

# VIRGINIA WOLF – Teaching Guide

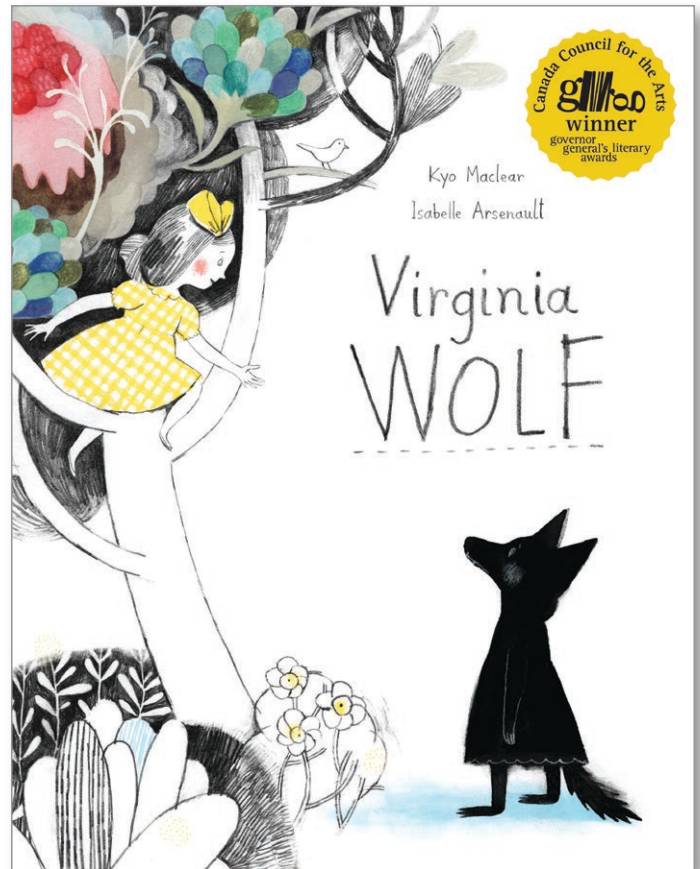
## About the Book

Vanessa's sister, Virginia, is in a "wolfish" mood — growling, howling and acting very strange. It's a funk so fierce, the whole household feels topsy-turvy. Vanessa tries everything she can think of to cheer up her sister, but nothing seems to work. Then Virginia tells Vanessa about an imaginary perfect place called Bloomsberry. Armed with an idea, Vanessa begins to paint Bloomsberry on the bedroom walls, transforming them into a beautiful garden complete with a swing and ladder "so that what was down could climb up." Before long, Virginia, too, has picked up a brush and undergoes a surprising transformation of her own. Loosely based on the relationship between author Virginia Woolf and her sister, painter Vanessa Bell, *Virginia Wolf* is an uplifting story for readers of all ages.

## About the Author

**KYO MACLEAR**'s father is British and her mother is Japanese. She was born in England, where she enjoyed a brief theatrical career in London's West End. Little did she know when she appeared in *The King and I* that her one line — "I believe in snow" — would be prophetic. At age four, in the midst of a very snowy winter, she and her parents moved to Toronto, Canada.

Later Kyo attended university, where she pursued a degree in art history. She followed this degree with another degree in cultural studies. Alas, though she acquired several useful skills as a longtime student, neither degree led to particularly enriching employment. This was just as well because this time period provided Kyo an opportunity to fire up her imagination.



ISBN 978-1-55453-649-8

## About the Illustrator

**ISABELLE ARSENAULT** was born in 1978 in Sept-Iles, Quebec. After studies in Fine Arts and Graphic Design, she specialized in illustration. Quickly, she gained recognition from the industry and her peers through several awards from major international illustration contests such as Communication Arts, American Illustration and Applied Arts. In 2005, she won the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award for the illustration of her first children's book, *Le Coeur de Monsieur Gauguin*. Her passion for children's imaginations allows her to produce images that appeal to young readers as well as older ones. Through children's illustration she gives life to her own childhood dreams and in doing so, she hopes to inspire upcoming generations. Isabelle Arsenault now lives in Montreal, Quebec.



