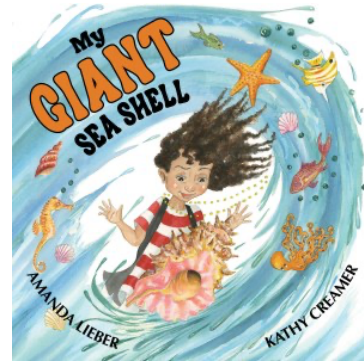


My GIANT Sea Shell

Written by Amanda Lieber
Illustrated by Kathy Creamer

ISBN: 978-0-6489641-9-3 (hardback)
First published 2023
Little Pink dog Books
Recommended for ages 4+



Summary

Through the eyes of a child, we are taken on a journey as she watches her mother disappear through depression and tries to understand her mother's transformation from what she once was to where she is now, and how to help get her back and find her happiness again. With the strength of love, encouragement and never giving up hope, she can help her mother rise above her unseen pain. The thoughtful narrative and beautiful illustrations combine to sensitively explore the idea of change within a person who is dealing with depression. This story is about hope and the strength of family love. This sensitive story explores the magical relationship between a mother and daughter and the transformation of this relationship as the mother suffers through depression. Her daughter comes up with solutions on how to get her 'laughing, cuddling mummy back' whilst trying to understand and make sense of her mother's sadness.

Teacher information

Mental illness is a part of life. Convey to the students that it is a challenge and not a disorder. Having a mental illness does not mean the person will always be ill. It's important to emphasise that depression is not the person's fault. The aim of the teaching and learning activities is to reduce fear and leave students with a sense of hope. These notes were prepared by an educator, not a health professional. Therefore, it is important to seek information and advice from suitable sources. The activities are applicable for Years 1 to 4 but can be adjusted for Foundation. Please select those most suitable for your stage.

Themes

Transformation, mental health, depression, family, love, encouragement and hope.

Australian curriculum links

Health and physical education

Foundation

Identify and describe emotional responses people may experience in different situations ([ACPPS005](#))

Year 1 and 2

Identify how different situations influence emotional responses ([AC9HP2P03](#))
Identify and practise emotional responses that account for own and others' feelings ([ACPPS020](#))

Year 3 and 4

Investigate how emotional responses vary in depth and strength ([ACPPS038](#))

English

Year 1

Explore different ways of expressing emotions, including verbal, visual, body language and facial expressions ([ACELA1787](#))

Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students' own experiences ([ACELT1582](#))

Engage in conversations and discussions, using active listening behaviours, showing interest, and contributing ideas, information and questions ([ACELY1656](#))

Year 2

Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning and begin to analyse texts by drawing on growing knowledge of context, language and visual features and print and multimodal text structures ([ACELY1670](#))

Year 3

Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts, and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative ([ACELT1599](#))

Discuss the nature and effects of some language devices used to enhance meaning and shape the reader's reaction, including rhythm and onomatopoeia in poetry and prose ([ACELT1600](#))

Year 4

Use metalanguage to describe the effects of ideas, text structures and language features of literary texts ([ACELT1604](#))

Before reading

Identifying emotions

1. Provide emoji cards showing a range of emotions. In small groups, students sort the cards into 'happy' and 'not happy'.
2. Share responses with the class and give specific names to the emotions in each category, such as excited, surprised, amused, sparkling, laughing, tired, angry, sad, anxious, depressed, grumpy or scared.
3. Introduce and unpack the term 'depression'. Which emojis might show depression? Focus on inward feelings of depression, such as grumpy, down, miserable and anxious.
4. Ask students to share activities that they enjoy and times when they have had fun, including with their family. Explain that depression can have outward signs such as an ongoing loss of interest or pleasure and enjoyment of fun activities.

While reading

Suggestions for discussion

1. Look at the cover title, images and endpapers. Where will the story be set? Who is the main character? How did the cover and endpapers help you work this out?
2. Which characters do we meet on the first page? Have you any other ideas about where the story could take you?
3. Read the book, showing the illustrations.
4. From whose point of view is the story written? As you read, identify words that indicate first person: 'I', 'me', 'my', 'mine' and inclusive words 'we', 'our' and 'us'.
5. For each double-page spread, ask students to identify the characters (including the dog) and their emotions using facial expressions. What are they doing on each page? How is this connected or not connected to the way they feel?
6. Look for changes as the story develops. For example, Mummy, the girl and the dog are all happy and interested in the imaginary worlds of the stories on the first few pages. When and how does the mood change?

