



Teacher Notes

The Grey Beret's Guide to Surviving the Odds

Written by Anna Battese, illustrated by Erin Reeves

Teacher notes prepared by Karys McEwen

Publication details

Publisher: Simon and Schuster Australia

ISBN: 9781923135352

Size/format: 304 pages, HB

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Pub Date: 28 July 2026

Reader ages: 8-12 years

Themes

- Anxiety and worry
- Courage and resilience
- Grief and healing
- Family and relationships
- Friendship and trust
- Stepping outside your comfort zone
- Risk versus safety
- Adventure
- Hope and optimism
- Growth and self-belief

Learning Areas

- English
 - Language
 - Literature
 - Literacy
- Health and Physical Education
- Science
- Humanities and Social Sciences (Geography)
- Design and Technologies

Core capabilities:

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Ethical Understanding
- Personal and Social Capability

- Intercultural Understanding

Cross curriculum priorities:

- Sustainability

About the Book

Odie Gusberry-Smith doesn't like surprises. But when a mysterious package arrives in the mail, she finds *The Grey Beret's Guide to Surviving the Odds* – a book that feels like it was written just for her.

Odie is going to need it, because her dad has had the ridiculous idea that they should go on a cruise. When calamity strikes (as she could have told you it would), Odie will need to use every trick in the Guide to keep herself and her alarmingly danger-prone group safe.

Along the way, she might just realise that the Guide is not the only thing she can rely on...

Get ready to join the Grey Berets in this warm, charming and begrudgingly adventurous first instalment of a trilogy that is perfect for worriers great and small.

About the author:

Anna Battese lives in Naarm-Melbourne with her two girls, a well-meaning if wild pair of puppies and an imaginary octopus named Hans Gruber. Once a marine biologist, she now spends her days writing children's stories full of adventure, whimsy and the occasional catastrophe. Like Odie, Anna feels very nervous about a lot of things. *The Grey Beret's Guide to Surviving the odds* is Anna's first middle grade novel.

About the illustrator:

Erin Reeves lives in Gadigal-Sydney with her boyfriend and their ever-expanding record collection. She owns a cocktail bar called Jangling Jack's, which is about as fun as it sounds. She loves reading, punk rock, a dangerously sharp pencil and afternoon naps. Her favourite thing to do is draw, and she pinches herself that she gets to draw all day, every day. Like Baby, Erin often finds herself in sticky situations and doesn't mind that at all.

Before Reading

- Examine the title, cover and illustrations. What do they suggest about the story? What kind of adventure do you think Odie might face? What clues can you find about the novel's tone or genre?
- Discuss the phrase "surviving the odds". What does it mean? Can you think of situations where someone might have to overcome difficult circumstances or unexpected challenges?
- If you were creating your own Guide to Surviving the Odds, what advice would you include? Write three humorous or practical "rules" for surviving everyday disasters (for example, losing your homework, forgetting your lunch, or getting caught in the rain).
- Odie believes that preparing for the worst is the best way to stay safe. Do you agree? Hold a class debate or create a continuum from Always expect the worst to Always expect the best. Students can explain where they place themselves and why.
- The novel blends adventure, humour and heartfelt emotional moments. Brainstorm the features of each of these genres before reading. How do you think they might work together in one story?
- From the cover and blurb, the Grey Berets appear to be a mysterious organisation. Imagine you have just been invited to join a secret organisation. What would it be called? What would its purpose be? Design a badge, motto or uniform that reflects its mission.
- Throughout the novel, Odie relies on facts, preparation and routines to help her feel safe.
- included these sections throughout the novel?
- How does Odie's relationship with her father change over the course of the story? Identify key moments that bring them closer together.
- Throughout the novel, Odie learns that courage does not always mean being fearless. Find three examples where a character acts bravely despite being worried or uncertain. Explain what each example reveals about courage.
- Odie often relies on facts and preparation to feel safe. Working with a partner, create a T-chart showing:
 - Times when planning genuinely helps Odie.
 - Times when her worries or over-preparing make situations more difficult.
 - What conclusion can you draw?
- The novel explores grief without losing its sense of humour. How does Anna Battese balance funny moments with more emotional ones? Choose one scene that made you laugh and one that made you feel empathy for a character.
- Which secondary character had the biggest impact on Odie's journey? Explain your choice using evidence from the novel.
- Imagine you have been accepted into the Grey Berets after the events of the novel. Write a new page for The Grey Beret's Guide to Surviving the Odds, including a humorous survival tip inspired by something that happened in the story.
- Looking back at your predictions from before reading, which ones were accurate and which surprised you? How did the novel challenge your expectations?