**Kids Can Press**

We acknowledge the assistance of the Ontario Creates Book Fund, an initiative of Ontario Creates.

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## About This Resource

This resource is anchored in **critical consciousness literacy**<sup>1</sup>.

*What is critical consciousness literacy anyway?*

Many educators may be familiar with critical literacy. **Critical literacy** embraces the belief that every text, whether a picture book or an essay, needs to be a platform to better read and understand the world. Only when young people are afforded the opportunity to read the world do they have the capacity to create a better one.

*Where does culturally relevant pedagogy fit in?*

A key principle of **Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**<sup>2</sup> is that students see themselves in the learning and know that who they are is valued. When children engage in any form of literacy where they feel connected and their educational needs are being met, learning will take place. As well, a curriculum that provides opportunities to envision diverse ways of being and lived realities gives students opportunities to learn about other experiences and builds both understanding and respect.

This brings us to **Critical Consciousness Literacy**, which asks us to focus on the child by embracing both culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and critical literacy. Students' development of a "critical consciousness" in their acquiring of critical literacy skills is crucial in that it is this "consciousness" that results in an awareness of the culture and the dynamics of societal power. Understanding oneself in relation to societal power means exploring concepts such as social identities, stereotyping, bias, discrimination, privilege and marginalization. This then prepares students to become agents of social change, giving them the wherewithal to challenge the status quo and to be proactive toward social justice issues. Therefore, a **pre-activity** was designed to support the building of connection between the text and the reader. This pre-activity, which contains a component for the teacher and a separate one for the students, is foundational to this guide.

### CRITICAL LITERACY means ...

- Recognizing that texts contain certain perspectives and biases
- Recognizing that point of view influences how a text is interpreted and understood
- Determining whose voices are present or absent
- Evaluating multiple perspectives for bias, reliability, fairness and validity
- Analyzing how language is used
- Taking a stance and engaging in a response in the interest of equity, fairness and social justice
- Using technology to see divergent perspectives, interact with authentic audiences, and express ideas

— *Adolescent Literacy Guide* (2016), p. 26



<sup>1</sup> "Critical Consciousness Literacy" is a term anchored in the work of Paulo Freire (2004) combined with the critical consciousness tenet in the work of Ladson-Billings (2002) in *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*. (Gaymes-San Vicente, A. & A. Te, TDSB Presentation, Spring 2017)

<sup>2</sup> "A nuanced approach to challenging the power and privilege that remain within our school walls can be seen in the fusion of *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings) and *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (Geneva Gay). These two distinct bodies of research (building on the work of Paulo Freire and his dialogic teaching, discussed more fully below) have recently been fused together by curriculum activists at the Centre for Urban Schooling at OISE/University of Toronto, into what has become known as Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP)." (Clanfield et. al., 2014, p. 268)

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## Overview

	Grade	Theme	High-Yield Strategies
<b>Pre-Activity</b>	All	Finding the Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing and contrasting</li> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• Higher-order thinking</li> <li>• Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</li> <li>• Nonlinguistic representations</li> </ul>
<b>Activity 1</b>	K–6	Exploring Emotions Using Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• Higher-order thinking</li> <li>• Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</li> <li>• Nonlinguistic representations</li> </ul>
<b>Extension 1</b>	K–6	Exploring Emotions through Visual Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• Higher-order thinking</li> <li>• Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</li> <li>• Nonlinguistic representations</li> </ul>
<b>Activity 2</b>	7–12	Understanding Depression and Finding Strategies to Cope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing and contrasting</li> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• Higher-order thinking</li> <li>• Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</li> </ul>
<b>Extension 1</b>	7–12	Understanding Depression through the Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparing and contrasting</li> <li>• Identifying similarities and differences</li> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• Higher-order thinking</li> <li>• Generating and testing hypothesis</li> </ul>
<b>Extension 2</b>	7–12	Understanding Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nonlinguistic representations</li> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> <li>• Higher-order thinking</li> <li>• Reinforcing effort and providing recognition</li> </ul>

