

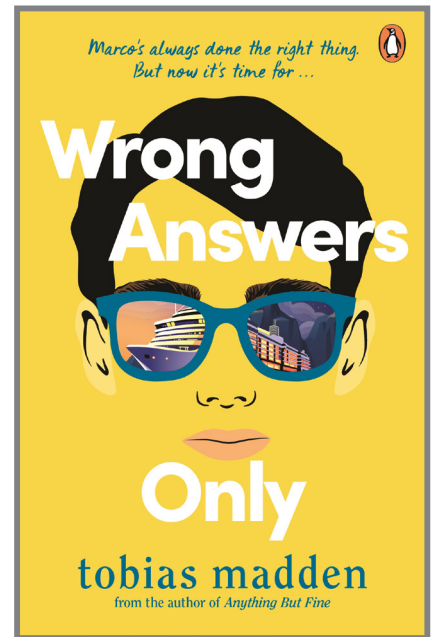
# Wrong Answers Only

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Upper Secondary  
(Language, Sexual Content, Drug and Alcohol References)



## SYNOPSIS

Marco should be at university, studying biomedicine. Instead, he's been sent to live on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean with his estranged uncle, all because of a 'blip' everyone else is convinced was a panic attack. (Which it most definitely was not.)

And even though Marco's trip is supposed to provide answers—about himself, about his family—all he finds on board the Ocean Melody are more and more questions.

But then his best friend CeCe proposes a new plan: for someone who has always done the right thing, in every possible way, it's time for Marco to get a few things wrong. And hooking up with a hot dancer from the ship is only the beginning.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Originally from Ballarat, Tobias Madden worked for ten years as a performer, touring Australia and New Zealand with musicals such as *Mary Poppins*, *CATS* and *Guys and Dolls*. He now resides in New York City with his husband, Daniel, and their Cavoodle, Ollie.

In 2019, Tobias edited and published *Underdog: #LoveOzYA Short Stories* and co-wrote the cabaret show *Siblingship*. His debut novel, *Anything But Fine*, was awarded the Australian Association of Family Therapy's Book Award for Older Readers, was shortlisted for ABIA Book of the Year for Older Readers, was named one of Better Reading's Top 50 Kids Books, and was included on Bank Street College of Education's list of Best Children's Books of the Year (US). His second novel for young adults, *Take a Bow, Noah Mitchell*, was published in 2022.

Tobias is a passionate member of the #LoveOzYA and LGBTQ+ communities, and he currently works full-time in book marketing.

## THEMES

- Family and friendship
- Cruise ships
- Mental health and anxiety

**STUDY NOTES****BEFORE READING**

- Before you start reading, look at the cover of the book. From the image and design, what do you think the book will be about?
- How has a sense of tone been established by the chosen fonts, colours and design style?
- Look at the quotes on the first two pages of the book. Research these authors if you aren't already familiar with their novels. What are some common themes between Tobias's book and these other authors' books?

**WHILE READING****Writing Style**

- Why has the author chosen a first-person point of view to tell this story?
- After reading a couple of chapters, how would you describe Tobias's writing style?
- Which literary devices does the author use to help create a sense of place and tone within the scenes?
- Do you think the use of messages, video calls and emails in the narrative helps with character development?
  - How do these forms of communication help the reader get to know Marco, Marco's mum and CeCe better?
- There are several characters and locations that cross over in Tobias's three novels. Can you pick the characters and places in this novel that also feature in *Take a Bow*, *Noah Mitchell* and *Anything But Fine*? How are they connected to Marco's story?
- How does the author use humour throughout the narrative? Can you find examples of humour being used to defuse the tension in a scene?
- Marco's voice is the driving force of the story. This means that we don't hear the point of view of other characters. Choose a scene in the narrative and write it from another character's point of view.

**Themes****Anxiety and Mental Health**

- Why do you think it was so hard for Marco to acknowledge his panic attacks?
- Have there been times when you or someone you know has suffered from panic attacks? Are there strategies that you could put in place to help at such times?
- Do you feel that Marco's parents made the right decision in deferring Marco from his first year of university?
- What did you first think when you heard Marco's mum retelling her account of his first panic attack on p 25? How did this inform your reading of Marco's reactions during that scene?
- How has the author captured the moment of Marco's panic attacks (for example, pp 5–6) Do you think the use of italics and repetition has successfully communicated how Marco felt in those moments to the reader? Are there other ways this could have been written?
- Do you think Marco feels pressured by other people to do well? Or is he mainly putting the pressure on himself to be the best at everything?
- How do you think Marco taking a break before starting university will help him? Do you think this will give him an advantage in some ways over his peers or will it be a disadvantage? Why or why not?
- Research different organisations or systems that can be accessed if you or someone you know needs help.
- Choose two or three characters from the book. Write a description of how that character is 'choosing the wrong thing' in some way. Do you think they have resolved their issues by the end of the book?
- Marco starts using visualisation techniques to try to help him get over his anxiety about going to Melbourne and starting uni. Create a visualisation or a meditation to use in situations when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. These could involve different images or words to focus on, or a breathing technique.

