

A HEART-WARMING STORY OF ONE BOY'S
EXPERIENCE OF LOCKDOWN.

MAX COUNTS TO A MILLION



SOMETIMES, JUST
KEEPING ON GOING
MAKES YOU
A HERO.

Teaching
Resources
for KS2

JEREMY WILLIAMS

MAX COUNTS TO A MILLION

A HEART-WARMING STORY OF ONE BOY'S EXPERIENCE OF LOCKDOWN.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

Stories are a great way to help children explore and manage difficult experiences and the feelings and emotions generated by them. Stories are safe and unthreatening – they distance children from a situation, allowing them to 'experience' (or re-experience) it safely while it's happening to someone else. This distancing can then help them manage their own experiences, or to develop empathy for others.



Max Counts to a Million is one child's story about the first UK Covid-19 lockdown that started in March 2020. It explores an eight-year-old's feelings at that time, including anxiety, fear, confusion, loneliness and anger, and how he found his own way to manage those feelings and eventually feel differently by using a coping strategy in a positive way.

It is also a story about friendship, family love and care, and resilience in the face of something that was experienced nationally and internationally. Max's story is likely to resonate with many children who were a similar age, and help them make sense of their own emotions and behaviours at that time. It can also be used as a way to help children identify, articulate and name their own feelings, and safely explore and develop personal coping strategies for the future.

This resource is designed for teachers to use as part of their RHE or PSHE scheme of work to explore learning around emotions and feelings, change, family and friendships, and health. Schools may also want to use it as part of an ongoing Covid recovery curriculum. It is broadly aimed at Years 5 and 6 as these are children who would have been the same age as Max during lockdown, but can be adapted for use with younger age groups if required.

You may want to let parents know about the book and any activities you are using alongside reading it, as children may ask questions or raise issues that parents might want to discuss on a more individual and personal level at home.

Before using the book or related activities in class, please refer to the guidance on safe teaching and learning delivery on the following page.

Resource pack written by Lucy Marcovitch, author and education consultant at Lucy Education.

CREATING A SAFE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



All pupils will have been impacted by lockdown, both implicitly and explicitly, and it is important to manage activities and discussion in a way that is sensitive to individual and collective experiences and circumstances, both known and unknown. As with any PSHE lessons, teachers should ensure that, when reading and discussing the book, pupils feel safe and supported.

It is recommended that you read the book yourself so you are prepared for using it with pupils – you may find that you also have an emotional reaction to it, and you may want to consider your own feelings before introducing it in class.

Safe teaching and learning methods include:

- Agreeing and reinforcing ground rules for discussion and behaviour. Pupils should be confident that anything they express and share is valued and not judged.
- Considering vulnerable pupils who may have experienced family separation, illness or bereavement during lockdown, or been adversely impacted in other ways, including living in unsafe or insecure family circumstances or local authority care. Some children may have adverse feelings triggered by the content of the book (e.g. dad having to move out), even if their home situation is secure and safe, and events are in the past.
- Distance learning by using the book to reflect on Max's experiences, not pupils' own – no-one should feel under pressure to share personal stories or experiences, although they can choose to if they wish.
- Encourage and respond to questions, but also provide a way (e.g. an anonymous questions box or post-it board) for pupils to ask questions or share something away from the rest of the class, and making yourself available to pupils if they want to discuss anything individually. Ensure pupils know where else they can get support if they need it, both in and out of school. If a child says anything which causes concern, or makes a disclosure, you must follow your school's safeguarding and confidentiality policies and procedures. If you are unsure of these, speak to your Designated Safeguarding Lead, or contact the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000.

QUESTION AND DISCUSSION IDEAS



These are suggestions to begin, prompt or extend discussion about the book. They can be adapted and developed to fit with your teaching methods, and with class and individual needs, or used to create new or support existing lesson plans. Other questions might also arise, depending on pupils' responses and reactions. Choose or adapt questions that work best for you and your class – these are examples only.

