

# WHEN THE WHAT IF'S VISIT



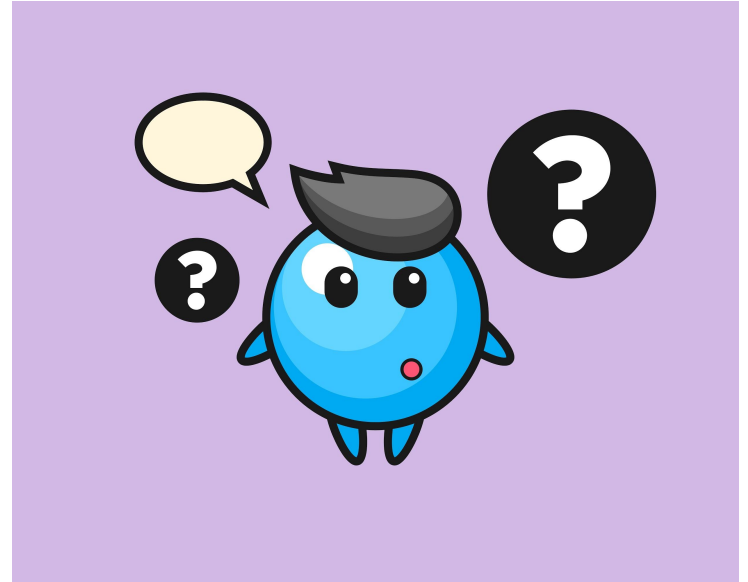
*A story about worry*

BY DAWN MCGRATH

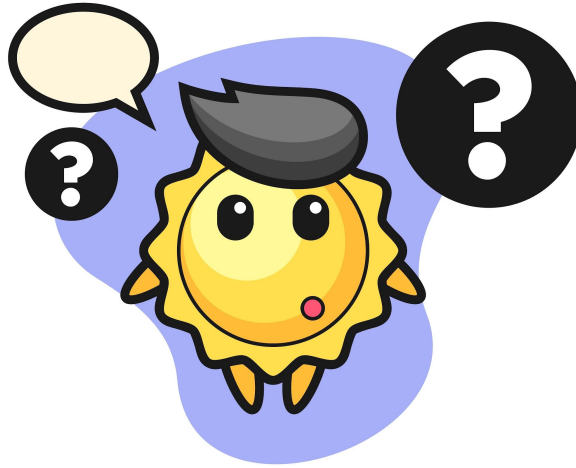
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM ASSORTED  
ARTISTS ON FREEPIK.COM

*Sometimes I have these thoughts.  
Actually, they are more like  
questions.*

*I call them the What Ifs.*



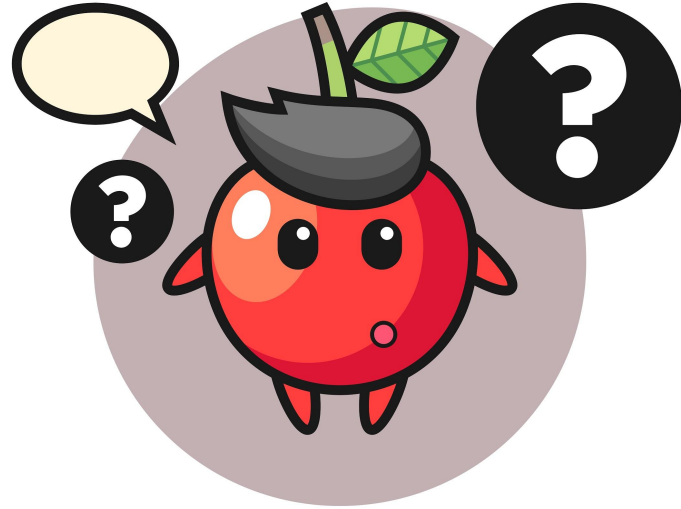
*The What Ifs come from all around  
to ask me about the future.*



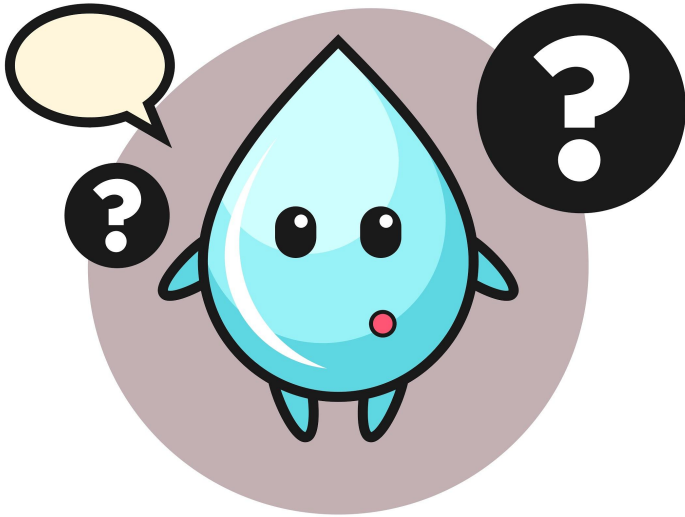
*Most of the time they are friendly whispers.*

