Teacher resources written by the author and illustrator,

Selina Tusitala Marsh
SYNOPSIS
An inspirational graphic memoir of growing up Pasifika in New Zealand, written and illustrated by our fast-talking PI Poet Laureate, Selina Tusitala Marsh.

At school, Selina is teased for her big, frizzy hair. Kids call her ‘mophead’. She ties her hair up this way and that way and tries to fit in. Until one day – Sam Hunt plays a role – Selina gives up the game. She decides to let her hair out, to embrace her difference, to be WILD!

Selina takes us through special moments in her extraordinary life. She becomes one of the first Pasifika women to hold a PhD in English. She reads for the Queen of England and Samoan royalty. She meets Barack Obama. And then she is named the New Zealand Poet Laureate. She picks up her specially carved tokotoko, and notices something. It has wild hair coming out the end. It looks like a mop. A kid on the Waiheke ferry teases her about it. So she tells him a story . . .

This is an inspirational graphic memoir, full of wry humour, that will appeal to young readers and adults alike. Illustrated with wit and verve by the author – NZ’s bestselling Poet Laureate – Mophead tells the true story of how a young New Zealand girl realises how her difference can make a difference.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR
Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh is of Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish and French descent. She was the first Pacific Islander to graduate with a PhD in English from The University of Auckland and is now Associate Professor in the English Department, specialising in Pasifika literature. Her first collection, the bestselling Fast Talking PI, won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Award for Best First Book of Poetry in 2010. She has published two additional collections, Dark Sparring (2013) and Tightrope (2017). Marsh represented Tuvalu at the London Olympics Poetry Parnassus event in 2012; her work has been translated into multiple languages and has appeared in numerous forms live in schools, museums, parks, billboards, print and online literary journals. As Commonwealth Poet (2016), she composed and performed for the Queen at Westminster Abbey. She became New Zealand’s Poet Laureate in 2017 and in 2019 was appointed as an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to poetry, literature and the Pacific community.

WRITING STYLE
This is a graphic mini-memoir. This means it tells a true story about the author’s life through pictures and words. The ‘I’ in the book belongs to the character Mophead, who is also me! But you can’t tell everything about someone’s life. Stories are about choosing which moments to tell. They’re about selecting the important scenes to draw and describe, the saddest, the happiest, the most challenging scenes. Stories are about connecting these things with an interesting thread so the reader can follow along easily. Here, I connect these moments with my wild hair. These moments all explore the themes of the book.

THEMES
• Your difference makes a difference
• Find your voice, tell your story
• Growing resilience: imagination makin’
• Mistakes are made for making
• We are all made of up of amazing cultural strands
1. BEFORE READING
- What does the word ‘Pacific’ mean?
- What does the word ‘Pasifika’ mean?
- What does it mean when you are named Head Girl or Head Boy of a secondary school?
- What is a PhD?
- What is a Poet Laureate?

2. ACTIVITY: THE COVER
Look closely at the cover.
- What two words are in the title?
- What do you use a mop for? What do you use a head for? Why have these two words been put together?
- What’s wrong with putting them together?
- Is being different ok?

How does the cover show:
- The main idea connecting these stories?
- That this is MY personal, true story?
- What might the main themes be?

3. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS
Growing resilience: imagination makin’

Mophead is dedicated to ‘those who stick out’.
- What makes you stick out?
- Have you ever been teased for something about you that was different from others?
- What was Mophead’s response to being teased?
- What did you think of Mophead’s response?
- What makes you uniquely you? Your eyes? Hair? Height? Voice? Do you have a special talent?
- How might you turn your difference into your super power?

I drew the pictures in Mophead. Her hair started out as a mistake that I scribbled out. Then I discovered that scribbling was the best way to draw her hair. The lines were wild and free – like her. Mistakes are made by making.

- Lots of people say it’s good to make mistakes. Why?
- Have you ever made a mistake and turned it into something good?
- How might you turn a mistake into something good to make?
4. ACTIVITIES

A) Mistakes are made for making
Make a scribble on some paper. You can use my graphic of six squares if you'd like. Three have the same scribble in the middle of them and can be re-imagined as a sheep, an insect, a cup of frothy hot chocolate, a moustache, etc. Draw your own scribble onto the three blank squares and turn them into something else.

B) Growing words and worlds
Mophead loves reading. It is key to helping her imagination grow strong. Books grow words and worlds.

- Draw your own pile of favourite books OR fill in Mophead's pile of books with your own titles.
- Write out your favourite lines from the books OR write down what you learned from the books.
- Share with others.
5. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS
We are all made up of amazing cultural strands

Afakasi is the Samoan word for being Samoan plus something else. We’re all made of beautiful mixes!

