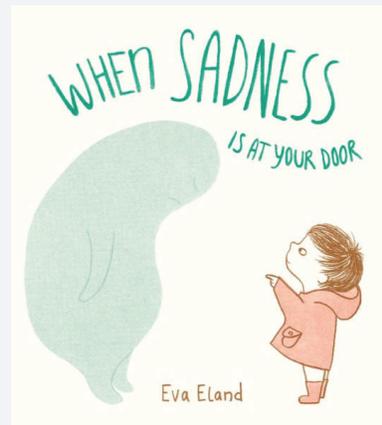


Second Reaction: Embracing Sadness

Eland, Eva. *When Sadness Is at Your Door*. Illustrated by Eva Eland.
Random House Children's Books, 2019

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There is a phrase I encounter often throughout my day, plastered on water bottles, laptops, and car bumpers, among other places: good vibes only. It's an innocent enough phrase, meant to emphasize the positivity, but, at times, feels tyrannical. It often feels as though our society is obsessed with happiness, as though it is possible to maintain happiness as a perpetual state. To be human is to experience a range of emotions. What is one to do when good vibes feel impossible to manifest? How do we recognize, honor, and negotiate sadness? And, perhaps most importantly, how do we help children do this work?

Dutch author and illustrator Eva Eland grapples with these questions in *When Sadness Is at Your Door*, a gentle picture book about a young boy who greets the amorphous, round, aqua Sadness at his literal doorstep. Sadness is not a welcome guest, particularly after it "sits too close to [him], [that he] can hardly breathe" (5). The boy then attempts to hide Sadness in a broom closet, to no avail, later acknowledging that sometimes sadness can sometimes feel all-consuming.

Eland's approach to depicting sadness as this globular aqua character is particularly striking for a reader. She does not elaborate on the many potential causes of sadness within the book, only that it exists and can manifest in a variety of experiences. This choice to marginalize the causes of sadness allows the reader to focus on what to do with the big emotion rather than seek out solutions for the cause of the sadness. The beauty of *When Sadness Is at Your*

Door resides in Eland's gentle suggestions of what to do when confronted with sadness as an unwelcome guest. Sparse illustrations in a limited and muted color palette are welcoming and allow children to envision how they might wrestle with Sadness: being quiet with it, engaging in activities they enjoy, or engaging in physical activity. For children confronted with sadness, the book provides an anchor, reminding them that sadness is a universal human emotion, one to be embraced and one that can be lived through.

The simplicity of the illustrations, line drawings in a muted, warm-brown with aqua and red accents give readers a sense of how all-encompassing sadness can feel—particularly in an image wherein Sadness stands over the little boy in the story, casting him entirely aqua—but also how to work through sadness. While the aqua comes to symbolize the feeling of sadness, red comes to represent coping with sadness, accenting images of the boy drawing, walking through the forest, and sitting alone with sadness on the sofa. In addition to these illustrations, Eland cleverly uses her endpapers, with the front papers depicting people experiencing Sadness and the endpapers showing those same individuals coming to some sense of peace and coexistence with Sadness. It's a thoughtful and powerful touch and a detail that might spark conversation with young children.

When Sadness Is at Your Door is a lovely book, despite its subject matter. Eland has written and illustrated a thoughtful text that is accessible to children who may be working through sadness, giving them words and images to express how they are feeling in a variety of forms. Furthermore, the book acknowledges sadness in ways that emphasizes it as an essential big feeling to be worked through. It is only by acknowledging sadness that we can come to more fully appreciate happiness and joy. Rather than marginalize sadness, Eland's book fully embraces it with the hopes that readers, both child and adult, will do the same.

About the Author

Nicholas E. Husbye is a teacher educator and literacy researcher at University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. His favorite strategy for working through sadness is to sit on the couch and knit while listening to a podcast or audiobook.