

# THE GOLDFISH BOY

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## Lesson plan for upper key stage two

### Objectives

- To be able to infer from close reading of the text a character's feelings, thoughts and motives, and justify this with evidence.
- To develop positive coping strategies to help manage uncomfortable feelings and emotions.

### Outcomes

- Character analysis of Matthew
- Writing from an alternative viewpoint
- Strategies for positive visualisation to overcome anxiety
- Understanding of the features of a detective novel

### Resources

- Activity sheet 1: What is 'normal' anyway?
- Activity sheet 2: Character profile
- Activity Sheet 3: Features of a detective story

### Lead-in

Before introducing children to the text, ask them to work in small groups. They should choose one or two of the words from the list below and brainstorm all the meanings and associations they can think of for each word, being as imaginative as possible. Give each group an opportunity to feed back their ideas, and explain that these words will be significant. This work can be revisited in the context of the events of the story, as children come to understand that things that seem straightforward actually take on more sinister connotations in Matthew's mind.

- goldfish
- clean
- lamp
- germs
- pond
- gloves
- doll
- elephant



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Now ask children to look closely at the cover of the book. What stands out for you? What do you notice about the expressions of the different people portrayed? They are looking straight at you. How does that make you feel? What do you predict is the significance of the title 'The Goldfish Boy'? How do you think the Goldfish Boy is feeling here? Do the title and the cover make you want read the book? Why (not)?

### Activity one – All about Matthew

Just as Matthew – with some help from Melody and Jake – tries to piece together the puzzle of Teddy's disappearance, so the reader has to play detective and solve the 'mystery of Matthew' as the story unfolds, working out from the clues he gives us what has brought him to this point.

Before reading, read the statements from Activity Sheet 1 – What is 'normal' anyway? Ask children to work in pairs, and on a large piece of paper, draw a horizontal line to represent a continuum from ordinary behaviour for a twelve-year-old boy to unusual or strange behaviour. Where on the line would you put each of the statements? Do you think a 'normal' person exists, or do we all have quirks that make us a little bit unusual?

Ask the pairs to compare their version with other pairs. Is there a general agreement about what constitutes 'normal' behaviour? As you read the book, ask children to consider whether they would move any of the statements further along the continuum? Discuss how Matthew takes normal behaviours to extremes, but tries to rationalise this in his mind.

Children should use Activity Sheet 2 – Character profile to record evidence about the different aspects of Matthew's character as they read the story.

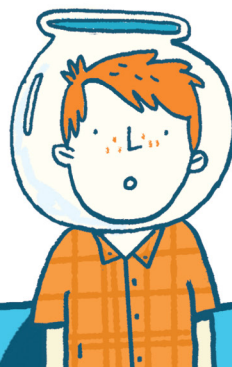
### Activity two – The Wallpaper Lion

Discuss with children the relevance of the Wallpaper Lion. Who is he? How does Matthew feel about him? Is he always kind to Matthew? How does Matthew react when Dad redecorates his room and the Wallpaper Lion comes down? Why is it significant that Matthew is able to ask his Mother to throw the Lion away at the end of the book?

Re-read the following extracts from the story:

- p17–18 The Wallpaper Lion is introduced
- p71–74 Dad comes into Matthew's room
- p91–92 Matthew has a dream conversation with the Wallpaper Lion
- p244–245 Matthew cleans the Wallpaper Lion
- p314–317 Dad decorates Matthew's room

Now divide the class into two groups, asking one half to make a list of things that Matthew would say to the Wallpaper Lion or questions he would ask him, and the other half of the class to list things the Wallpaper Lion would tell Matthew. Of course in the story, the conversations between Matthew and the Lion are one-sided; any imagined response from the Wallpaper Lion is from Matthew's perspective. However, children can now 'hot-seat' both characters, playing out an imaginary dialogue between them.



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Drawing on the understanding that comes from this activity, ask children to re-write part of the story from the perspective of the Wallpaper Lion. He should start by introducing himself and explaining his relationship with Matthew. They could write about Casey pushing Teddy into the pond (chapter 3), Matthew's parents trying to him to come to the picnic (chapter 6) or Melody's visit (chapter 11).

### Activity three: Visualising a safe place

Challenge the class to come up with an A-Z of feelings. Which ones do you think are uncomfortable feelings? When might people experience them? Explore where in your body you know that you are experiencing those feelings. Refer back to the examples Matthew gives of his anxiety: 'insides squirming', 'a vicious black beetle scuttling around my stomach', 'my stomach was in knots'. Talk about some of the feelings experienced by other characters in the story, and the causes of these: Old Nina, Mum, Melody, Jake, Penny.