Before reading

- Tell pupils that you are going to be reading a story about the 2020 lockdown with them, and ask who remembers what happened then. Pupils can share answers if they want to, but encourage them all to think about memories such as:
 - When they first heard about Covid
 - What teachers/parents/other adults told them about it
 - School closing
 - Online learning when it first started, and how it developed
 - Things they did during lockdown
 - Things that were different
 - Anything funny that happened or things that they enjoyed
- Ask pupils to think about any of the feelings they can remember having during lockdown, at the beginning, but also as time went on. Again – they do not have to share these.
- Show pupils the front cover of the book and ask them what they think it is going to be about. Do they think it will just be about what the title says?
 - What else might happen in the book?
 - Why do they think Max counted to a million?
- Challenge pupils to write 'one million' in numbers, then show them what it looks like.
 - What's the highest number they can count to?
 - How long do they think it would take to count to a million?
 - What do they think it might be like to count to such a high number?

After reading

- What are pupils' reactions to the book? How does the ending make them feel? Is it a happy ending? Make a list of class words that they would associate with their thoughts about the story overall.
- Which parts of the story did pupils like the best/least? Why?
- Were there things in the story which they also experienced, or could relate to?
- Did it matter that they knew Max was going to count to a million from the beginning? Why/why not?
- Do they think this was a true story? What kind of story was it? (This could lead to discussion around story genres, and the difference between stories based on real life, autobiography/ memoir and non-fiction).
- Would they recommend this story to other children of their age? Why/why not?

ACTIVITY: RECOGNISING AND NAMING EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS



Use the story to support learning and understanding about how to recognise emotions in ourselves and others.

- Pick out words that Max uses to describe how he is feeling at different points in the book. For example: 'weird'; 'strange'; 'confused'; 'scared'. Start a class list, and see whether these words change as the story goes on. Use the list to highlight with pupils how feelings can change with time. Encourage them to widen their vocabulary of emotions by thinking of alternative words or synonyms for the different emotions identified.
- Ask pupils to identify different situations when someone might be feeling particular emotions such as fear, anger, excitement or worry. How would that person know they were feeling that way? Using an outline of a body, ask pupils to identify where someone might feel these emotions.
- Max describes emotions using different images. For example:
 - When he's worried: *'a little whoosh inside me, like all the jets of worry starting up inside my heart.'* (chapter 16)
 - When mum says he can count to a million: *'in my mind I shot up out of the window, soared into the sky and high-fived all the swifts.'* (chapter 17)
 - When Max distracts Mum from her work: *'she didn't finish her sentence, but sort of slumped a bit. Like a bouncy castle when they let the air out.'* (chapter 12)
 - When he is upset about Grandad: *'I felt all full inside, like when you fill a cup too close to the edge. Just a tiny bump and the tears would spill out.'* (chapter 23)
 - When Grandad is better: *'I still felt full to the brim somehow, but it wasn't with sadness. It was with something else. I didn't know what to call it.'* (chapter 25)
- Ask pupils to think of similies, metaphors or images to describe different emotions e.g. 'When I am worried it feels like...' or 'I was so excited that...'. They could write these descriptions down, draw themselves feeling that emotion, or draw an image of how the emotion feels. You could use these in an emotions display.
- People don't always say how they feel, especially when they have a difficult or upsetting emotion. Explain in these cases we can often get clues to how someone is feeling by the way they behave. Can pupils identify any times in the book when they know a character is feeling a particular way but they don't say it? How does the behaviour show us how the character is feeling? You could use the following examples from the story and ask pupils how they think the character is feeling, and how their behaviour demonstrates that:
 - *'Mum looked at her list and then at the shelves, and her arm dropped to her side. Her mouth dropped open. No words came out.'* (chapter 5)
 - *'Mum stared out of the window for a bit while her coffee steamed.'* (chapter 15)
 - *"Don't call me sunshine!" I snapped.
Mum stopped and looked at me.
"What's got into you all of a sudden?" she asked.
"Nothing!" I shouted. "You're so annoying sometimes!" And I slammed my pen down.'* (chapter 13)
- In small groups or pairs, give pupils a different emotion, and ask them to show that emotion without using words. Other groups could guess which emotion it is they are demonstrating.

