

What Do You Do With a Problem?

Discussion Guide and Activities for At-Home Learning

Age range: 5–8 Grade level: K–3

Written by Kobi Yamada Illustrated by Mae Besom

AWARDS

- National Indie Excellence Award (2017)
- The Christopher Award (2017)
- Moonbeam Children’s Book Award (2016)

OBJECTIVE

Teach students how to tackle their problems so that they can learn and grow from them.

SUMMARY

What Do You Do With a Problem? is a reminder that even though problems are scary, we grow and learn from tackling them.

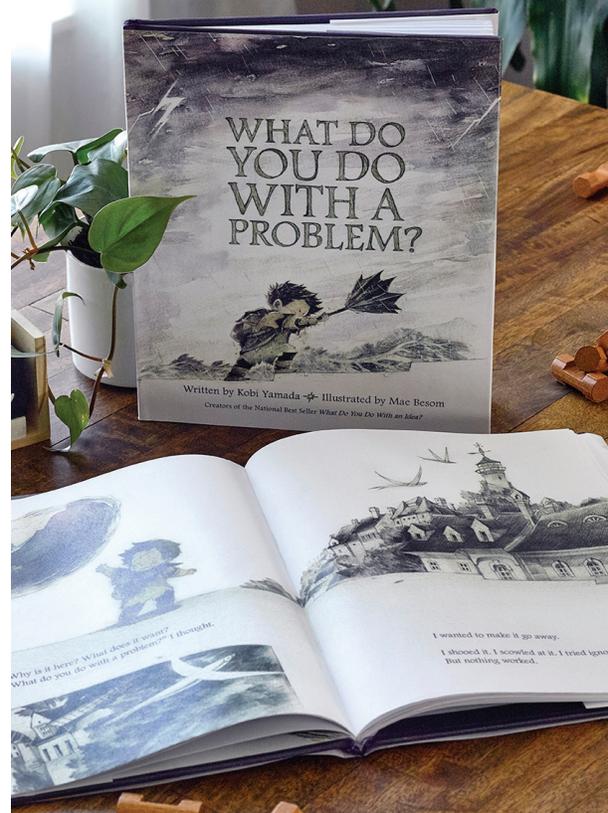
The story follows a boy who suddenly has a problem one day. He begins to avoid it because it’s scary. But the problem follows him around and makes him worry, until he decides to tackle it. When he does, he sees his problem isn’t so scary, and it holds something amazing inside.

Yamada and Besom’s award-winning and *New York Times* best-selling book explores why it’s good to tackle your problems—because they help you learn and grow. Readers are sure to feel less scared of their problems when they understand how much they can offer us.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Problems are no fun—they make us worry and feel bad, especially when they follow us around like dark clouds. *What Do You Do With a Problem?* teaches readers that it’s actually okay to have a problem—and sometimes it’s even a good thing.

Yamada and Besom aim to teach readers that if you look close enough, your problem really contains an opportunity. But we often don’t see that because problems can be scary on the outside, and they make us worry. Besom’s dark, moody illustrations are meant to show how scary the boy’s problem is. It’s only when the boy tackles his problem that light and color begin to brighten the book. The symbolism here shows readers that life becomes richer and brighter when we do what’s hard, because we learn from it. The boy’s bravery transforms the problem into something



beautiful, something he would never have had if he didn't tackle his problem.

The key takeaway is that even though problems can seem scary, each one has an opportunity for something good if you look for it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe a time when you had a problem. How did it make you feel?
- Why are problems scary?
- Why doesn't the boy's problem go away when he ignores it?
- How would you face a problem?
- How can problems help us grow?
- The boy says he makes his problem bigger and scarier than it actually is. Why do you think that is?
- What do you think it means when a problem holds an opportunity?
- How can you help your friends who have problems? What would you tell them?
- Think back to the problem you described earlier. What was the opportunity it held inside?



ACTIVITIES

Draw a problem

Ask students to draw a problem they have. Give them colored pencils, pens, crayons, and other art supplies to help bring their drawing to life. Then have students think about how they can address their problem. They could even draw themselves tackling or dealing with it! This activity is meant to help children vocalize their problems and foster creative skills through drawing.

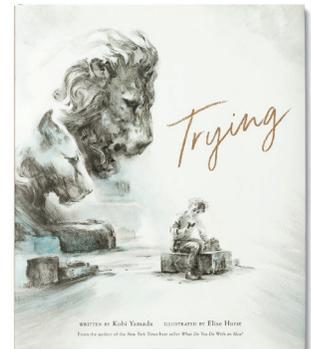
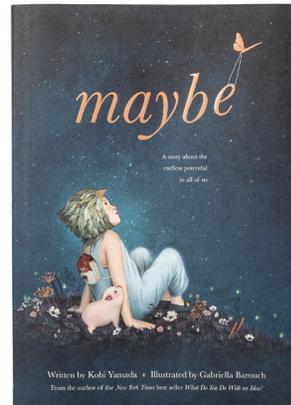
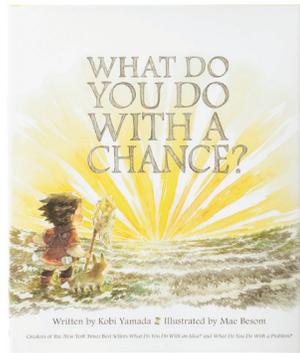
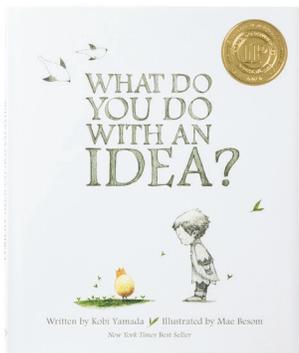
Practice tackling problems

Have students stand up and act out a normal day in their lives. Then, take a pillow or soft object and label it as “the problem.” Their problem could be that they forgot their homework, they lost their backpack, they said something that made a friend sad, or they felt afraid to read in front of the class. Gently toss the problem to them, and when they catch it, ask them how they think they can solve it. Once solved, have them toss the problem back to you. Do this a few times, or enough so that they get their wiggles out. This activity is meant to encourage physical movement, critical thinking skills, and flexibility when unexpected problems come their way.

Create a spyglass

At the end of *What Do You Do With a Problem?*, the boy has a spyglass, which he uses to look for the opportunities inside problems. Have students create their own spyglasses as a reminder to look for the good inside problems too. They can use toilet paper or paper towel tubes, rolled-up paper or magazines, or even tinfoil. Ask them to decorate their spyglass and make it their own. The next time they have a problem, they can use their spyglass to look for opportunities. This activity is meant to foster creativity and encourage bravery.

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