

WHAT IF

BY KATEY HOFFMAN

STUDY GUIDE

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COMPANY LIST

Playwright

Katey Hoffman

Cast:

Milo

Nicky

Teo Saefkow

Paige Fraser

Director

Costume Design

Set and Animation

Sound Designer

Stage Manager

Patrick McDonald

Hannah Case

Ruth Bruhn

Ian Tamblyn

Melissa McCowell

GREEN THUMB THEATRE:

Artistic Director

General Manager

Associate Artistic Director

Tour Manager

Production Manager

Education & Outreach Coordinator

Patrick McDonald

Breanne Harmon

Rachel Aberle

Aliya Griffin

Ruth Bruhn

Bronwyn Carradine

Green Thumb Theatre operates on the traditional unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people.

Study Guide materials created and curated by Bronwyn Carradine.

Green Thumb Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional Artists who are members of Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

Study Guide Design by Markian Tarasiuk at The Art Left Creative Group - www.theartleft.com

Photos of Parmiss Sahat and Teo Saekfow by Leah Gair at Chicknsratch Productions

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	COMPANY LIST
3	TABLE OF CONTENTS
4	USING THIS GUIDE
5	SHOW ETIQUETTE AND TIPS
6	PLOT SYNOPSIS AND A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT
7	DEFINITIONS
8	PRE/POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATIONS
9	UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY: WHAT IS ANXIETY?
10	CLASS DISCUSSION

ACTIVITIES

11	<i>1. WORRY OR ANXIETY? KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE.</i>
12 - 13	<i>2. FINDING CALM IN COLOURING</i>
14	<i>3. THE CALM JAR</i>
15 - 16	<i>4. NAMING OUR FEELINGS</i>
17	<i>5. GOOD FEELINGS JOURNAL</i>
18	<i>6. THE 5,4,3,2,1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE</i>
19 - 20	TIPS FOR TEACHERS OF ANXIOUS STUDENTS
21	SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS!

USING THIS GUIDE

Green Thumb is committed to telling stories that spark thought and provoke dialogue. To us, a really successful show gets people talking. The following study guide is intended to help teachers facilitate classroom discussions before and after the performance.

This study guide will help you decide how to prepare your students to see **WHAT IF**, as well as give you information and resources to deepen your knowledge of topics and information used in the play. This guide will look deeper into understanding the themes of the play through pre and post show questions, activities, and discussions around the main topics of the show: friendship, worry vs. anxiety, and healthy living.



SHOW ETIQUETTE AND TIPS

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE PLAY

Sometimes when young people attend a live theatrical performance for the first time, they may not realize how different it is from watching a movie or a television show. With live theatre, the performers are right in front of you, and they can see when you're moving around or hear if you're speaking during the performance. We want to prevent these types of disruptions, which are distracting to the actors, while encouraging genuine, engaged reactions that make live theatre so much fun!

To ensure we all have a good time, please remind your students to use the bathroom before the show and to not talk or move too much during the performance. Let them know that part of being a good audience member is expressing their feelings about what they see, like laughing if they think something is funny or gasping if they're surprised.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This study guide contains activities and worksheets that will connect the play to the lessons in your classroom. In keeping with BC's curriculum, they address the **Communication and Thinking Core Competencies** with particular connection to the **Social Responsibility Core Competency**.

The activities in this study guide incorporate Big Ideas in the following curricular areas

English Language Arts

- Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy (K-7)
- Through listening and speaking we connect with others and share our world (K-2)
- Exploring stories helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world (3-7)
- Questioning what we hear, read and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens (4-7)

Arts Education

- Dance, drama, music, and visual arts are each unique languages for creating and communicating (K-8)

PLOT SYNOPSIS

For most kids, hitting the playground is the best part of their day, but for Nicky it turns her stomach into knots. So she likes to spend recess reading her Big Book of Birds in the school's sick room, alone and undisturbed. That is, until an adventurous kid named Milo comes into the room. At first their worlds collide, but as time goes on, cautious Nicky and adventurous Milo both come to discover that they may have more to learn from each other than they thought.

CHARACTERS

NICKY: A nervous, smart, and shy 10-year-old who loves birds.

MILO: A vibrant, outgoing, and adventurous 10-year-old who loves ventriloquism.

