



# TEACHERS' NOTES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary (ages 15+; years 10 to 12)

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Arts, Health and Physical Education
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A funny and heartwarming story about friendship, family, resilience and finding your way.
- An entertaining exploration of what to do (and what *not* to do) when life doesn't go to plan . . .

## THEMES

- Family and friendship
- Cruise ships
- Mental health and anxiety

## PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

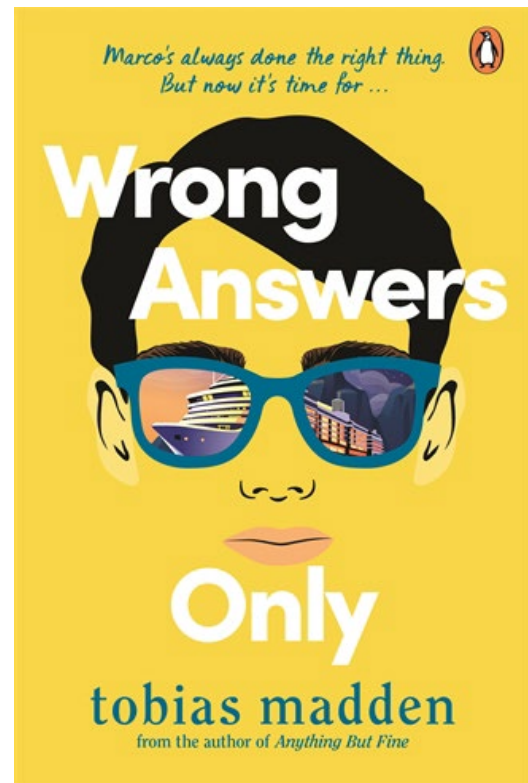
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## Wrong Answers Only Tobias Madden

### PLOT SUMMARY

Marco should be at university, studying biomedicine. Instead, he's been sent to live on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean with his estranged uncle, all because of a 'blip' everyone else is convinced was a panic attack. (Which it most definitely was not.)

And even though Marco's trip is supposed to provide answers – about himself, about his family – all he finds on board the *Ocean Melody* are more and more questions.

But then his best friend CeCe proposes a new plan: for someone who has always done the right thing, in every possible way, it's time for Marco to get a few things wrong. And hooking up with a hot dancer from the ship is only the beginning . . .

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Ballarat, Tobias Madden worked for ten years as a performer, touring Australia and New Zealand with musicals such as *Mary Poppins*, *CATS*, and *Guys and Dolls*. He now resides in New York City with his husband, Daniel, and their Cavoodle, Ollie.

In 2019, Tobias edited and published *Underdog: #LoveOzYA Short Stories* and co-wrote the cabaret show *Siblingship*. His debut novel, *Anything But Fine*, was awarded the Australian Association of Family Therapy's Book Award for Older Readers, was shortlisted for ABIA Book of the Year for Older Readers, was named one of Better Reading's Top 50 Kids Books, and was included on Bank Street College of Education's list of Best Children's Books of the Year (US). His second novel for young adults, *Take a Bow, Noah Mitchell*, was published in 2022.

Tobias is a passionate member of the #LoveOzYA and LGBTQ+ communities, and he currently works full-time in book marketing.



Photo © Kate Williams

## AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

When I started working on my third book, I knew I wanted to write about three things: the year after high school; cruise ships; and anxiety.

My first two books took place during high school – the first in Year Eleven and the second in Year Twelve – so it felt right that my next book should follow that progression. There is something so exciting and terrifying about the transition from high school to whatever comes next for someone, and I just knew I had to delve into that experience.

Why cruise ships? My first job after university, as a fresh music theatre grad, was singing and dancing on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean. Ever since, I've dreamed of setting a novel on a ship. It is the most fascinating environment. In many ways, a ship is its own little universe – a floating microcosm of society. And because I remember my own experiences so vividly, I knew how much fun it would be to write about not only day-to-day ship life, but all the incredible places I was lucky enough to visit (and all the food I was lucky enough to eat!).

