

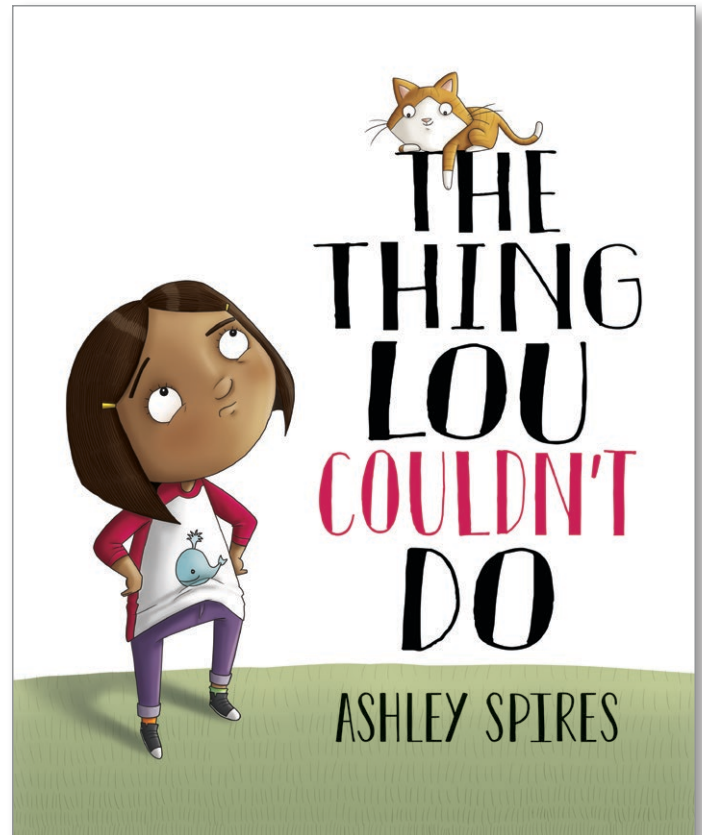
THE THING LOU COULDN'T DO – TEACHING GUIDE

About the Book

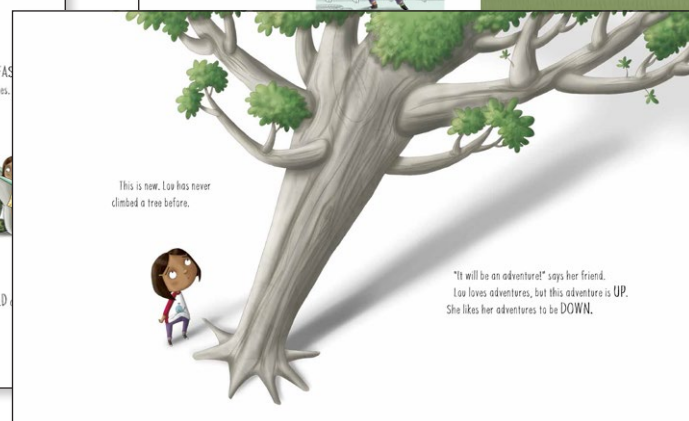
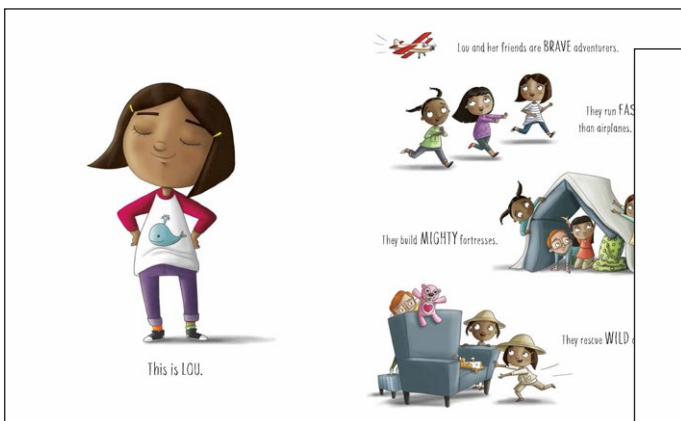
“Lou and her friends are BRAVE adventurers. They run FASTER than airplanes. They build MIGHTY fortresses. They rescue WILD animals.” But one day, when they’re looking for a ship to play pirates in, Lou’s friend has an idea: “Up there! The tree can be our ship!” “Ummm ...” says Lou. This is something new. Lou has never climbed a tree before, and she’s sure she can’t do it. So she tries to convince her friends to play a not-up-a-tree game. When that doesn’t work, she comes up with reasons for not joining them: her arm is sore, her cat needs a walk, you shouldn’t climb so soon after eating. Finally, she tells herself that she doesn’t want to climb the tree. But is that true, or is this brave adventurer just too afraid to try? Ultimately, Lou faces her fear, and although she fails, the effort empowers her, encouraging a growth mindset.