FRANK: Milo's precocious puppet

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

KATEY HOFFMAN



When Patrick approached me about writing a show for elementary school audiences, I was thrilled. After acting in **CELESTIAL BEING**, Green Thumb's play about autism awareness, for three seasons, I was excited to see how else I could contribute to the world of Theatre for Young Audiences. After a couple of meetings, we decided to write a show about anxiety, which has always been an issue near and dear to me.

Like Nicky, I was a very nervous kid. I didn't hide in the sick room every day like she does, but a lot of the big feelings she deals with in the play—constantly running through the possible “what ifs” of every situation, feeling overwhelmed and sick because of it—come from my own life.

As an adult, I have learned healthy ways to manage my anxiety, but when I was a kid I had no idea what that gripping tightness in my chest was, let alone how to cope with it.

In writing *What If*, I wanted to explore this very personal issue of anxiety; how it's normal to feel nervous sometimes and that there are ways to make yourself feel better when it all seems like too much. Just as important, I wanted to write about the beginnings of a true friendship; one in which both sides learn and grow from one another.

WHAT IF is Nicky's story. It's also kinda my story. Hopefully other kids will be able to recognize a part of themselves—or a friend!—in it as well.

DEFINITIONS

ADVENTURE: An exciting experience.

ALLERGY: A medical condition for some people where they become sick after eating, touching, or breathing in certain things.

ANXIETY: A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome, that affects your day to day life. For example: not wanting to go to school to present a project.

DIABETES: A condition that occurs when the body can't use glucose (a type of sugar) normally. Glucose is the main source of energy for the body's cells and is controlled by a hormone called insulin, that helps glucose enter the cells. People with diabetes either don't produce insulin, or the insulin their bodies make doesn't work properly. This is why diabetics have to measure their sugar levels and take synthetic insulin, accordingly.

HOME SCHOOLED: When someone is taught at home instead of going to school.

INSULIN: Insulin is a hormone your body uses to regulate how your body breaks down and digests food, particularly how your body converts food into energy.

SICK ROOM: Like a nurse's room in a school, where students go to take medicine or rest when they're sick.

THE DAWN CHORUS: Birds singing at the start of day, heard mostly in the spring months.

TWITCHER: A specific kind of bird watcher. The term *twitcher* is reserved for those who travel long distances to see a rare bird that would then be ticked, or counted on a list. The term originated in the 1950s, when it was used for the nervous behaviour of Howard Medhurst, a British birdwatcher.

VENTRILOQUIST: An entertainer who makes their voice appear to come from a puppet.

WORRY: When we are uneasy about something uncertain or potentially dangerous.

PRE PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

1. What does the title **WHAT IF** suggest to you? What do you think this play will be about?
2. What are some of your favourite things? Why do you like them?
3. What are some things that you like to do that might be scary to others?
4. What are some things you are scared to do that others aren't?
5. What are some ways you know someone is happy, sad, or scared?
6. When you meet someone new, what do you do to be friendly?
7. How do you know if someone is your friend?

POST PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATIONS

1. What are some of Milo and Nicky's strengths?
2. How did Milo and Nicky feel about each other when they first met?
3. What made them change their minds by the end of the play?
4. What were some things that made Milo & Nicky different?
5. How did Nicky change over the course of the play?

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

FAST FACTS FOR TEACHERS

ANXIETY IS...

- excessive fear or doubt that interferes with day-to-day tasks
- made up of three components:
 - physiological symptoms (sweaty palms, racing heart, stomach aches, or butterflies)
 - behavioural symptoms (avoidance or refusal to participate in things)
 - disruptive thoughts ("If I stay overnight, I fear I'll miss my family and everyone will laugh at me.")

HOW COMMON IS ANXIETY?

10% of children are at the mild end of the anxiety continuum, and 2% experience significant anxiety to the point it interferes with their functioning. Approximately 1 in 4 people will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder in their lives.

ANXIETY AND WORRY – WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

A lot of the time anxiety and worry can look very similar, but there are some very big differences between the two. In the right situation, worry is a healthy response. Like if a campfire is growing too big, or if you feel like you're getting a sunburn, or maybe if you think there might be something you're allergic to in a meal you've been served. In instances like those, worry keeps us safe.

Anxiety, on the other hand, stops us from doing things that we probably don't need to worry about. Anxiety is what makes people scared to leave the house, even though it's a perfectly sunny day outside, or nervous that they're going to forget our words to a school project, even though they've been practicing for weeks. Anxiety makes things that aren't dangerous feel like they are.