As for anxiety, well . . . that is something I've been dealing with my entire life, though for the most part, I didn't know what to call it. The process of writing a character who suffers from anxiety and panic attacks (but isn't willing to admit it) was truly transformative for me. Seeing the world through Marco's eyes provided answers to questions I'd had for many years, but never knew I needed to ask.

Then, finding a way to bring all those different elements together . . . well, that was the really fun part!

## PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Before you start reading, look at the cover of the book. From the image and design, what do you think the book will be about?
2. How has a sense of tone been established by the chosen fonts, colours and design style?
3. Look at the quotes on the first two pages of the book. Research these authors if you aren't already familiar with their novels. What are some common themes between Tobias's book and these other authors' books?

## WRITING STYLE

### Questions

1. Why has the author chosen a first-person point of view to tell this story?
2. After reading a couple of chapters, how would you describe Tobias's writing style?
3. Which literary devices does the author use to help create a sense of place and tone within the scenes?
4. Do you think the use of messages, video calls and emails in the narrative helps with character development? How do these forms of communication help the reader get to know Marco, Marco's mum and CeCe better?
5. There are several characters and locations that cross over in Tobias's three novels. Can you pick the characters and places in this novel that also feature in *Take a Bow*, *Noah Mitchell* and *Anything*



*But Fine?* How are they connected to Marco's story?

- How does the author use humour throughout the narrative? Can you find examples of humour being used to defuse the tension in a scene?

### Activity

- Marco's voice is the driving force of the story. This means that we don't hear the point of view of other characters. Choose a scene in the narrative and write it from another character's point of view (e.g. Oliver, Angel, Ezekiel, Sofia, Wendy 2.0, Leo or Renzo).

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### Anxiety and Mental Health

#### Questions

- Why do you think it was so hard for Marco to acknowledge his panic attacks?
- Have there been times when you or someone you know has suffered from panic attacks? Are there strategies that you could put in place to help at such times?
- Do you feel that Marco's parents made the right decision in deferring Marco from his first year of university?
- What did you first think when you heard Marco's Mum retelling her account of his first panic attack on page 25. How did this inform your reading of Marco's reactions during that scene?
- How has the author captured the moment of Marco's panic attacks? (For example, pp5-6) Do you think the use of italics and repetition has successfully communicated how Marco felt in those moments to the reader? Are there other ways this could have been written?
- Do you think Marco feels pressured by other people to do well? Or is he mainly putting the pressure on himself to be the best at everything?
- How do you think Marco taking a break before starting university will help him? Do you think this will give him an advantage in some ways over his peers? Or will it be a disadvantage? Why or why not?

#### Activities

- Research different organisations or systems that can be accessed if you or someone you know needs help.

- Choose two or three characters from the book. Write a description of how that character is 'choosing the wrong thing' in some way. Do you think they have resolved their issues by the end of the book?
- Marco starts using visualisation techniques to try to help him get over his anxiety about going to Melbourne and starting uni. Create a visualisation or a meditation to use in situations when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. These could involve different images or words to focus on, or a breathing technique.

### Cruise Life

#### Questions

- In the story, this is the first time Marco has been overseas. Have you even been out of the country either on a holiday or school trip? Research what you would need to do in order to plan an overseas trip. (EG: Would you need to take time off work or school? Do you need to apply for a passport or visa? How much money would you need to have saved up?)
- Marco realises very quickly that there are different rules for passengers and staff on the ship. Can you find examples of these differences in the story? Can you also find evidence of differences between the groups of passengers?

