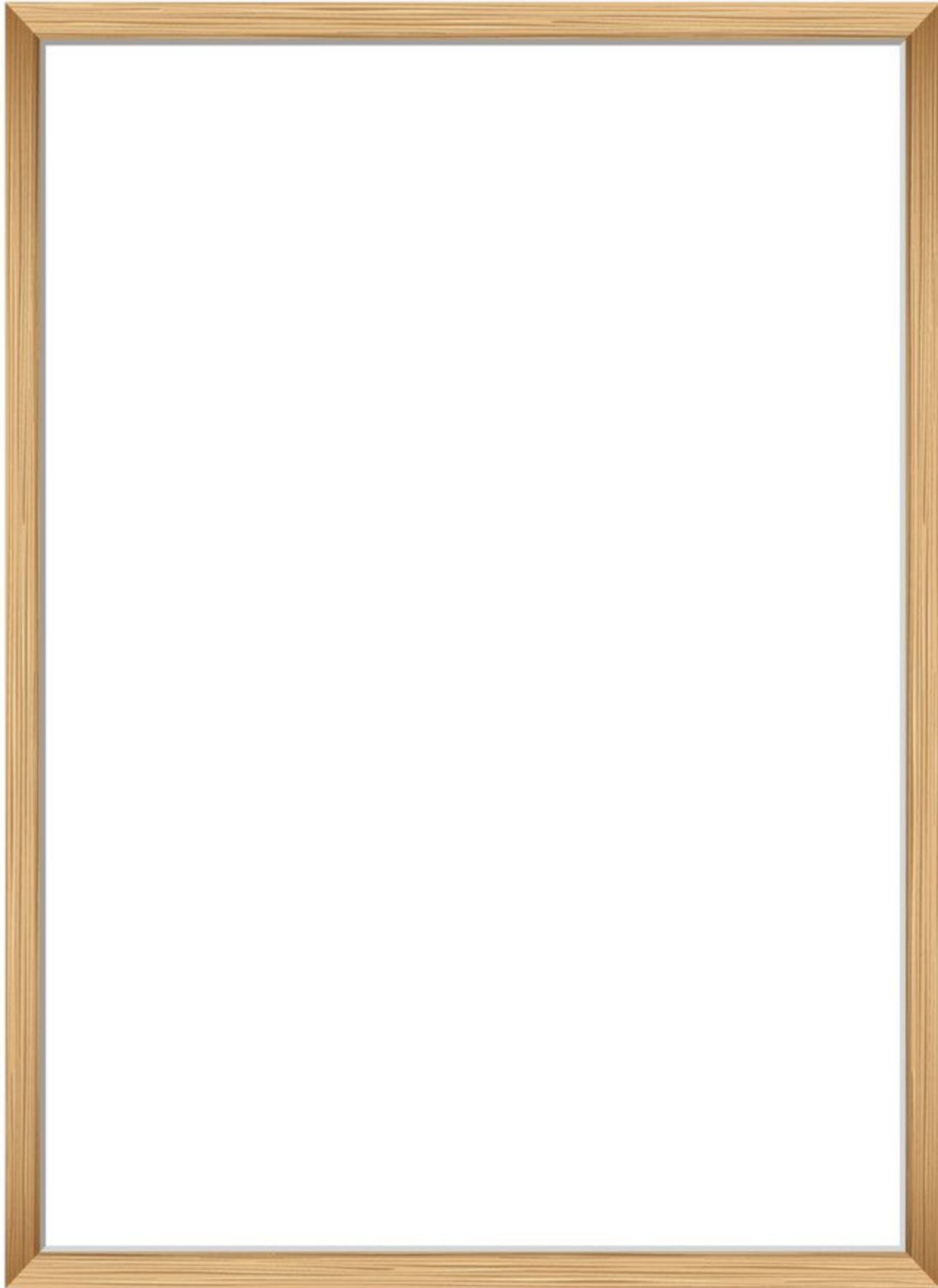
1. What do you think happens on Picture Day?
2. Why does Andrew’s grandmother’s face light up when she hears ‘Picture Day’?
3. When Andrew’s mom says, “You can’t take the teacher out of the lady,” what does she mean?
4. Picture Day is a long-standing school tradition. Why is it such a memorable event?
5. Can school photos really help us remember people forever? Why or why not?
6. With so many photos shared on social media, do school photos still matter as much as before?
7. Have you looked at old childhood photos and seen how much you’ve grown? What did you notice?
8. In the second extract, how does the photographer react to Andrew’s appearance?
9. Andrew also calls himself a ‘whole glorious mess’ when having his photo taken. How has his attitude developed from the beginning of the story, when looking nice was the goal?
10. How do you think Andrew’s mom and grandmother will react when they see his photo? Do you think they’ll be proud that he stayed positive and took the photo despite his chaotic day?