Comprehension questions

- How would you describe Odie at the beginning of the novel? Which events in her life have shaped the way she sees the world?
- Why does the mysterious package have such a powerful effect on Odie? What makes it different from anything she has experienced before?
- Odie believes that if she prepares for every possible disaster, she can prevent bad things from happening. Create a list of the evidence from the novel that explains why she thinks this way.
- The Grey Beret's Guide contains many humorous "survival" rules. Which advice did you find funniest or most memorable? Why do you think the author

Literacy:

Genre

The Grey Beret's Guide to Surviving the Odds combines exciting adventure with laugh-out-loud humour and thoughtful exploration of grief, anxiety and family. Discuss how Anna Battese balances these different elements to create a story that is both entertaining and emotionally meaningful. How would the novel change if it focused on only one of these genres?

Create a story map identifying where the novel feels most like an adventure story, a comedy and an emotional family story. Then, write a short scene that combines two different genres (for example, mystery and comedy, or adventure and friendship) into a single chapter. Reflect on how blending genres can create richer stories.

Characterisation

At the beginning of the novel, Odie believes that being prepared is the only way to stay safe. As the story progresses, her experiences begin to challenge this belief. Explore how Anna Battese develops Odie's character through her actions, relationships and choices, rather than simply telling readers how she has changed.

Create a character journey timeline for Odie, identifying key moments that shape her thinking. Add quotations or illustrations to show how her confidence, relationships and understanding of courage develop across the novel. Then compare another character's journey with Odie's. How does each character grow or change over the course of the novel?

Voice

One of the novel's most distinctive features is the inclusion of *The Grey Beret's Guide*, whose dramatic survival advice reveals important ideas about Odie's mindset while adding humour and shaping the novel's unique narrative voice. Examine how the guidebook entries interrupt, complement and reshape the main narrative. How do they influence the pacing, humour and themes of the novel?

Research a real survival guide, emergency handbook or outdoor manual. Identify the language features used to give advice and compare them with the fictional Grey Beret entries. Then write your own humorous guidebook page for surviving an everyday challenge (such as starting a new school, presenting in front of the class or surviving a family road trip), using the same exaggerated style as the novel.

Final reflections:

- Throughout the novel, Odie discovers that courage is not about eliminating fear, but learning how to move forward despite it. What do you think she has learned by the end of the story? How has her understanding of risk, bravery and trust changed?
- The Grey Beret's Guide teaches Odie many practical survival skills, but what are the most important lessons she learns that aren't written in the guide? Which lesson do you think readers could apply to their own lives?
- Reflect on the novel's final chapters. Did the ending surprise you? How did it change your understanding of Odie's journey? If you could ask Anna Battese one question about the novel, what would it be?

Creative activities:

- Design your own Grey Beret survival kit. First, decide what ten everyday items you would carry to help you survive unexpected challenges. Label each item and explain why it earned a place in your kit. Finally, illustrate your finished design.
- Create and illustrate your own edition of *The Grey Beret's Guide to Surviving Everyday Life*. Include a cover, contents page and one humorous guide entry.
- Odie's world is full of fascinating animals and surprising facts. Research an animal Odie would have loved to learn about because of its remarkable survival adaptations and create an illustrated fact file or short presentation explaining how it survives in its environment.
- Imagine you have been asked to lead a Grey Beret expedition. Choose a destination anywhere in the world and design an itinerary, map and packing list. What dangers might you encounter? How would your team prepare for them?
- At the end of the novel, Odie receives another mysterious package containing *The Grey Beret's Guide to Defying the Odds: Volume 2*. What challenge might await her next? Write the opening chapter of a sequel, introducing a new mystery, adventure or mission while capturing the novel's distinctive blend of humour, suspense and heart.