#### Activities

- Using the narrative throughout the story, create a floor plan of the *Ocean Melody*. See if you can chart a path from Marco's cabin to Cece's cabin.
- Following the cruise route of the *Ocean Melody*, plot a new cruise to a different part of Europe or perhaps to another part of the world like Scandinavia or a part of Asia. Try to fit it into the same two-week timeframe as the cruise Marco was on.
- Marco and Hunter get into big trouble when they miss embarkation at the end of chapter 30. (p272) Research why this would be such a big deal from the cruise ship management's point of view. Can you find information about this type of thing on any real cruise line websites? Is there a different way that Marco and Hunter could have handled this situation?
- Marco mentions the *Titanic* – a quite famous passenger liner – several times throughout the narrative. Write a list of what would be the same and different for travellers on a cruise in 1912 and in 2024.



## Family, Friends and Soulmates

## Questions

1. Marco leaves his family and support network to go around the world to an uncle he doesn't know. What do you think would have happened had he stayed at home? What do you think his year would have looked like had he stayed in Ballarat?
2. Do you think it is possible for friends to be soulmates, like CeCe and Marco? Do you have a friend that you feel this close to?
3. Was CeCe justified in reporting Hunter to management for a rule infringement? Why or why not? Is there another way in which this could have been handled?
4. Read the conversation Marco has with his dad on pages 358–364. What do you think would have happened next? Do you think Andrea would have looked at the letter from Sofia to Lorenzo?
5. Can you think of other novels that involve family secrets? Why do you think it's such a popular theme in a lot of books, films and streaming shows?
6. Sofia tells a lot of stories about her life as a young woman in Sorrento. Are their stories like this that have been passed down in your family. Do you have a particular person in your family group that is the custodian of this type of information?
7. Do you think the six or so months that CeCe and Marco have been apart have made a difference to their relationship? Has it shifted the maturity dynamics between the two? Why or why not do you think this is so?
8. Do you think it matters that Hunter never found out that Marco wasn't the one to report him? Why or why not?

## Activities

- Write one of the letters that Sofia sent to Lorenzo after he left home.
- The author shows the reader – especially through the characters of Marco and CeCe – that everyone is going through/has gone through something in their life. Choose one or two characters and write a scene from their point of view showing their internal struggle with something. (EG: what do you think Jess is going through? How has she coped with CeCe being made Dance Captain ahead of her? What worries does Oliver have? How

are Dante and Leo coping with their brother leaving?)

- In a group, discuss what your plan is for when you finish school. Talk about how you would feel if something happened to stop that plan from happening, as it did for Marco. What type of support system would you have to help you get through something like that?
- Write a scene depicting an imagined conversation between Sofia and Marco once he returned home to Sydney. Do you think Sofia would tell Marco everything about what went on when Lorenzo left?

## KEY QUOTES

1. *'Co, I know. I get it. I'm just saying, you and your dad are more similar than you like to admit. Why do you think you clash sometimes? It's not because you're different, it's because you're the same.'* (p341) Do you think Celine is correct here in thinking that Marco and Andrea clash because they are so similar? What evidence in the text can you find to support her theory?
2. *'Dad has spoken about the rules. Often. He brings them up anytime one of us wants to do something he deems even slightly unreasonable. But I always assumed they were Nonno's rules. And Dad has never referred to Nonna as 'cold'. He's never said a bad word about her. Ever.'* (p176) Marco has a difficult time reconciling the Nonna he knows with the Sofia that his zio Renzo grew up with. Why do you think Sofia was so different when she was younger? Do you think she would have been able to explain it to Marco?
3. *'If we were soulmates, you would've told me about your dad.'*

*'We were fighting.'*

*'I'm pretty sure your dad trying to kick you out is a little more important than some silly argument about a boy, Co. Surely you know I'm not that petty?'*

*'Of course I do.'*

*'Then why not come to me? Why not tell me as soon as you found out?'*

*'I don't know, I say, cringing at myself, wanting out of this conversation all of a sudden. I'm doing my best here, Ce. This isn't –'* (p260) Why do you think Marco didn't go to CeCe when he received the email from his dad? Do you think, deep down, he knew CeCe would have supported him? And if that's the case, what stopped him from going to



her? Have there been times when you've been upset but not reached out to those who love you the most? Do you think this is a common behaviour in people?