## Pre-Activity — Finding the Connection

### TEACHER REFLECTION

Children learn best when the learning is relevant and meaningful for them. Using critical literacy as well as a Culturally Relevant and Responsive approach, this activity is designed to support students by creating meaning and connections to the picture book. Therefore, this essential pre-activity begins with an opportunity for teacher reflection prior to engaging in the pre-activity with the students.

“Teaching for critical literacy empowers students to be active thinkers, to look at the world from multiple perspectives and to develop questioning habits that encourage them to think and act on their decisions.”

— *Adolescent Literacy Guide* (2016), p. 26

“Developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive program planning is therefore essential in facilitating literacy learning experiences ... learning opportunities that we design need to be grounded ... in intentional consideration of who our learners are and what experiences will enable them to learn, adapt and achieve literacy success.”

— *Paying Attention to Literacy*, p. 3



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## LEARNING GOAL

Teachers will learn to recognize who is automatically included and positively valued through the use of *Virginia Wolf*. For any reader, connection to the book can take place through social identities. Social identities include, but are not limited to: race, indigeneity, sexual orientation, social class, gender identity and language. Those who feel connected to the book are more likely to be engaged. Therefore, this knowledge is essential, as it allows you to consider how to create inclusion for those who are not automatically included.

1. Consider your favorite picture book or novel — something that you really enjoyed reading.
2. On the “Making It Stick” chart, **Appendix A**, complete Section A.
3. Read *Virginia Wolf* with the following question in mind: How do you feel personally connected to *Virginia Wolf* through the text, pictures, messages or characters?
4. On the “Making It Stick” chart, Appendix A, complete Section B.
5. Review the elements of the book (content, pictures, character gender/race etc.) that gave you automatic inclusion, or not. Recognize that students who automatically and positively connect to the book (through any social identity) have an advantage as their connection can allow them to more readily engage in and demonstrate comprehension through subsequent activities. Their connection can allow them to engage in subsequent activities more readily. It becomes imperative for you to create a connection for those students who do not automatically connect. This connection can be the difference between engagement and disengagement as well as equal access to the learning.
6. Review the first two columns of the “Guiding Questions for Critical Literacy and Culturally Responsive Teaching” chart, **Appendix B**.
7. Review a list of students who you intend to use this book with. Consider which students might struggle to connect to the book.
8. On the “Making It Stick” chart, Appendix A, complete Section C.



## Pre-Activity

1. Show students the cover of *Virginia Wolf*.
2. Slowly leaf through the pages so that students can see the pictures.
3. Post the following connection prompts on chart paper:
  - This reminds me of ...
  - The picture looks like ...
  - The title makes me think of ...
  - Other
4. Depending on the grade, ask students to articulate orally, through writing or through visual art how they connect with the front cover or the pictures in the book.
5. Make an intentional effort to check in with the students recorded in Section C of the “Making It Stick” chart who may struggle to connect with the book.
6. Identify, post and review key or unfamiliar words from Spork.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY

A great learning opportunity for everyone might be to explore what the front cover would look like if each child were to design it. Using an age-appropriate art medium (paint, clay, plasticine, etc.), have students redesign the cover to create something that they feel includes them.



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## Activity 1: Exploring Emotions

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

### MATERIALS

- *Virginia Wolf*
- Board or chart paper
- Elmo or Doc Cam projector
- Copies of the Critical Analysis Process to post for students to see

### OVERVIEW

The tale of *Virginia Wolf* is told from the perspective of young Vanessa, who is dealing with a very real problem. Virginia, Vanessa's sister, is very sad and as a result the whole house is upside down! Throughout the story, Vanessa struggles through multiple ways to support her sister during a bout of depression. This story is filled with beautiful imagery, emotions and human connection. In this activity, students will be given an opportunity explore emotion using the arts.