About the Author-Illustrator

ASHLEY SPIRES grew up in a little town on the coast of British Columbia called Tsawwassen, with two parents, an older sister, eight cats, a dog and the occasional newt. For a while she thought that animation was her future, but then photography caught her eye, which led her to bookmaking courses. These classes introduced her to the world of illustration, and she never looked back. Delighted that there was, in fact, a career that allowed her to remain in her pajamas, hang out with her cats and be productive at the same time, she knew illustration was the perfect job for her. Ashley spent time living in Toronto and Saskatoon before returning to her home turf of Delta, British Columbia, where she now resides.



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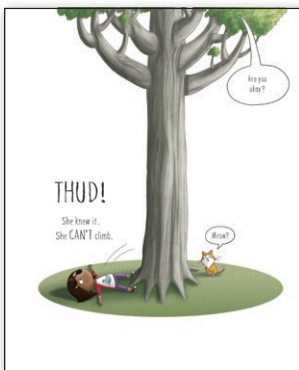
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Overview

This teaching resource focuses on mental health, and specifically on the social determinants of mental health (see the box to the right). The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that to curb mental illness, we must consider a “life course” approach, which involves focusing on social conditions at each stage of life. This resource highlights a life course approach in light of an ever-present need to address the startling rate of suicide, and particularly youth suicide.¹ The story of *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do* is powerful. It involves Lou, a young child, encountering a challenge that at this stage she simply cannot overcome. However, we witness Lou attempting to overcome her fear, and although she fails, we are left with the impression that she accepts that she is not yet able to climb the tree and perhaps one day she will. This mindset of resilience is key to mental health. Even though Lou fails to climb the tree, the story indicates she has developed the disposition to think in a resilient way about her challenge. This skill, as well as others, must be intentionally taught/discussed to support the positive mental health of young people.

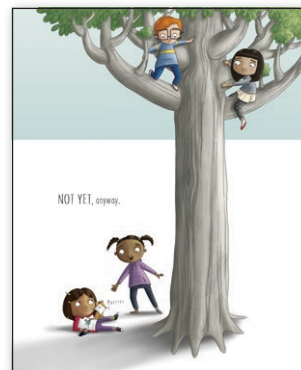
Depending on the local context, certain individuals and groups in society may be placed at a significantly higher risk of experiencing mental health problems. These vulnerable groups may (but do not necessarily) include members of households living in poverty, people with chronic health conditions, infants and children exposed to maltreatment and neglect, adolescents first exposed to substance use, minority groups, indigenous populations, older people, people experiencing discrimination and human rights violations, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons, prisoners, and people exposed to conflict, natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies.

Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020,
World Health Organization, 2013, p. 7.



THUD!

She knew it.
She CAN'T climb.



NOT YET, anyway.

	Grade	Theme	High-Yield Strategies
Activity 1	1 to 5 and 6 to 8	Healthy Choices When Faced with a Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative Learning • Comparing and contrasting • Higher-order thinking • Identifying similarities and differences • Nonlinguistic representations
Activity 2	7 and 8	Removing the Stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing and contrasting • Cooperative Learning • Higher-order thinking • Nonlinguistic representations • Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
Activity 3	7 and 8	Personal Resiliency: The Basics of Self-Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative Learning • Identifying similarities and differences • Higher-order thinking • Reinforcing effort and providing recognition

¹ WHO cites suicide as the second leading cause of death for young people ages 15–29 worldwide. The pervasiveness of suicide extends beyond young people to adults as well. Statistics Canada indicates that in 2013 there were 4054 suicides, that the rate for males was 3 times higher than for females and that the highest rates were among adults aged 40–59. Therefore, intentionally teaching protective factors for mental health at a young age may reduce adult suicide rates.