Matthew's bedroom is his 'safe place'. For him, because of the severity of his psychological condition, it actually becomes more of a self-imposed prison. In fact, when Doctor Rhodes asks him what his hope is for the future, he says 'I want to go downstairs and re-join the living.' However, visualising a special, safe place where you feel peaceful and calm can be a very useful technique for coping with difficult feelings.

Ask children to think of a special place where they feel relaxed and happy. It might be a beach on holiday, a favourite park where they like to play or somewhere at home. Ask them to close their eyes and start imagining themselves there. Ask them to picture what they can see around them, think about the sounds they might hear, what it smells like and what gentle things they can reach out and touch. Ask them to really focus on the details of this scene and how happy and relaxed they feel, breathing deeply all the time. Explain that if they practise this technique regularly, then when they are feeling anxious, they can just picture their special place, and quickly start to feel calmer. If children would like to, they could describe or draw their special place.

NB Refer to the guidance documents relating to teaching about mental health and emotional wellbeing produced by the PSHE Association for further advice on confidentiality and safeguarding.

### Extension

Provide children with Activity Sheet 3: Features of a detective story and ask them to work with a partner to go back through the book and identify these features in *The Goldfish Boy*.

### Suggestions for further cross-curricular work

- Ask children to use a close reading of the story to create a map showing the layout of all the houses on Chestnut Close. (Geography: measure, record and present the human and physical features in the local area using a range of methods, including sketch maps and plans).



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- The book fits well with a science topic on micro-organisms. Children could draw what they think Matthew imagines a germ to look like, and then research different micro-organisms, including what they look like under a microscope. They could explore ways in which we can prevent coming into contact with harmful micro-organisms and produce a poster focusing on an aspect of disease prevention. They could also explore the beneficial aspects of micro-organisms, such as the 'friendly' bacteria in our stomachs and the use of viruses in gene therapy and cancer treatments. They could also find out about famous microbiologists such as Edward Jenner and Sir Alexander Fleming. (Science: learn how to keep your body healthy and how your body might be damaged. Describe how living things are classified into broad groups according to common observable characteristics and based on similarities and differences, including micro-organisms.)

## Curriculum links

### Speaking and listening

Pupils should be taught to:

- ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge.
- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions .
- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes, including for expressing feelings.
- participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates.
- consider and evaluate different viewpoints, attending to and building on the contributions of others.

### Reading comprehension

Pupils should be taught to:

- maintain positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:
- reading and discussing an increasingly wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks.
- identifying and discussing themes and conventions in and across a wide range of writing.
- understand what they read by:
- checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context.
- asking questions to improve their understanding.
- drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence.
- identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning.
- participating in discussions about books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, building on their own and others' ideas and challenging views courteously.
- explaining and discussing their understanding of what they have read, providing reasoned justifications for their views.



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## Writing composition

Pupils should be taught to:

- plan their writing by selecting the appropriate form and using other similar writing as models for their own and noting and developing initial ideas, drawing on reading and research where necessary.
- draft and write by describing settings, characters and atmosphere and integrating dialogue to convey character and advance the action.

## PSHE (based on the PSHE Association Programme of Study – non statutory)

### Health and Wellbeing

Pupils should be taught:

- what positively and negatively affects their physical, mental and emotional health to deepen their understanding of good and not-so-good feelings.
- to extend their vocabulary to enable them to explain both the range and intensity of their feelings to others.
- to recognise that they may experience conflicting emotions and when they might need to listen to their emotions or overcome them.
- that pressure to behave in an unacceptable, unhealthy or risky way can come from a variety of sources, including people they know.
- strategies for keeping physically and emotionally safe.



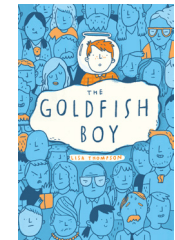
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# Activity sheet 1: What is 'normal' anyway?