### LEARNING GOAL

Students will use *Virginia Wolf* as a platform to identify three emotions, create a tableau and use the Critical Analysis Process to critique their own work as well as the work of another group.

### ACTIVITY

1. Complete the student pre-activity. **Note to Educator:** If it is not possible to complete the pre-activity, review Appendix B and proceed to step 2. If you have engaged in the pre-activity, skip to step 3.
2. If you have not completed the pre-activity, show students the cover of *Virginia Wolf*. Ask students what they think the story will be about. This will allow them to share thoughts, make connections and activate their prior knowledge.
3. Share with students that in this book they you will notice many different types of emotions from the main characters, Vanessa and Virginia.
4. Ask student to name some emotions. As they respond, record their responses on the board or chart paper.
5. Read *Virginia Wolf*.
6. Depending on the age group, ask students to record the emotions they feel as you read the book (one emotion per sticky note), and post the sticky notes on the board (as you are reading) for other classmates to see. This will allow students to see what emotions have been evoked in their classmates.
7. Review all of the emotions that have emerged on the sticky notes. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the age group, facilitate a conversation about the emotions and where they emerged. Or, you may want to have students do this in small groups.
8. Ask students to listen to the book a second time to discover feelings that did not occur to them the first time, but may have been pointed out by their classmates.
9. Discuss with students that different forms of art, such as visual arts and drama, have the ability to evoke different emotions. **Note to Educator:** It is important to mention that different people will feel different emotions because we each see the world through our unique cultures, biases, perspectives and everything else that informs our existence — sort of like a pair of glasses. This is okay and should be validated.



**tableau.** A group of silent, motionless figures used to represent a scene, theme, or abstract idea (e.g., peace, joy), or an important moment in a narrative. Tableaux may be presented as stand-alone images to communicate one specific message or may be used to achieve particular effects in a longer drama work. Important features of a tableau include character, space, gesture, facial expressions and levels.

— *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8, The Arts*, 2009, p. 172

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## ACTION

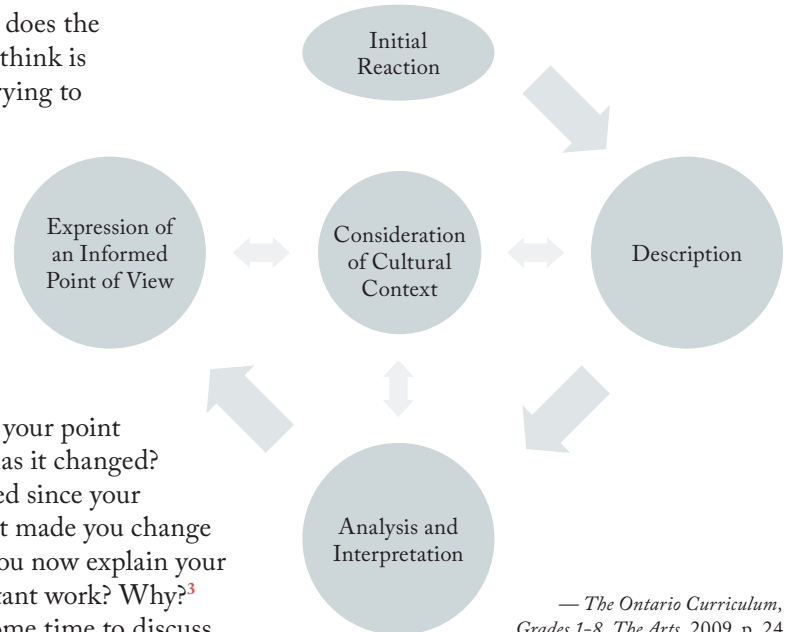
1. Project a picture from *Virginia Wolf* you feel will elicit emotion.
2. Guide the students through a critical analysis process (if this is an unfamiliar process for them) using your selected picture.

