

A Classroom Guide for Bear Feels Sad: Combining Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Literacy Learning

What is SEL? Why include it?

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) includes skills that help students understand their own emotions and learn to manage them, and develop productive relationships with others. More specifically, children learn to set positive goals, feel empathy for others, listen carefully to what other people have to say, cooperate in group settings, and engage in active, productive, and responsible decision-making.

When SEL and academic learning are combined, the result is a positive learning environment that is caring and safe. Children are productively engaged so they can grow socially *and* academically. Researchers have found that when children engage in SEL learning, it has a positive effect on their academic learning. That's why teaching SEL and literacy together is a powerful combination.



About Bear Feels Sad

By Karma Wilson,

illustrated by Jane Chapman

One way to successfully combine academic learning and SEL is by using picture books like *Bear Feels Sad*. This book tells how Bear awakens from his cave to find all his animal friends are away. He begins to feel more and more sad as the day goes on. To make himself feel better, he tries eating a yummy snack, but that doesn't work; then he tries building a blanket fort, but neither activity is fun to do without a friend. Finally, he decides to take a walk to keep himself busy and collects different flowers for each of his friends. This makes him feel better. When he returns home, Bear finds his friends waiting for him, and they also have gifts for him. This makes him very happy. Bear learns that they all think about one another even when they are not together.

Examining the Story Through a Social-Emotional Learning Lens

This story provides teachers with the opportunity to discuss with young readers how Bear felt when he saw that his friends were gone and what things he did that made him feel better. It also opens up the opportunity for children to think about and share stories about a time when they were sad and what they did to feel better. Children learn about how to handle their emotions more successfully.

Bear Feels Sad also provides the opportunity to deal with literacy learning by doing these activities: (1) investigating how the illustrations and words work together to tell the story, (2) examining the beginning, middle, and end of the book to see how the story develops, and (3) watching video read-alouds of three different stories about Bear to see how the stories in the series are similar and different.

Discussion Questions

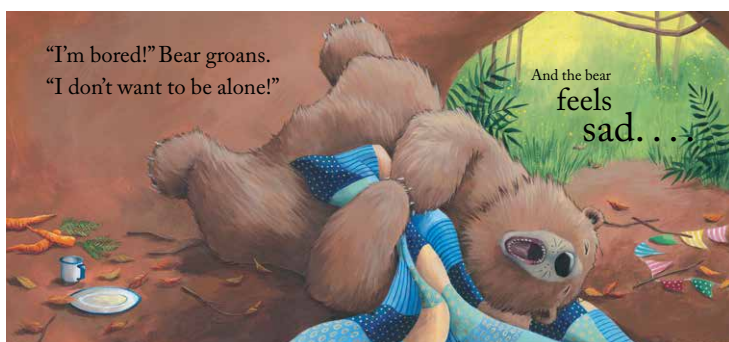
1. In the beginning of the story, Bear feels sad. Why does Bear feel that way?
2. Bear's first two ideas for feeling better are eating a yummy snack and building a blanket fort. Why don't these ideas work?
3. Bear decides to go for a walk and finds a field of flowers. He decides to make a bouquet with a special flower for each of his friends. Why do you think this makes him feel a little better? Was it a good idea? Why?
4. In the end, what surprise did Bear find when he returned to his den? How do you know he went from feeling sad to feeling glad?
5. Have you ever felt like Bear? Did you change from feeling sad to feeling glad? Share your story.
6. If you could talk to Bear, what questions would you ask him about his day? Have a student pretend to be Bear and answer questions from the rest of the class. Take turns asking questions of other animals in the story such as Raven, Hare, and Mouse.
7. What do you think Bear learned about being a good friend? What did he learn about helping himself change from sad to glad?
8. What would you tell Bear to do the next time he feels sad because his friends are gone and there is no one to share things with? How would your idea help Bear?
9. Read or listen to Raven's poem *Forevermore* at the end of the book. Raven writes that the animals will be friends forevermore, *or always*. *How do you think this poem makes Bear feel?* How does it make you feel?
10. When you are sad, what can you do to make yourself feel better?

Learning from the Words and the Illustrations

The words and illustrations work together to explain how Bear feels. Examine the two sets of pages below to see how the words and illustrations give us different information about Bear's feelings. Then answer these questions about each two-page spread.

1. What information do the words tell you about Bear's feelings?
2. What information do the illustrations show you about Bear's feelings?
3. How do the words and illustrations work together?

How Bear Feels at the Beginning of the Book



How Bear Feels at the End of the Book



Learn More About Karma Wilson

Visit the author's website at <https://karmawilson.com>

Click on Features for Teachers to find a printout for making a Bear mask, instructions for making Bear paper bag puppets, and an activity for drawing items Bear might use throughout the seasons.

Guide written in 2025 by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

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