4. *'Marco?' a voice calls from back down the path towards the street. 'We have to go!' (p369)* In the 'Nine months later' section of the story, who do you think is with Marco in the lemon orchard? Why do you think the author has left this as a mystery? How would the end of the story be different if we knew who this person was?



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



*Anything But Fine*  
by Tobias Madden

**A heartfelt and hilarious Australian YA debut from a rising star.**

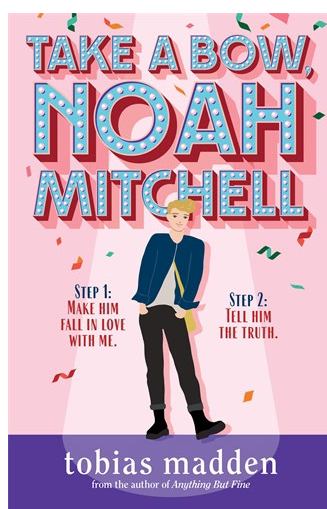
Luca is ready to audition for the Australian Ballet School. All it takes to crush his dreams is one missed step ... and a broken foot.

Jordan is the gorgeous rowing star and school captain of Luca's new school. Everyone says he's straight - but Luca's not so sure ...

As their unlikely bond grows stronger, Luca starts to wonder: who is he without ballet? And is he setting himself up for another heartbreak?

'*Anything But Fine* is everything wonderful I love in a book: characters so real they breathe, a rollercoaster of a story that made me laugh, cry, and swoon, and vivid, gorgeous writing. Brilliant.'  
JENNIFER NIVEN, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *All the Bright Places*

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



*Take a Bow, Noah Mitchell*  
by Tobias Madden

**Tobias Madden delivers another swoonworthy YA rom-com winner with his second novel!**

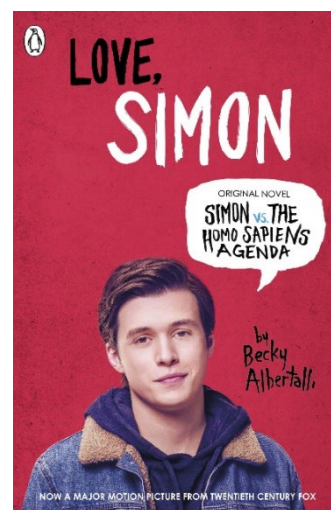
Noah is in love with his online best friend. Which is a huge problem, for the following reasons:

1. His crush has no idea.
2. Noah only knows him as his gaming avatar.
3. There's zero chance they'll ever meet in real life.

So, when Noah sees an opportunity to secretly meet his crush, he takes it. Even though he'll have to join the cast of a local production of *Chicago* with his self-obsessed mother. Even though he'll need to lie to his best (and only) friend. And even though he'll have to sing and dance in front of actual people.

Because love is worth the risk. And, really, what could possibly go wrong?

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



*Love Simon*  
by Becky Albertalli

*Straight people should have to come out too. And the more awkward it is, the better.*

Simon Spier is sixteen and trying to work out who he is - and what he's looking for. But when one of his emails to the very distracting Blue falls into the wrong hands, things get all kinds of complicated. Because, for Simon, falling for Blue is a big deal ...

*It's a holy freaking huge awesome deal.*

Hilarious and heartbreaking ... Readers will fall madly in love with Simon - Publishers Weekly (starred review)

[Teachers' notes available.](#)



## ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Wrong Answers Only	Tobias Madden	9780143777403	10-12	\$19.99		
Anything But Fine	Tobias Madden	9781761042027	10-12	\$19.99		
Take a Bow, Noah Mitchell	Tobias Madden	9780143777397	10-12	\$19.99		
Love Simon	Becky Albertalli	9780241330135	10-12	\$19.99		
<b>TOTAL</b>						

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