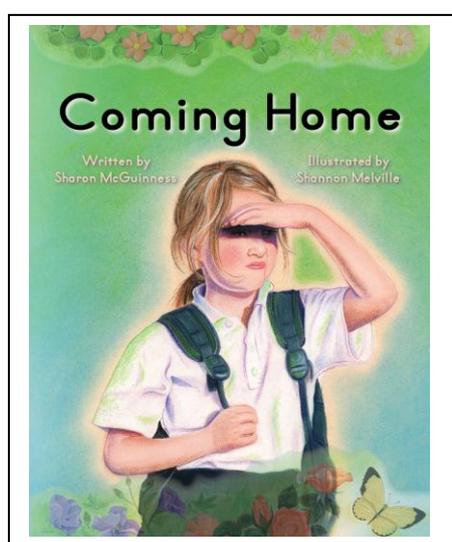


Teacher's Notes and Ideas

Prepared by Wombat Books



Coming Home

By Sharon McGuinness

Illustrated by Shannon Melville

ISBN: 978-1-921633-77-5

Recommended Retail: \$24.95

Recommended Age: Children 8+

Introduction/Story Summary	page 2
Key Learning Areas	page 2
Values Addressed/Themes	page 2
Related text/Resources	page 3
Useful Websites	page 3
About the Author/Illustrator	page 3
Discussion Questions	page 4-5
Colouring Pages	page 6-7

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Introduction

Gemma doesn't understand why her father doesn't want to play with her anymore. All he does is sit in the garden – he seems sad all the time.

Gemma's father suffers from a depressive illness – we aren't told why, so it could be for a number of reasons – from a specific event, a chemical imbalance in the brain or even due to the onset of winter. The story follows Gemma as she tries to understand her father's illness, which occurs over time – signified in the story by the changing of the seasons. The story shows how a depressive illness affects members of the family, particularly children, who often find it more difficult to understand. *Coming Home* focuses on hope, as Gemma's father recovers eventually.

The illustrations mirror the journey Gemma's father endures, beginning with black and white endpapers of weeds and closing with the final endpapers of a garden in flower, bursting with colour.

Coming Home is suitable to be shared with upper primary students in years 5 and 6 and also useful for secondary students in years 7-10 studying PDHPE.

Story Summary

Gemma watches her dad as he sits alone in the garden, she doesn't understand why he seems sad all the time and doesn't want to play with her anymore. She questions whether she has done something wrong to make him feel this way. Gemma seeks answers from her mother, who reassures her; informing Gemma that her dad suffers from an illness called depression, which may not be as visible as other illnesses. At her mother's urging, Gemma tries to engage her father in her interests, but he again disappears into his 'other place'. One day, however, as the sun begins to warm his back, Gemma's dad begins to feel different and we know that his depression has begun to lift.

Coming Home tells a story common to one in five families where someone experiences such an illness. The story is hopeful and even though Gemma's dad is ill, he does get better over time. He does find his way home.

Shannon Melville's illustrations convey the father's mood at the beginning of the book, in the use of limited black and white shades. Symbols of a tangled, unkempt garden are also used to convey the mood and state of mind of Gemma's father. As he recovers, colour begins to creep onto the pages, ending with a united father and daughter and images of a flowering, weedless garden.

Key Learning Areas

English (Australian National Curriculum Foundation to Yr 10)

Visual Literacy

PDHPE (NSW Curriculum Stages 4 & 5)

Values Addressed/Themes

Family Relationships

Depression

Related Text/Resources

Tan, Shaun *The Red Tree*

Miller, David *Big and Me*

Nikolin, Tara *The Shadow on the Wall* www.blurb.com/books/3269437

Useful Websites

Black Dog Institute fact sheets on depression

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/factsheets/index.cfm#factDepression

Black Dog is a centre for research, education, advice and consultation. The fact sheets are suitable for students in Years 7 and above.

Youth Beyond Blue www.youthbeyondblue.com/factsheets-and-info

Designed for a teenage audience, this site provides information of specific interest to young people

Headspace www.headspace.org.au This National Youth Mental Health Foundation helps young people undergoing difficulties in their lives. There are fact sheets and information on the site and also details regarding where to locate a headspace centre or how to access the 24hr eheadspace service.

RUOK www.ruokday.com.au/content/home.aspx This initiative is held annually on September 15 and encourages people to ask 'RUOK?' instead of 'How are you?' which may illicit the automatic response of 'Good', even though the person may not really be feeling that way. The site encourages people to start a conversation with someone you feel may be experiencing a mental health issue. Site suitable for secondary students.



