



# MAX and the Purple Worry

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*"It has to be perfect," said Worry.*

*"What happens if it isn't?" asked Max.*

*"The world explodes . . . KA-POW!"*

## A Discussion and Activity Guide about Worry and Anxiety

In *Max and the Purple Worry*, Max is joined by an unwelcome companion. Worry, in the form of a purple meerkat, appears whenever Max attempts to do his math. Worse still, Worry refuses to leave even though Max does his best to comfort and reassure Worry.

This reading guide explores the story's themes and provides conversation starters and activities to help children express their feelings. Access this guide online at [www.flyawaybooks.com/resources](http://www.flyawaybooks.com/resources), where you can follow the links for more information.

### Key Themes

#### Feeling Worried

As soon as Max sees his math work, he begins to feel worried. His racing thoughts and fears appear in the form of a meerkat who voices Max's concerns and gives Max advice on how he should behave. By characterizing Worry as a stressed-out meerkat, this book shows how worried thoughts can escalate and affect our behaviors.

The humor in Worry's movements and speech lightens the mood, which can help open discussion about pinpointing when our worries become overwhelming.



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## Accepting Feelings

At first, Max listens to Worry, but eventually he decides to go against Worry's advice and ask the teacher for help. Importantly, Max does not reject Worry entirely, ask Worry to leave, or try to ignore Worry. Max speaks calmly and rationally, comforting Worry as if his emotion is his friend. And even though Worry is opposed to Max's plan to just try his best, Max does it anyway. This is a great way to show young readers that we should not push our feelings away: we can accept that they're there, treat ourselves with kindness when difficult emotions appear, and choose a course that differs from where those emotions would lead us, even if the emotions remain.

## Developing Confidence

Max is not confident about his math ability and is afraid to ask for help. Many young students are anxious about schoolwork, but Max's situation can be applied to anything a child is worried about. Max listens to and believes in Worry's fears, which only increases his anxiety. By the end of the book, Max has decided to act differently. He may still have worries about math, but he is now confident in his ability to ask for help without Worry's catastrophic fears coming true.



# Discussion Starters

## Before You Begin Reading

- Look at the front cover of the book. What do you think the story will be about?
- Which character is Max, and which character is Worry?
- What kind of animal is Worry?
- Why do you think Worry is portrayed as an animal?
- Can you tell from the cover what Max might be worried about?
- Do you worry about doing math or other schoolwork? Why or why not?

## Comprehension

- At the start of the story, Max wishes he could run away. Why?
- When Max begins his math, he says to Worry, "I have to write *something*." Worry replies, "It's a risk." Why does Worry think it's risky?



- What does Max do to avoid completing his math in class?
- Why do Max and Worry try to hide and then run away?
- Max's grown-ups hug him before tucking him in bed and tell him to just try his best. Why can't Worry sleep that night?
- Why does Max say "I'll look after you" to Worry?
- When does Max decide to do something differently in his next math class? Why does Max decide to do this?
- Worry starts to fade near the end of the story. Can you find the page where Worry turns from deep purple to a paler shade? Why do you think Worry starts to fade at this point in the story?

- At the end of the book, after Worry has faded away, a new character called Resilience lands on Max's desk. Do you know what *resilience* means? Why does Max meet Resilience?
- Do you think anyone other than Max can see or hear Worry and Resilience? Why do you think this is?



## Reflection

- When Max feels worried, his stomach churns like a washing machine. Have you ever felt like that? What happens when you feel worried or nervous?
- On the classroom wall behind Max, there are three posters that show faces. What emotion does each face represent?
- When Max asks Worry what happens when something isn't perfect, Worry tells him the world explodes or, worse, everyone looks at you. Do you think the world really would explode? What might happen instead?



- When we're feeling worried, asking for help can seem a bit scary. What happens when Max asks for help?
- Does Worry become more worried, less worried, or stay the same as the story goes on? Does Max become more or less worried or stay the same as the story goes on?
- Why doesn't Max just ask Worry to leave? Why does Worry stay?
- What was your favorite part about this book? Did you have a favorite page?
- Do you have a worry that can be represented by an animal? Which animal?

## Activities

### Draw Your Feelings

How do you feel right now? Happy? Excited? Bored? Angry? Imagine that whatever you're feeling is an animal that has come to sit with you. What would your animal be? Perhaps it's a happy lion, a sad giraffe, or an angry duck! Draw your feeling animal. Perhaps you could be in your picture too.

### Make a Worry Box and a Happy Box

Find two boxes, a pen or pencil, and some strips of paper. One box will be a worry box, and the other will be a happy box. The boxes can be decorated with glitter, ribbon, artwork, or anything else—be creative!

To use the worry box, write down a worry on a slip of paper and put it in the box. You can write a full sentence or just a word or two, or you can draw a picture of your worry. Place the worry in the box and give it to your grown-up to keep. Set a time in the future for you and your grown-up to go through the box together, then set the box aside and think about something else. Remember, your worries don't need constant attention; leave them in the box and come back to them later. When it's time to go through the box, you can talk with your grown-up about any problems that still bother you and perhaps put them back in the box to discuss later. You can also throw away the things you aren't worried about anymore!



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For the happy box, think of items or experiences that make you happy, write them down or draw them, and place them in the happy box. You can write down the name of a friend, write a short note describing a fun day, include photos or drawings of your favorite places and people, or add anything else that comes to mind. Again, be creative and use your imagination. Open the box regularly to have a look at all the things that make you feel good!

## Create Your Own Short Story

Partner with a friend or two for this activity! Together you will create your own short story about Max and Worry. Think of a situation where Max is feeling worried and consider what will happen when the character Worry returns. Here are some questions to think about:

- Why is Max nervous?
- What does Worry say?
- Is Worry still an animal? If so, what kind? If not, what form does Worry take?
- What does Worry tell Max to do? Does Max do it?
- How does Max help Worry to start fading away?
- Who does Max meet at the end of your story?

If you feel like it, perhaps you could act out your story!