## ACTIVITY 2: ALTERNATIVE AND AUTHENTIC

- To make this lesson more engaging and personal, start by sharing an old school photo of yourself with the students and if possible, also display some of their own past school photos.
- If that isn't feasible, begin by discussing school photos and their role as personal records or milestones. Explain how these photos help us remember and reflect on different stages of life, such as the transition from primary to secondary school or the growth and changes that occur from year to year.
- Talk about the experience of Picture Day in your school. Invite students to share their favourite and least favourite aspects of having their photos taken and how they feel about presenting themselves with a polished appearance and pose in front of the camera.
- Depending on the age of the students, you could also discuss additional elements of school photos, such as the use of a neutral background and the use of professional cameras, lighting and editing, and how these factors contribute to making all school photos and their subjects look similar.
- Encourage students to consider whether a perfect appearance really represents who we are or if embracing a bit of messiness, like Andrew does after his dramatic day, might be more authentic.
  - Discuss the second extract from the book, focusing on Andrew's interaction with the photographer and his description of himself as a 'whole glorious mess'. Ask students to imagine Andrew's appearance at that moment.
- Compare their descriptions with the illustration of Andrew's actual school photo on page 270 of the book, featuring broken glasses, a ripped collar, messy hair and ketchup stains all over him.
  - Describe how Andrew's photo stands out from a usual school photo because it is true-to-life in showing what happened to him on that day and why it might be a memorable talking point for years to come between him and his family.
- As a fun activity, have students use the activity sheet with a frame template to create their own 'alternative' or 'authentic' school photo of how they would realistically look on a typical school day.
  - Encourage them to consider the following:
    - What kind of facial expression or pose would you have?
    - How would you be wearing your uniform?
    - Might you have messy hair, ripped clothes or food stains on you like Andrew?
  - Would your photo look different if it was taken at the end of a long school day compared to first thing in the morning?
- Following this, students could share their drawings with the class or in small groups. You could also set up a classroom gallery to display the students' alternative school photos to not only celebrate their creativity but also provide a visual representation of the diversity and individuality within the class.
- As an extension, students could use digital tools or apps to create a digital version of their alternative/authentic school photo, incorporating their design ideas.



**ACTIVITY SHEET 2: PERSONALISE YOUR SCHOOL PHOTO**



### LESSON 3

#### **EXTRACT 3: TENSE KID**

(from CHAPTER 2 - JONESY: pages 30-32)

*I kind of have an issue with worrying. Stressing. Obsessing. Whatever you want to call it. Like sometimes I can lock up or spin out over a simple English assignment, or something stupid. One time, a few years ago, I just about came unglued in an arcade when I couldn't get a pair of SpongeBob sunglasses in one of those claw games.*

*Not real proud of that.*

*I also have the tapping thing. I have a few tics—I guess that's what you'd call them. Like, tapping things five times. And I absolutely have to hit the pad of the finger only. If any fingernail touches the surface I'm tapping—or I think it might have—I start the five taps over or . . . I don't know what. I just do it.*

