

THE EFFECTS OF BIBLIOTHERAPY ON REDUCING
STRESS/WORRY IN INNER-CITY FIRST GRADE STUDENTS

By

Wendy Meier-Jensen

A Research Paper

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Mr. Rod Crist, Investigation Advisor

The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
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The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, Wisconsin 54751

ABSTRACT

<u>Meier-Jensen</u>	<u>Wendy</u>	<u>S.</u>
(Writer) (Last Name)	(First)	(Initial)

The Effects of Bibliotherapy on Reducing Stress/Worry in Inner-City First Grade Students

<u>Guidance and Counseling</u>	<u>Mr. Rod Crist</u>	<u>May 7, 2000</u>	<u>34</u>
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This descriptive research was designed to determine if bibliotherapy increases problem solving skills thus reducing stress in first grade inner-city students.

A major concern of this study was to identify stressors that inner-city first grade students are experiencing. As important was the research of bibliotherapy, and it's effectiveness. Identifying quality literature with problem solving situations related to the stressors indicated by the responses on the questionnaire was essential to the success of this study.

Twenty first grade inner-city first grade students were orally administered by the researcher, a 20-item, yes/no questionnaire of stressful events (pretest). Next, the students participated in bibliotherapy, for thirty minutes, five days a week, for 8 weeks. The questionnaire (posttest) was given to the same group of first graders at the completion of the bibliotherapy sessions with similar procedures.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Children today are living in a hectic and changing world. Children are often forced to adjust to numerous adverse situations as divorce, neglect and death. Many children are trying to overcome the effects of poverty, frequent moves, poor living conditions and health problems (Wolveton, 1988). Assaults against children are on the increase. Verbal abuse is more widespread.

Consider these grim statistics regarding American children: every day, 10 are murdered, 16 die from guns, 316 are arrested for crimes of violence, and 8,042 are reported abused or neglected (Massey, 1998). This places them in a very vulnerable place in life. Yet, in spite of it all, we find children who become healthy, self-supportive, responsible adults.

Children who live in a stable, supportive home have a better chance of coping because they have adults to give them the love and guidance they need. Unfortunately, many children under stress also live in a chronically stressful home that has adults who deal with all difficulties by using alcohol, drugs or violence. Most children are not conscious of their own coping strategies for stress (Brenner, 1984). Children who are unable to relieve their high levels of stress become depressed, impulsive, aggressive, antisocial, self-destructive, and irritable (Selye, 1976).

As a nation we need to find ways to meet the needs of these children. Research studies indicate that children with multiple risks in their lives can develop into “confident, competent, and caring adults” when schools provide emotional and

environmental support (Bernard, 1995). Prevention efforts need to focus on attributes that researchers have been consistently identified as positive interventions for these children who are at risk due to the stress in their lives. Unfortunately, the identification of risks does not necessarily provide a clear sense of the strategies needed to reduce the risks. If we look at children who are stress resistant, or most commonly termed “resilient,” we can find attributes that are common to these children and create our school and classrooms to foster and provide these critical factors.

Problem solving is an attribute that is found in resilient children. When children are given some autonomy in decision-making they learn they have a degree of control over their lives. They learn to assess their strengths and weaknesses and accept that coping with stressful situations in life is a natural part of growing up (Robinson and Rotter, 1991).

Literature has been found to be a creative tool for helping children cope with stress in their lives (Pardeck, 1994). Research supports the use of stories as a method for helping individuals solve problems or better understand themselves in personal growth and affirms self-growth. This method is referred to as “Bibliotherapy.” Bibliotherapy has been defined as a process or activity designed to help individuals solve problems or better understand themselves through their response to literature. Helping researchers have been using literature in treatment for a number of years.

For years, recognition has been given to the importance of reading aloud to children. Teachers, and counselors can offer guidance through literature to help children explore their own individual needs. Through bibliography a child can release pent-up emotions and confront pain through discussion. Bibliotherapy is a valuable technique for

both treating and, as well as preventing problems during childhood. As the teacher or counselor reads the book, children can learn how to solve problems as they observe the story characters. These observations can assist children in handling their own related problems. The interaction with the adult while discussing the books can help children gain more valuable insight as they attempt to solve problems. For many children, realizing that others have suffered in much the same way will reduce fear and shame. This may be the first step in both an intervention and prevention in behaviors associated with stress and coping (Pardeck, 1990).