(continued)

CLASS DISCUSSION

In **WHAT IF**, Nicky talks about how she's so nervous to go to school that those feelings give her stomach aches. School should be challenging, because being challenged means we're learning new things, but school shouldn't feel scary. There's a difference between scary and challenging. Even though they sometimes feel the same, they're not – and it's important to know the difference.

Take some time to discuss the difference between worry and anxiety with your class, focusing on when it's smart and safe to face challenges, and when to trust their fears.

Examples you can use:

Feeling afraid that you've forgotten your homework, even though you checked your backpack three times before leaving for school. **ANXIETY** – remind yourself of the steps you've taken to be prepared.

Feeling afraid that your parents or nanny will forget to pick you up from school, even though they never have before. **ANXIETY** – remind yourself that you haven't been forgotten before, and that no matter what, there is school staff in the office that can help you call your parents if you can't find them.

Feeling afraid because an adult you've never met wants you to get into their car. **WORRY** – listen to your gut! Find an adult you trust, or call out loudly for help.

Feeling afraid because your friend wants you to ride down a steep hill on the handle bars of their bike without a helmet. **WORRY** – listen to your gut! You could get seriously hurt. Tell your friend you're not comfortable riding in such an unsafe way.

ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY #1: **WORRY OR ANXIETY? - KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE**

TOOLS: Classroom board, tools for writing.

OBJECTIVES: Support students in mindfulness; identifying feelings and responses to feelings while separating worry from anxiety. Older students will also be able to visually see the different patterns in thinking, further supporting this cognitive separation.

CLASS TIME: 10 min+

Using examples from the play, make two columns on the board: One for listing Worries and one for listing Anxieties. Discuss some of Nicky and Milo's moments in the play, talking about whether or not they were a worry or anxiety, then ask them to put the situations in the right category.

For example: Nicky not wanting to go on the slide, or not liking Halloween, and not wanting to present in front of the class.



ACTIVITY #2: **FINDING CALM IN COLOURING: BUILDING WAYS TO STAY CALM IN THE CLASSROOM**

GRADES: K-3

TOOLS: Print out, crayons or markers.

OBJECTIVES: Provide students with fun, meditative tools that support calm and free the mind; tools they can always use in the future to support having a focused conversation.

CLASS TIME: 30 minutes

STEP 1: Have your students colour in the photo of the bird (next page).

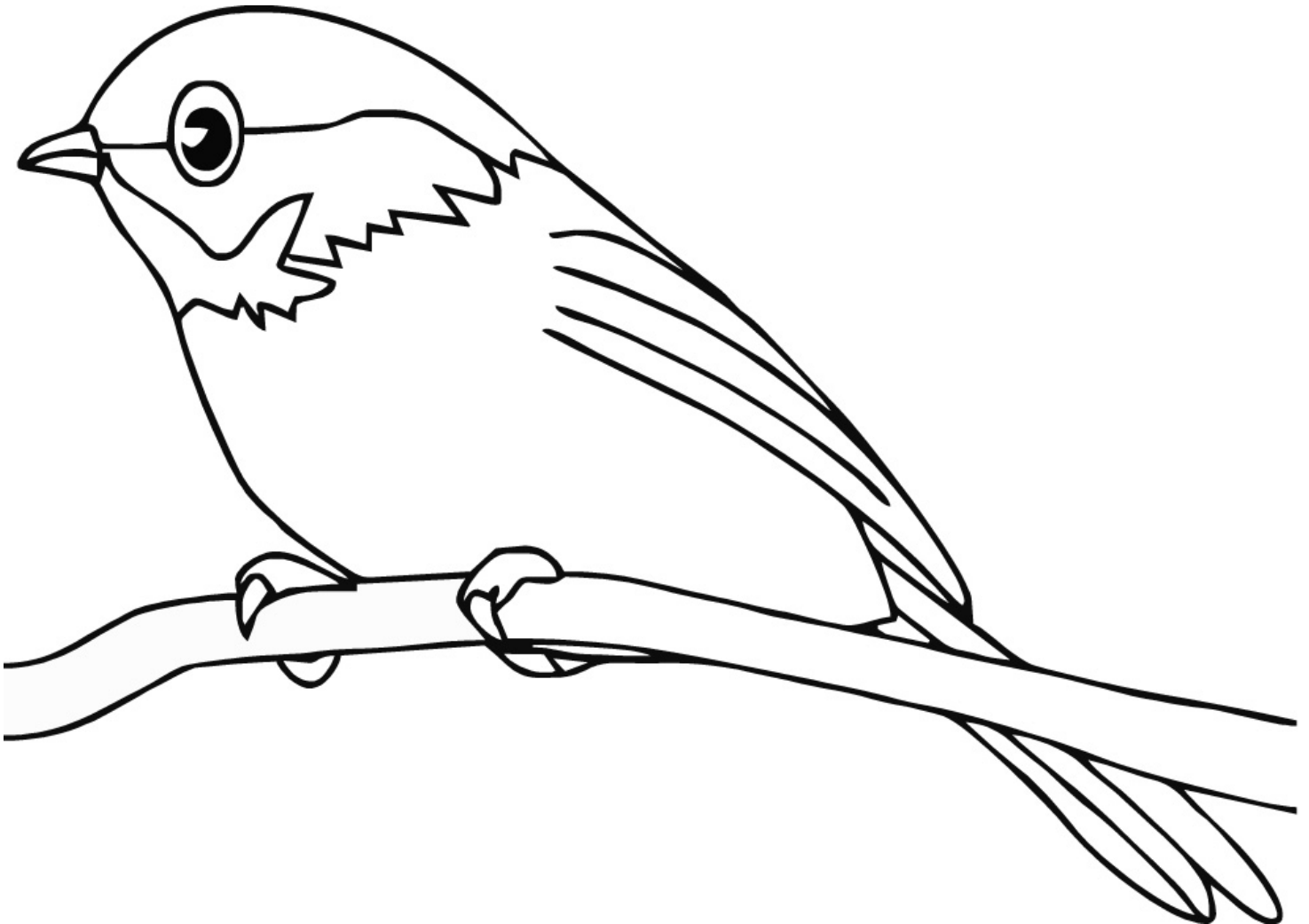
STEP 2: Relate the colouring back to the play. Talk about Nicky's love for birds, and how thinking about them calms her down when she starts to get worried.