*Sometimes, I have to turn the light on and off five times, or until it feels right. And I check and recheck that the door is locked. I'll be all the way down the block and have to go back and all the way upstairs to double-check the apartment door. It's super annoying, but it feels like I don't have a choice. Or I'll have to shut my locker a few times until the chunk of closing it sounds just right. It feels like if I don't do it, something awful will happen. There's a little voice in my head that just won't shut up until I do it right. I know it makes no sense, but I can't get myself to stop. So, I just do it. It's easier than freaking out about it all day.*

*My mom even took me to a therapist a few times for this stuff—Dr. Cain—but I still do it. She explained it some and gave me some breathing exercises and a sketchbook to "draw my feelings" in and stuff that kinda sorta maybe helped? Results may vary.*

*Here's one of the first drawings I did. He's like my stand-in. I call him Tense Kid. He's kind of freaky-looking with his big eyes, but he sort of captures what I feel like at times:*



*I'll show some more of my sketches and cartoons—I call 'em the Anxiety Files—as we go.  
I'm no artist, but I have gotten better.*

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. The narrator (Andrew) uses the words worrying, stressing and obsessing. In your opinion, do you think these words all mean the same thing or do they describe slightly different feelings?
2. What happened to Andrew at the arcade with the SpongeBob sunglasses? How did it affect him?
3. He says that he taps frequently and describes this as a tic. Do you know what a tic is? (*A tic is a repetitive, involuntary movement or sound that a person makes, often when they are feeling stressed or anxious.*)
4. Besides tapping, what other methods does Andrew use to calm himself when he feels stressed?
5. How does the little voice in Andrew's head influence his behaviour?
6. What specific techniques or tools has Dr. Cain, Andrew's therapist, recommended for managing his anxiety?
7. Have you ever felt so overwhelmed by something in a way similar to Andrew?
8. Look at the drawing of 'Tense Kid', Andrew's first sketch. Choose three words that describe how you think Andrew feels based on the appearance of the drawing.
9. Do you think drawing and creating art, like Andrew's "Anxiety Files", can help with dealing with anxiety? Why?
10. What do you do when you face a stressful situation? How do you manage or cope with it?

### ACTIVITY 3: ANXIETY THROUGH ART

- Write ANXIETY on the board. Ask students what it means to them and record their range of responses around the word. Review their answers as a class and highlight any common themes or ideas.
  - Explain that anxiety is a normal emotional response to stress or perceived threats and it can affect anyone, regardless of age. It often involves feelings of worry, nervousness or fear and can show itself in many ways such as a racing heartbeat, sweating or a feeling of being easily overwhelmed.
- Describe some common situations where people might feel anxious (e.g. exams, social situations, public speaking). Then, have students pair up and share their personal experiences of feeling anxious.
- Afterwards, gather as a class to discuss the shared experiences. Consider sharing your own experiences with anxiety to show that adults also face similar feelings, as mentioned earlier.
- Next, read the provided extract and explore the physical manifestations of Andrew's anxiety. Discuss how his anxiety presents itself through behaviours such as worrying, stressing, obsessing, tapping a specific number of times, repeatedly turning the light on and off and constantly rechecking things.
- Refer back to the book and how its main message highlights the ways in which the main character, Andrew, manages his anxiety. Talk about how he does this through therapy with Dr. Cain and the methods that she provides, such as breathing techniques and using a sketchbook.
- Display the image from the provided extract of Tense Kid, the first drawing Andrew created in his sketchbook, on the board. Engage the class in a discussion about how the drawing reflects Andrew's feelings. Ask them how they interpret the artwork and what emotions or thoughts it might represent.
  - Discuss that just like Andrew uses his sketchbook to help manage his anxiety, art can be a powerful tool for expressing and dealing with emotions and creative activities like drawing, painting or writing can serve as a form of therapy by providing an outlet for feelings and helping to process emotions.
  - Show examples of different types of art used for emotional expression and therapy. This could include simple drawings, doodles or even abstract art. Explain how these methods can help people reflect on their emotions and gain insights into their feelings.
- Provide students with either the provided activity sheet or a blank piece of paper and drawing materials. Ask them to create a drawing or doodle that represents how they feel when they are anxious.
- Allow students sufficient time to work on their drawings. Ensure they understand there's no right or wrong way to express their feelings; it's all about personal expression. Once they've finished, invite them to share their drawings with the class if they feel comfortable.
  - Ensure students know that they can speak with you, another trusted adult or a counsellor if they need further support or want to talk more about their feelings.
  - To extend this activity, students could develop their character into a full comic strip, using a series of panels to illustrate their experiences and emotions.

