

## Dealing With Big Feelings Productively in Children's Literature

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"There's no 'should' or 'should not' when it comes to having feelings. They're part of who we are and their origins are beyond our control. When we can believe that, we may find it easier to make constructive choices about what to do with those feelings."

—Mr. Rogers (162)

Children contend with experiencing, understanding, and regulating big feelings on a daily basis. Everyday interactions with friends, family, and new situations can generate powerful emotions for any young person. But further, far too many children live in stressful or traumatic situations, including poverty or homelessness. One in five children live below the poverty threshold, increasing their risk for social, emotional, and health stressors (NCCP 2019). This reality makes attending to emotional well-being even more vital.

Children look to the adults in their lives to regulate, interpret, and process their feelings in a positive way, and picture books are a wonderful way to start. In this edition of *First Opinions, Second Reactions*, we offer five titles that unpack an array of emotions productively for young readers. From anxiety, anger, sadness, apprehension, and fear, each emotional state is processed supportively through the characters' experiences, inviting conversation and personal connections.

Leanne Evans and Kara Zaicow review the first book, *All Birds Have Anxiety* by Kathy Hoopmann, which is a nonfiction text featuring photographs of a variety of birds, many alert and startled-looking, accompanied by humorous text that clearly describes what it feels like to experience anxiety, as well as how to deal with anxious feelings when they arise.

Next, Taraneh Matloob Haghanikar and Amanda Case review *Jabbari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall, a strikingly illustrated picture book about a young boy who, with the support of his family, overcomes his trepidation about jumping off the diving board for the first time.

To continue the theme of confronting fears productively, Lokia Scott and Rachel Ploskonka review *There Might Be Lobsters* by Carolyn Crimi. This story chronicles the worries of a dog, Suki, who is extremely hesitant to go to the beach because of the dangers she imagines might lurk there. In the end she is able to overcome those fears, in part, by extending help to a friend in need.

Adriana Medina and Kaitlyn Holshouser review the next book, *Fergal and the Bad Temper*, by Robert Starling. This book tells the tale of a short-tempered dragon who blasts fire at

friends, family, and school acquaintances when he doesn't get his way, only to realize others don't want to deal with such "fiery" behavior. As an alternative, he learns to successfully leverage strategies to control his anger in-the-moment.

Finally, Nicholas Husbye and April Regester review *When Sadness Is at Your Door* by Eva Eland. This book simply illustrates common experiences of sadness and how to sit with it, acknowledge it, and eventually work through it.

We feel compiling this collection of titles offers a productive starting point for discussing children's common emotions and helping them work through them productively with a trusted adult.

### **Works Cited**

Rogers, Fred. *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood: Neighborly Words of Wisdom from Mister Rogers*. Penguin, 2019.

National Center for Children in Poverty. "Child Poverty." <http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>. Accessed 10 December 2019.