

Type of Text

Picture book

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

English Literacy

The Arts

Writing

Social Science, HPE

Science

Music

Maths

THEMES

- OCD
- Family
- Relationships
- Mental health
- Anxiety disorders in children
- School
- Science
- Cognitive behaviours / Rational thought processes
- Coping
- Social issues

Publication Details

Published: 15 March 2021

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Publisher: Wombat Books \$24.99 (HB)

ISBN:

Format: Hardcover 32pp Paperback POD

Ideal for: 4 – 8 year olds and sufferers of OCD

TEACHERS NOTES for OSWALD MESSWEATHER

Prepared by Dimity Powell & Siobhan McVey 2021

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SYNOPSIS

Oswald gets jiggle legs and itchy palms – all the time. He gets them so often, he hardly has time to sleep. He has no idea how to make them or the chaotic tangle in his head stop. Maybe his CRAYONS hold the answer.

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.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

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](#).

WRITING STYLE

Dimity's writing style is often described as powerful and emotive, laced with humour and lilting language to soften the often sensitive subject matter she tackles.

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Oswald is not a picture book that focuses intently on the educational perspectives of children with OCD but rather more on the emotional aspects associated with this debilitating condition. Oswald is caught in the grips of needing to be in control of the messier aspects of his life and like many young children suffering from obsessive worrying and anxieties, wants to stop but can't. By allowing Oswald to take control of his anxieties and employ them with purpose, Oswald gains room to breathe and awareness that they need not govern him. The meme, '*Don't let your ice cream melt as you count the sprinkles*' resonates strongly with Dimity and not just because she loves ice cream! She too shares a tendency to obsess over minutiae, often losing sight of the bigger beautiful picture.

I wanted Oswald to reflect a child's compulsive anxiety disorder, his mental anguish and frustrations and their impact on him both socially and in the home environment but without sounding prescriptive. The use of repeating phraseology conveys a sense of the compulsive reactions Ozzie (as he became known to me) endures to combat his obsessive, destructive thoughts; thoughts born from a fear of consequence, that something bad might happen if he doesn't count his crayons.

This story assumes a loose cyclical structure, ending almost as it begun with one very important difference; that Ozzie is no longer utterly exhausted by his condition. He has turned a corner with the realisation that he has more control than he originally thought and with this realisation comes a certain salvation.

Siobhan's evocative stylised illustrations help reinforce as well as soften the prose which is occasionally metaphoric and curt. Ribbons and swirls of colour speak for Oswald, depicting the intensity of his emotions through their form and complexity and deliver a sense of hope and enlightenment.

ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND

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.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

I decided to depart from my normal use of traditional media for this book, and instead focus on digital illustration. The style still seems as though pencils or pastels have been used, but working digitally meant I could be more precise, move or rotate elements when needed, and erase more cleanly to show small details and colour. Towards

the start of the book, Oswald is at home, an environment which feels crowded, claustrophobic and chaotic. The straight lines of the wallpaper, the details of mess around the house, lots of lines and a limited colour palette demonstrates that Oswald is finding various situations difficult and requires a coping mechanism. At school, the sheer volume of possible issues again propels Oswald to manage his anxiety. And yet, as he begins to use his crayons for their colourful potential and not merely as a counting tool, the environment seems a little more colourful, a little more hopeful. The playground can be enjoyed, the wallpaper at home now reminds him of his colourful crayons, and he can dream of vivid solutions in peace. The use of pencil itself is scratchy and sometimes rough, not clean and precise as Oswald would prefer. This is real life, and continues even when Oswald has found peace.

SELLING POINTS

- Published Australian author and illustrator
- Zero – 100-year readership.
- Spotlights the concepts of mental well-being and mental health, anxiety and OCD in young children
- Illustrates one aspect of compulsive behaviour resulting from obsessive thoughts and reactions
- Highlights cognitive behaviour, limitations and involuntary outcomes in early primary schoolers
- Addresses the Australian primary SOSE curricula plus many other areas including Math, Science, Art, HPE, and Social Sciences.
- Unique character-driven artwork artfully accentuates the sometimes misinterpreted behaviours and emotions of children with OCD, highlighting their internal struggles

ABOUT WRITING *OSWALD MESSWEATHER*

Sometimes picture book ideas spring up out of nowhere. I can't recall exactly where Oswald's story came from or why the urge to tell it hammered at me so strongly, but once he slipped into my life, he was determined to stay and be heard. Oswald Constantine Dorian Messweather's tale first bubbled to life during a flight from Brisbane to Singapore. In just under eight hours, Ozzie as he affectionately became known to me, invited me into his precise and anxious world. I knew I had to treat him gently yet couldn't wait to share his tale of overcoming, or rather managing, OCD with the world. This is his story.

While many of us, young and old, develop repetitive habits that can be interpreted as obsessive, it is when unwanted reoccurring thoughts, fears and sensations (obsessions) dominate actions and compel repetitive behaviours to reduce or alleviate the fear of a consequence (compulsions) that the illness, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) becomes apparent.