7. How do the words and illustrations show us this change on the page where Dad and the girl come home from school?
8. At the kitchen table, Dad's and the girl's half is in colour, but Mummy's half is in shades of grey. What is this showing us about their emotions?
9. Why do you think the dog stays with Mum in the grey world? How does the dog feel?
10. The dog's collar stays red. What could be the meaning behind this use of colour? (We will explore this more later.)
11. The main character is the girl, but we don't know her name. Why do you think the author did not tell us her name? What other characters' names don't we know?
12. As the story continues, what has Mummy stopped doing? What does she still do? What do you think she feels? How can you tell?
13. How does Daddy explain what's wrong with Mummy, and what advice does he give about how to treat her?
14. When the family goes to the beach, what fun things do Dad and the girl do? How does Mum feel at first? What special things helped her to feel a bit better?
15. How does the illustrator show us that Mummy is improving?
16. On the third last double page, how does the end of the story reflect the start? Why does the author repeat this?
17. There are two more double pages. What feeling do they add to the ending? (Hope.)
18. What else might help and support Mum in her mental health challenge? (Seeking help is to be encouraged, such as professional help, seeing a doctor, taking medication, joining a support group and using wellbeing apps or websites.)

After reading

Language

1. Looking at each double-page spread, ask students to identify different fonts. What do the fonts highlight? Develop this activity to either revise prior learning or introduce new learning. Discuss how the examples fit the definition of each form of verbal imagery as suitable for your students. Find, list and categorise examples of imagery, selecting from:
 - alliteration 'whole wild world', 'of waves and the wind ... and a whisper ...', 'spurting and spluttering'
 - describing words 'tall', 'deep', 'giant'
 - movement 'twirling until the moon comes up...'
 - similes 'bursts like a volcano', 'drifted away like a shell lost at sea'
 - metaphors 'we're pirates', 'bucket loads of happiness'
 - onomatopoeia 'hiccups', 'spluttering', 'whisper'
 - emphasis 'I want to bring her back', 'empty'.
2. The 'black dog' has been used as a metaphor for depression, famously by Sir Winston Churchill to describe his dark moods. In the book, the black dog is a loyal and ever-present companion to Mum. It is portrayed as faithful but not frightening. At times, the dog looks worried or sad, reflecting his owner's feelings as pets often do. Unpack this with the students sharing about their own pets, describing them and sharing their feelings about them. Does anyone sometimes feel that their pet understands them better than other people do? Discuss how the dog in the story represents depression in a visual form, as well as other emotions.
3. The dog (depression) might never leave, but its role can change. Note the use of red on the dog's collar, particularly in the black and white sections. What could the red dog collar represent? What does the dog wear instead of a collar? Why does it stay red?

Visual arts

1. Investigate how colours have symbolic meanings and the meaning of red through different cultures, such as life, health, courage, love, good luck, anger and danger. Discuss the reasons why red stands out and how it is often used on warning signs.
2. Explore the colours used by the illustrator. On the first double-page spread, the colour palette is mostly cool colours. Which colour stands out, and on what is it used? (Red; girl's striped top and dog's collar.) On the second spread, where is red added? (Pirate bandanas.) Continue looking at the use of red throughout the book.
3. Use red in sea-inspired paper craft. Students make red crabs using folded red circles, one large for the body and four small for the claws. Use two small white circles for eyes. Write a 'red' word inside the body half-circle. Draw the crab's facial expression to match the 'red' word inside, such as 'angry', 'loving', etc. Paste onto a contrasting blue or sea green background, which can include a beach made from plain craft paper or a collaged or painted background. Then draw legs, arms, mouth, eye stalks and eyeballs using black markers. A background of painted swirls also works well and can continue the use of contrasting colours. Other simple ideas include making starfish, fish and octopus. When displayed, discuss the bright, cheerful effect of the colour contrast between the red sea creature and the background. Students can guess the word inside from the creature's facial expression.