STEP 3: Have your students draw pictures of things that they like, and things they can think of when they feel scared or worried. Have them keep these drawings or put them up in the classroom.

TIP: Colouring is helpful tool to calm down young students because they can concentrate on one task. To ensure that students feel completely at ease, you can have them colour without any intention to show others (removing potential strain of creating a 'presentable' drawing). With older students, feel free to discuss why colouring feels calming and what other activities they can think of that might help them quiet their minds.

Focusing on one thing often helps children with anxiety because they don't have to concentrate on the greater world surrounding them, which might be very busy and overwhelming.





ACTIVITY #3: **THE CALM JAR**

GRADES: K-4

TOOLS: Clear jar, glitter, white glue, and sequins (optional).

OBJECTIVES: Multiple paediatric professionals suggest this activity as something to do with young children who are dealing with anxiety. Once made, the 'calm jar' is a good tool to use when a student is getting worked-up or worried about something. Watching the glitter slowly move around the jar is proven to be quite soothing.

CLASS TIME: 20 min +

For this activity, if you wish to reduce the materials needed, we recommend splitting up into 3-4 groups and making a group calm jar, or a class calm jar. By having these readily available to the students, they can begin to understand how to build tools to combat the nervous feelings they might be having.

STEP 1: Add warm water to your jar or bottle until it reaches around a third of the way up.

STEP 2: Add the glitter glue and stir until it combines with the water.

STEP 3: Add 3 drops of food colouring and stir. You can add more or less depending on what shade you'd like, but remember not to add too much or the mixture will become very dark and difficult to see the glitter.

STEP 4: Pour in the glitter! Again, you can use as much or as little as you'd like. Stir well until combined with the existing mixture.

STEP 5: Top off your jar with the rest of the warm water, until it's almost full. Make sure you leave a little gap at the top of the jar to allow the mixture to move around.

STEP 6: Shake it!

TIP: Use a bit of liquid soap in your jar if you want to give it a slower moving 'galaxy' effect.

Huffington Post, "9 things every parent with an anxious child should try" https://www.huffingtonpost.com/renee-jain/9-things-every-parent-with-an-anxious-child-should-try_b_5651006.html

Mama OT "Why calm-down jars work" <http://mamaot.com/sensory-calm-down-bottle/>

ACTIVITY #4:

NAMING OUR FEELINGS

MODIFIED FROM KIDSHEALTH IN THE CLASSROOM

GRADES: 3-7

TOOLS: Print out (next page), pencil or pen

OBJECTIVES: Sometimes it's hard to know exactly how we feel at a certain time. Sometimes we might be feeling more than one thing, so it's important to understand all those feelings and decide what to do next, in order to feel better.