ACTIVITY: MANAGING EMOTIONS AND DEALING WITH CHANGE



Explain to pupils that when a big change happens in someone's life, that person might experience lots of different kinds of emotions and find that change hard to deal with. One of the reasons that lockdown was difficult for many people was because so many big changes happened at once.

- Ask pupils to discuss changes that might happen to people in their lives, or changes that have happened in their lives since they were babies. Which emotions, good or not so good, can they think of that might accompany these changes?
- Then ask them to make a list of all the changes that happened to Max during lockdown. Can they identify all the changes that were the same for everyone of Max's age (i.e. the age the pupils were then)?
- Why do pupils think Max counted to a million? Discuss different coping strategies that people use to manage difficult or upsetting feelings caused by change. For Max, counting was a coping strategy to manage his worry:
 - *'When I was counting, I didn't think about Coronavirus and I didn't miss Dad or worry about him getting sick.'* (chapter 16)
 - *"The counting helps me," I said quietly.*
"What does the counting help you with Max?" Mum put her arm around me.
"I miss Dad." (chapter 17)
- Can pupils identify any other coping strategies characters in the book use (e.g. Mum running; Toby doing push-ups)? Ask them to think of any coping strategies they or people they know used during lockdown, and how these things helped them.
- Mum tells Max *"It's perfectly normal to worry about the people you love... it's what you do with the worry that counts."* (chapter 23) Before he starts counting, one of the things Max does is write a list of questions to help him manage his worries (chapter 7). In pairs or small groups, ask pupils to discuss things that might help someone manage their worries; examples could include writing them down, telling someone else about that worry; finding out some facts and figures about that worry. They could do the same with other difficult feelings, such as anger, sadness or anxiety. If someone is worried about lots of different things, what or who could help them?
- Discuss the people who helped Max during lockdown (e.g. Mum, Dad, Dr Grace, Grandad, Toby, Ava and Felix). What do they do to help him manage his feelings? Ask pupils to think about the people who helped them manage difficult feelings during lockdown, and what they did.
- Who did Max help (e.g. people via his fundraising; Grandad)? Ask pupils to think about anyone they might have helped during lockdown, and how.
- *'Do something positive for Grandad, Mum had said, and that had worked. Rather than count to push my worry away, could I count as a way of doing something positive? I think I could.'* (chapter 24) How did Max's reasons for counting to a million change from helping him to helping others? How did this help him to feel better?
- Ask pupils to identify things which made them feel good during lockdown. It might have been something they did, something funny they saw on television, or something which turned out to be more fun than they'd expected (like a birthday).

ACTIVITY: FAMILIES AND FRIENDSHIPS



The story could be used as a way to support learning about family care and friendships.