**Cruise Life**

- In the story, this is the first time Marco has been overseas. Have you even been out of the country either on a holiday or school trip? Research what you would need to do in order to plan an overseas trip (eg. Would you need to take time off work or school? Do you need to apply for a passport or visa? How much money would you need to have saved up?).
- Marco realises very quickly that there are different rules for passengers and staff on the ship. Can you find examples

of these differences in the story? Can you also find evidence of differences between the groups of passengers?

- Using the narrative throughout the story, create a floor plan of the Ocean Melody. See if you can chart a path from Marco's cabin to Cece's cabin.
- Following the cruise route of the Ocean Melody, plot a new cruise to a different part of Europe or perhaps to another part of the world like Scandinavia or a part of Asia. Try to fit it into the same two-week timeframe as the cruise Marco was on.
- Marco and Hunter get into big trouble when they miss embarkation at the end of Chapter Thirty (p 272). Research why this would be such a big deal from the cruise ship management's point of view. Can you find information about this type of thing on any real cruise line websites? Is there a different way that Marco and Hunter could have handled this situation?
- Marco mentions the Titanic several times throughout the narrative. Write a list of what would be the same and different for travellers on a cruise in 1912 compared to 2024.

### Family, Friends and Soulmates

- Marco leaves his family and support network to go around the world to an uncle he doesn't know. What do you think would have happened had he stayed at home? What do you think his year would have looked like had he stayed in Ballarat?
- Do you think it is possible for friends to be soulmates, like CeCe and Marco? Do you have a friend that you feel this close to?
- Was Cece justified in reporting Hunter to management for a rule infringement? Why or why not? Is there another way in which this could have been handled?
- Read the conversation Marco has with his dad on pp 358–364. What do you think would have happened next? Do you think Andrea would have looked at the letter from Sofia to Lorenzo?
- Can you think of other novels that involve family secrets? Why do you think it's such a popular theme in a lot of books, films and streaming shows?
- Sofia tells a lot of stories about her life as a young woman in Sorrento. Are there stories like this that have been passed down in your family. Do you have a particular person in your family group that is the custodian of this type of information?
- Do you think the six or so months, that CeCe and Marco have been apart, have made a difference to their relationship? Has it shifted the maturity dynamics between the two? Why or why not?
- Do you think it matters that Hunter never found out that Marco wasn't the one to report him? Why or why not?
- Write one of the letters that Sofia sent to Lorenzo after he left home.
- The author shows the reader—especially through the characters of Marco and CeCe—that everyone is going through/has gone through something in their life. Choose one or two characters and write a scene from their point of view showing their internal struggle with something.
- In a group, discuss what your plan is for when you finish school. Talk about how you would feel if something happened to stop that plan from happening, as it did for Marco. What type of support system would you have to help you get through something like that?
- Write a scene depicting an imagined conversation between Sofia and Marco once he returned home to Sydney. Do you think Sofia would tell Marco everything about what went on when Lorenzo left?

### AFTER READING

- 'Co, I know. I get it. I'm just saying, you and your dad are more similar than you like to admit. Why do you think you clash sometimes? It's not because you're different, it's because you're the same.' (p 341). Do you think Celine is correct here in thinking that Marco and Andrea clash because they are so similar? What evidence in the text can you find to support her theory?
- 'Dad has spoken about the rules. Often. He brings them up anytime one of us wants to do something he deems even slightly unreasonable. But I always assumed they were Nonno's rules. And Dad has never referred to Nonna as 'cold'. He's never said a bad word about her. Ever.' (p 176). Why do you think Sofia was so different when she was younger? Do you think she would have been able to explain it to Marco?

- 'If we were soulmates, you would've told me about your dad.'

'We were fighting.'

'I'm pretty sure your dad trying to kick you out is a little more important than some silly argument about a boy, Co. Surely you know I'm not that petty?'

'Of course I do.'

'Then why not come to me? Why not tell me as soon as you found out?'

'I don't know,' I say, cringing at myself, wanting out of this conversation all of a sudden. 'I'm doing my best here, Ce. This isn't—' (p 260).

Why do you think Marco didn't go to CeCe when he received the email from his dad? Do you think, deep down, he knew CeCe would have supported him? And if that's the case, what stopped him from going to her?

- Have there been times when you've been upset but not reached out to those who love you the most? Do you think this is a common behaviour in people?
- 'Marco?' a voice calls from back down the path towards the street. 'We have to go!' (p 369). In the 'Nine months later' section of the story, who do you think is with Marco in the lemon orchard? Why do you think the author has left this as a mystery? How would the end of the story be different if we knew who this person was?