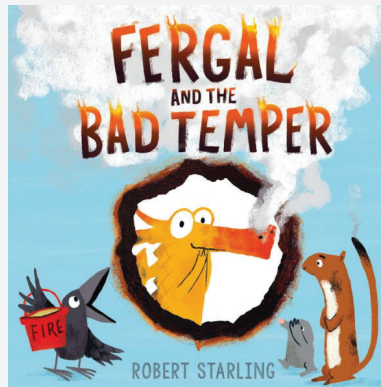


First Opinion: Fergal: A Little Dragon Coping With Big Feelings

Starling, Robert. *Fergal and the Bad Temper*. Imprint, 2019.

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Fergal is a nice dragon and like some dragons he can shoot fire. He has a good family and lots of friends. Yet he also has a fiery temper that is triggered when things do not go his way. Fergal does not like people telling him what to do. He would rather keep playing than eat his vegetables. He likes soccer, but is not happy when the coach tells him to play goalie. He is also impatient when playing games with his friends. Fergal feels it is not fair when things are not going his way; it makes him feel fiery and before he knows it—SCHOOOF!—he has shot out fire! His friends and family feel it is not fun or fair when the vegetables, soccer ball, and games are left in ashes.

After each fiery episode, Fergal looks remorseful, sad, and even confused. He does not seem to understand his feelings or know how to control his temper. His family and friends express annoyance and are frustrated and tired of the fact that Fergal cannot keep his cool. Yet they care about Fergal enough to help him. Fergal's family and friends share with him their own strategies for staying calm when they feel fiery. Fergal's mother's trick is to count to ten. His friends' tricks range from talking about it, retreating into nature, finding other outlets to expend energy, and just stopping and laying down. The next times Fergal notices he is feeling fiery, he tries one of these strategies and it works. Before he knows it, Fergal finds himself controlling his temper and keeping his cool. With his feelings of anger under control, Fergal comes to the realization that there are more productive ways for him to use his fire; he can use it to have fun with his friends.

Fergal and the Bad Temper would be a great addition to any home, classroom, school, and community library. It is a book that could be utilized to strengthen social and emotional literacy and learning. Anger can be an intense emotional response that is difficult for a young child to identify, label, and manage. With the guidance of an adult, this book could be helpful for a young child with a fiery temper who might identify with Fergal and could use help with their anger. Through discussing Fergal's temper, his realization of when he is feeling fiery, and what elicits his fiery feelings, a child could be guided to begin to consider their own fiery feelings and what triggers them. Discussion of how Fergal's reactions to his anger impact his relationships might be useful in helping a young child be empathetic and begin to understand the effects of their actions and behaviors. Additionally, discussion of Fergal's coping mechanisms could also influence a young child to try different ways to manage their anger. Furthermore, with the guidance of an adult, this story could also be helpful for children who identify with Fergal's family and friends who feel annoyed and frustrated. Discussion of how Fergal's friends feel and respond to Fergal's anger could be helpful for teaching appropriate words and responses, healthy boundaries, as well as empathy and helpfulness toward others who are angry.

To be most useful for social and emotional learning, discussion around this story would need to be facilitated by an adult. In the book, there are elements of the anger cycle that are not expressed through words, but rather through illustrations; thus, putting appropriate social and emotional literacy words, such as *remorseful*, *sad*, *frustrated*, and *confused*, to the illustrations to fully comprehend the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to anger might be best accomplished by an adult. Similarly, the triggers and related thoughts can be implied, but they are not explicitly stated in the text. While this story could be read to either one child or a group of children just for enjoyment and with discussion centered on anger, there would be a missed opportunity if discussion around other related emotions was not also had.

The book lends itself to conversations around related feelings such as frustration, regret, and guilt, just to name a few. Admirably, Starling has written and illustrated a story about a common human emotion that is appropriate for everyone because, after all, inside each of us there sits a Fergal.

About the Author

Adriana L. Medina, PhD, is an associate professor of reading at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She has had many experiences where she can relate to Fergal as well as to his family and friends. Over the years, she has developed healthy coping mechanisms that include meditation and prayer to calm down, exercise to get it out, and forgiveness to move toward compassion and understanding of herself and others.