With appropriate literature, teachers, counselors, and school staff can help children develop a better sense of control over their lives through problem solving. Establishing a problem solving process through the use of bibliotherapy can help children learn ways to deal with stress constructively.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine if bibliotherapy in an inner-city first grade classroom will increase problem-solving skills resulting a decrease in stress/worry.

Objectives

There are two main objectives this study wishes to address. They are

1. to determine which areas are most common in stress/worry in inner-city first graders.
2. to determine if bibliotherapy is beneficial in reducing stress/worry in inner-city first graders.

Definition of Terms

Bibliotherapy- As used in this study, bibliotherapy is defined as a non-medical use of books as therapeutic aids in emotional stabilization of unhappy and worried children in normal classroom environment, providing the children with books which concern problems similar to his own and letting him abstract to them. (Pardeck and Pardeck, 1986)

Coping-A set of strategies and tactics for dealing with the world. (Garbarino and Stott, (1989)

Self-esteem- Out of the interaction of a child's experiences and characteristics comes a perspective on himself. (Garbarino and Stott, 1989)

Stress- The non-specific response of the body to any demand. (Selye, 1975)

Stressors- That which produces stress. (Selye, 1975)

Worry- To feel uneasy or troubled.

Because problem solving and decision -making are commonly sited in similar context, they are presented in the same context in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

Introduction

Each day in the United States, an incredible number of children are subjected to a multitude of problems related to poverty, poor housing and health care, school difficulties, abuse and violence. (Kunesh and Farley, 1993)

Bibliotherapy can be used as an effective tool for helping children cope with these stressors (Pardeck, 1994). Children may not discuss personal problems directly with a teacher or counselor regardless on how much they like or respect them, but they can often project their own problems in a much more impersonal manner through class discussion of main characters with which he has identified. The bibliotherapeutic approach can be beneficial when working with children for the following reasons. First, through books, a child can see how others confronted and solved problems similar to the child's. Two, a child can see how others have encountered anxieties and frustrations, hopes, and disappointments, and then apply this insight to real-life situations. Three, a child can see how others have solved problems, and with the support of the helping person, gain insight into alternative solutions (Pardeck and Pardeck 1986).

History

Throughout the years many have continued to investigate the influence and potential of specific books for the treatment of a various mental health issues. The basic idea of bibliotherapy can be traced back as far as the Greek and Roman time periods.

Early Greeks realized the healing value of bibliotherapy in their writings as a form of healing. Romans associated medicine and reading (Brown, 1975).

By 1900, Europeans used bibliotherapy as an important method of psychotherapy, and it was as important to them as exercise in its effectiveness of treating and curing mental illnesses. Libraries were a central part of the hospitals, and reading was encouraged as a part of the recreational programs (Brown, 1975).

John Minson Galt II, according to Brown (1975) was the first American to write about bibliotherapy in the early 1850's. He supported today's belief on the importance of fitting the book to the needs of the individual, and he published his views in annual reports. He stressed the importance of hospitals having libraries as "a kind of intellectual pharmacy stocked with remedies for every kind of disorder."

In the 1930s, librarians began to compile lists of books for therapeutic purposes into two distinct forms. One form went with earlier findings of helping individuals alter feelings, thoughts and behaviors or therapeutic literature. The second form came from counselors working with librarians approving literature for individuals undergoing emotional stress (Gladding and Gladding, 1991). It was this second form where individuals showed change through catharsis, or identifying with the characters.

In spite of earlier recognition of the values of bibliotherapy, teachers and counselors did not use literature for children until the 1940s. Today, with the changes in society, and children many teachers and counselors use bibliotherapy for both general and very specific types of situations.

Value of Bibliotherapy

As children grow, the sources of self-esteem become more integrated. School-age children's self-esteem is still developing and is vulnerable, especially in stressful situations (Garbarino and Stott, 1989). Negative and positive consequences can occur when children find ways to cope with stress. The specific techniques children use always seem to them to be a good solution to their problems, no matter how foolish, illogical or self-destructive these actions may seem to adults (Brenner, 1984). One possible way of learning new strategies to deal with stress is through collaboration with another person. The advantage of an adult who can provide scaffold is that this person can organize the activity in a way that the child is unable to manage for itself (Bjorklund, 1990).