Unhealthy reoccurring anxious thoughts can inhibit daily functioning in the most corrosive ways. Nearly 3 per cent of Australians experience OCD with children as young as six displaying symptoms. Causes and triggers are many and

varied however, this picture book endeavours to create a timely and gentle medium, which parents and carers can share with young children to encourage deeper discussion and promote emotional and mental healing in a non-instructive way.

The book is dedicated to my father, a devotee for detail who perhaps passed on this trait to me. The ability to observe closely is without argument a plus in my career. However, my apparent tendency to tip into compulsive behaviours at times also prompted me to pay homage to disorder. Life is messy at times and that's not necessarily a bad thing. If we can relax the need to always be in control perhaps healthier mental outlooks can prevail improving emotional resilience and mental wellbeing.

Ensuring that the language remained interesting and fun was paramount in making this story kid-friendly, relatable and memorable despite the complexity of the subject matter. OCD can't be cured in 32 pages but hopefully Ozzie's story assists in the recognition and acknowledgement of this debilitating disorder and offers sufferers a glimpse of what could be. I hope it sends a message that they are not alone and that relief exists. For those unfamiliar with this condition, *Oswald Messweather* is a way to connect with peers different from them by elevating their understanding and tolerance.

ABOUT ILLUSTRATING OSWALD MESSWEATHER

My goal with *Oswald Messweather* was not to dive into the fears and obsessions literally, but rather show the ongoing presence of the psychological and physical ramifications of OCD. At home, Oswald doesn't seem to have the understanding and support of those around him, and so finds his own way of coping with the messes and problems. At school, a single setting poses several anxiety provoking obstacles, and Oswald must once again calm himself with counting.

His ability to find a solution by counting is commendable, and shows a desire for wanting to cope, so I decided to make the colour palette restricted but not too dark and dreary. I wanted to call attention to his physical process in detail but also metaphorically illustrate his perspective of the environments from a place of anxiety and worry. A continual presence of thin black tendrils is the reminder of his anxiety, and a burst of unrestrained colour shows a new perspective on how he can focus and find fulfilment with the same tools he had used for counting.

TEACHING POINTS & 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

- Before Reading (Interpreting, analyzing, evaluating / [ACELY1660](#))
 - Show the cover to the class and ask the students what they think the book might be about.
 - Read the back cover blurb. Does this give them more of an idea of what the book could be about?
 - Ask students if they can recognize the setting of this story from the cover image.
- During Reading
 - Ask students if Oswald Messweather reminds them of anyone they know: a friend, a sibling, themselves perhaps.
 - What is their first impression of Oswald Messweather? Do they regard him as happy, shy, worried, outgoing or friendly?
 - What changes does Oswald Messweather experience during the story?
 - Discuss why they think Oswald Messweather needs to count his crayons repetitively.
 - 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 (Responding to literature / [ACELT1783](#), [ACELT1582](#), [ACELT1578](#))
 - Ask students how they think Oswald Messweather views his family and friends by the end of the story.
 - What are the students' impressions of his parents, brother, friends? Do they seem 'normal' to them or funny, perhaps messy?
 - Are they relieved that Oswald Messweather found a way to contribute to his science group? Are they happy for him? If so, why?
 - Do they find the ending: satisfying, confusing, hopeful, predictable, a surprise, comforting, or a relief?
 - 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.
 - 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?

- Examine the similarities between Oswald Messweather's character, his family and school friends with their own relationships.
- Whom do students regard as the main character of the story? Who are the sub or secondary characters?
- Why are the sub characters important to the story?
- How do they support Oswald Messweather and help him learn from his situation?
- 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 emphasise 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?

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- Do they think this is because the anxiety is shown internally? Oswald keeps his concerns carefully packed away.

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.

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](#)

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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.

VISUAL LITERACY (Expressing and developing ideas / ACELA1453)

- Search for the visual clues the illustrator includes in the story to show a change of:
 - Emotion / action
 - 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](#)

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- 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)

MATHEMATICS

(Probability/Chance, Shape, Numbers and Patterns [ACMSP024](#), [ACMMG042](#),

[ACMNA035](#))

- Chance and Probability
 - 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
 - Identify the geometric shapes and symbols used throughout the illustrations e.g. boats, brick walls, oranges, eggs, hopscotch grid etc.
 - Count them and examine their use in the illustrations. Is it deliberate or incidental?
 - 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?

THE ARTS

VISUAL ARTS / CRAFT

(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.

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)

SOCIAL SCIENCE

(Social Health [ACPPS005](#), [ACPPSO17](#), [ACELA1787](#), [ACPPS020](#))

- Discuss the notion of mental illness in young people, specifically, OCD. Do the students understand
 - What it means
 - How it might affect a person / their life or those around them
 - 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).
 - 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)

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:
 - 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!](#))
 - Replicate with oranges, paper boats, eggs
 - 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.
 - Which objects float better than others? Examine why this is?
 - 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.
 - Hypothesize why they think this is and then research the answer.
 - 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...](#)
- 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

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- 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.

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?
- Have fun!