Social anxiety disorder, also known as social phobia, is a mental health disorder that is characterized by an irrational fear of social situations. Simple activities such as eating in front of others, answering questions in class, or walking down a school hallway can evoke panic in the person who has this disorder. Facing scrutiny from one’s peers becomes an all-encompassing fear, and those who suffer from social phobia try to avoid public humiliation or situations where they could potentially be embarrassed in front of others. Avoidance of social activities can also exacerbate other mental illnesses that may have already been present, such as depression. Our culture has been slow to recognize social anxiety disorder as a real illness, and has traditionally viewed the condition as mere shyness. This gradual development is highlighted by Deborah Beidel and Samuel Turner in the text *Shy Children, Phobic Adults*, where they mention how social anxiety disorder has only been recognized as a diagnosable disorder over the past few decades. As a result, people who have the disorder are oblivious to their clinical syndrome and do not seek help.
As someone who struggled with social anxiety as a youth, I want to educate others and provide insight into the life of someone suffering from the condition. My creative project is a short animated film about a teenage boy named Gill, who suffers from intense social anxiety. A terrible incident happens to young Gill that manifests his worst fears and throughout the film, he tries to avoid and run from situations that will evoke similar feelings. I settled on the film name, Gill, because I wanted to play with the idiom, “a fish out of water”. Gill feels out of place in social situations, and one of the symptoms of anxiety attacks is having trouble breathing. A fish on land struggles to breathe, with its gills struggling for oxygen. The goal of this film is to inspire audiences and bring awareness to the issue of social phobia.