Literature

1. Bring shells into the classroom and engage the students' senses of sight, touch and sound. Make a list of words to describe the way shells look, feel and sound.
2. Play a soundtrack or video of ocean sounds. (There are many available online.) Students listen carefully and then list the sounds. Encourage the use of 'sound words' or onomatopoeia, such as 'swish', 'whoosh', 'gurgle', 'growl', 'roar' and 'crash'. Identify sounds that the shell and the ocean have in common.
3. Make connections with the students' experiences by questioning. For example, 'Who has been to the beach on a holiday? Can you share some things you did, saw and heard?' Vary the questions for relevance to the class. If students are from the inland, share experiences from dams, lakes, waterfalls and rivers. Encourage active listening behaviours.
4. Introduce a poem that uses onomatopoeia to describe the sea and/or sea shells. Read aloud and ask students to identify the sound words.
5. Create a poem using group construction and the words previously listed. Include rhythm, onomatopoeia and alliteration and then discuss the effects on the momentum of the poem.
6. Enrichment: students create a poem individually or in pairs.

Reflection

1. Who can tell us one thing they have learned about depression that they did not know before?
2. What questions could you ask someone who may be sad or depressed? Formulate different types of questions, such as open and closed questions, and 'how', 'when' and 'why' questions. For example, 'How are you? Are you okay? Do you want to talk? When did you start to feel ...?'

Application

1. What would you do if you found out your friend or a family member felt depressed or had been diagnosed with a mental illness?
2. What would you do if you saw someone at school making fun of a person with a mental illness?
3. If your friend or family member seems sad, grumpy or depressed, do you also have to feel that way? What could you do to stay happy? (For example, telling stories, sharing cuddles, creating, imagining, talking to family and friends, playing outdoors and seeing beauty.)

About the author



Amanda Lieber found a box stuffed with note books, scraps of paper, old menus, bits torn out of magazines and crumpled serviettes covered with her scribbles, observations, characters, plots and stories. That's when she realised she was passionate about storytelling and wanted to share her characters and their stories with the world. So far, being an actor has been Amanda's favourite career, performing in South Africa, London, Edinburgh, Italy and Sydney. On the side she has been a drama teacher, fairy (with lots of sparkles and wings), curio shop assistant, pastry chef, theatre usher, a very bad coffee maker, an early childcare teacher, filed archives in a basement and more odd jobs, which she's sure will make a great story one day. Amanda hopes that writing stories for children will be her new favourite career.

About the illustrator

Kathy Creamer is a children's illustrator and writer who has been published by Oxford University Press, Reed International, Julia Gabriel Communications, September 21, Christmas Press, Second Look and other organisations. She has an MA in Children's Book Illustration from the renowned Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University in England. Having moved from Melbourne to Armidale, and with her husband Peter, Kathy set up Little Pink Dog Books Children's Publishing to help new and aspiring children's writers and illustrators.



Additional resources

Health Direct, *Depression in children* <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/depression-in-children>

Raising Children Network <https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/mental-health-resources/depression-anxiety-stress-0-18-years>

Be you/Beyond Blue, *Supporting children and young people experiencing depression* <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/mental-health-issues-and-conditions/supporting-children-and-young-people-experiencing-depression>

Emerging Minds, *A Parent's Guide to Anxiety and Depression* <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/parents-guide-anxiety-depression/>

PyschCentral, *How to Talk with Your Kid About Depression* <https://psychcentral.com/depression/how-to-explain-depression-to-a-child>

Acknowledgements

© Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (**ACARA**) 2010 to present, unless otherwise indicated. This material was downloaded from the Australian Curriculum website (www.australiancurriculum.edu.au) (**Website**) (accessed 19/07/2023) and was not modified. The material is licensed under **CC BY 4.0** (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>). Version updates are tracked in the 'Curriculum version history' section on the 'About the Australian Curriculum' page (<http://australiancurriculum.edu.au/about-the-australian-curriculum/>) of the Australian Curriculum website.

Teaching notes prepared by Jen Scanlan