

## A note from Ash

What do you think Ash's main worries will be during his last year of primary school?

It wasn't just singing that went wrong, it was everything: friends, birthday parties, brain maggots, and most of all, the big, scary exams that we had to do at the end of the year.



Ash was worried about numerous different things.  
Do you have anything that worries you?

## Chapter One "It's no big deal."

It is normal to be nervous before going on stage for a performance.  
Do you have any experiences of stage fright?

"Come on, Ash, we're all waiting," said Janelle, as if I didn't already know. Suddenly, I started to think: what if Mr Rivers decided to start the play without me? What if I forgot all of the words to my solo number? What if there was a power cut in the middle of the show?



What makes you nervous?  
What tips do you have for trying to conquer your nerves?

## Chapter Two

### “Look on the bright side.”

Why was Ash feeling jealous of Janelle?  
What should Janelle have done?

It was silly but for some reason, I felt jealous of Janelle, even though I was the one who had dropped out. How could Janelle just get up in front of hundreds of people and do a part that she hadn't even practised, when I was too scared to?



It's never OK to feel jealous.

Do you agree or disagree? Why?

## Chapter Three

### “You're overthinking it.”

Who has behaved rightly or wrongly?  
Ash, Janelle, neither or both?

As the bell went and we started to traipse inside, my mind felt like a piece of paper, crunched up very small. I trudged through the corridor, staring at my feet and not really seeing them. That's how I ended up walking into Mr Rivers.



Does the way that we feel affect the way that we move?

## Chapter Four “It’s all in your head.”

If you were Ash, would you have spoken to Janelle first?

It was like the bad dream fog had evaporated away; I felt normal. I felt complete.



Can you think of any other ways to describe a feeling of relief or happiness coming after anxiety or worry?

## Chapter Five “Don’t be a flake.”

Why do you think Ash felt that he couldn’t go to the party?

I couldn’t go to the party. There wasn’t any one definite reason. I just couldn’t go.



Have you ever had to do something or go somewhere that you didn’t want to?

## Chapter Six “What’s wrong with you?”

What do you think Ash meant when he says he ‘felt paralysed’?

He spoke in the wise, serious voice of a grown-up used to dealing with troublemakers. I felt paralysed. I’d never been one of the troublemakers before.



Why do you think Ash was misbehaving?

## Chapter Seven “You’re fine.”

Why does Ash not want to be at school?

On Monday, I tried to convince Mum to let me stay off school. I wore every jumper that I could find and wrapped myself in two duvets until I started sweating. Then, I limped downstairs.



What acceptable reasons are there for not being at school?  
What reasons are not acceptable for being off school?

## Chapter Eight “Man up.”

Do you think that Ash wants to be in the leavers’ assembly or not?

“Look, Ash, I need to know if you’re serious about being in the leavers’ assembly.”



Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to do something but also felt scared or worried or nervous about doing it? How did you handle the situation?

## Chapter Nine “Here we go again.”

Was Noah worried about exams? What were his reasons?

“I didn’t think that you’d be worried about exams,” said Noah.

“Me?” I turned to him in shock. “I didn’t think that you’d be worried. You’re a genius!”



Worrying about tests or exams can be a good thing as well as bad.

Do you agree or disagree?

## Chapter Ten

### “What an overreaction.”

How do you think Janelle felt before, during and after the test?

Janelle’s eyes were red and her mouth was a wobbly line, but she looked determined.



It’s always better to try your best in a test, rather than not try at all. Do you agree with this statement?

## Chapter Eleven

### “Get over it.”

How did Ash’s feelings change between the two tests?

The exams were like quicksand, sucking me down into dark, suffocating depths and there was nothing I could do to pull myself free. In the morning, I felt like I hadn’t slept at all.



Have you ever had something in your mind keeping you awake at night?

What tips do you have to help get to sleep?

## Chapter Twelve

# “There’s nothing wrong with you.”

What were Ash’s symptoms and what did the doctor diagnose?

“Mental illness is just that: an illness. It’s not something that you can help. What we want to do now is manage your symptoms and help you to get better.”



Mental illness can affect young or old people, boys and girls.

Do you agree with this statement?

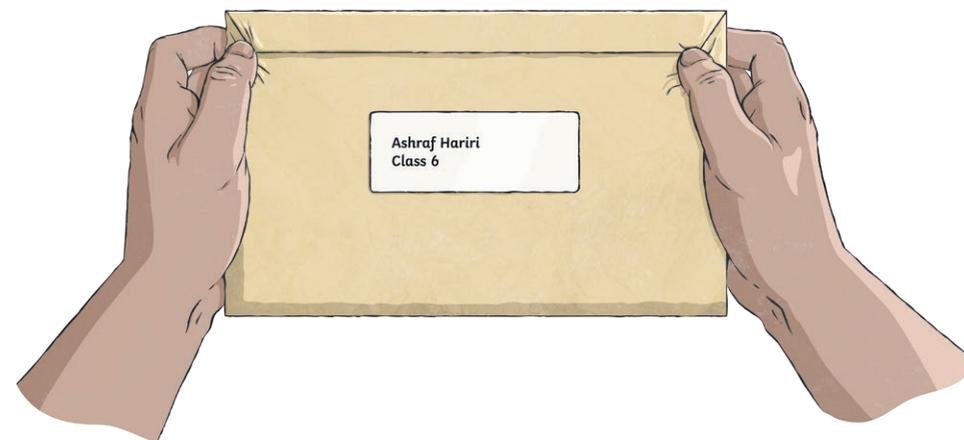
## Chapter Thirteen

# “What are you waiting for?”

What other things changed for Ash after the exams were over?

Describe how he felt during this time.

By then, summer was so close that when I closed my eyes, all I saw was sunlight. But on the morning of results day, I woke to a world that seemed cloaked in grey.



The colour grey is used here to show a change in mood. What other colours do you think could be linked with particular moods or feelings?

## Chapter Fourteen

### “I am not my anxiety.”

The leavers' assembly was a success.

Do you agree or disagree?

What evidence do you have to support your opinion?

I hadn't just gone back to being the old Ash. I was a new Ash – an Ash who knew himself better.



Describe a time when you have learnt something or changed in some way which has helped you to become a better person.

## Another note from Ash

Mindfulness is for people who have anxiety or a mental illness.

Do you agree or disagree?

I learnt lots of different techniques to help me when I'm feeling anxious.



Which of the techniques listed by Ash have you tried or would like to try?