CLASS TIME: 15 min+

Have your students go through these situations and write down their responses. Then ask the students to discuss their responses, taking turns sharing their different feelings and responses to the situations. Remind students that it's important to listen, support, and relate; not judge or shame other students' feelings and responses.

After students have written their responses, read through the situations and ask them to discuss their responses as a classroom.

For each example, ask them:

Have they been in a situation like that?

What made them feel better?

What would Milo or Nicky have done in those situations, and how do they react differently?

ACTIVITY PRINT OUT

NAMING OUR FEELINGS

Think about how you'd feel in each of these situations and write your response.

It's time for recess! You've been waiting all morning to play on the swings, but when you finally get to the playground they're all being used. How do you feel?

It's the end of the school day and almost everyone's parents have picked them up but yours are late. How do you feel?

You're building a giant sandcastle. Just when it's almost perfect, another child steps on it. How do you feel?

You're in line to get ice cream on a warm summer's day. How do you feel?

You're at an amusement park about to go on a roller coaster that goes really fast and really high. How do you feel?

Your parents are going out for dinner and a new babysitter you've never met before is coming over to watch you while they're gone. How do you feel?

You notice you have a toothache and your parent says you'll have to go to the dentist. How do you feel?

ACTIVITY #5: **GOOD FEELINGS JOURNAL** FROM THE NEMOURS KID'S HEALTH FOUNDATION

GRADES: K-5

OBJECTIVES: Students will practice identifying positive experiences and feelings; leaving with a visual reminder of them as a reinforcement tool in the classroom.

MATERIALS:

Paper
Pencils, crayons, markers
Stapler, or other tool for binding pages together (compiling into a journal)

CLASS TIME: 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS:

Ask your students to draw a picture of something that makes them feel good, and then tell them to write a sentence at the bottom of the page describing the picture. (Or have them tell you what to write below). When they're done, have them hand in their drawings and staple them together to make a classroom Good Feelings Journal. Once it's finished you can have it available for students to look at if they need to cheer up or distract themselves from bad feelings. Finish with the classroom conversation below.

DISCUSSION:

There are many kinds of good feelings. You can feel happy, silly, calm, safe, relaxed, proud, or excited.

What other types of feelings do you consider to be 'good' feelings? What makes you feel good?

Sometimes special things make us feel good, like birthdays or vacations and holidays. But, those things don't happen every day. What are some of the little things that make you happy every day?

EXTENSION:

Each student can make their own Good Feelings Journal with multiple pages of things that make them feel good.



ACTIVITY #6:

THE 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

GRADES: 1-7 (Modify as needed)

This is a technique recommended by many child therapists. The counting down from big picture to small picture can help calm someone down and slowly understand where the feeling is coming from, by making themselves become completely present in the current moment. They can achieve this by noticing everything that's going on around them.

OBJECTIVES: Provide a safe space to practice tools for greater understanding of their own feelings and the world around them, especially when they're feeling stressed or anxious.

MATERIALS:

None. Though this activity works great outside.

CLASS TIME: 30-40 min

ACTIVITY:

Go through the list of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 techniques, below. Do it slowly and then discuss.

5 - LOOK: Look around for 5 things you can see around you and say them out loud. For example: "I can see the computer, I can see the cup, I can see the photo."

4 - FEEL: Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things you can feel. Say them out loud as well. For example: "I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel a tingling in my hands, I feel the chair I am sitting on."

3 - LISTEN: Listen for 3 seconds. What do you hear? Traffic outside, the sound of typing, maybe your tummy rumbling. Say 3 things out loud.

2 - SMELL: Say two things you can smell. If you can't smell anything at the moment, then name two of your favourite smells.

1 - TASTE: Say one thing you can taste. It may be the leftover toothpaste from brushing your teeth, or juice you just drank. If you can't taste anything, say your favourite thing to taste.

Finish the exercise by asking the class:

How does every sense differ? Did you notice anything you hadn't noticed before?

Tell your students that this is one thing that they can use when they feel anxious. Sometimes paying close attention to little details helps calm people down, or get them "out of their heads".

