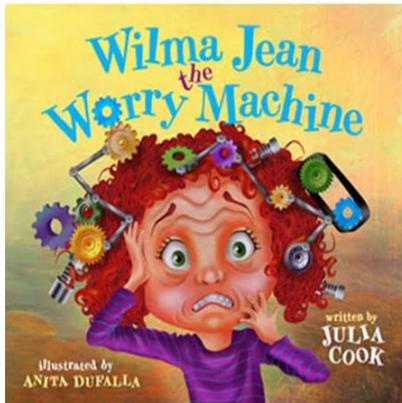


Book Nook  
Using Books to Support Social Emotional Development



**Wilma Jean, the Worry Machine**  
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Wilma Jean is a young girl who has plenty to worry about! She thinks about these worries all day: What if I forget how to spell? What if someone makes fun of me? What if I don't like my school lunch?" She calls herself "The Worry Machine", and describes the way her panic attacks feel at school "My tongue got salty, my throat got tight, I gritted my teeth cause nothing felt right. My stomach felt like it was tied up in a knot, My knees locked up, My face got hot!" Wilma's teacher works with

Wilma and her mother to come up with a solution. Whenever Wilma has a worry, she tells her teacher to write it on a card. They sort the worries together into "Worries I Can Control" and "Worries I Can't Control." Wilma's teacher helps her come up with strategies for the worries she can control (If you are worried about being picked for a math problem on the board, I will give you the problem the night before so you can practice at home.) For the worries Wilma cannot control, she is given a 'worry hat'. She is directed to put the hat on her head and think all her worries into the hat. Then when she takes it off her head, it will hold those worries for her. If she wants to think about them again, she can get the hat and put it on. When the hat is off, she should not think about these worries.

This story acknowledges anxiety in children and provides a model of a teacher helping a student with a social-emotional skill. It is written in rhyme and somewhat wordy, so is most appropriate for students K-2. However, a pre-K class could use the book if the teacher read some of the text, but also pointed and talked about the pictures, so the length of sitting and listening was not overtaxing.

Examples of activities that can be used while reading "**Wilma Jean, the Worry Machine**" in class.

- As a pre-reading activity, introduce the concept of 'worry'. Worrying is a feeling of anxiety or discomfort when we are thinking about something that troubles us, especially if it makes us nervous. Sometimes when we worry our bodies feel different. We can have tummy aches, we can feel hot or sweaty, our muscles can feel tense, and/or our breathing can be too fast. Everybody worries, no matter how old they are, and it is important to learn to control our worries to be happy and healthy. Book intro: "In this book, *Wilma Jean, the Worry Machine*, we will read about a girl named Wilma who has a lot of worries. I want you to pay attention to what makes Wilma worry, and also to the **solution** to the problem, the way her teacher helps her handle her worries.

- **During Reading:** Alternate between reading exact text and describing the pictures based on the age and attention span of your students. Some classes may not need the story 'read' to them, but benefit more from looking at the pictures together, talking about what Wilma Jean is worrying about in the pictures, and giving a brief explanation for the page in the book with the teacher and the worry sort and worry hat. Other students who are ready for it may have the book read to them in its entirety. It can also be read in two chunks, with the stop at page 16, and then page 16 to the end on the second day.
- **After Reading:** Invite students to do as a class what Wilma Jean did with her teacher. Some may need additional scaffolding, like a day making a 'class list' of worries on chart paper together instead of generating their own. Students each give the teacher a worry to write on a large post-it, either picking from a class list or generating themselves. The teacher and the students together then sort the worries into two sections. "Worries I Can Control" and "Worries I Can't Control" The completed chart is saved for a follow up lesson.
- **Follow up Lesson:** Briefly review what has been done so far, the plot of *Wilma Jean, the Worry Machine* and the chart that students created and sorted with their own worries. Inform students that today is the day that the class will work together about 'Worries I Can Control'. Select individual student examples and brainstorm together what the student could do to control the worry (Example: "I get worried that no one will play with me outside." We can control that worry by asking a friend to play when we line up, or by joining a group outside once playing has started. "I worry when my mom is not here." We can have a picture of your family for you to look at in the classroom when you miss her, and reminders during the day of what we are doing before we see mom again).
- **Follow up Lesson 2: Worry Hat.** Using one oversized hat, reintroduce the concept of the "worry hat" in *Wilma Jean the Worry Machine*. The worry hat is for worries that we can't control. Model for students thinking of a worry that can't be controlled and putting on the worry hat so the worry stays within. (Ex. Teacher says, "I worry sometimes about whether it will snow, because I do not like to drive in snowy weather." Teacher puts on the hat and states. "I worry about the snow" aloud, and then takes the hat off. "Now my worry is in the hat. If I want to think about the worry again I can find the hat and put it on, but when the hat is not on, I will think about different things.") After modeling, allow students opportunities using the worries already sorted onto the chart.

#### Alternative Lesson Ideas:

- **Calm Down Area:** Create an area in the classroom to be the 'calm down area' and model and practice going to that area any time a student is feeling worried or another 'strong

feeling' (angry, sad, scared). This is not a time out; students choose to go to the "calm down area", and during moments of emotional distress can be reminded it is an option. Students should not be made to go to the "calm down area". The area should be inviting and comfortable - a yoga mat on the floor with a few pillows nearby, a basket of fidgets to play with while trying to relax, a timer to monitor how long to stay (3-5 minutes should be enough). Visual charts that remind students what to do to calm down, such as taking belly breaths, hugging a toy, counting to ten, etc can be posted in the area or kept in a basket. For children who calm themselves by looking at books, a few books can be placed in the area as well. After reading *Wilma Jean the Worry Machine*, remind children that when they worry at school they can use the "calm down area" to help their bodies and feelings get under control and then return to the group.

- Worry Monster: Using a cardboard box and construction paper, create a 'monster' with a large cutout mouth trimmed with teeth and a 'scary' face. Tell children that this is a worry monster who can live in our classroom and 'eat' our worries. At any time during the school day, children can either write down or ask an adult to write down for them, a worry that they can then feed to the monster. At the end of every day or week, the teacher should take out all the worries, look at them, and follow up if need be with her own attention or counselor support. If the worry recorded never happened or did but is over now, have a conversation with the student about how worries do not always last, and even the bad worries are usually things that will pass and we will feel better soon.