- Ask pupils to explore the different ways in which Max's family demonstrate love and care for him, and how he demonstrates love and care for them. Why do they think it was particularly important during lockdown for people and families to love and care for one another?
- Explore Max's friendships. What do different people do to show they are good friends (e.g. Felix, Alex, Ava)? Discuss whether friends always have to be the same age – for example, what does Toby do to demonstrate friendship; why does Max call Bea Hixby his friend, even though she is an adult?
- Ask pupils to consider their own relationships with different people of all ages. They could write 'A good friend is' in the middle of a piece of paper, then around the outside write the ways a good friend makes someone else feel, and the things someone might say or do to be a good friend. They could also include the names of people they know who they consider friends, and why.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Use Dad's explanation of a pandemic and viruses (chapter 4) to support learning about these as part of wider health education. Max imagines the virus as little zombies, or as a suitcase full of coughs travelling around the world. Can pupils think of other ways to imagine the virus? They could create drawings of their ideas.
- Can pupils write down the number one million? Explore what it looks like using Max's attempts in chapter 15. Throughout the story Max counts different objects to keep himself going (there are some examples all together in chapter 16). Ask pupils to come up with different ideas of things they could count in the classroom, outside or at home in the same way. Set challenges such as:
 - What could you count to get up to 100/1000/10,000?
 - What is the biggest number you could get up to just by counting a particular thing (e.g. leaves on a plant; bricks in a wall; fence panels; pictures in the corridor etc)?
 - Who can come up with the most unusual thing to count?
 - Do some creative sums with some of the counting you have done (e.g. the number of leaves minus the number of fence panels; bricks in the wall divided by corridor pictures). They could set these sums for one another.
- Pupils could do their own research project to find out more about NHS Charities Together, or about the 'Spanish flu' pandemic after World War 1.
- Do Max's quiz at the end of the book with the class/in small groups. Ask pupils to create their own quiz, either based on the story, or on anything they have found out as a result of discussion or activities around it.
- Show pupils the video of Jeremy Harper, who holds the world record, reaching one million: <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/100483-highest-number-counted-out-loud> Can they find out about any other world record holders related to counting?

CURRICULUM LINKS



Using this resource within a planned, developmental curriculum can help you link to the following statutory and non-statutory areas of learning:

Relationships and health education: statutory guidance

General primary guidance:

Physical and mental health

- Giving pupils the language and knowledge to understand the normal range of emotions that everyone experiences. This should enable pupils to articulate how they are feeling, develop the language to talk about their bodies, health and emotions

Area of learning	Core area	Detail
Relationships	<i>Families and people who care for me</i>	Pupils should know: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The characteristics of healthy family life, commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members.
	<i>Caring friendships</i>	Pupils should know: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.
Physical and mental health	<i>Mental wellbeing</i>	Pupils should know: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That there is a normal range of emotions (e.g. happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, nervousness) and scale of emotions that all humans experience in relation to different experiences and situations.• How to recognise and talk about their emotions, including having a varied vocabulary of words to use when talking about their own and others' feelings.• Simple self-care techniques.• Isolation and loneliness can affect children and that it is very important for children to discuss their feelings with an adult and seek support.
	<i>Health and prevention</i>	Pupils should know: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• About personal hygiene and germs including bacteria, viruses, how they are spread and treated, and the importance of handwashing.

CURRICULUM LINKS



Non-statutory PSHE programme of study (KS2)

Core theme	Sub-section	Learning Opportunities
1: Health and wellbeing	<i>Healthy lifestyles</i>	H9. that bacteria and viruses can affect health; how everyday hygiene routines can limit the spread of infection; the wider importance of personal hygiene and how to maintain it
	<i>Mental health</i>	H18. about everyday things that affect feelings and the importance of expressing feelings H19. a varied vocabulary to use when talking about feelings; about how to express feelings in different ways H23. about change and loss . . . and how these can affect feelings H24. problem-solving strategies for dealing with emotions, challenges and change.
2. Relationships	<i>Families and close positive relationships</i>	R6. that a feature of positive family life is caring relationships; about the different ways in which people care for one another R8. to recognise other shared characteristics of healthy family life, including commitment, care, spending time together; being there for each other in times of difficulty
	<i>Friendships</i>	R10. about the importance of friendships; strategies for building positive friendships; how positive friendships support wellbeing R16. how friendships can change over time, about making new friends and the benefits of having different types of friends
3. Living in the wider world	<i>Shared responsibilities</i>	L4. the importance of having compassion towards others; shared responsibilities we all have for caring for other people and living things; how to show care and concern for others

THANK YOU!



We hope you enjoyed [Max Counts to a Million](#) and found these resources helpful.



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