On a cognitive level, children with appropriate guidance from an adult, with the use of bibliotherapy, may learn selective strategies for approaching potential problems and prevent or reduce unwanted stress (Gladding and Gladding, 1991). On a behavioral level, children can relate to the characters and see how they handle difficult situations. This approach deals with proper and appropriate ways of relating to self and others. John and Jean Pardeck, authors of many books and articles on bibliotherapy, state three applications to use with children. It can be used with children who have emotional problems; children who need help dealing with adjustments of a less nature and with all children in a developmental manner (Krickeberg, 1991).

School Use

The relationship among children and the world around them has become increasingly important to educators over the last several years. Many would agree that educational practices can no longer focus on children's academics but must include life,

social and problem-solving skills (Epstein and Elias). Resilience research provide scientific evidence that many children—even those with multiple and severe risks in their lives—can develop into “confident, competent, and caring adults” when educators play a critical role in this process (Bernard, 1995).

Providing children with opportunities for meaningful involvement, through asking questions and developing problem - solving and decision making skills allows a child to feel that they have a place in society. When bibliography is used appropriately, teachers and counselors will enrich the life of the child and empower them to think, feel and act in productive ways. Children will be able to release stress and begin feeling good about themselves.

A study conducted by Allen Anderson on child crisis and developmental guidance, found that students and teachers positively benefited from bibliotherapy. Children learned that a) they are not alone in their feelings, b) they initially tended to blame themselves, c) that one lived through a crisis and that the painful feelings changed, and d) it helped to talk to someone about what they went through. Teachers noticed that a) they quickly learned a lot about some of the emotional issues facing their students, b) students were attentive to each other and that their classroom climate improved and, c) students seemed to grasp a better understanding of themselves and how to handle crisis situations (Anderson, 1985).

Self-esteem, Problem Solving, and Bibliotherapy

Both teachers and counselors are self-esteem advocates. When children have positive self-esteem, they have a powerful coping resource. Kaplan (1993) supports an interactive cycle of life’s stressful and successful experiences through anxiety, solving a

difficult problem, struggle and perseverance through the challenge of the problem, accepting mistakes and disappointments, working hard and demonstrating mastery. When a child can say, “I can do something today that I could not do yesterday,” self-esteem will flourish.

Enriching self-esteem will help our children deal with stress. Teaching them how solve problems can do this. Engaging children in real life situations can help children learn to ask for help, how to express anger with conflict-solving words instead of using violence, or how to feel understandably sad when someone dies, or gets hurt (Kaplan, 1993). Myrna B. Shure, (1994) sets the standard for teaching young children problem-solving skills. Her works suggests that adults who teach children these skills through the child’s point of the problem will have success in resolving conflict and stress:

1. Think about their own and others’ feelings, a problem situation.
2. Consider alternative solutions to the conflict.
3. Understand the consequences of their actions.
4. Evaluate their proposed solution(s).

This approach is similar to the goals of bibliotherapy. When using bibliotherapy, John Pardeck (1994) suggests teachers and counselors should keep these objectives in mind:

1. To provide information about problems.
2. To provide insight into the problems.

3. To stimulate discussion about problems.
4. To communicate new values and attitudes.
5. To create awareness that others have dealt with similar problems.
6. To provide solutions to problems.

Bibliotherapy shows children how to solve problems effectively.

When children can relate to literary characters similar to themselves, they can release emotions, gain new directions in life and promote new ways of interacting. (Gladding and Gladding, 1991)

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methods and procedures used in this study. The methodology will include how the subjects were selected, how the instrument was developed, and the procedures used to collect the data.