TIPS FOR TEACHERS OF ANXIOUS STUDENTS

Adapted from Dr. Lynn D. Miller, Registered Psychologist - Kelty Mental Health Organization

Communicate with parents You need to be in touch with the parents, but in a positive, problem-solving way. Clear communication can help you support behaviours the parents are trying to help the child modify. Perhaps they can help by getting a tutor, or keeping the child on track with assignments. Having a peer who the anxious child trusts, and the parents recommend, can also be helpful in the school.

Take the child's concerns seriously How are they managing, is there anything they don't understand, do they need extra help? Express confidence in the child's ability to be brave and overcome anxious feelings. If it seems they are overwhelmed, arrange to discuss jointly with their parents some ways to reduce expectations for a defined time period. Do not excuse them from class, however! Regular attendance is a lifeline.

Adjust work expectations Short answer, multiple choice, and match-type testing may be easier for anxious students. They often need help breaking down larger tasks and projects into individual steps. You could help by encouraging the child to make intermediate deadlines, checking how they are coming along, and providing encouragement to keep it up. Anxious children often have perfectionist standards, which results in assignments "not being good enough" to turn in. Encourage submission of any part of an assignment.

Normalize subject failures It is not uncommon for even a good student to fail a term when they are anxious. Often, a subject, especially math or science, needs to be repeated in summer school or the next year as core material has been missed. Please be understanding and encouraging in this situation, as students can feel very ashamed and worried about their academic future. They may feel they have let you down too.

Reduce public interaction in the classroom Anxious children do not like to be singled out for the teacher's attention. This includes having their name put on the board, being selected for special projects, getting disciplined in front of others, or being asked to volunteer for reading aloud.

Knowing fight vs. flight syndrome Humans know anxiety as an adaptive response to threatening cues. We respond by either fighting or running ("flight") from the feared situation. While the hallmark of anxiety is avoidance, if a child is attending school and perceives a situation to be threatening, the child may also respond by "fighting" or becoming quite agitated or even occasionally aggressive. The child is typically hugely remorseful after the outburst and regrets responding in this manner. If you cannot ignore the behaviour, staying calm, talking quietly and being reassuring at this time is more helpful than challenging the child. Do not try to physically remove a child from this situation, as this may escalate the behaviour.

Remind the child to use coping techniques Quietly suggest or remind students to implement whatever coping behaviours they find helpful. This may include breathing deeply, using distraction techniques, and practicing positive self-talk.

Be consistent All children thrive on reliable, consistent schedules. For the anxious child, this cannot be stated strongly enough. Consistency is very reassuring and allows the child the ability to anticipate and predict future transitions. If a change does have to be made in the daily schedule, quietly alerting the child to this change is appreciated.

SOURCES & RESOURCES:

CAMH Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
<http://www.camh.ca/>

Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada
<http://www.anxietycanada.ca/>

Canadian Institute for Health
<https://www.cihi.ca/en>

Anxiety and Depression Association of America
<https://adaa.org/>

Anxiety Disorders Association of Ontario
<https://www.mooddorders.ca/>

Dr. Lynn Miller & Kelty Mental Health Organization - UBC
<https://www.anxietybc.com/>

Nemours Kid's Health Foundation
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/nemours.html>

KidsHealth in the Classroom
<https://classroom.kidshealth.org/>

Confident Parents: Thriving Kids – A Resource for Parents
<https://cmha.bc.ca/programs-services/confident-parents-thriving-kids/>

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS!

We love getting mail and your students' feedback!

GREEN THUMB THEATRE:

Mailing address: 5522 McKinnon Street, Vancouver, BC, V5R 0B6

Email: info@greenthumb.bc.ca

Phone: 604-254-4055

Fax: 604-251-7002

Write a Letter!

Ask your students to write us a letter to share their thoughts and opinions on the performance of **WHAT IF**.
Send it to us at Green Thumb!

Write a Review!

Have your students write a theatre review about this performance of **WHAT IF**.
Send it in to us at Green Thumb!

A theatre review usually includes the following:

- A brief summary of the story.
- A comment on the quality of the play itself.
- A description of the costumes and set and a comment on whether these were interesting and appropriate.
- A comment on the actors' portrayal of the characters and on the director's skill at pulling the whole show together.

There are many examples of reviews in newspapers and online that you could use to introduce the concept and format of a theatre review.
Take a look at "How to Write a Play Review" on Wiki How.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Play-Review>

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