**Note to Educator:** It is important to model this process because students will use this process twice within the activity. First, they will use it to analyze and improve their own tableau. Second, they will use it evaluate and improve the work of another group.



3. As a class:
  - Give students an opportunity to **react** to the picture. Pose a number of questions: What is your first impression? What does this picture bring to mind? What emotions does this picture make you feel? What are your questions? What connections can you make between this picture and other art forms, or between this picture and your own experience? (*The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8, The Arts*, 2009, p. 24)
  - Give students an opportunity to **describe** the picture. Pose a number of questions: What do you see when you examine the picture closely? What grabs your attention in the picture? What do you sense (e.g., see, hear, smell, feel, taste) when you examine the picture? What characteristics can you identify in this work? (e.g., strong, repeated rhythm; rapid and slow movements of the upper body; vibrant paint colours; bold brushstrokes or lines; a performer speaking in role with clarity and conviction)? What do you think the artist worked particularly hard at while she created this picture?<sup>3</sup>
  - Give students an opportunity to **analyze** and **interpret** the picture. Pose a number of questions: What elements and conventions of the art form are used in this work? How are the elements organized, combined, or arranged? How does the work evoke ideas, feelings, and images? What do you think is the theme or subject of the work? What is the artist trying to communicate, and why? (Or, when reflecting on their own work: What did you intend to communicate, and why?) In your opinion, what is the artist's view of the world? How does this view match or contrast with your own view of the world?<sup>3</sup>
  - Give students an opportunity to **express their informed perspective** about the picture. Pose a number of questions: How effectively does the artist select and combine elements to achieve an intended effect in this work? What doesn't work and why? Has your point of view shifted from your initial reaction? If so, how has it changed? Have your thoughts or feelings about the work changed since your first impressions? If so, how have they changed? What made you change your mind? If you have not changed your mind, can you now explain your first reaction more fully or precisely? Is this an important work? Why?<sup>3</sup>
4. Depending on the age group and past experience, take some time to discuss the elements of tableau. **Note to Educator:** CODE may be a useful site to explore the elements of tableau: <http://code.on.ca/resource/power-influence#section-2> and <http://www.code.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/resources/97-power-influence/documents/8drama-powertoinfluence-blm2elementsoftableauchecklist.pdf>
5. Explain to students that their job is to create three frozen pictures that represent three emotions. Let students know that other students will critique their tableau using the questions that you co-develop. As a class, identify criteria that they are trying to meet from the critical analysis process (above). For example, from the Initial Reaction stage, the criteria may be: "Your tableau causes a reaction from your classmates or makes your classmates feel something."
6. After your criteria have been identified and students know how they will be assessed, place students (or allow them to select) into groups of two to assume the roles of Vanessa and Virginia.
7. In their groups, have students identify three different tableaux that are representative of different emotions.
8. Give students the opportunity to create a tableau with three different scenes.

## THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS PROCESS



— *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8, The Arts*, 2009, p. 24

<sup>3</sup> *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8, The Arts*, 2009, pp. 24–26.



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## CONSOLIDATION

1. Give students an opportunity to practice, self-assess and make their tableau better together. **Note to Educator:** The self-assessment time is key. We know that when students can evaluate their own work and make it better without intervention from teachers, they take responsibility for their learning.
2. Place students into larger groups (or allow them to select) and give them time to present to each other.
3. Have the students critique each other's tableau using the Critical Analysis Process.
4. Give students an opportunity to make their tableau even better!

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY 1

1. Consider another art medium to express emotions. Depending on the grade level, you may want to allow students to experiment with materials, such as paint or clay.
2. Inform the students that they will be creating two pieces of art.
3. Utilizing the Critical Analysis Process, give students an opportunity to create, critique each other's work and make another piece with the same materials.