*They help me to think about what might happen  
when I make a choice.*

*“What if you were at a new  
school? Maybe you should  
invite that new kid to join  
the game.”*



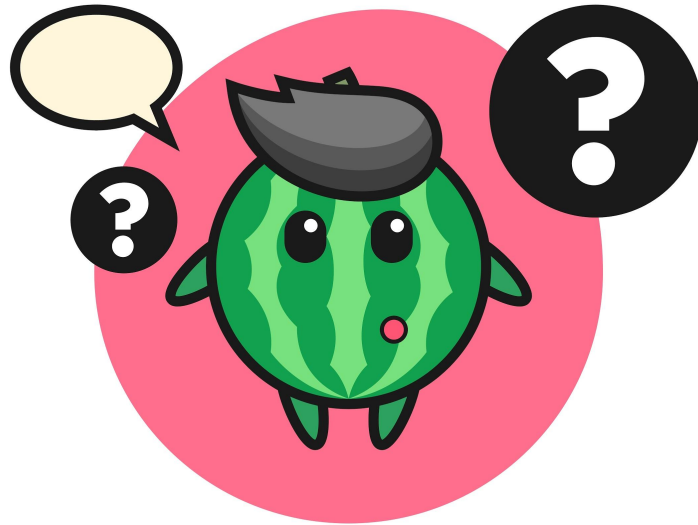
*They warn me to be careful  
when something doesn't feel quite right.*



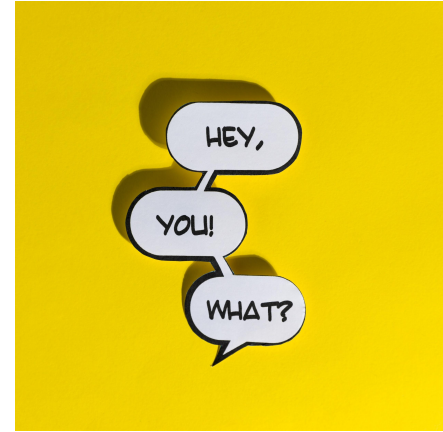
*“What if you fall? Maybe  
you should ask for help  
instead of climbing on the  
counter.”*

*They ask me to take safe risks and try new things.  
Like when my parent wants me to eat broccoli.*

*“What if you like it?  
Maybe you should take  
one bite.”*



Sometimes, I don't mind  
when the *What If's* visit.  
Especially when they give me courage.



(By the way, I actually liked the broccoli.)

But some *What If's* aren't so friendly.  
Especially when they ask me questions that make me feel  
nervous or scared.

Sometimes, the *What If*s can get so loud that it feels more like they are yelling at me.



*“WHAT IF I RAISE  
MY HAND AND  
GIVE THE  
WRONG ANSWER?”*

And when the *What If*s come together, they can crowd my mind until I feel like I can't think about anything else.



WHAT IF MY FRIEND DOESN'T LIKE ME ANYMORE?  
WHAT IF I GET STUNG BY A BEE? WHAT IF THE FIRE  
ALARM GOES OFF? WHAT IF MY TEACHER ASKS ME  
TO READ OUT LOUD? WHAT IF MY COACH DOESN'T  
THINK I RUN FAST ENOUGH? WHAT IF I DISAPPOINT  
MY PARENTS? WHAT IF I FORGET MY SNACK?

**WHAT IF...?**

These *What If*s are not helpful because they ask me questions over and over, even when I don't know the answer.

They don't care if I am trying to sleep or concentrate on schoolwork.

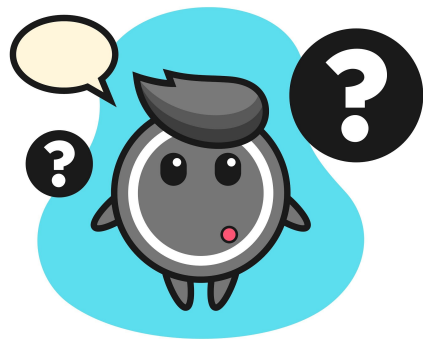
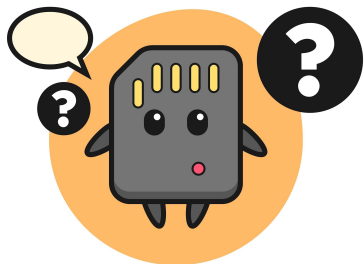
Sometimes *What If*s make my stomach hurt or give me a headache.