THE THING LOU COULDN'T DO – TEACHING GUIDE

ACTIVITY 1: Healthy Choices When Faced with a Challenge

MATERIALS

- *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*
- Chart Paper / Board
- Space for students to create a tableau

OVERVIEW

This activity is designed to support young people in thinking about various options when faced with a challenge. The two options explored are (1) asking for help and (2) using positive thinking to accept not being able to overcome a challenge immediately (knowing they can return to the challenge later). Multiple sources (such as *School Mental Health Assist*) cite “asking for help” as a cornerstone to supporting mental health and suicide prevention. In addition, a key protective measure is the ability to be resilient. Therefore, it is imperative to support young people to increase their level of resilience and to recognize that asking for help is an option. **Note to Educator:** It is important to remember that due to various forms of systemic oppression/discrimination, such as racism, classism and homophobia, there are particular demographic groups (e.g., Aboriginal people, LGBTQ people, families living in poverty) at higher risk of mental illness. In addition, educators must remember that asking for help can be complex if there is stigma attached or if asking for help means telling on someone else.

LEARNING GOAL

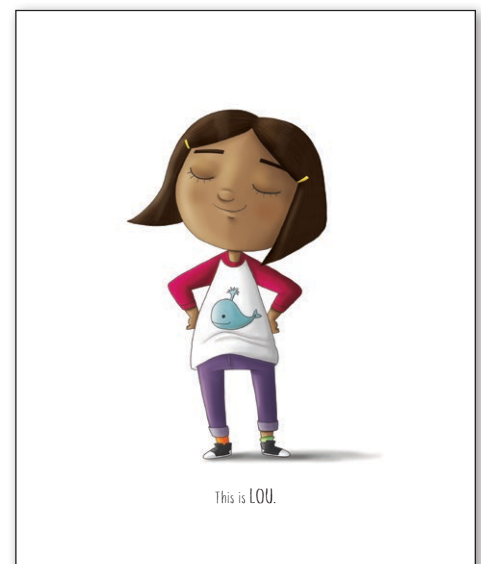
In this activity students will:

- Grades 1–5: produce one tableau demonstrating how they might respond in the face of a challenge. Later in the activity, students will be guided to think specifically about the two options above (asking for help and bouncing back from failure by using positive thinking) as two possible healthy choices.
- Grades 6–8: produce two tableaux demonstrating how they might react in the face of a challenge. They will also be guided to think specifically about the two options (asking for help and bouncing back from failure by using positive thinking) as two possible healthy choices.

Note to Educator: A tableau is a series of motionless scenes that tell a story without words. In the scene, students can be a person or an inanimate object.

ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*. Ask students what they think the story is about. **Note to Educator:** This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow.
3. Tell students you are going to read *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*, a story about a girl who faces a challenge. Lou must decide how she will deal with this challenge. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the age of your students, you may want to discuss what a challenge is and offer a few examples. You may also want to do a class brainstorm on common challenges that children their age face.



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ACTION

1. Read *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do* up to and including the page which says “OH. That does look pretty great. If only Lou could climb trees.”
Grades 1–5: Put students in groups of three to five and ask them to brainstorm a new ending to this story that they will share with the class through one to three tableau scenes. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the age of your students, you may want them to do just one frozen picture.
Grades 6–8: Put students in groups of three to five and ask them to brainstorm two different endings to this story that they will share with the class through three to five tableau scenes. Before they physically create the scenes, give students a chance to draw a sketch of each scene for their two different tableaux. **Note to Educator:** You may wish to skip this step for younger grades. For older grades, you may wish to review each group’s endings prior to practice and encourage students to go beyond preparing the two extreme endings (e.g., overcoming the challenge and being victorious or giving up and being angry).
2. Once students have drawn and then practiced their tableau(x), have them present their scene(s). On the board or chart paper, track the different types of endings they have prepared.
3. (Grades 4–8 only) After the presentations, ask each group to create a chart with similarities and differences between the tableaux presented by their peers.
4. If any of the groups have presented either of the two key strategies (asking for help and being content with not being able to climb the tree for now), have them present again. **Note to Educator:** These two strategies are often not the options that students utilize. The key here is to ensure that students know these are healthy options. As stated earlier, learning how to ask for help is a protective factor for suicide prevention, and the mentality of “being okay” with not overcoming a challenge immediately (and knowing that they can come back to it later if they desire) builds resilience.
5. If these two options have not been presented by the group, provide these options to the students. Assign the groups one of these options to practice, present and consolidate.