## Activity 2

### MATERIALS

- *Virginia Wolf*
- Chart paper
- Bristol board
- Access to the internet

### OVERVIEW

The tale of *Virginia Wolf* is told from the perspective of young Vanessa, who is dealing with a very real problem. Virginia, Vanessa's sister, is very sad, and as a result the whole house is upside down! Throughout the story, Vanessa struggles through multiple ways to support her sister during a bout of depression. In this activity, students gain a deeper understanding of what depression is and is not. They will also have the opportunity to examine a variety of strategies that can combat depression.

### LEARNING GOAL

Students will think about, compare and establish their own working definition of depression. They will also research and utilize strategies to challenge moments of sadness, irritability and loss of interest, which *Virginia Wolf* calls "wolfishness."

### ACTIVITY

1. Complete the student pre-activity, "Finding the Connection." **Note to Educator:** If it is not possible to complete the pre-activity, review Appendix B and proceed to step 2. If you have engaged in the pre-activity, skip to step 3.
2. If you have not completed the pre-activity, show students the cover of *Virginia Wolf*. Ask students what they think the story will be about. This will allow them to share thoughts, make connections and activate their prior knowledge.
3. Read *Virginia Wolf*.



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## ACTION

1. Reread the first page of *Virginia Wolf* to the class.
2. Explain to students that they will reread the text in small groups to define “wolfish” on a large sheet of chart paper.
3. In groups of 2–4, have students reread the text and define “wolfish.”
4. **Optional:** Choose two appropriate videos from YouTube to share with students. The intention of the videos is to help students understand the following: (1) the relationship between mental health and mental illness and (2) depression. The following key words may be helpful:
  - Video 1: educational children’s video + mental health + mental illness
  - Video 2: educational children’s video + depression.
5. Post and read the definition of depression (below) from “Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being,” p. 41.
6. Ask students to think about how their definition of “wolfishness” compares to the definition as articulated in the video or in the quotation.
7. Ask students to research depression using the resources available in your school library as well as a strategy to use if you are feeling sad.
8. With your help, have students vet each other’s definitions to ensure the definitions are accurate. **Note to Educator:** Build in a process to vet definitions prior to consolidation.



One day my sister Virginia  
woke up feeling wolfish.  
She made wolf sounds  
and did strange things...

In general, **depression** is the term we use to describe a feeling of sadness, irritability, or loss of interest in activities that the person has typically enjoyed. Most children and youth will, from time to time, experience feelings of sadness as they move through life. These feelings may be related to temporary setbacks, such as receiving a bad mark, having a disagreement with friends, or not making a sports team. Feelings of this type usually do not last long and, as children and youth mature, they learn a range of coping strategies to deal with and adapt to such difficulties. However, when sadness, irritability, or lack of interest are associated with more long-lasting issues, such as sustained conflict with peers, lack of engagement in activities, ongoing academic struggles, or difficulties at home, there may be a need for supports or intervention.

— “Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being,” Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 41

## CONSOLIDATION

1. Ask students to present their definition and strategy on two square 11x11 in. bristol board pages. The definition should be on one square and the strategy on the other. **Note to Educator:** This is an opportunity for art. You may want students to present their definitions or strategies on top of a painted base using the elements of design (e.g. line, shape and form, space, texture, color, value or base).
2. Create a strategy board. As students present their definitions and strategies, use the definitions as a border and the strategies as the inside of the board. The visual is representative of the process of pushing depression out.





