



A Mushroom Popped Up On My Head!

A Full English translation is available.

我的頭頂長了一朵香菇

Author: Pin Xuan Zhu **Illustrator:** Pin Xuan Zhu **Publisher:** Locus Publishing

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In this charming and whimsical story, a duck wakes up one morning to find a mushroom growing on top of her head. Confused and anxious, she visits the doctor, who reassures her that the mushroom is simply a worry. With a good night's sleep, it will surely fall off on its own. But the duck can't stop worrying about how to stop worrying!

With fresh humor and warmth, this story explores how we deal with our anxieties. The mushroom—both a symbol of worry and a literal mushroom—sparks disagreement about the proper treatment. The duck encounters friends who try to help, yet initially nothing seems to work. Meanwhile, the mushroom won't stop growing.

Ultimately, the duck learns that worries, like mushrooms, can be transformed. You can face them head-on, roast them into something tasty, and even share them with others. This book teaches readers that while we may never leave worries behind, we can confront them in creative, unexpected ways.



Author **Pin Xuan Zhu**

Pin Xuan Zhu is a picture book writer and illustrator from Taiwan. Her illustrations were selected for the 2022 Japan Illustrators' Association Future Artists Award, the 2022 iJungle Illustration Awards, and the 2023 World Illustration Awards. *A Mushroom Popped Up on My Head!* was awarded the 2025 Openbook Good Book Award for Children's Literature.

Is It a Mushroom or a Worry? That Is the Question!

by Xia Xia

(originally published on OKAPI.BOOKS.COM.TW)

If a worry suddenly appeared with a loud “Boop!”, wouldn’t that feel a little abrupt? Then again, worries often do arrive inexplicably—as is the case in the picture book *A Mushroom Popped Up on My Head!*, a story that illustrates the universal quest to eliminate one’s own worries.

This book opens with a scene that is both ridiculous and amusing. “I don’t know why, but this morning when I woke up,” says a little duck, “a mushroom popped up on top of my head.”

Everything begins with that simple “I don’t know why.” The little duck, now bearing a mushroom on its head, decides to visit the hospital. The doctor—a tiny mouse perched on an absurdly tall chair—takes one look and declares, “This must be a worry!”

For the duck, this diagnosis seems improbable. Clearly, what sits plainly and awkwardly on her head is a mushroom. How could that be a worry? Trying to offer comfort, the mouse finally acknowledges that what sits on her head is a mushroom, but it’s also a worry.

With a few simple lines, the author Pin Xuan Zhu captures the essence of worries. What appears a worry to others may not look like it to oneself. The author chooses the mushroom as a metaphor. Some readers may wonder: why a mushroom? Why not something else? The story unfolds by making this whimsical, nonsensical idea feel perfectly reasonable.

First comes avoidance, the strategy humans use best. Little duck tries to hide the mushroom, but this only makes its

presence even more impossible to ignore. Eventually, there is no choice but to face the worry directly.

Here, the author uses a child’s perspective to dissolve a seemingly immense burden. If a worry grows into a mushroom, why not simply pluck it and eat it?

And so the duck does exactly that. Together, she and her friends roast and eat the mushroom. Having been “nourished” by time and anxiety, this mushroom has grown fat and flavorful. The result is comically satisfying. We are reminded that children often guide us past trivial troubles with simple solutions, reaching relief with lightness and joy.

But with the mushroom gone, does life immediately return to carefree bliss? The author knows better. Endless worries are, after all, one of life’s defining features. So the story takes an amusing turn: mushrooms, broccoli, carrots, and other vegetables start to sprout on everyone’s heads. Plucked and shared, they become delicacies for others. By letting characters literally “eat their worries,” the story suggests that the burdens one person carries may be cherished—or even desired—by another.

But is it too early to discuss worries with children? Aren’t children carefree? No. That mistaken *belief* belongs to adults alone, who often overlook or chuckle at

children’s concerns. On the other hand, children view adults similarly. While adults agonize over body image, work performance, household order, or their children’s grades, children may quietly observe us with clarity, finding humor in our self-imposed anxieties.

Pin Xuan Zhu’s illustrations, forged with simple lines and generous blank space, help children focus on the sprouting mushroom. This clarity magnifies every change and allows young readers to track the protagonist’s emotional journey. Such awareness of emotions is essential practice for facing future challenges. When reading with children, these pages open rich opportunities for discussion. We may even hear surprising insights from them—answers that dissolve real-life troubles lingering in our own minds.

And so, with one soft “Boop!”, the worry disappears.

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

Xia Xia, a popular author, is passionate about writing and life. She is also the mother of two sons. Inspired by her children’s endless curiosity, she began writing children’s poetry not only to document their growth but also to answer their questions.

Good morning, your hat...

Good morning! This is not a hat;
it's a mushroom, and it's also my worry.
The doctor said that as long as I don't worry, it will fall off.
But how exactly can I stop worrying?





Or should I just take it off?

Huh? But this is a worry, right?

Can you just take off a worry?

It's both a worry and a mushroom!

If it's a mushroom, then you can take it off!