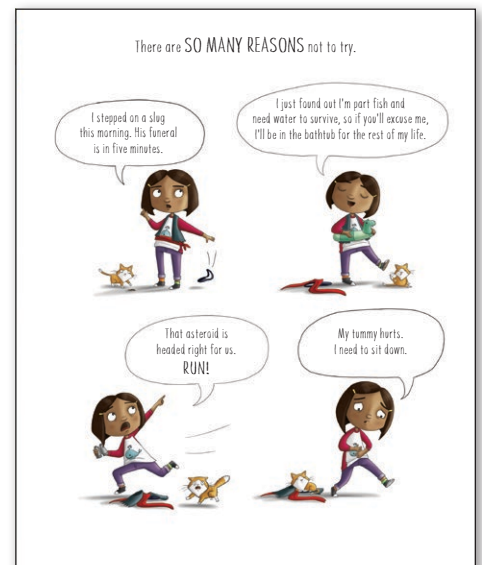


CONSOLIDATION

1. Individually, in groups or as a whole class, brainstorm the positive impact of the last two options.
Note to Educator: Students may have created other valuable options that you may want to profile to the entire class.
2. Read the rest of *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do* so students can see how the story ends.
3. In a journal or other written form, have students write about the positive impact of these two options (or of other healthy options).

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

(Grades 4–8) The issue in *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do* is very “safe,” as Lou is grappling with not being able to climb a tree — a challenge with only minimal consequences. Based on the demographic of your students, engage the students in conversation, another tableau or journal writing on a challenge with more risk. **Note to Educator:** It is important for students to think about decision-making on a critical level. They should consider what kinds of situations and decisions are more challenging to handle than others. Who faces more challenges and why? What kinds of people should you ask for help and in which circumstances? What if asking for help means telling on someone you care about or love? How do you protect yourself and others? What if not being successful at something has detrimental consequences and leads to isolation and exclusion?



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ACTIVITY 2: Removing the Stigma

Before starting this activity, review the **Guiding Questions** on the last page of this guide.

MATERIALS

- *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*
- Materials needed to produce a video/poster/display

OVERVIEW

In society, the phrases “mental health” and “mental illness” can be taboo and often elicit a negative response. This activity begins to explore what these terms really mean and how they are different. Students will be asked to think about the impact of “the taboo” among young people and about how they can be change makers by helping to “remove the stigma.”

LEARNING GOAL

After gaining a clear understanding of mental health and mental illness, students will use technology to create a video/poster/display or some other type of presentation. Their creation will be a tool to teach others the difference between mental health and mental illness in an engaging way with the intention of removing the stigma.

ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*. Ask students what they think the story is about.
Note to Educator: This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow.
3. Tell students you are going to read *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*, a story about a girl who faces a challenge. Lou must decide how she will deal with this challenge. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the age of your students, you may want to discuss what a challenge is and offer a few examples. You may also want to do a class brainstorm on common challenges that children their age face.
4. Read *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*.

ACTION

1. Put students in groups of three to five and assign them the task of researching the difference between mental health and mental illness. In addition to using tools like **School Mental Health Assist** and *The Social Determinants of Mental Health* (WHO, 2014), students should use multiple resources to gather information. **Note to Educator:** As per the graphic to the right ([source](#)), it is key for the students to begin to understand that everyone has mental health, but that it ranges from poor to optimal based on a number of factors. For example, someone can have a mental illness but be mentally well, or be mentally unwell and not have a mental illness. Students should also begin to understand that a mental illness is hard to see, but must be treated like any other illness.