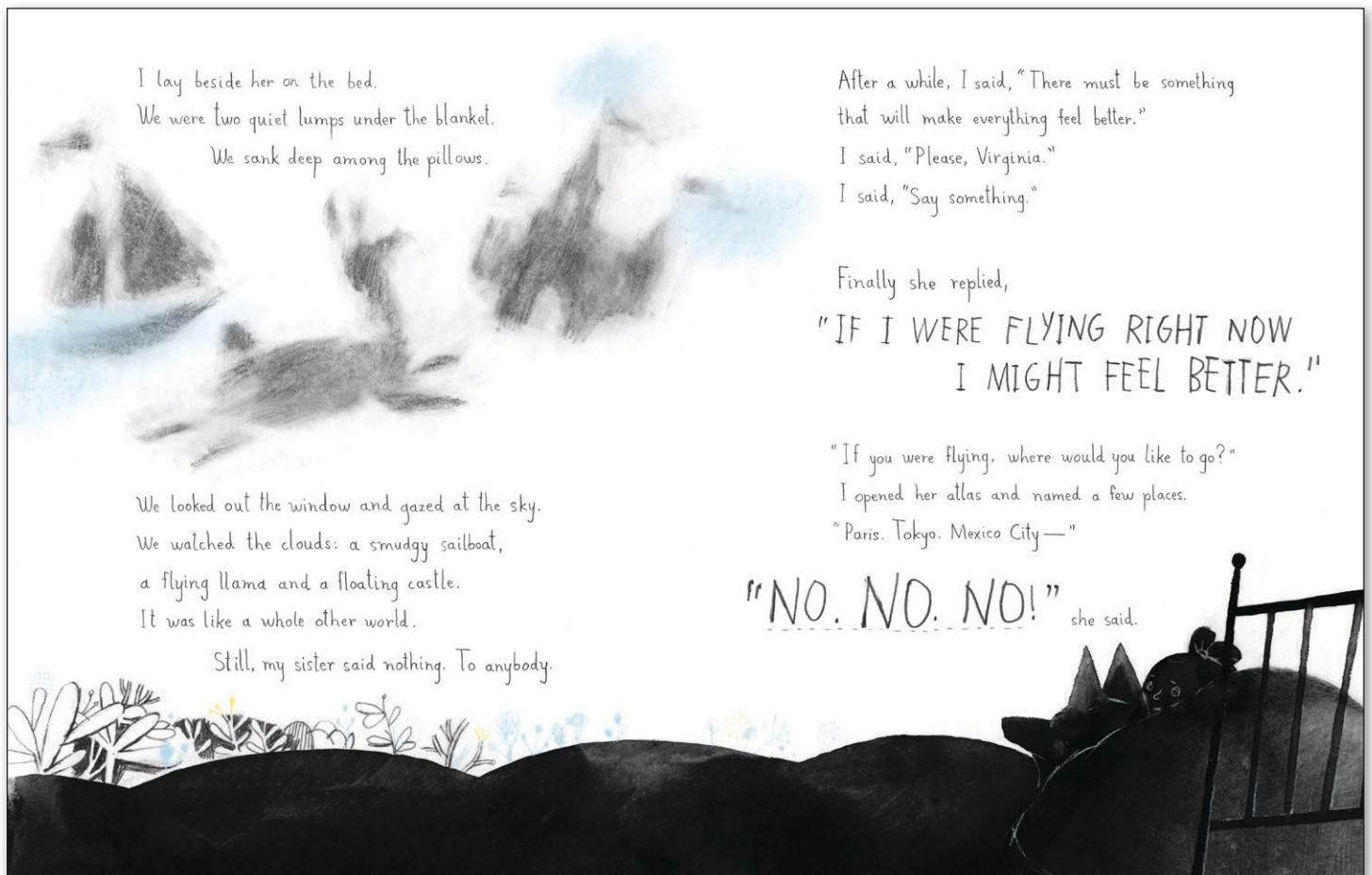
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## EXTENSION ACTIVITY 1

