



Book Publication Details

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Recommended For

Primary (5-12 years)

Secondary (lower secondary)

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Student Lessons and Book Ideas developed by

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Synopsis

My dad built me the best and wackiest cubby ever, centres on a child and father who set out to build a cubby house.

They shop for parts and build a cubby under streaming sunshine, until clouds begin to snake in on a hazing horizon.

Skies swell, a clouding storm brews and finally breaks and swirls into pouring rain.

All the while the cubby grows wackier. Eventually, the storm subsides to streaming sunbeams.

This is all a metaphor for the father's growing mental ill-health.

The father's health improves with the love and support of the child and its mother, and the child ends up with the best and wackiest cubby ever. The chapter book sits at around 3300 words and is based on a true story. It could be used as a classroom text that explores mental health and provides some understanding to children on mental illness.

The topic is a tough one to write about and understand because we can't 'see' anything wrong or broken with the brain. It's the building of the cubby house into something magically wacky, and the telling of the story with subliminal reference to weather that helps lighten the story, along with the soft illustrations that always show hope and magic that never goes away.

About The Author

Dr Monika Schott is a writer and researcher specialising in marginalised communities and sewerage ghost towns. She released a literary non-fiction novel about a community once living on Melbourne, Metropolitan Sewerage Farm for almost 100 years.

More information can be found at www.monikaschott.com

Key Curriculum Areas

- Learning area: English
- Learning area, Health and Physical Education
- Learning Area: Personal and Social capability
 - Self-awareness; Personal awareness
 - Emotional awareness
 - Self-management; reflective practice
 - Social awareness
 - Social management

Themes

Feelings - Emotional Regulation -
Depression - Anxiety.

Before Reading See Appendix 1

- Examine the cover of the book together with the children. Ask children to predict what the story might be about.
- Explore what can be learnt about the story by looking carefully at the cubby house on the front cover

Guiding Questions

- What do you see in the image on the front cover?
- Where might the story be set - city or country? Ask children to support their theories by providing additional information.
- What type of neighbourhood might the story be set in?
- Discuss how the story feels as a result of the colour choices in the illustration. Could the story be light and friendly or grey and unfriendly?
- Monika has written in her dedication on the (first?) page "*for all of us and our mental health*". Why do you think she wrote that?
- How often might you talk to someone about your feelings? Who do you talk to? Did you feel any better after talking about your feelings?

Reading the Book

- Look for questions that can be answered through the illustration on the relevant page.
- Ask students to examine the images on their respective pages for further information and clues to the story.
- How do the images throughout the story represent or connect to what is happening in the story?
- How do the clouds change throughout the story?
 - Why do you think they change so much?
 - What do you think this might mean?
- How do the colours in the cloud illustrations show us how the characters might be feeling?
- What does this suggest about the mood and about how the rest of the day might go?

Exploring the Book

Chapters One and Two

- How would you describe the mood in these chapters?
- What words describe this mood? (Happy, excited, energetic, industrious, content, happy, loved)

Chapter Three

- What have you noticed about the mood?
- How is it different from the first two chapters?
- What do you think Monika meant when she wrote “A wounded walrus answers from under the covers.”
- How has dad changed in this chapter?
- “Clouds grow swirly to crowd out the sun. There is no floor tomorrow because Dad didn’t get out of bed. At all.” How does this sentence relate to dad not getting out of bed?

Chapter Four

- How has the mood changed from the beginning of the book?
- Have you ever thought about dads crying?
- What sorts of things make **you feel good/safe?**

Chapter Five

- Explore the term subliminal message.
- What does it mean?
- Can you find the subliminal references to weather in this chapter?
- Explore the word analogy. What does it mean?
- How is the boy helping his dad down the stairs an analogy for supporting someone with mental ill-health.

Chapter Six

- How has the mood in this chapter changed?
- Who do you think put up the new mast with the bananas and pineapple?

Two

Chapter Seven

- What does dad mean when he says “...my brain’s a little sick...” ?
- What is happening when the boy reflects that his “flood bursts and swirls with Dad’s murky, muddy rain”?
- What do you think it means when mum refers to dad when saying “The chemicals in his brain are a bit off balance”?

Chapter Eight

- What does the boy mean when he refers to “...the man in two-hundred-year-old aching bones”?
- What are the different things you like to do specifically with your mum and dad - or significant other?
- Why might some things be better to do with particular people?

Chapter Nine

- How has the mood changed from the previous chapters?
- Why might dad not remember building the mast and rope?
- What do you think might be seen from the porthole window?

Reflect on your own feelings - taken from the My Feelings reflection pages at the end of the book.

- List three great things that happened today
- Breathe deeply in, then breathe gently out - how do you feel?
- In what way are you strong?
- What makes you cry?
- What might you feel if fog covered your eyes?
- What happens when you get confused?
- What makes you feel better?
- How do I know when my worries go away?
- What are three things that make you happy?

Lesson Ideas

Most of the following ideas can be adapted and contextualised to suit your given age group.

Have an open mind and make this not only a learning experience from an academic viewpoint but importantly, a learning experience from a well-being viewpoint.

Foundation - Year 2

- What does it mean to feel worried?
- What sorts of things can make you worry?
- What is the day like when you feel worried?
- Look at the images of the clouds in the chapter numbers and talk about colour and mood
- Ask students to choose a cloud and either:
 1. Create a drawing, using the cloud as a basis
 2. Look at the clouds and choose one that the student can connect to - ask them to talk about why they connected to it.
 3. Discuss the structure/colour of the cloud and ask the student to name an emotion/feeling that they feel when they see this.

Year 3 & 4

- What does it mean to feel worried or anxious?
- What sorts of things can make you worry or feel anxious ?
- What is the day like when you feel worried or anxious?
- Look at the images of the clouds in the chapter numbers and talk about colour and mood

Ask students to choose a cloud and either:

- Draw faces that show the feelings which match the cloud illustrations.
- Draw how the weather affects you and your moods.

Year 3 & 4 continued

- Draw a mind map of the things that put you in a bad mood.
- Draw an open mind portrait of the things that you can do to make yourself feel better?
- Create a puppet show through Puppet Pals on your iPad to illustrate how being in a bad mood can make everything even worse?
- Draw a cartoon strip of how other people may feel about you when you are in a bad mood.

Year 5 & 6

- What does it mean to feel anxious/live with anxiety?
- What sorts of things can make you feel anxious ?
- What is the day like when you feel anxious?
- Look at the images of the clouds in the chapter numbers and talk about colour and mood. How has the illustrator used colour to depict mood?
- Create a movie or puppet show which retells the story and is suitable to share with children in the lower year levels.
- Consider including sound effects or music to help convey the same mood as the words and illustrations.
- Think about how your attitude or the way you view things can totally change a particular situation. Choose a way to share how this might look to someone else, eg: draw, write, journal, open mind portrait, brainstorm
- Write a rap, lyrics to a song, story, poem etc to show:
 - ways to make situations better
 - how you might feel /have felt in a given situation
- Write a 'how to' guide to make yourself feel better in bad situations.
- Think of a piece of advice or an affirmation and write/print these to build a book or wall of Happiness.

Putting Grammar into Context

Putting grammar into context involves making connections between grammatical patterns and the meaning of texts. Misty Adoniou has shared strategies for teaching grammar in context and offers the following planning process to support teaching grammar in context.

See Grammar in Context Flowchart at the end of this document.

1. Text Orientation:

Purpose: to ensure all students understand the story, so they can be 'text participants'.

- Builds the 'inner world' of the text so children gain a deeper insight into what the author is conveying.
- Gives equal access to the content of the text.
- Engages the students, allowing them to tune in to the story
- Shows the emotion and inferences of the text.
- What vocabulary needs explaining?
- What parts of the story may be inferred and therefore explained?
- What images might be used as prompts?

How to retell the story:

Retell to provide the orientation of the text.

- Tell the story in storytelling mode, without reading it; use the spirit of the text.
- What are the key ideas? (in order to form a retell - not every detail though).
- Let the story flow, don't be distracted or answer questions until after reading.
- Use key code vocabulary from the text and illustrations to tell the story.
- Provide multimodal supports, including visuals and gestures
- Work inferences into the storytelling, to ensure all children understand.

Checking for student comprehension:

In order to identify whether students have comprehended the story, they retell in a chosen way (except writing). This may include: role plays, comprehension questions, drawing, story mapping, puppets, picture sequencing.

2. Language Orientation *See Appendix 2*

Language orientation focuses readers on the written text and makes explicit why particular words and phrases were chosen and the role they play in the story.

- Prepare students for the language
- Identify unknown words
- Elaborate to provide deeper understanding
- Sentences can track the movements, even with one word.
- Personification - written in a way where the setting becomes a character
- Alliteration - involving the beginning of the syllable whether the onset alone or the combination of onset and nucleus. Makes key messages more memorable.
- Similes - comparing one thing with another thing of a different kind to make the writing more descriptive.

Select an excerpt - a sentence or paragraph to:

- Understand the meaning of the selected text
- Understand the vocabulary
- Explore the function of the word (not necessarily the name of the grammatical part)
- Ask students questions about the text; focus on the descriptive language used.
- Why would language be so important in a story like this?
- Look for meaningful parts in the story.
- Look at the function of words - why were they chosen
- Look at other features like punctuation.

Putting Grammar into Context

Language Orientation continued

Word Study

Choose words from the language orientation including:

- Words that are often misspelt.
- Words that teach morphology (the study of words and their parts).
- Words that build word families and vocabulary.
- Words that can teach analogy (a comparison between two or more things).
- Words that will pique interest in word histories.

Word Reading

- From the sentence selection in language orientation - teach phrasing, fluency and expression.
- Jointly Constructed Writing.

3. Transformation *See appendix 2*

This builds an understanding of the construction of sentences and the consequences of choices when writing. Students physically manipulate the text and this kinaesthetic experience appears to play a role in the effectiveness of the strategy.

Transformation Continued

Transformations consolidate the learning from the language orientation and allow the students to demonstrate their learning.

4. Patterned Writing *See appendix 3*

Patterned writing uses a sentence from the author's text and explores the functions of the various language parts (much the same as in language orientation). Students then use this same pattern to write their own sentences about a new idea that follows the author's pattern.

5. Independent Writing

THRILL - Children have lost the thrill in writing, formal writing can be pointless, especially for competent writers.

WILL - Children need to want to write

SKILL - Children may not feel good about their ability to write

- Consider authorial vs secretarial
- Build a language reservoir to build on and deepen the language knowledge
- Writing is not talk on paper
- Placement of clauses and phrases, the function of the language - where, when,

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

If these topics have raised any concerns for you personally or someone you know please seek the necessary support from any of these organisations:

- Emergency Services - 000
- Lifeline Australia - 131114
- Lifeline Crisis Support Chat Online - <https://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat>
- Suicide Call Back Service - Call 1300 659 467 or Chat online - <https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/need-to-talk/>

Predictions

My prediction is that it is going to be like a treehouse story and how the dad adds different furniture to the treehouse to make it more unique.

Maybe the treehouse is like a whole different dimension where when you enter you go to a different world unknowingly.

The dad is a wacky wizard and he makes it magic for his daughter or son.

Maybe it is a child's escape from reality because they are having a hard time.

I predict that her dad would build a treehouse yet it would not be any normal treehouse...

I predict that the she/he wants it because they had nowhere to stay for quiet time so their dad gave him/her space to play in.

Dad becomes a grey cloud that fills the silent storm, slumped in the sofa in the lounge room with the blinds drawn.

Language Orientation

Select an excerpt (sentence or paragraph) and analyse the function of its words/phrases. Highlight these accordingly.

Who What Verb What Verb Where Verb What

Dad becomes a grey cloud that fills the silent storm, slumped in the sofa in the lounge room with the blinds drawn.

Dad becomes a grey cloud that fills the silent storm, slumped in the sofa in the lounge room with the blinds drawn.

Transformations 1

Dad

becomes

a grey cloud

that fills

the silent storm,

slumped

in the sofa

in the lounge room

with the blinds

drawn shut.

Transformations 2

His fog

has lifted

and sunbeams

streak

from him

to banish

the dark and grey.

Select an excerpt and students cut up to rearrange, add or remove words to create a new sentence that still contains a similar meaning to the original.

"His fog had lifted and sunbeams streak from him to banish the dark and grey."

The dark and grey banished .

His fog has lifted and sunbeams streak to get rid of his sadness.

His fog has lifted. Sunbeams streak to banish the dark and grey.

The fog lifted, with sunbeams piercing from him, to vanish the dark and grey.

To banish all fog and the dark and grey. From him, a streak has lifted the sunbeams.

His fog was lifted from him to banish the dark and grey. As sunbeams arose from him.

The dark and grey fog from him has banished to a streak of sunbeams.

His fog lifted the dark and grey. Sunbeams streak from him to banish his emotions.

Appendix 4 Patterned Writing

Patterned Writing - My dad built me the best & wackiest cubby ever -Dr Monika Schott

What the author wrote.						
His	fog	has lifted	and sunbeams	streak	from him	to banish the dark and grey.
What the language does.						
Who?	What?	Verb	What?	Verb	Where?	Verb
What the class wrote.						
Her	cloud	faded	and rays of light	shone	on her	to exile her gloomy emotions.
What you wrote.						

Using a chosen sentence, students create a new sentence focusing on what the language is doing in each part of the sentence.

"His fog had lifted and sunbeams streak from him to banish the dark and grey"

His negative emotions grew weak and sunshine overpowered him to eliminate his bad side.

His worries dissipated while a churning light arose inside him, to empower his heart.

Her storm moved on and rainbows came from her to banish all evil.

His blizzard retreated and rays of light broke out of him to eject his sunless emotions.

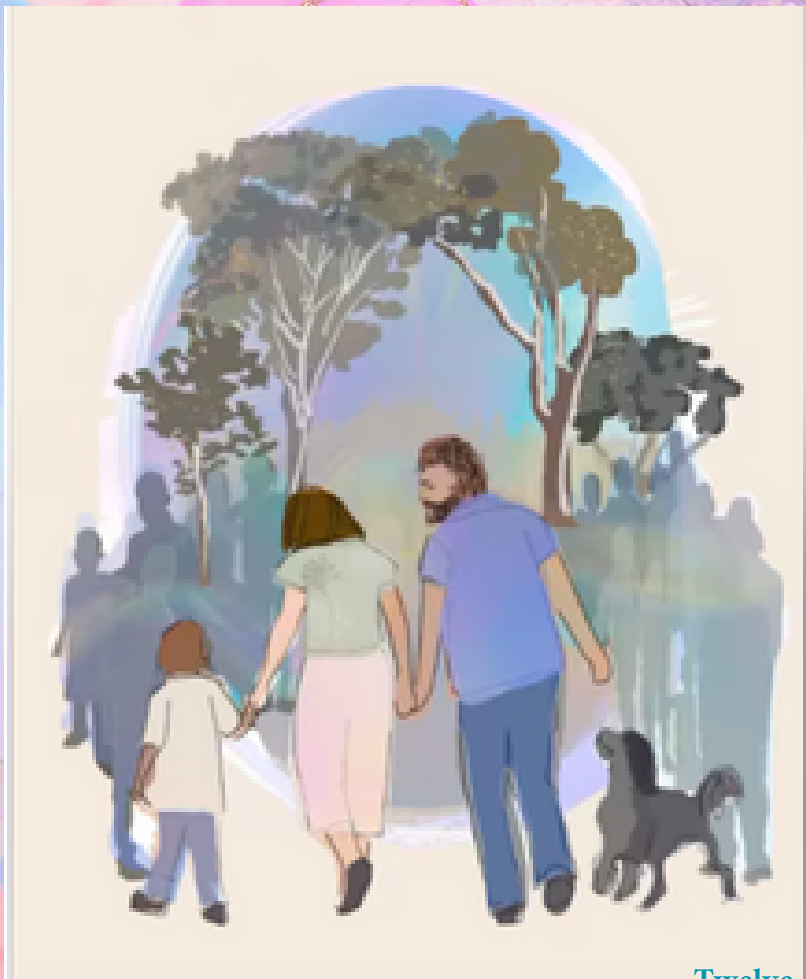
The rain vanished and beauty of sunlight roamed onto him to release his emotions.

His dam collapsed and piercing light emitted from him to cut off his flood.

His storm drained and sunshine rose above him to disappear his murky emotions.

Her rain evaporated and stars appeared on her to disintegrate her fear.

His light faded and clouds of gloom sat on him and took over his shine.



THE SEQUENCE IS FOCUSED ON PARAGRAPH, SENTENCE AND WORD LEVEL OUTCOMES, HOWEVER IT CAN BE USED TO LOOK AT TEXT LEVEL OUTCOMES AS WELL.

TEACHER DETERMINES INTENDED LITERACY LEARNING OUTCOMES AND THEN SELECTS TEXT



TEACHING A
DIAGRAMMATIC OVERVIEW
OF A LITERACY TEACHING SEQUENCE