### ACTIVITY SHEET 3: CREATE YOUR COMIC CHARACTER

Design a comic book-style character to represent how you feel when you are anxious.

Use the prompts below to guide your creation:

- What does your character look like when they're anxious?
- What kind of facial expressions or body language might they have?
- How does your character's anxiety show through their actions or surroundings?
- What colours or symbols can you use to express your character's feelings of worry?
- Does your character have any special traits or powers that relate to their anxiety?

Name of character: \_\_\_\_\_

(Use the space below to draw your comic character)



## LESSON 4

### EXTRACT 4A: A MISERABLE START (from CHAPTER 5 - AFTER MATH: pages 60-62)

*I dart one way and he pulls the other and I hear a ripping sound. I feel it, too, as the collar rug-burns my neck. Chokes me. But I keep pulling. Then Gene lets go and my sudden freedom causes me to stumble down the hall. The only thing that prevents me from going all the way down is the side of the mathlete trophy case hanging on the wall. The top of my head connects hard with the solid piece of wood, making a big hollow THONK!*

*I grab my head, wincing—that really hurt—and turn to see Ms. Wilson grabbing Gene by the arm. He’s staring back at me with the creepiest grin ever on his face.*

*“You’re dead.”*

*He only mouths it, but I get the message loud and clear. Then he’s pulled off into the thinning hallway crowd. Kids are staring, both at me and at Gene as he’s pulled away.*

*My heart is pounding so hard, I can feel my body shaking. I’m mad and upset and embarrassed all at once. I want to scream, but I don’t. I guess I’m more of a shove-it-down-deep-inside kid.*

*I turn around to look at my reflection in the trophy case glass. It’s hard TO see much, but it looks like the collar of my (brand-new) shirt is all kinds of messed up. I’m furious at Gene, and I reeeeeeally wish everyone and their brother hadn’t seen that happen—but then I feel a twinge in my stomach thinking of my mom. She’ll be so upset. Or disappointed, or whatever.*

*And none of those kids in G’s pile of photos had ripped clothes.*

*I turn away, gently feeling the top of my head to see if there’s a lump, thinking this day is off to a miserable start.*

### EXTRACT 4B: THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD DAY (from CHAPTER 12 - THE MENDED COLLAR: pages 155-156)

*Looking in the mirror at the shaking, black-eyed wet rat I’ve become, all I can think of is that picture book about that poor kid’s terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.*

*I feel you, Alexander.*

*I use my fingers to try and comb my hair, but it isn’t behaving. It’s sticking out all over. I put my shirt back on and head for the nurse’s office. I keep my head down in the halls, hoping I’m invisible.*

*Nurse Finnegan takes one look at my messed-up, wet-hair-dripped-on shirt and her hand goes to her chest. “What happened now?” She has my shirt in her lap and she’s fiddling with the collar.*

*I look over at the small mirror on the wall. “I got ketchup’d.”*

*“Seriously?” She stares for a second. “You aren’t doing this on purpose, right? It isn’t some viral online Picture Day Challenge or something?”*