- On a world map, show the journey all your ancestors took to get here.
- What special things did you inherit from your ancestors?

6. ACTIVITY

Look at my different hair equation below (pages 10–11 in the book).

- List all the countries that your parents and grandparents and great-grandparents come from.
- List one special thing you have inherited from that part of your culture – it can be anything.
- Draw your own equation of the special things you have inherited from your own bloodlines that equal YOU! It doesn’t have to be hair, or the same thing each time. For example, a woven fan from Tonga, a kilt from Scotland and a big laugh from your Māori side = YOU (you would draw a picture of you laughing, wearing a kilt and fanning yourself).
7. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS
Growing resilience: imagination makin’

The imagination is one of the strongest tools in the universe! You have the power to change the world around you, and how you see yourself in it. It’s a rocket that needs one kind of fuel: play. After school, I used to go home and play, pretending that the mop wasn’t just a smelly mop, but a horse, a microphone, a hiking stick! I’d conquer the world! And the mop became my friend.

- Discuss other ways we can use play and imagination to build inner strength.

8. ACTIVITIES

A) Game

Form a circle. Take an object. Pass the object around the circle. Each person has to turn the object into something to use, then pass it on. You may not repeat anyone else’s idea. If you pass, you need to sit down. The circle will grow smaller and smaller as the ideas get wilder and wilder.

Make a poem using the object from the game as the title. List all the things you can remember it being turned into.

Example:

**A Pen is a**
Wand
Worm
Hair pin
Sword
Laser light
Dinosaur toe bone
Run over dried banana
The world’s smallest sky tower . . .

B) My Mop is a . . .

What three things can you turn a mop into?

- Draw them.
- Now make a poem titled ‘My Mop is a . . .’.
- Using your drawings, fill in the blanks.
- Insert the title in between your own lines (5 lines in total).

Like this:

**My Mop is a . . .**
Line 1: [object] because [the reason]
Line 2: my mop is a
Line 3: [object] because [the reason]
Line 4: my mop is a
Line 5: [object] because [the reason]
Example:

My Mop is a . . .

horse because it has a wild mane

my mop is a

microphone because it has power

my mop is a

hiking stick because it is carries me far

C) Your difference makes a difference

Write a 5-line poem using the thing that makes you different as the title.

Complete the sentence starters below to begin your poem. Use your imagination if the answer isn’t obvious. Use mostly concrete words and things (nouns), some actions (verbs) and a few descriptions (adjectives). Choose your words carefully and keep to one line:

Line 1: Feels like . . .

Line 2: Looks like . . .

Line 3: Sounds like . . .

Line 4: Smells like . . .

Line 5: Tastes like . . .

Example:

Wild Hair

Feels like wire, thick and frizzy

Looks like black lightning, a midnight cloud, curly waves at night

Sounds like whispers on my shoulders

Smells like the salty ocean

Tastes like sweet honey on fingers

Now remove the instructions and you have your poem!
9. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS
Find your voice, tell your story

I found my voice by finding, and following, people who I could identify with. In the book *Mophead*, it’s the poet, Sam Hunt. I saw a way of being in the world that energised me, that connected with who I was when I played by myself with the mop at home to who I could be out in the world. Sam showed me that this brave and wild person didn’t want to be the ‘same’ as everyone else. They were brave enough to be different, and to use that difference to be themselves wherever they are. Being courageous and curious enough to keep asking questions is key to finding your voice. I have asked the question, ‘Could I do that?’ my whole life. The answer is always, ‘Yes.’ This is a question everyone can ask. But it also involves a decision. For me, the decision was to be brave enough to be myself, to not be the ‘same’, and to do something about it. If you choose to live in the ‘yes’ then you will do it your own way. You will find your voice.

- Who first inspired Mophead to embrace her difference?
- How did the poet Sam Hunt help Mophead find her own voice?
- What question did Mophead have to ask to find her own voice?
- What decision did Mophead have to make?
- What action did she take?
- As Mophead grows up, how did she find others to inspire her?
- What question did she ask?
- What action did she take?
- Who inspires you?
- How will you find others?
10. ACTIVITY
Investigate your ‘Inspirator’ (my made-up word for someone who inspires!)

• Make a list of people who inspire you.
• Choose one person and do some research on them. Find out what they do and how they got there. Make a poster of your findings showing why they inspire you.
• At the bottom of your poster, write: Could I do that? Write one decision you could make to turn that answer into a reality. This should be an action.

11. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS
We are all made up of amazing cultural strands
We all hail from different places and countries. It’s important to know where we are in the world. Objects carry cultural stories. That’s why they’re important. When objects are passed down, the stories can grow.

Look on a world map. Point out all the countries mentioned in Mophead.

• What is a tokotoko?
• Why is it special?
• What is a fue?
• Why is it special?

12. ACTIVITY
Draw a taonga (treasured object) from your culture that tells a story. It might be a special shell, a fan, a stone, a necklace, a blanket, a woven mat, an item of clothing, your grandad’s watch, your mother’s ring. These objects hold stories. Tell yours.
13. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Growing resilience

Mophead is teased because she sticks out. Some of this teasing is racist. People can be racist in their attitude or their behaviour. Racism ranges from physically hurting someone, or stopping them from doing things other people can do, to making jokes because of someone’s hair or skin colour. But racism is never funny. Whether you’re the one making the joke, or if you just laugh, it is an act of racism and it hurts both the person it’s aimed at, and you.

- What is racism?
- What racist attitudes is Mophead exposed to?
- What storybook character does the racist phrase ‘Pippi Blackstocking’ refer to? Why do you think Mophead loved the character of Pippi Longstocking?

14. ACTIVITY

Write down, or discuss, your answers to the following questions:

- Have you come across racism before?
- Was it aimed at you or someone else?
- What did you do?
- What could you do if it happens again?
NOTES FOR TEACHERS
Additional notes and guidance to some of the more complex questions, for teachers only!

1. BEFORE READING
• What does the word ‘Pacific’ mean? It refers to the region of islands in the Pacific Ocean.
• What does the word ‘Pasifika’ mean? A word used to describe trans-culturally diverse people with connections to the Pacific region who now live in New Zealand.
• What does it mean when you are named Head Girl or Head Boy of a secondary school? The Head Prefect of a school, awarded in Year 13. A position of responsibility which recognises the leadership qualities of the person voted in by school and staff.
• What is a PhD? The highest qualification you can get from a university. It usually involves 3–10 years of study. You choose a topic and then become an expert on it. I wrote a 100,000 word thesis (book) about my research topic: ‘The First Pacific Island Women Poets’.
• What is a Poet Laureate? The highest award for poetry a country can give. Lots of countries have their own Poet Laureate. In New Zealand it was formed in 1996 and each laureateship lasts two years. During that time the poet represents New Zealand in all things to do with poetry. During my term (2017–19) I told the tokotoko’s tale in 11 countries and 35 towns and cities, I wrote a book of poetry, and I wrote Mophead.

2. ACTIVITY: THE COVER
How does the cover show:
• The main idea connecting these stories? Wild hair dominates the cover. Hair is the connecting strand between these stories.
• That this is MY personal, true story? This is a close-up of my face and I’m looking directly into the eyes of the reader.
• What might the main themes be?
  • The hair is made from scribbled lines drawn by free hand. They’re wild lines, not perfect lines. Some of the scribbles could be mistakes because mistakes are made by making.
  • You just see the top part of Mophead’s face. Her eyes look a bit sad. The red lettering of the Mophead title sits crookedly over her hair. This is the word kids have teased her with. She has yet to find her voice, to change the meaning of Mophead from a negative word about the thing that makes her stick out (her hair), to something positive. This is a story about finding her own voice and how she takes control of her own story.

9. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS
• Who first inspired Mophead to embrace her difference?
  • The poet Sam Hunt.
• How did the poet Sam Hunt help Mophead find her own voice?
  • She saw herself in his wild hair, his wild words. He was happy and proud of sticking out.
• What question did Mophead have to ask to find her own voice?
  • Could I do that?
13. SHARED LEARNING AND DISCUSSION POINTS

• What is racism?
  • When a person is treated badly because of their race or skin colour; and other physical features. When they are treated unfairly because of where they come from and what they look like, and not who they are as a person.

• What racist attitudes is Mophead exposed to?
  • Name-calling based on racist stereotypes. ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy’ was a term used by the colonial British to describe East Africans based on the shape and style of their hair. ‘Gollywog’ is a book character that was turned into a doll with exaggerated African racial features of black skin, wide nose, big lips, Afro-styled hair. It is viewed as being one of many anti-Black popular figures.

• What storybook character does the racist phrase ‘Pippi Blackstocking’ refer to? Why do you think Mophead loved the character of Pippi Longstocking?
  • Created by Astrid Lindgren, the Pippi Longstocking series of stories began to be published from 1945. In 1969 it was turned into a popular TV series.
  • Pippi Longstocking was a tomboy, a rebel, and really stuck out!