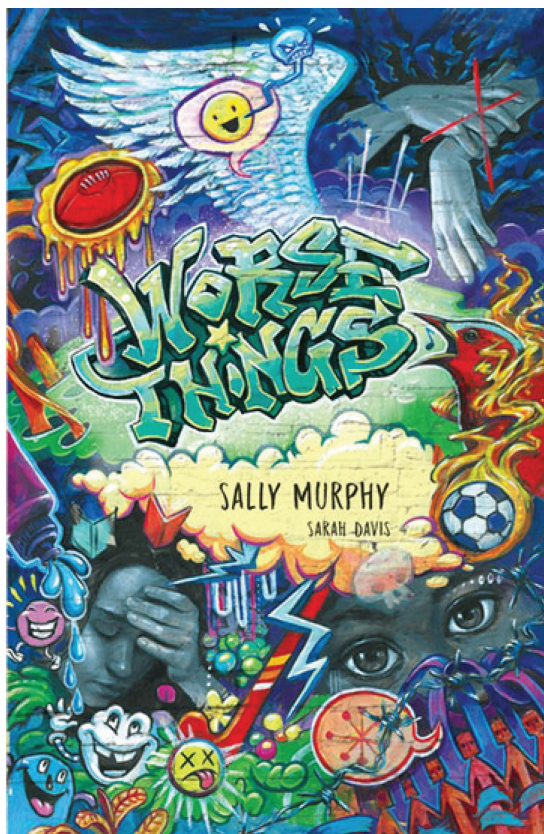


Worse Things

Exploring the 2021 CBCA Short List: Younger Readers



Parts in this unit of work

- [Reading, listening to and appreciating the book](#)
- [Using the book for speaking, writing and creating](#)
- [Relevant resources and links](#)

Author: [Sally Murphy](#) **Illustrator:** [Sarah Davis](#)

Publisher: [Walker Books](#)

Synopsis: From the award-winning author of *Pearl Verses the World* and *Toppling* comes a story about connections, the ways they are made and what happens when they are lost. *When you're part of the team the sideline is a place of refuge of rest of reprieve. But when you're out of the team the sideline changes. Suddenly*

it's the loneliest place of them all. After a devastating football injury, Blake struggles to cope with life on the sideline. Jolene, a gifted but conflicted hockey player, wants nothing more than for her dad to come home. And soccer-loving refugee, Amed, wants to belong. On the surface, it seems they have nothing in common. Except sport. A touching and inspirational story about the things that bind us all.

Themes: Connections between people, friendship, family, loss, supporting each other.

Year levels: Australian Curriculum: English, Years 5 and 6

Why use this book? The theme of fitting in and belonging will resonate with the intended audience for this book – allowing classes to explore the feelings of others and find ways to make their class and friendship groups more open and accepting of others. The three main characters demonstrate resilience as they use shared interests in sport, reading and ultimately the support they give one another, to help cope with the pressures of their lives, providing good role models for a preteen audience. Exploration of these themes through role play or small group discussions will help bring out the meanings in the story. The reader is allowed inside the characters' minds, as the free verse creates a poetic stream of consciousness that highlights the role of language in forming one's own identity and establishing friendships.

Focus passages: Jolene on pages 44–47, Blake on page 70 and Amed on pages 68 and 69

Unit writer: [Jennifer Asha](#)

Reading, listening to and appreciating the book

Book introduction (big picture)

- Use online and print dictionaries to find definitions of 'worse' and 'worst' to help make predictions about the possible plot of the book. Make note of the layout of dictionary entries to compare them with the beginning of each chapter as you read. [ACELY1702](#) [ACELY1712](#)
- Look closely at the illustrations on the front cover and use prompting questions to assist with making predictions about possible characters and the setting of the story. Notice the grey monotone sections, the eyes, the face and the hands. *How do these sections indicate how many protagonists will be in the book? Compare these grey sections to the colourful graffiti-like parts of the illustration. How does the illustration hint at street art? What might the symbols of sport and emoticons be hinting at in terms of the characters' age and interests? How does the graffiti lead the reader to predict the story is set in the current day?* [ACELT1608](#) [ACELY1713](#)
- Ask students to talk in pairs or small groups to share their interests in watching or playing sport. Give them prompts to scaffold discussion, for example, *What positive experiences have you had playing sport? What do you believe are the benefits of playing sport, physical, mentally, socially? What do you enjoy about watching sport?* [ACELY1699](#) [ACELY1709](#)
- Share a wide range of poetry, reading aloud in pairs and small groups, with the whole class. Talk about poetic preferences and share observations of techniques and their effects. Come up with a broad definition of poetry, drawing students to similar conclusions as those made by famous poets, such as Coleridge, who defined poetry as 'the best words in the best order', or Wordsworth, as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. [ACELT1611](#) [ACELT1617](#)
- Sensitively share experiences of starting at a new school, learning to read or learning English as a second language. Discuss what was hardest and what helped the most. [ACELY1699](#) [ACELY1709](#)
- Write descriptions of yourself, how you would define yourself; your values, beliefs, interests and character traits. Ask students to reflect on the way they see themselves changing across the last 6-12 months, in terms of those values and character traits. How have they grown or gained strength? What has been the catalyst? How has the catalyst played a role?