Subjects

The sample consisted of twenty first grade students from an inner city elementary school in St. Paul, Minnesota. The school's population was culturally diverse with the largest racial and ethnic groups of thirty-four percent African-American and thirty-three percent Asian. Other characteristics of this sample were:

- High poverty levels
- Low student achievement rates
- Racially diverse neighborhood
- Poor attendance rates
- High discipline problems
- High Mobility

Instrumentation

The instrumentation was developed during the spring of 2001, after reviewing the current literature on stress in the lives of children. The Stress Questionnaire For Children is adapted from The Holmes-Rahe (1967) Life Stress Inventory, The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (modified for children), from another children's version of the Holmes-Rahe

Life Stress Inventory by Miller (1982), and the Events and Life Change Units for the Coddington Life Events Record for Use with Fus Age Groups (Coddington, 1973). The questionnaire (Appendix A) consists of 22 life events (stressors). All questions will be answered either yes or no. The respondents are asked to circle a yes or no, depending on if it is a worry or stressor to them.

Procedure

Permission to carry out this study in the spring of 2001, was obtained from the building administrator. With the cooperation of two other first grade teachers, a parental cover letter and permission form was sent home with the first grade students in the three first grade classrooms (Appendix B). After the parental permission was granted, students were individually administered the questionnaire orally. After all students completed the questionnaire, the students participated in eight weeks of bibliotherapy.

The bibliotherapy was presented in a large group setting and the researcher acted as the leader.. The lessons taught through bibliotherapy lasted for thirty minutes, five sessions a week and for approximately eight weeks. The literature read to the sample group was chosen for literacy excellence by the researcher with consideration of length, theme, characters, language, setting, plot, and illustrations. The bibliotherapy was developed according to stressors that appeared on the questionnaire; friendships, relationships with school and family, death, drug and alcohol use. The books used were each completed with a discussion and an extension in each lesson except for *Accidental Lily*, which lasted for four lessons (Appendix C). The summary of each lesson consisted of:

1. Introduction of the Book
 - a. Discuss theme and primary characters
2. Discussion of the Book
 - a. Discuss decisions the character made
 - b. Discuss how the characters made you feel
 - c. Discuss a how the story could have ended differently
3. Extensions Used
 - a. Writing Activity
 - i. Write a letter to a character telling them how you feel
 - b. Role Playing
 - i. Role-play the main characters and the decision they had to make.
 - ii. Role-play a new ending to the story.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Results

Introduction

The results of this study are important to parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and students. The reported findings indicate that first grade students are experiencing many stressors in their lives. The reported findings also indicate that a percentage of first grade students participating in bibliotherapy, lessened their stress and worries. With this knowledge, concerned others may be more aware of the stressors experienced by these students and may help them with the use of bibliotherapy.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed by comparing the pretest and the posttest scores to each question, after the students participated in bibliotherapy. Assessment of the effectiveness of the bibliotherapy could be seen in the number of students who lessened their stress by a change in their answers from the pretest to the posttest.

- On the pretest ninety percent of the first grade students worry about going to school. On the posttest, eighty percent of the first grade students worry about going to school.
- On the pretest and the posttest, thirty percent of the first grade students worry about becoming involved with drugs and alcohol.

- On the pretest and the posttest, sixty percent of the first grade students worry about becoming homeless.
- On the pretest eighty percent of the first grade students worry about having friends. On the posttest, fifty-five percent worry about having friends.
- On the pretest fifty-five percent of the first grader students worry about being different than the other students. On the posttest, thirty-five percent worry about being different than the other students.
- On the pretest seventy-five percent of the first grade students worry that they will move. On the posttest, sixty percent worry about moving.
- On the pretest seventy-five percent of the first grade students worry that they will break school rules. On the posttest, only fifteen percent worry that they will break school rules.
- On the pretest fifty-five percent of the first grade students worry when their parent(s) argue. On the posttest, thirty-five percent worry when their parents argue.
- On the pretest eighty-five percent of the first graders worry about having to share their things. On the posttest, eighty percent worry about having to share their things.
- On the pretest one hundred percent of the first graders worry about others being nice to them. On the posttest, sixty percent worry about others being nice to them.