About the Author – Sharon McGuinness

Sharon McGuinness works as a teacher librarian in a primary school on the south coast of New South Wales and writes picture books and junior novels for children. After writing her first 'book' in year six for a school assignment, Sharon has been writing ever since. She has had two stories published in the New South Wales School Magazine and her first ebook *Try!* was published in March, 2012. Apart from writing and teaching, Sharon is kept busy with her two teenage children and mischievous border collie, Buster.



About the Illustrator – Shannon Melville

Shannon is a freelance illustrator, graphic designer and community art teacher from Perth. She has illustrated the following books: *My Arms Your Legs* (Blake Education) by Kim Rackham, *Matilda's Morning Adventures* and *Choose Active Transport: A Teacher's Resource* (Physical Activity Taskforce, 2010) by Kim Chute, and *Little Good Wolf* (Wombat Books, 2011) by Aleesah Darlison.

Coming Home is the fifth book she has illustrated and she particularly enjoyed working in pastels.

When she is not working Shannon loves walking with her husband, Ninian, Dora explorer Jaya, and sheep rounder Hugo.

Discussion Questions

1. After reading the first few pages of *Coming Home*, what were your first thoughts about Gemma's dad?
2. What do you think Gemma was feeling when she looked at her Dad sitting in the garden?
3. What did Gemma's mum mean when she explained the father's illness as 'something you can't see'?
4. Can depression be visible? How do you know Gemma's dad is depressed by reading the text?
5. Gemma refers to her dad being in 'that other place'. What does she mean by this?
6. What is the significance of the title *Coming Home*?
7. Why do you think the author used symbols of plants and a garden extensively throughout the book?
8. What feelings do the author and illustrator leave you with at the end of the story?
9. What things make your students happy? Students may even draw their responses. Ask them what they think has helped Gemma's dad begin to feel happier.

Discussion Questions – Visual Literacy

1. Look at each of the beginning and final endpapers. How do these symbolise the beginning and ending of the story?
2. Why has the illustrator used black and white illustrations?
3. Why do you think the illustrator has coloured some aspects of the illustrations on most of the pages?
4. Look at the illustration featuring the father reaching out to the warm sunshine. What does this represent?
5. What does the wilted rose symbolise?
6. How does the text and illustrations work together to tell the story?
7. What is it that the father sees in the garden, trying to reach the sunlight?

Discussion Questions – PDHPE (Secondary Students)

1. What are the main symptoms of depression? (use the fact sheets on the Black Dog Institute site)
2. Which symptoms do you recognise in Gemma's father?
3. Depression can be referred to as an invisible illness. How true do you think this statement is in relation to the story and characters?
4. What are some of the reasons for depression?
5. Which, if any, can you recognise within the story?
6. Why is depression sometimes referred to as an 'episode'?
7. What are some useful ways to help someone through an episode of depression?
8. What do you see as evidence of support for Gemma's father in the book?
9. How have the author and illustrator combined to tell both a story and information about depression?
10. Discuss with your students the differences between sadness and depression.

11. Using the recommended websites, ask students to research suggested ways to relieve and prevent depression.
12. What things do the students do that make them happy?
13. Find specific web pages from the sites provided that would be helpful for teenagers experiencing depression.
14. Design your own ecard and send it to someone you know who is experiencing depression. You may be inspired by some examples on the Black Dog site:
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/public/gettinghelp/ecards.cfm
15. Encourage students to enter the annual Black Dog photographic competition or hold your own to raise awareness and promote resilience. See:
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/public/events/photocompetition.cfm

Classroom Activities - Upper Primary Students

1. Students could develop a Reader's Theatre script and perform in front of the class.
2. Using students' own drawings or images of weeds and gardens collected via Flickr Creative Commons, design a book trailer for *Coming Home*. Teachers and students have the illustrator's permission to use the illustrations provided on these pages. Send the best trailer to the author via the website www.mrsmacsbooks.weebly.com
3. Design a postcard and send it to someone the students care about. In it, instead of asking 'How are you', use 'Are U OK' instead. The Black Dog site has a page with a selection of ecards teachers could use as examples.
4. Using 'Storybird' (www.storybird.com) students could work on a collaborative story with a classmate. One person starts the story and it is sent to another who continues the story before returning it to the first person, etc. It could focus on how students can help someone feel better if they have been sad lately. What things could students do to make them feel better? Use the illustrations on the site for inspiration.
5. Based on the idea above, students could also write their own story and publish it as an ebook using a combination of power point and movie maker software. Instructions can be found here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJ9es0KEA6I&feature=plcp
6. As an art activity, students could use the endpapers as inspiration, and create their own version. These could also be scanned and used in book trailers.
7. Colour plays a key role in the illustrations of *Coming Home*. It also has a role in the two key organisations that assist people who experience depression – Black Dog and Beyond Blue. Ask students what is 'blue' to them? This could also lend itself to an art activity.