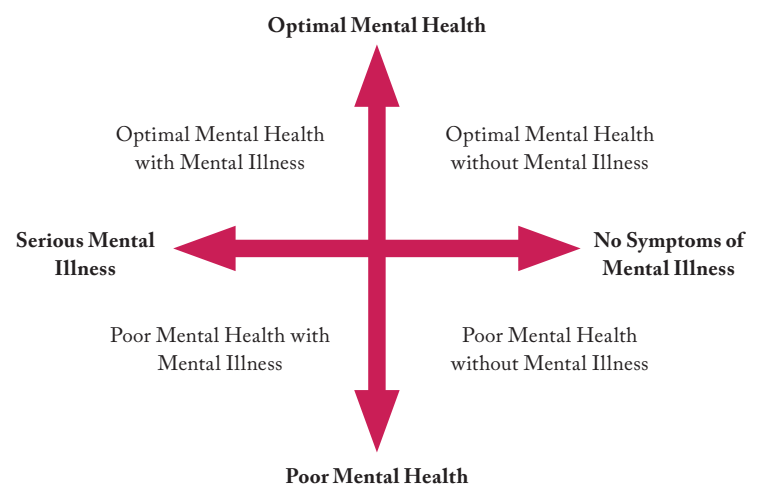
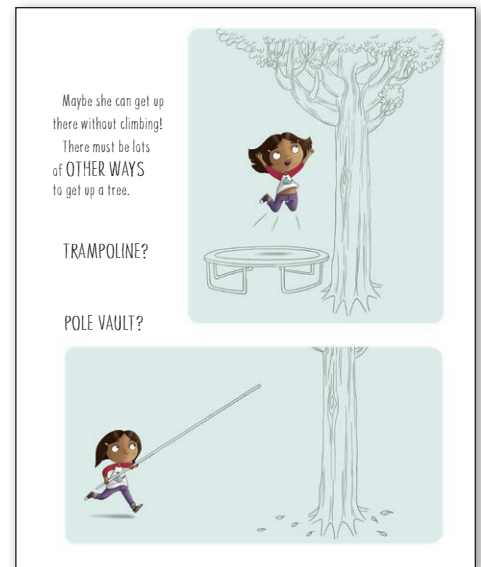


Figure 1: The Mental Health/Illness Continuum

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2. Students should create a proposal for their project for peer and/or teacher feedback prior to creation.
Note to Educator: The draft should clearly articulate the relationship between mental health and mental illness. It should also clearly challenge the stigma in an appealing way.
3. Create it!

CONSOLIDATION

1. In small groups, students can demonstrate their understanding of mental health and mental illness by presenting their work to their peers.
2. The group should give feedback on each presentation with respect to their understanding of the relationship between mental health and mental illness and share thoughts on how the stigma was challenged.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. As a class, discuss which presentations are more likely to challenge the stigma among their peer group.
2. Have students think about how they can begin a schoolwide “Removing the Stigma” campaign.
3. Begin the campaign.

ACTIVITY 3: Personal Resiliency: The Basics of Self-Care

MATERIALS

- *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*
- Materials to create a one-pager
- Copies of **Personal Resiliency: The Basics of Self-Care**

OVERVIEW

Self-care is an important component of personal resiliency. In this activity, young people will have an opportunity to review, analyze and critique a one-page resource on self-care. Students will then produce their own one-page resource about self-care based on their own lived realities and aimed at children their own age.

LEARNING GOAL

When a one-pager is written to cater to multiple audiences, the point of connection for children of diverse identities is not always well represented. Therefore, in this activity students will create a one-page resource on self-care that resonates with them from their own cultural context, to promote resilience. They should also include at least one item that is outside of their comfort zone — maybe something they would not typically do, such as a gratitude walk.

ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*. Ask students what they think the story is about.
Note to Educator: This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow.
3. Tell students you are going to read *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*, a story about a girl who faces a challenge. Lou must decide how she will deal with this challenge. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the age of your students, you may want to discuss what a challenge is and offer a few examples. You may also want to do a class brainstorm on common challenges that children their age face.
4. Read *The Thing Lou Couldn't Do*.



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ACTION

1. After reading the story, have a brief dialogue with the students about how Lou decided to deal with the challenge of climbing a tree. **Note to Educator:** It is important to highlight the fact that Lou decided to stay positive and return to this task at a later time.
2. As a class or in small groups, brainstorm various characteristics and traits that might form the disposition which Lou holds (e.g., high self-esteem, positive outlook, high level of resilience, etc.).
3. Introduce the term resilience and co-create a working definition. **Note to Educator:** Definitions should include content such as the ability to bounce back and/or the ability to recover from adversity.
4. Discuss, or have students find examples of, how Lou demonstrated self-care and resiliency throughout the story.
5. Share this PDF on **Personal Resiliency** from School Mental Health Assist or a different one-pager from another source relevant to your context.
6. Review the document as a class.
7. Put students in groups and ask them to critique this document for visual appeal, content and relatability.
8. Ask students what they would do to make this document more relevant to them.
9. Ask students to create their own one-pager on “Personal Resiliency: The Basics of Self-Care.”

CONSOLIDATION

Put students in small groups and have them share their one-pagers and explain why their documents are appealing.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. As a class, discuss which one-pager is more likely to appeal to the students’ peer group.
2. Have students think about how they can share their one-pager with others.
3. With student permission, produce posters of their one-pager and/or send them to a mental health provider for possible publication. **Note to Educator:** The poster would require careful vetting prior to sending for possible publication.



THE THING LOU COULDN'T DO – TEACHING GUIDE

Why Use This Teaching Guide?

This resource strives to support educators who want to give students the tools to critically read the world. It embraces a critical pedagogy that engages dialogue with students about how social, political and economic factors impact them and others. Through the activities provided, educators will empower and support students to challenge social inequities and create a better world.

This resource uses high-yield instructional strategies (e.g., making comparisons, cooperative learning, reinforcing effort, etc.) as a tool to increase students' skill sets and create a platform for relevant inquiries. Literature has the power to engage children and promote imagination, and it can also maintain stereotypes or interrupt them. This resource aims to offer young people the opportunity to think critically and to problem-solve — life skills that will equip them to navigate various life circumstances.

GUIDING QUESTIONS WHEN USING PICTURE BOOKS

	Questions to think about PRIOR to using a picture book	Questions to plan for PRIOR to the activity
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you know your own biases?• Do you know what stereotypes and biases are present in the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are you prepared to challenge the stereotypes and biases in the book?
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who will connect most with the images in the book?• Who will connect most with the content and themes in the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you support all students to make a personal and meaningful connection to the book?
Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whose voices are present?• Whose voices are missing?• Who has the power and privilege? (Think in terms of gender, race, ability, economic class, religion, etc.)• What is the historical context of the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you include the missing voice(s)?• How can you address issues of power and privilege?• How can you contextualize the book?
Social Action and Challenging Inequity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can issues of social justice be taken up through the use of this book? (Every book has an avenue where we can consider issues of social justice. For example, if the book is set in a middle-class community, what are some of the injustices for those who do not live in middle-class communities?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you help students to think about taking action that is meaningful to them (i.e., older students have more playscape time, the absence of a community center in the neighborhood, factors that cause poverty in the community/other countries)?• How can you equip students to take action against inequities?

RESOURCES USED IN *THE THING LOU COULDN'T DO* TEACHING GUIDE

Heartache 2 Hope. <http://www.heartache2hope.com>

Mental Health-Assist. <https://smh-assist.ca/>

Marzano, Robert J., Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock. *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001.

Ontario Ministry of Education. *Supporting Minds: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Students' Mental Health and Well-being*, (2013). <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/SupportingMinds.pdf>

World Health Organization. *Social Determinants of Mental Health*, 2014.

http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/gulbenkian_paper_social_determinants_of_mental_health/en/

World Health Organization. *Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020*, 2013.

http://www.who.int/mental_health/action_plan_2013/en/