- On the pretest eighty percent of the first graders worry that they are not brave and strong. On the posttest, fifty percent worry that they are not brave and strong.
- On the pretest seventy-five percent of the first graders worry about having enough money. On the posttest, thirty percent worry about having enough money.
- On the pretest one hundred percent of the first grade students worry about their brothers and sisters. On the posttest, seventy-five percent worry about their brothers and sisters.
- On the pretest zero percent of the first grade students worry about being cared for at home. On the posttest, thirty percent worry about being cared for at home.
- On the pretest zero percent of the first grade students worry about being cared for at school. On the posttest, thirty percent worry about being cared for at school.
- On the pretest seventy-five percent of the first graders worry about someone close to them dying. On the posttest, twenty-five percent worry about someone close to them dying.
- On the pretest eighty-five percent of the first graders worry about their parent(s) spending time with them. On the posttest, seventy percent worried about their parent(s) spending time with them.

- On the pretest ninety percent of the first graders worry about too much homework. On the posttest, seventy percent worry about too much homework.
- On the pretest eighty percent of the first grade students worry about being hurt. On the posttest, fifty-five percent worry about being hurt.
- On the pretest ninety-five percent of the students worry about doing well in school. On the posttest, seventy percent worry about doing well in school.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the conclusions that have been determined from the research and provide recommendations of using bibliotherapy to reduce stress/worry in children.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the objectives proposed in Chapter One.

1. to identify which areas are most common causes of stress/worry in inner-city first grade students. The most common causes identified by the students were going to school, others being nice to them, having to share their things, brothers and sisters, spending time with their parents, and too much homework. This satisfies the first objective of this research.
2. to determine if bibliotherapy is beneficial in reducing stress/worry in inner-city first grade students.. With the use of the stress questionnaires' pretest and posttest scores, we have determined that many stressors were reduced when first grade students participated in bibliotherapy.

Recommendations

This study has direct implications for administrators, teachers, parents and counselors in terms of providing an effective approach helping children solve problems and reduce stress. Using bibliotherapy can help children make such connections by

selecting stories that they can easily identify with. Bibliotherapy should be presented so the power of the literary transaction between children and story, coupled with interaction between an adult and children has the potential for bibliotherapy to be at it's best.

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Appendix A
Stress Questionnaire For Children

STRESS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN
Wendy S. Meier-Jensen
University of Wisconsin-Stout

Each day brings stress into a child's life. This is a questionnaire that is based on current research in child stress.

DIRECTIONS: Circle one number under each question that best describes how you feel.

1. I worry about going to school.

No

Yes

2. I worry about becoming involved with drugs or alcohol.

No

Yes

3. I worry about becoming homeless.

No

Yes

4. I worry about having friends.

No

Yes

5. I worry that I am different than the other students.

No

Yes

6. I worry that I will move.

No

Yes

7. I worry that I may break school rules.

No

Yes

8. I worry when my parent(s) argue.

No

Yes

9. I worry about having to share my things.

No

Yes

10. I worry about others being nice to me.
No Yes
11. I worry that I am not brave and strong.
No Yes
12. I can make good choices.
No Yes
13. I worry about not having enough money.
No Yes
14. I worry about my brothers and sisters.
No Yes
15. I feel cared for at home.
No Yes
16. I feel cared for at school.
No Yes
17. I worry about someone close to me dying.
No Yes
18. I worry about my parent(s) spending time with me.
No Yes
19. I worry about too much homework.
No Yes
20. I worry about doing well in school.
No Yes

Appendix B
Parent Permission Slip

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This spring I am completing my research in the field of Guidance and Counseling. My research examines using bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy has been defined as a process or activity designed to help individuals solve problems or better understand themselves through their response to literature.

The focus of my study will be in the area of problem solving. During my earlier research, I found that problem solving is an attribute that is found in resilient children. My research also supports the use of stories as a method for helping individuals solve problems or better understand themselves in personal growth and affirms self-growth. Therefore I am hoping that students who participate in bibliotherapy will increase their problem solving skills and reduce stress in their lives.

I will present the bibliotherapy, in a large group setting. The lessons taught through bibliotherapy will last for 30 minutes, five sessions a week and for approximately eight weeks. The summary of each lesson follows:

4. Introduction of the Book
 - a. Discuss theme and primary characters
5. Discussion of the Book
 - a. Discuss decisions the character made
 - b. Discuss how the characters made you feel
 - c. Discuss a how the story could have ended differently

6. Possible Extensions to Use

a. Art Activity

- i. Story Map- Illustrate story events
- ii. Collage- Paste pictures from magazines on paper illustrating the story events
- iii. Illustrate your favorite character or part of the story

b. Role Playing

- i. Role-play the main characters and the decision they had to make.
- ii. Role-play a new ending to the story.

c. Written Response

A pretest and a posttest will be given to the students as a means of measurement. Both the list of the stories and the questionnaire are attached. Each student's individual pretest and posttest will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about my study, please call me at school, Dayton's Bluff Achievement School, (651) 293-8915 or my advisor Rod Crist, (715) 232 1343. Please sign the attached form indicating whether or not you have or have not agreed to have your child participate and return it by Friday, February 16, 2001.