Close reading

- Encourage students to engage with the meanings of the text and reflect on the characterisation of Jolene, Blake and Amed, as shown to the reader through the extracts. Pose questions to stimulate group discussions and ask students to justify their responses with reference to the text. *What are Jolene, Blake and Amed's interests? What do they dislike? What do they value? To what extent do they each feel a sense of belonging? How do they feel about their life's circumstances? How might they describe themselves?* [ACELY1703 ACELY1713](#)
- Consider the way each character undergoes some degree of transformation across the story by comparing the early extracts, to those later in the story, for example; *Jolene* pages 189–190, *Blake* pages 194–196 and *Amed* pages 197–198. *How has each characters' sense of identity changed? What role has sport, friendship or family relationships played in each character's transformation?*
- Investigate the poetic techniques used by Sally Murphy to convey the emotions of the characters through the text. [ACELY1801](#)
- **Similes:** Use the example on pages 46–47 that describes literature, poetry and words as treasures, to demonstrate the technique. Use other literary examples that convey a similar message about literature to compare the author's use of similes, such as *Treasure Box* by Margaret Wild and Freya Blackwood, *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce and *Midnight in the Library* by Ursula Dubosarsky and Ron Brooks. [ACELY1701 ACCEL1614](#)
- **Metaphors:** On page 69 Amed's sense of isolation is described using the metaphor of an *invisible fence of language*. Consider Amed's experience and the way Sally Murphy uses metaphor and Sarah Davis uses symbols on page 86, then compare those depictions to the meanings and techniques used in *My two blankets* by Irena Kobald and Freya Blackwood and *Pie in the Sky* by Remi Lai. [ACELY1701 ACCEL1615](#)
- **Verb tense and voice:** Guide students in analysing and categorising the verbs in each extract. Comment on the way the present tense verbs convey a sense of immediacy. Highlight the pronoun use as a means of identifying first person narrative. Contemplate the way the two grammatical choices allow the voicing of the characters' thoughts and give the reader access to the characters' points of view. Sally Morgan's *Sister Heart* also uses these two grammatical choices to put the reader 'in the shoes' of the lead Indigenous character. Compare the similar language with different authorial intentions. [ACELT1795 ACELA1523](#)
- **Repetition:** This literary technique is used for emphasis. On page 70 the *re-* onset is repeated to convey Blake's positive feelings of being on the sideline before he broke his arm, through the words *reset, reprieve, refuge*. Compare this instance of repetition to pages 74 and 75 when Amed repeats 'You don't know...'; to express the seemingly unrelenting sense of isolation and lack of understanding from the children in his new school. [ACELT1795 ACCEL1610 ACCEL1615](#)

Word recognition, phonic knowledge and spelling

- Locate the compound words in each extract. Discuss the definition of compound words and hypothesise about the way these words are likely to cause difficulties in understanding for people learning English as a second language.
- Note the morphology of *alone, lonely and loneliness*. [ACELA1513](#)
- Investigate the etymology of *re-* words. The website [Etymonline](#) could be a good resource. [ACELA1500 ACELA1526](#)

Using the book speaking, writing and creating

- Have students interview each other in pairs, asking how they would compare themselves to one of the three protagonists. After this oral rehearsal of their thinking, ask students to write about themselves, stating similarities and differences in interests, values and personalities when compared to one of the characters. How do students sympathise or empathise with the experiences of the character and how the character responded to their life's circumstances in the story? [ACELY1699 ACCEL1613](#)
- Use the symbols and icons in the Sarah Davis' illustrations as inspiration and ask students to create a symbolic representation of themselves. Note the visual reference to a range of historical and modern art

influences such as mandalas, pointilism, street art and emoticons. Encourage students to delve into their family history for artistic inspiration. [ACELY1704](#) [ACELY1714](#)

- Ask students to act out or mime part of the story with heightened emotion. Have them think about how to use gesture and facial expressions to clearly show the emotion. [ACELY170](#) [ACELY1710](#)
- Turn your hand to the writing of free verse to express the feelings embodied through the previous drama exercise. Apply one or more of the poetic techniques investigated during the close reading of the text. Incorporate students' own experiences of difficulties with friendships or family pressures. [ACELT1798](#) [ACELY1704](#) [ACELY1714](#)
- Revisit the front cover illustration in light of the meanings of the text. Look closely at the black and white sections in particular, and decide as a class which character is represented by each of these three parts. Take black and white photographs of students in poses that emulate the emotions from their poems. Use software to add layers of colour, symbols and icons, or print out the photographs and add to them with a variety of art mediums. [ACELY1700](#) [ACELY1717](#)
- Create a list of the traits of a good friend, incorporating what has been learnt through reading the text. [ACELY1703](#) [ACELY1713](#)

Relevant resources and links

Books referenced above include [Treasure Box](#) by Margaret Wild and Freya Blackwood, [The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr Morris Lessmore](#) by William Joyce and [Midnight in the Library](#) by Ursula Dubosarky and Ron Brooks, [My two blankets](#) by Irena Kobald and Freya Blackwood, [Pie in the Sky](#) by Remi Lai and Sally Morgan's [Sister Heart](#). Visit the illustrator [Sarah Davis'](#) website, explore [mandala design](#), [pointillism](#) and [street art](#). Find more PETAA units of work on verse novels in [Bindi](#) and [The Little Wave](#), and watch a PETAA members webinar with Wendy Orr on [the joy of poetry](#).

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