Normal  
behaviour

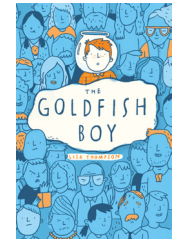
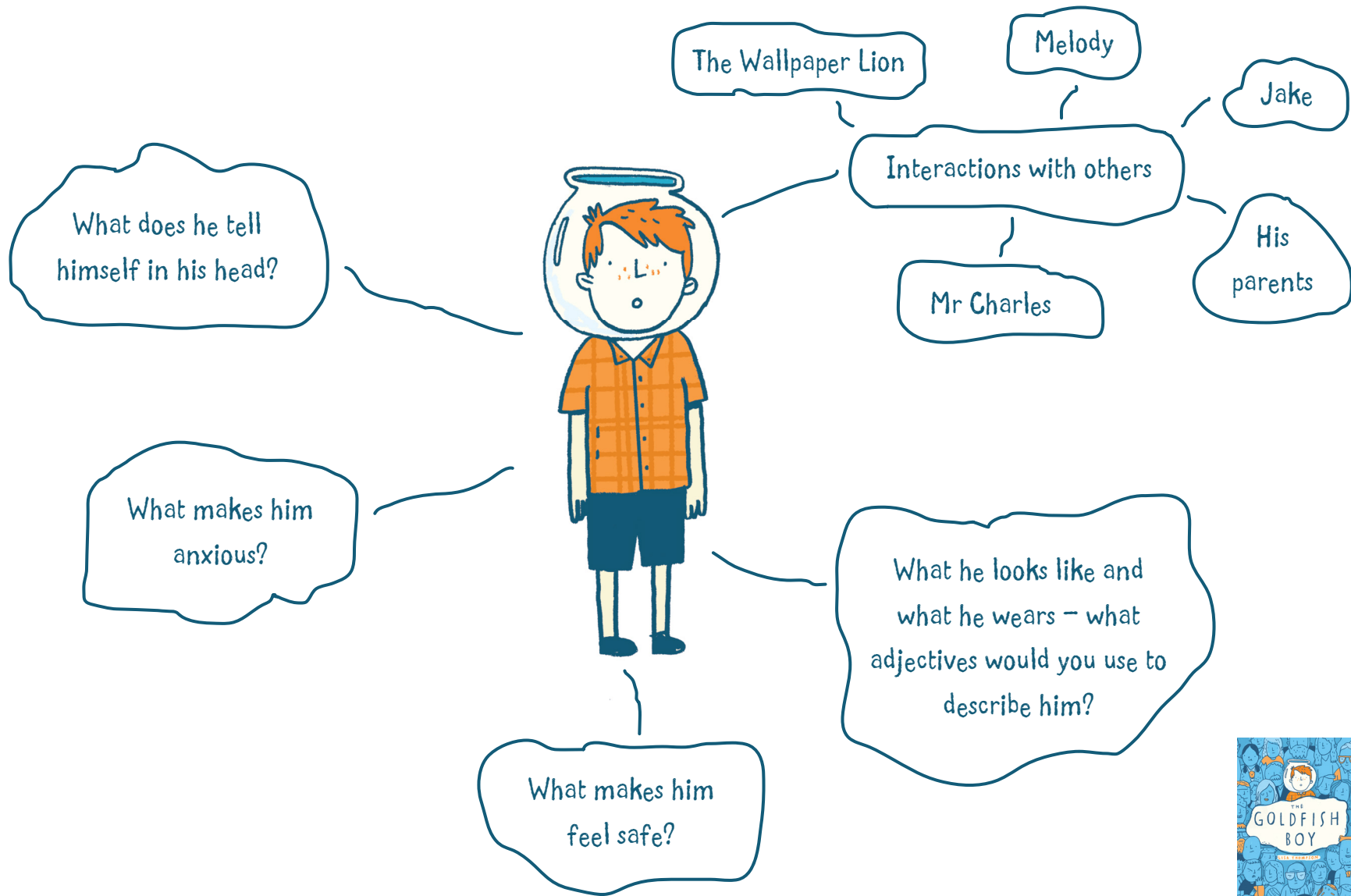
Unusual/strange  
behaviour

Likes to keep an eye on what the neighbours are doing.	Talks to a lion he imagines in the wallpaper.	Washes his hands regularly.	Opens doors using his sleeve.	Likes keeping his bedroom clean.
Likes to make lists, including in his head.	Avoids using the phone.	Not keen on pets.	Doesn't like to be hugged.	Doesn't like people coming into his bedroom.
Finds his parents annoying.	Would rather check his emails than play outside.	Doesn't like school.	Feels anxious about the number 13.	Counts to seven in his head to help him calm down.



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## Activity sheet 2: Character profile



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# Activity sheet 3: Features of a detective story

## Health and Wellbeing

Listed below are some of the features that you find in a detective story. What evidence of these can you find from your reading of *The Goldfish Boy*?

### 1. A sense of foreboding

Hint: Look closely at chapter one, particularly Mr Charles with his roses and the description of the elephant mobile.

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### 2. An unsolved crime

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### 3. Clues

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### 4. A detective or investigator

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### 5. Wrong turns or twists

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### 6. An element of mystery

Hint: Think about the descriptions of the Old Rectory and Melody's visits to the graveyard.

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### 7. A cliffhanger moment

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### 8. The risk of danger

Hint: Explore the descriptions and behaviour of Mr Charles, Old Nina and Casey.

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### 9. The reader given a feeling of involvement

Hint: Think about the memories and thoughts Matthew shares.

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