*I sit down on a chair in the corner. “It is not.”*

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What has happened to Andrew in these extracts?
2. Find two phrases that describe how Andrew’s body shows he is feeling. (e.g. ‘My heart is pounding so hard’, ‘I can feel my body shaking’)
3. He says he feels a twinge in his stomach when he thinks about his mom. What does a twinge feel like?
4. Which character from a picture book does Andrew relate to during his bad day?
5. Who does Andrew go and see about the day he is having? How might Nurse Finnegan help him?
6. When you have a bad day, do you think it’s because of bad luck or because of the choices you’ve made?
7. Can you think of a time when you had a bad day? What happened and how did you handle it?
8. What do you do to feel better when you’re having a bad day?
9. Do you think being an optimist (someone who looks on the bright side) or a pessimist (someone who expects the worst) changes how you deal with a bad day?
10. Have you ever learned something about yourself from having a bad day? Can it teach you anything useful?

#### ACTIVITY 4: A DAY OF DISASTERS

- Start with a discussion on whether students have ever experienced a day when it felt like everything was going wrong or if they've had a particularly bad day. Ask them to share some funny events and memorable anecdotes from their own lives.
- They might recall moments like a series of mishaps or unexpected challenges that turned into stories or valuable lessons. Encourage them to reflect on how these experiences made them feel and how they managed to navigate through the difficulties.
- Read the two provided extracts from the story to show some of the many setbacks faced by the main character, Andrew.
- Highlight specific examples from the text where Andrew's reactions or solutions add a humorous touch, such as when Nurse Finnegan mistakenly believes his mishaps are part of a viral prank.
- Talk about the concept of resilience and discuss how, despite the numerous challenges Andrew faces in the book, he continues to persevere, manages his anxiety and maintains a mostly positive attitude.
- Ask students whether they think they would keep going like Andrew does, after the science experiment goes wrong, the rogue ketchup rocket and the encounters with the bully, or if they would feel too overwhelmed and give up.
- Following this, tell them that they are going to write a short story about a fictional character who faces one problem after another throughout a single day, feeling as though the world is against them, inspired by the picture book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst and illustrated by Ray Cruz, which Andrew references in one of the extracts.
- Help guide students to start by creating their fictional character. Encourage them to think about the character's personality, strengths and weaknesses. How will these affect how their character handles the series of problems they face?
  - Lead a brainstorming session where they list the types of problems their character might face during the day. Encourage creativity while ensuring they include some realistic scenarios. Next, have students outline their story, mapping out the progression of events using the provided activity sheet.
- Discuss how resilience can play a role in their story. Ask students to think about how their character will respond to each problem—will they keep trying, find creative solutions or use humour to cope? How does the character's resilience help them get through the day?
- Give them time to write their short story, focusing on their character's feelings with each problem and how they eventually find a way to keep going, even when it feels like everything is against them.
- Once they have completed their stories, encourage students to share their work with the class or in small groups. This can be followed by a discussion on the different ways their characters handled the challenges and a reflection on what they learned about resilience and storytelling through this activity.



## ACTIVITY SHEET 4: PLOT PLANNER

### Story Outline

Instructions: Outline your story by mapping out how the day will progress for your character.  
Use the prompts below to structure your story.

#### **Introduction and Beginning of the Day**

Describe your character and the first problem they face:

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#### **Middle of the Day**

Write about two more problems they have as the day progresses:

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#### **End of the Day and Resolution**

Show how they solve the final problem and end their day:

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## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES AND INNOVATIVE IDEAS

- **Author Study and Q&A Session:** Organise an in-person or virtual Q&A session with the author/illustrator of the book, Rob Harrell, if possible. Have students prepare insightful questions to find out about his inspiration for the book and creative process. This opportunity allows students to engage directly, providing them with valuable insights into his artistic journey and the making of the book.
- **Character Swap:** Since the story is told from Andrew's perspective, students select another character from the book and write a recount of events from that character's viewpoint. This helps them to understand the broader context of the story and the different ways people experience the same events.
- **Jonesy's Decision Diary:** Write diary entries from Jonesy's perspective about her feelings and challenges in deciding to stop playing competitive basketball. They should include her thoughts, concerns, and the process of finding the courage to talk to her dad, as well as her reflections on how this decision might impact her identity and relationships with friends and teammates.
- **Anti-Bullying Pledge:** Discuss the bullying Andrew experiences from Gene and examine possible reasons for his behaviour. After the discussion, students create and sign an Anti-Bullying Pledge that outlines their commitment to preventing and addressing bullying. Display the signed pledges in the classroom or school to reinforce the anti-bullying message and promote a supportive environment.
- **Character Collage – Inside vs. Outside:** Students create a two-part collage of a character from the book, depicting how they appear to others on the outside and how they feel on the inside, especially in relation to anxiety. This activity helps students explore the difference between what people show and what they might actually be experiencing internally.
- **Classroom Corner:** As a class, design a corner in the classroom where students can go when they need a moment to de-stress. They can contribute ideas for the space, such as comfortable seating, calming colours or mindfulness tools like stress balls and calming jars.
- **Relaxation Workshop:** Participate in a relaxation workshop where students learn and practice techniques mentioned in the book. This could include guided meditation and breathing exercises. After, they could journal about how these made them feel and how they might apply them in real life.
- **Kernel Scale:** Encourage students to develop their own Kernel Scale, a personalised chart, to track their feelings throughout the day. They can design the scale with creative visuals representing different levels of stress or calmness and as they go about their day, they can mark where they are on the scale during different activities or situations, reflecting on what causes shifts in their mood. This not only helps them monitor their feelings but also encourages emotional management.
- **Mindfulness Mandalas:** Create Mindfulness Mandalas, which are geometric patterns and designs that radiate from a central point. Mandalas are often used in mindfulness and meditation practices to help focus the mind. This activity encourages relaxation and self-expression through art.
- **Positivity Jar:** Collectively contribute to a Positivity Jar by writing down things you're thankful for or positive thoughts on slips of paper. These can be related to themes in the book, such as friendship, resilience or small victories. The jar serves as a resource for students to read from whenever they need a boost or if they're having a bad day.



## NATIONAL CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES (KEY STAGE 3)

### **English**

#### **Reading**

Pupils should be taught to:

- develop an appreciation and love of reading, and read increasingly challenging material independently through:
  - reading a wide range of fiction and non-fiction, including in particular whole books, short stories, poems and plays with a wide coverage of genres, historical periods, forms and authors.
    - understand increasingly challenging texts through:
      - making inferences and referring to evidence in the text
        - read critically through:
          - studying setting, plot, and characterisation, and the effects of these

#### **Writing**

Pupils should be taught to:

- write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
  - writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including:
    - stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing
  - summarising and organising material, and supporting ideas and arguments with any necessary factual detail

#### **Grammar and vocabulary**

Pupils should be taught to:

- consolidate and build on their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary through:
  - studying the effectiveness and impact of the grammatical features of the texts they read drawing on new vocabulary and grammatical constructions from their reading and listening, and using these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects

#### **Spoken language**

Pupils should be taught to:

- speak confidently and effectively, including through:
  - giving short speeches and presentations, expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point
  - participating in formal debates and structured discussions, summarising and/or building on what has been said

#### **Art and design**

Pupils should be taught to:

- to use a range of techniques to record their observations in sketchbooks, journals and other media as a basis for exploring their ideas

### **PSHE (taken from Programme of Study for PSHE education: KS1-5)**

Pupils learn:

#### **Mental health and emotional wellbeing**

- H6. how to identify and articulate a range of emotions accurately and sensitively, using appropriate vocabulary
  - H7. the characteristics of mental and emotional health and strategies for managing these
- H9. strategies to understand and build resilience, as well as how to respond to disappointments and setbacks