1. Using the depression strategy board, allow students to select two strategies that they will utilize over a two-month period when they are feeling low, irritable, a lack of interest, etc.
2. Give students an opportunity to journal about the impact of this strategy on a weekly basis.
3. At the end of the two-month period, allow students to determine if any of the strategies are working for them. They can choose to trade both, one, or none of the strategies for the next two-month period.
4. Let students know that if at any time they find managing sadness too difficult to let you know so that you can help them acquire the best professional services. **Note to Educator:** It is important to understand that depression can be a very serious and fatal medical condition. In such cases, a health care professional with the proper credentials needs to be contacted to assess and treat the condition. However, caring adults may see signs and symptoms that support a decision to seek medical attention for a child. Resources such as “Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students Mental Health and Well-being” may be of assistance.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITY 2

1. Present to the class the real Virginia Woolf and her experience with depression. Ask students to research other famous people who have battled depression. Have students select one person and engage in deeper research about their experience of depression (e.g., Selena Gomez, Ellen Degeneres, Lady Gaga, J.K. Rowling, Kendrick Lamar, etc.).
2. Ask students to compare and contrast Virginia Woolf’s experience of depression with that of the celebrity they have chosen.
3. Ask students to determine one thing that they think either Virginia Woolf or their selected person would want the world to know about coping with depression.
4. Ask students to display their message. **Note to Educator:** This is an opportunity to utilize art.
5. Ask students to present their findings.



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## Appendix A: Making It Stick

### Section A

**PROMPT** Consider your favorite picture book or novel — something that you really enjoyed reading.

Why was this one of your favorite picture books or novels? Think about the images, the text, the connections you were able to make.

### Section B

**PROMPT** How do you feel personally connected to *Virginia Wolf* through the text, pictures, messages or characters?

Consider some the following social identities:

Race	Sexual orientation	Social class	Indigeneity
Gender identity	Language	Religion	Others
Ethnicity	Culture	Abilities	

How many of these identities created a sense of inclusion for you?

### Section C

**PROMPT** Are there students who might struggle to connect to the book?

Record the names of students who will be included by 4–6 social identities and record their names.

Record the names of students who will be excluded because they are connected to less than four social identities.

Consider how you might include them.

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## Appendix B: Guiding Questions for Critical Literacy and Culturally Responsive Teaching

	Questions to consider PRIOR to using the book	Questions to consider PRIOR to leading an activity
<b>What is being reinforced?</b> <i>Thinking about bias and stereotypes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your biases? (We all have biases about race, class, gender identity, ability, sexual orientation, etc.)</li> <li>• How might your personal beliefs and bias influence your understanding of this text?</li> <li>• What stereotypes, as well as conscious and unconscious biases, are present in the book?</li> <li>• What other resources can you integrate?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you challenge conscious and unconscious biases in the book?</li> <li>• How can you challenge stereotypes in the book? What other resources can you integrate?</li> <li>• What stereotypes might students have in relation to this text?</li> </ul>
<b>What is the connection?</b> <i>Thinking about inclusion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will connect most with the main characters in this book?</li> <li>• Who will connect most with the social identities of the main characters in the book?</li> <li>• Who will connect most with the story and main ideas in the book?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you support all students to make a personal and meaningful connection to the book?</li> </ul>
<b>Who benefits most?</b> <i>Thinking about power and privilege</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are male, female or transgender voices most present?</li> <li>• What race or culture is most present?</li> <li>• Are different abilities valued?</li> <li>• Whose voices are missing?</li> <li>• Who has the power and privilege?</li> <li>• What is the historical context of the book?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you include the missing voices?</li> <li>• How can you address issues of power and privilege in the book?</li> <li>• How can you contextualize the book to engage more diverse lived experiences and values?</li> <li>• How might you address conflicting viewpoints and values? How might you validate underrepresented voices?</li> </ul>
<b>How do we make a difference?</b> <i>Thinking about personal impact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What stereotypes or biases does this book challenge?</li> <li>• For what issues of social justice can this book serve as a springboard?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might you raise awareness of social justice issues that students are unfamiliar with or invested in?</li> </ul>

Adapted from © A. Gaymes-San Vicente & A. Te, 2017

### RESOURCES USED IN VIRGINIA WOLF TEACHING GUIDE

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## NOTES: