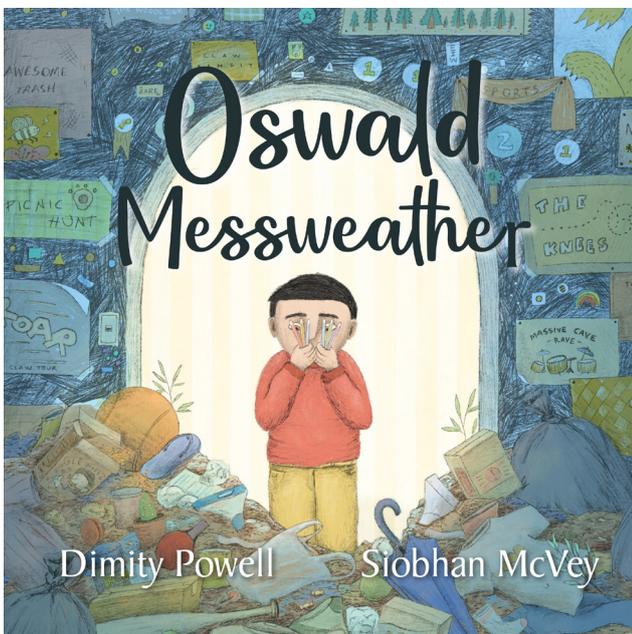




**Wombat Books**  
Stories you'll want to share

## Teachers' Notes



### Oswald Messweather

Dimity Powell / Siobhan McVey  
ISBN: 9781761110184 / 9781761110320  
Recommended retail: \$24.99  
Reading level: Ages 4-8 Picture Book

### Book Summary

Mess and disorder upset Oswald. Even the complexity of his own name is enough to set Oswald's legs jiggling and his palms itching with anxiety. To combat his unease and ward off poisonous thoughts, Oswald obsessively counts his 'pocket pals' – a set of his favourite crayons. It is a self-soothing compulsion he finds comforting but also extremely exhausting. Oswald's obsessive preoccupations distract him from everything and everyone else around him, until one day Oswald is encouraged to use his penchant for perfection and eye for detail in a class science project. With the help of his crayons, Oswald's classmates successfully complete their experiment, which helps Oswald realise just how valuable he is in spite of his anxieties, allowing him to better master disorder and his reactions to it.

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### Reasons For Studying This Book

This book addresses difficult-to-discuss themes that are universal and affect people of all ages and backgrounds. It prompts discussions about how to deal with illness or hardship through the power of imagination. The story focuses on how one can use their mind to confront/escape fear, anxiety and pain.

The book addresses childhood illness in a sensitive, non-didactic way and can be used to help normalise the types of emotions that ensue. It can help support childhood mental health care, particularly for those children who are experiencing stressful life situations or know others who are. It can also be used as a tool by those surrounding them as carers, and school counsellors, psychologists or other practitioners who are facilitating support programs.

In addition, the story ties in nicely to learning about weather patterns and changes, particularly clouds and the seasons. The book also showcases the passage of time and demonstrates different types of descriptive language.

### Themes

OCD	Family	Relationships	Mental Health	Coping mechanisms	School
Anxiety	disorders	in children		Science	Social issues
Cognitive	behaviours			Rational thought	processes

## About the Author:



Award winning children's author, Dimity Powell loves to fill every spare moment with words. She writes and reviews exclusively for children and is the Managing Editor for Kids' Book Review, one of the world's leading review sites for children's literature. She is a seasoned presenter both in Australia and overseas and believes picture books are food for the soul, to be consumed as often as possible. She regularly relishes creating her own including Pippa, (2019), the award-winning *At the End of Holyrood Lane*, (2018) and the critically acclaimed, *The Fix-It Man*, (2017) with more on the horizon.

Dimity is a tireless advocate of Kids' Lit with strong convictions about the power of storytelling, reading and writing. She loves sharing her accumulated knowledge with big and little kids and is a Books in Homes Australia Volunteer Role Model, Story City Community Mentor and G.A.T.EWAYS online and onsite presenter.

## About the Illustrator



Siobhan's love for picture books started long before she entered the publishing world. As a young girl, she would pore over her small collection of fanciful tales, hopeful quests and lessons learnt, studying the illustrations on each page with rapture. Her books didn't have to be the most well-known, newest, or overly colourful, as it was the worlds they created that drew her in.

This book in particular is important to me. I was initially studying to become a Clinical Psychologist, but decided to become an illustrator before I finished my degree. I worked with many children who were going through all sorts of troubles. Once I became an illustrator, I didn't believe I could use the understanding I had gained throughout these years, and yet, when I was asked to illustrate this book, I felt intrigued and compelled.

## Teaching Points and Activities

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Foundation to Year 6 primary aged children. Some activities may be applicable to early secondary school students, as well. Where possible, Australian Curriculum goal codes have been included which address Foundation to Year 2 curriculum learning outcomes and apply directly to the targeted audience intended for this book, (3 – 6 years).

### Knowledge and Literal Understanding

#### Pre-reading Questions

(Interpreting, analyzing, evaluating / ACELY1660)

1. Show the cover to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about.
2. Read the back cover blurb. Does this give them more of an idea of what the book could be about?
3. Ask students if they can recognize the setting of this story from the cover image.

#### After-reading Questions

4. Ask students if Oswald Messweather reminds them of anyone they know: a friend, a sibling, themselves perhaps.
5. What is their first impression of Oswald Messweather? Do they regard him as happy, shy, worried, outgoing or friendly?
6. What changes does Oswald Messweather experience during the story?
7. Discuss why they think Oswald Messweather needs to count his crayons repetitively.
8. Ask students how they perceive Oswald Messweather's situation. Do they think he is happy? Or anxious, embarrassed or even unfriendly.

## Inferential and Critical Thinking

### After-reading Questions

(Responding to literature / ACELT1783, ACELT1582, ACELT1578)

1. Ask students how they think Oswald Messweather views his family and friends by the end of the story.
2. What are the students' impressions of his parents, brother, friends? Do they seem 'normal' to them or funny, perhaps messy?
3. Are they relieved that Oswald Messweather found a way to contribute to his science group? Are they happy for him? If so, why?
4. Do they find the ending: satisfying, confusing, hopeful, predictable, a surprise, comforting, or a relief?
5. Gently enquire if any of the students have ever experienced urges like Oswald's, to make everything perfect, neat and orderly? Discuss how it made them feel.
6. What did Oswald Messweather do to help cope with his anxious thoughts? Do they think it worked? Discuss what students would do or have done?
7. Examine the similarities between Oswald Messweather's character, his family and school friends with their own relationships.
8. Whom do students regard as the main character of the story? Who are the sub or secondary characters?
9. Why are the sub characters important to the story?
10. How do they support Oswald Messweather and help him learn from his situation?
11. Do they regard Oswald's crayons as sub characters – things that offer support and healing?

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### English Literacy Skills

#### Vocabulary

*(Language for interaction/ ACELA1462)*

- Alliteration – give examples from the story.
- Onomatopoeia – where and how is it used to emphasis the situation.
- Repetition – where and why is it used?

#### Grammar

*(Expressing and developing ideas / ACELA1786, ACELA1451, ACELA1462)*

- Why do they think the main character in the story is named Oswald Messweather?
- Discuss the meanings associated with some names. Do students know what their name means?
- Investigate the meaning of Oswald Messweather's full name (Oswald Constantine Dorian Messweather) in relation to acronyms.
- The author sometimes refers to Oswald as Ozzie when she talks about him. Discuss nicknames, why we use them, how they make us feel, their good and bad points.
- Discuss how the punctuation used enhances the flow and drama of the story.
- Do certain words and adjectives link to the action sequences and emotions depicted in the illustrations? If so, which ones?
- Identify some of the metaphors and similes the author uses and discuss their meanings. For example; bear pit, tangled thoughts.
- Encourage students to identify some of the adjectives used. Can they suggest other words or ways to describe Oswald Messweather's frustration and fear?
- There is very little dialogue shown in this story. Why do students think this is? Does it make the story easier or less easy to follow?
- Do they think this is because the anxiety is shown internally? Oswald keeps his concerns carefully packed away.

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### English Literacy Skills

#### *Comprehension (Wellbeing / ACPPS005, ACELT1581)*

- Get students to name the sequence of events in this story. Attempt this via:
  - Listing them as a group
  - Writing out key sentences from the story, cutting them out and then getting students to arrange in order
  - Illustrating scenes in correct order of occurrence
- Discuss how it would affect the feeling and outcome of the story if it began at a different point in time, i.e. in the middle of the science project or with interaction between a classmate, his brother or worried parent.
- Do the illustrations follow the story? Do they enhance it, if so, how?
- At which point or points do Oswald Messweather's emotions change? How many times does this occur?
- Were students able to predict what would happen next? Name the clues – in the text and pictures? If not expected, how did it make them feel? Were they ever anxious about what could happen next?
- What do they think happens after Oswald Messweather wakes up again the next morning?
- Make a list of the various emotions and the adjectives that describe them that Oswald Messweather is experiencing e.g. fearful, confused, worried, tired, frustrated, hopeless, trapped, embarrassed, ashamed...
- Discuss whether students feel this is a sad story, an anxious one or a happy one and encourage them to give reasons based on the words and images used.

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### English Literacy Skills

#### Writing

(Examining literature / ACELT1584)

- Identify whose point of view (POV) the story is written in.
- Attempt to write the story from a different POV: Oswald's father, mother, a classmate, his teacher, Miss Mopp, a doctor.
- Get students to choose a scene and rewrite it using dialogue.
- Ask students to work in groups or pairs to create an Acrostic Poem using emotion words such as: HAPPY, SCARED, WORRIED, TIRED, UNCERTAIN. Share with the class and compare.
- Write a book review of the story using the [WORKSHEET 1 Book Review](#)

#### Literature and Media

(Responding to literature / ACELT1582, ACELT1583)

- Enquire whether students have ever seen information, news articles, and YouTube videos etc. that depict OCD in a certain way. Perhaps it's something their parents have relayed to them from one of these sources.
- Ask students to name cartoons, books ([picture and chapter books](#)) or movies that have similar themes to *Oswald Messweather*. (*Rain Man* for example features an autistic character, *Turner and Hooch*)
- Define which ones stick most in their memories and discuss why? Is it because of the way they make them feel, for example?
- Consider how they end. Do all emotional tales end uncertainly? If they think so, ask why they think this is.
- Which have the better endings? Which ones do students prefer most? Debate what makes a good ending and why that is important.

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### Visual Literacy

(Expressing and developing ideas / ACELA1453)

- Search for the visual clues the illustrator includes in the story to show a change of:
  - o Emotion / action
  - o Time / situation
- How do the end pages make students feel? What do they project about this story?
- How do the illustrations depict the personalities of the characters, notably Oswald's and what they are experiencing?
- Examine the perspective and angles used in the illustrations. Do the students get a sense of being with Oswald Messweather and how he feels from the way he is depicted?
- How does the use of altered or unusual perspectives enhance the story experience?
- How do the background patterns and colours influence the mood or feeling of the illustration?
- What direction do most of the illustrations flow to and from? When does this direction change? How does this influence the story and what does it tell us about the main character?
- How do certain colours make students feel? How can they apply these feelings to this story?
- Discuss the use of colours to project or symbolise emotion and a change of circumstances in this story. (used with Visual Arts and Craft)
- Identify the predominant colour palette, and then list emotions to match those colours. Use their location in the story and the associated text to help identify matches. [WORKSHEET 5 Matching Emotions to Colours](#)
- Ask students to identify Oswald Messweather's unique trademark(s). NB: it could be his incredibly neat hairdo!
- Ask student to draw their own favourite thing that gives them a sense of comfort and security. It might be a toy or object or even a pet. (used with Visual Arts and Crafts)

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### Mathematics

(Probability/Chance, Shape, Numbers and Patterns ACMSP024, ACMMG042, ACMNA035)

- Chance and Probability
  - o Explore the likelihood of Oswald Messweather feeling more secure and in control of his anxiety vs. not doing better next time in a group activity.
- Shapes
  - o Identify the geometric shapes and symbols used throughout the illustrations e.g. boats, brick walls, oranges, eggs, hopscotch grid etc.
  - o Count them and examine their use in the illustrations. Is it deliberate or incidental?
  - o Discuss how certain shapes could produce certain subliminal impressions, e.g. the swirling rainbow threads, tangled knots.
- Discuss the presence of patterns. Can students spot any – crayons, waves, boats etc.?
- Can students spot the numerical differences in the illustrations? The number of crayons, crumbs, oranges for instance.
- Discuss the significance of numbers in this story and as shown in the illustrations.
- Spatial awareness. Have students complete a custom made jigsaw puzzle. Use different numbers of pieces to increase difficulty and time how long it takes to complete based on level of difficulty. Is it easier or no different beginning with the border pieces already set up?

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### The Arts

#### Visual Arts/Crafts

*(Visual Arts / Communicating ideas ACAVAM108)*

- Make an [origami paper boat](#)! Use the instructions included on [Dimity's YouTube channel](#) or in this [video link](#). Experiment with different coloured paper. Colour with crayons to make it waterproof and test this in a sailing competition!
- Using [colouring-in templates and worksheets](#), found online and throughout these notes, use colours to show emotion and mental state of the characters in the various scenes.
- Invite students to name their favourite colour and explain why. (use with Visual Literacy)
- Ask students which page (spread) of the story they feel is the most dramatic or moving one and how it makes them feel? (This is known as the Blue page in picture books) What part of the story does this page occur?
- Which spread do they consider the saddest?
- Which do they deem is the happiest page?
- Ask students to draw their own favourite fruit, food, boat etc. using their favourite colour. (use with Visual Literacy)

#### Music

*(Communicating and interacting, wellbeing, Music ACPPS020, ACAMUM082)*

- Listen to and watch the [Book Trailer](#) for this story. What type of music is used? How does it make students feel?
- What types of instruments suggest anxious feelings? Excitement? Joy? Does the pace of the music dictate the feeling of this mini movie?
- Do students think background music is important for relaying the feel of the story and suggesting what it could be about? Do they think instrumental background music is enough or if a song with lyrics should be used instead; what would they choose?
- Can music trigger certain memories? Ask students if they have a particular song that elicits strong memories, good or bad. (use with Science)
- Encourage students to name instruments or music styles that describe the various movements, vocal sounds and habits of a person who is anxious, scared, embarrassed, nervous.

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### The Arts

#### Drama

*(Language for interaction, Drama ACELA1787, ACADM027)*

- Using [paper boats](#) and crayons or even [sock puppets](#) get students to re-enact the story. Rig up a small stage to facilitate this. (use with Visual Arts and Crafts)
  - Enlist someone to be the narrator.
- Get students to experiment with how to manipulate the boats and puppets to show the different emotions and voices used in the story. Cover:
  - Body Language
  - Stage position
  - Influence of music to the performance – when to use it to inject drama or relief for the audience.
- Re-enact the story with students but not using words or a narrator, just music to accentuate the:
  - ‘light and shade’ moments of the story
  - Show scene changes
  - Mood changes (use with Music)

# Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

## The Arts

*SOCIAL SCIENCE (Social Health ACPPS005, ACPPSO17, ACELA1787, ACPPSO20)*

- Discuss the notion of mental illness in young people, specifically, OCD. Do the students understand
  - o What it means
  - o How it might affect a person / their life or those around them
  - o Why it happens? (use with Inferential and Critical Thinking)
- Examine their understanding of 'obsession'. Discuss the difference between obsessing and acting compulsively. Explain why we sometimes can't always control how we feel or act.
- Ask them why they think this is – because of an imbalance of emotions, things that affect you that are beyond your control, inability to understanding how to control feelings and reactions?
- When is obsession healthy / beneficial? When is it not?
- Get students to discuss how they feel when they are faced with certain situations they may not be able to control e.g. mess, group activities, new things, being outside of their comfort zones.
- Oswald Messweather feels overwhelmed at times. Discuss this emotion and how it affects him, his family, society as a whole based on recent world history (global pandemics).
  - o Ask how students feel when something makes them feel frustrated. Get them to list some of the ways or things that would help them feel less frustrated. Explore ways to cope with bad feelings: writing / drawing them down, stepping back and counting to ten, meditation, talking about them, engaging in your favourite activity, burning energy, crying, telling jokes, sharing your anxieties with someone you trust... and so on. [WORKSHEET 2 Safe People](#)
- 'Oswald Messweather hates mess.' Name / discuss things you don't like both external / physical things (e.g. foods) vs. things like your name, siblings, parents' rules etc. (use with Contemporary Society)
- How does 'mess' relate to environmental concerns / awareness? (use with Science, Natural Science)

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### Science, Natural Science (STEM)

- What is OCD? Use the [Facts about OCD and Support Links](#) to research!
- Discuss the various types of acronyms for mental health disorders that students may have heard of before in their class room or family environments e.g. ADD, ADHD, PTSD.
- Are there people in their classroom that suffer from these disorders?
- Gently enquire how they feel? Explore ways others can help:
  - o What can others do / not do to elicit help, acceptance, support? (use with Social Science)
- Reenact Oswald's floating science experiment! ([see this Sink or Float video for guidance!](#))
  - o Replicate with oranges, paper boats, eggs
  - o Explore what other objects could be tested for their floatability - nails, pegs, straws, marbles, golf balls, paperclips, pencils, plastic vs wooden beads, playdough, feathers etc.
  - o Which objects float better than others? Examine why this is?
  - o Discuss the results? Were they expected, a surprise, hard to believe?
- What is the Archimedes principal with regards to displacement theory and floating? (use with History) [Sink or Float Experiment Results Worksheet 6](#)
- Consider the five senses and how music, smells and words can stimulate and trigger memories.
  - o Hypothesize why they think this is and then research the answer.
  - o Locate words, phrases and images the author and illustrator use in the story to add sensory detail and evoke the reader's senses. Discuss how this could enrich the story telling experience.
- What is 'mess'? How does mess originate? Deliberate, untidy habits, laziness, overuse of resources, rubbish, pollution etc.
- How does 'mess' relate to environmental concerns / awareness?
- What things can we do to 'tidy up' our planet, schools, homes ... bedrooms! [WORKSHEET 4 Ways to Tidy Up Our...](#)

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

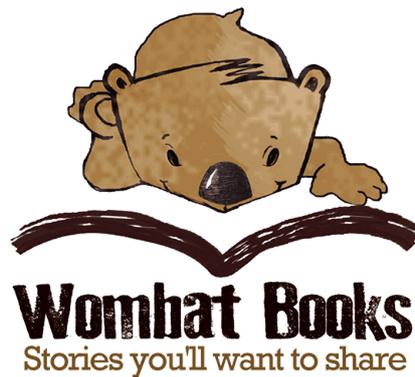
### Science, Natural Science (STEM)

- Humans invented boats to mimic animals that can float really well and to travel better across water. [Make a paper boat](#) (or several ones). Experiment with materials and design and see what designs are best for: (use with Mathematics and Visual Arts)
- - Stability
  - Maneuverability
  - Length of time afloat (without sinking!)
  - Durability
  - Appearance
  - Waterproofness
- What are some examples of manmade things that float? Use the WORKSHEET 3 Things That Float to record answers e.g. Li lows, inflatable pool toys, balls, plastic bottles, paddle boats, buoys, fishing boats, sailboats, surfboards, air craft carriers, and ocean cruise liners.
  - List things that float naturally (not man made) e.g. birds, jellyfish, whales, leaves, driftwood, sticks, bubbles.

## Cross-Curricular Discussion and Ideas

### Physical Education (Health and Wellbeing / ACPPS005, ACPPS020)

- Dancing is a fun physical activity that makes you laugh, move and feel good – useful in times of stress and anxiety. What other physical activities could positively improve mental wellbeing? (Hint: there were some in The Fix-It Man!)
- Floating is very physical too. What other sports or activities:
  - ○ Allow humans to float?
  - ○ Simulate the sensation of floating?
- Sailing, dinghy racing, surf boarding, standup paddle boarding, river rafting, water skiing, knee boarding, kayaking, parachuting are some sports and activities that simulate or facilitate floating.
  - ○ List other activities / sports that are safe (for kids) to try, examples: dinghy sailing, kayaking, body boarding
  - ○ Playing Pooh Sticks!
    - > Ask who knows how to play this game / what it is
    - > Where it originates from
    - > Who has played it before
- Identify students who have tried some of these activities. How do they make them feel? Who would like to try them?
  - ○ What's hard, scary, exciting, fun about these activities?



**Dimity Powell is available for author talks and workshops. Contact Wombat Books for more information.**

*Oswald Messweather Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.*

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