Thank you very much for your time and support,

Wendy Meier-Jensen

I, _____
 (Parent or Guardian) do _____ do not _____ (Check
 one) agree to allow my child, _____
 _____ to participate in this
 study to see if using bibliotherapy increases problem-
 solving skills and reduces the level of emotional
 stress.

Parent or Guardian Signature _____

Date _____

Please return to Ms. Wendy Meier-Jensen

Dayton's Bluff Achievement Plus

NOTE: Permission for obtaining research was supported by Dayton's Bluff
 Achievement Plus Building Administrator, Mrs. Jayne Ropella. Any questions or
 concerns about the participation in the research can be directed to Wendy Meier-Jensen
 or research advisor, Rod Crist, U.W. Stout, Menomonie, WI (715) 232-1343

Appendix C
Literature Used In Bibliotherapy Sessions

Literature Used in Bibliotherapy Session

Being Helpful by Joy Berry

This shows children how they can be responsible for themselves.

Saying No by Joy Berry

Children problem solve saying “No!” in troubling situations.

Accidental Lily by Sally Warner

Lily Hill is a six year old who wets the bed. Her brother and mother share their ideas on how to solve her problem.

The Hating Book by Charlotte Zolotow

Friendships can be difficult for young children. This short story helps children see how to work out uncomfortable name calling.

Eagle Eyes by Jeanne Gehert

Family members assist their son/brother with his A..D.D. With the direction of his counselor, made up songs and poems remind the young boy of some daily routines at home and at school.

Love You Forever by Robert Munsch

Getting old can be scary for some. This is a story of how a little boy who goes through the stages of childhood to becoming a man. It is also about parent’s love and how it crosses generations.

Making The Team by Nancy Carlson

Anyone can make a team no matter where their talents lie. Two best friends problem solve how to do just that!

I'll Always Love You by Hans Wilhelm

A child's sadness of the death of a beloved dog is tempered by the remembrance of saying every night, " I'll always love you".

I Like Me by Nancy Carlson

Little ones in need of positive reinforcement about themselves will find it here.

Big Sister, Little Sister by Charlotte Zolotow

A wonderful story about sisters and their growing relationships

Bottles Break by Nancy Maria Grande Tabor

Learning to take care of yourself is important when you do not understand the actions of others.

Lilly's Secret by Miko Imai

A great story for children and friendships for children with special needs.

Roses Are Pink by Diane de Groat

A sympathetic look at the small hurts in life and the importance of second chances.

The Empty Pot by DEMI

A lovely story about the importance of being honest with yourself and others.

The Day I Saw My Father Cry by Bill Cosby

This story reinforces the value of friendships and family relationships through the death of a close family friend.

Stephanie's Pony Tail by Robert Munsch

Being true to yourself is the best thing you can do even if others tease you.

Dinofours by Steve Metzger

Join the Dinofours as they learn how to be good friends.

Tyrone and the Swamp Gang by Hans Wilhelm

It is hard to say no to a bully but learn how to problem solve and think fast!

Koula Lou By Mem Fox

We all want approval and love from our mothers but it can be increasingly difficult to find the attention we want when we have young siblings.

Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting

Homelessness explained in a lovely, touching story.

The Baby Sister by Tomie dePaola

Learning to be a big brother before the baby comes can be exciting. Wonderful family relationships help a young boy get ready for the birth of his sister.

Beware of the Bears by Grayneth Williams

Trying to get back at someone may cause you more problems than you had before!

Angel Child, Dragon Child by Michelle Maria Sura

A multicultural book that allows children to see how hurtful teasing can be. A young Vietnamese student is missing her mother back home and the most unexpected classmate thinks of the perfect way to help her.

