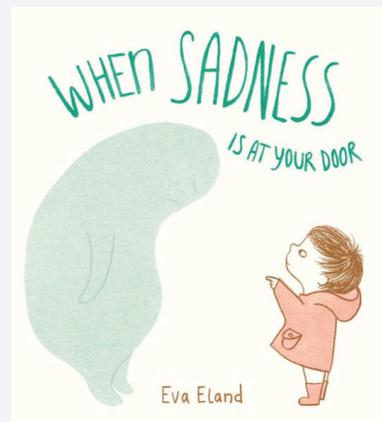


## **Second Reaction: The Unexpected Visitor: When Sadness Is at Your Door**

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

*April Register*



“Who’s that? Why is the boy yelling at it? Is he cold? What happened?”

Prior to settling in on the carpet floor, the questions started flowing from the small group of children that I was about to read with. They had spotted the book in my hand, and already noticed the jacket illustration. A simple blue-green character that resembles a blob, slumping downward with eyes closed and mouth turned down in a frown. The blob is large and dominates half of the page, but appears soft and is facing toward a much smaller young child who is wearing a raincoat and boots. The child’s eyes are open and head raised confidently, with arm outstretched pointing up toward the blob. The child appears to be in charge, yet acknowledging and confronting this character in front of him, which turns out to be the personification of Sadness. The use of illustration to discuss feelings such as sadness is done extraordinarily well in *When Sadness Is at Your Door* by Eva Eland. As author and illustrator, Eva tackles the complex feelings of sadness that all humans encounter in a way that acknowledges (even greets) the feeling before us as if they were a guest coming to our front door. By doing so, she takes the reader on a journey through time, recognizing that Sadness is not always invited and can feel suffocating at times. Acknowledging its presence helps to validate the feeling that exists and

offers potential strategies to pass the time and manage the experience, without the feeling taking over or dismissing it entirely.

*When Sadness Is at Your Door* is a picture book that gives shape to a feeling that is often overshadowed by its more popular relative (Happiness). The author opens the book with welcoming Sadness at the door and admits and accepts the potential responses that may take place by an individual, such as feeling overwhelmed and/or an attempt to ignore or suppress the unexpected visitor. As the story continues, a novel perspective is offered that acknowledges the existence and reality of Sadness and provides an approach that does not encourage the reader to just “get over it” or focus on “happy thoughts.” The author provides strategies that respect Sadness as a visitor (simply listen and ask what it might need), and encourages the reader to comfortably share space with Sadness (sit, draw, listen to music, drink hot chocolate, or take a walk together). This suggests that Sadness may simply want to know that it is welcome and recognized for being a natural part of the full spectrum of human emotions. As one day comes to a close and sleep takes over, the author shows the promise of a new day that may or may not include Sadness by using flexible language (might), but ultimately leaves the reader with the understanding that Sadness is not something to be feared.

While reading the text to a group of young toddlers in an early childhood education setting, they quickly made connections to their own experiences and environment. I heard about feelings of sadness when someone was physically hurt. I learned about the large teddy bear in the corner that is used as a place to sit when Sadness visits their classroom. I also learned about a book that they had previously read titled *The Bad Seed* by Jory John, which they felt discussed similar feelings. What struck me the most when reading the text, was their attention to detail in regard to the illustrations. They frequently mentioned that Sadness looked “cold” and the child in the story was “wearing a jacket” and had an “umbrella” because of the rain. These observations were often made with a hint of worry or concern about the child and Sadness (the character). As I flipped each page, they would make an additional observation and seemed to be anxiously waiting for the “sun to come out.” However, they did share feelings of disappointment when a new day emerged and Sadness was gone. Through the combination of illustrations and text, this book would fit easily into an early childhood setting or early elementary classroom. It would be a great addition to a thematic unit discussing emotions and could be aligned with an activity in which each child could illustrate their own personified Sadness. Students could identify strategies and resources within their classroom and home environments on how to approach Sadness when it comes for an unexpected visit. This could be accompanied by quick lessons on classroom routines on how to access these strategies and/or resources, preferably at the beginning of the year. Lastly, for students with social difficulties, this story could help to teach how to recognize feelings of sadness in others and offer suggestions on how to support them.

### **About the Author**

**April Regester** is an associate professor of special education in the Educator Preparation and Leadership Department at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Her research, teaching, and service all are rooted in the belief that creating, supporting, and promoting inclusive schools, places of work, and communities benefit all people. Her experience in high school participating in inclusive friendship programs led to a career as a paraprofessional, K–12 teacher, supported living vendor, and now researcher actively engaging and practicing this foundational belief to ensure that her own children live in a world that truly values the contributions of all members of our society.