When these *What Ifs* visit my mind,  
I reach for My Pocket.

My Pocket holds my ideas for quieting  
the *What Ifs* when they get  
TOO LOUD.



Today My Pocket has:

a picture of my dog. (It makes me happy to see his cute face.)

a baggie full of pine needles. (It is one of my favorite scents.)

a mindful moment. (I like to count breaths to 10 like this: 1-IN, 2-OUT, 3-IN, etc. Then, I start again if I need more time.)

a small piece of putty. (Pressing and rolling the putty keeps my hands busy when I feel shaky.)

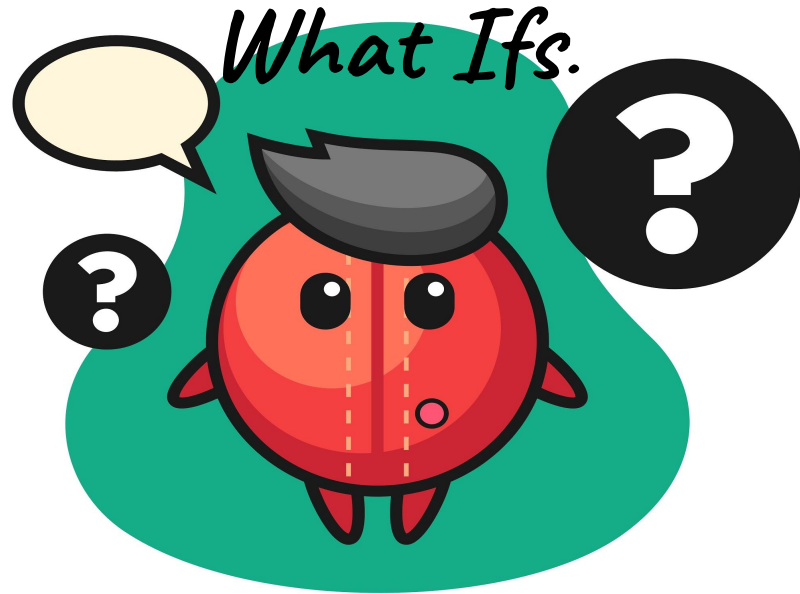
*I use the things in My Pocket to help me calm down  
and stay in control.*



*I like to store at least four ideas in My Pocket at a time. Some days, I just need to look at my dog. Other days, I can sniff the pine needles and feel a bit better. Then, there are times when I do both at once, and I imagine that I am walking outside with my dog where I can smell the trees.*



There are times when I need more than I can hold in my pocket. Like when I am visited by extra humongous



*“What if someone I  
love gets COVID?”*

*What if someone is  
mean to me because of  
my skin color?”*

This is why I always keep a note to myself in My Pocket with a reminder to ask for help when I need it. It reminds me to talk to a trusted adult whenever I feel like the **What Ifs** get to be too much for me. On my note, I put the names of three adults who make me feel safe.



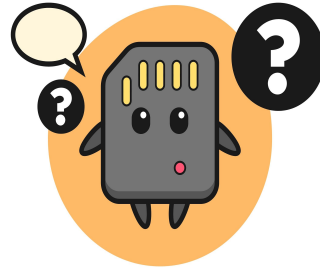


*My Pocket is filled with tools that work for me, and it doesn't always stay the same. Sometimes, I try new things.*



*If they work, I swap the ideas.  
Last year, I had a favorite book in my pocket, but I decided to take it out when I learned about mindful breaths.*

You can fill a pocket for when the *What If*s come for an unwelcome visit.



Work with a trusted adult to choose some ideas for your pocket. Use your tools, and change them if they aren't working. Most importantly, keep trying! Never let your pocket go empty.

# ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT:

**My Pocket:** Students develop ideas for their personal pockets. Pockets could be made from envelopes or created by attaching a pocket template to a sheet of cardstock. Pockets should remain accessible to students for use as needed. If a student is using their pocket excessively, then make time to meet one-on-one to discuss what is prompting the frequent need.

**“What Ifs” Class Book:** Allow students to share some *What Ifs* as a group. Students could write, illustrate, or both. Compile the pages into a class book as a reminder that we all have worries and we can use our tools to help us manage some of the *What Ifs*. Include a discussion about when to ask for help from a trusted adult. Then, brainstorm and post a classroom list of ideas for student pockets.



<https://www.welltogethernow.com>

Copyright © 2020 Dawn McGrath  
All rights reserved

Illustrations from various artists included:  
See premium license copyright © permissions on Freepik.com