

Mental Health Reading Activity for Grades 2-4

Listening with my Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion / Escuchando con mi Corazón: Un Cuento de Bondad y Autocompasión

This interactive reading activity is designed for students in grades 2-4 and provides educators with opportunities to help students develop social-emotional intelligence and reduce mental health stigma by introducing mental health challenges that children sometimes face.

A link to purchase the book, the book's synopsis, and an activity guide with discussion questions have been provided to help facilitate the activity, create dialogue and teach strategies, tools and skills that help to develop resilience, mindfulness, positive self-talk, self-esteem, confidence-building, acceptance and compassion for oneself and others, as well as teach students how to be a supportive friend and that it's okay to ask for help.

BOOK DETAILS

[*Listening with my Heart: A Story of Kindness and Self-Compassion* \(English\)](#)

[*Escuchando con mi Corazón: Un Cuento de Bondad y Autocompasión* \(Spanish\)](#)

By: Gabi Garcia, available in English and Spanish

Listening with my Heart takes the reader on a visual and narrative journey into the difficult emotions and negative self-talk that arise when Esperanza believes that she has failed. Strengthened by the compassion and friendship she shows to others, Esperanza discovers that she feels better when she becomes a friend to herself, too. The story ends by celebrating Esperanza's newfound capacity to accept and normalize that everyone makes mistakes and to respond to her struggles with positive self-talk and kindness toward herself. Activities to help students practice loving self-talk follow the story.

Emphasis: Social-Emotional Development

Diversity Notes: Shows ethnically diverse, able-bodied, female and male characters

Relationships: Mom, kitten, friendship between the main girl and a boy, peers, teacher

ACTIVITY + QUESTIONS

Read the Story:

1. Before you begin, introduce that this lesson is about learning to feel good inside ourselves and review your classroom's norms to ensure that students feel respected and safe.

2. Point out facial expressions and body language that reveal how characters are feeling:
 - when Bao feels lonely and scared on the bench
 - when Esperanza wants to disappear, says she ruined the play, feels disappointed
3. Emphasize shifts in Esperanza's self-talk as she begins to feel self-compassion:
 - realizing she didn't ruin the play
 - reminding herself that mistakes and accidents happen to everyone
 - discovering she can become a friend to herself

Discussion + Activities:

1. What things did Esperanza do to be a good friend to Bao?
2. How did Esperanza react when she fell on stage or missed the ball at soccer?
 - What feelings did she experience?
 - What sensations did she have in her body?
 - What thoughts did she have about herself inside?
3. What did Esperanza realize after receiving Bao's picture? How did her self-talk change?
4. Explore the activities on the last four pages:
 - Read "Listening with your Heart" to introduce the concept of self-compassion
 - As a group, have students practice, "Being my own friend"
 - Brainstorm and write "Kind words for myself," individually or as a group
 - Read "We are all connected," chanting the affirmations aloud or repeating them quietly inside
5. Help students connect with the concepts to be explored by writing/drawing individually, or sharing aloud in pairs, small groups, or whole class, their responses to:
 - Have you ever made a mistake doing something you cared about, like performing on stage, playing sports, or talking in front of the class? How did you feel?
 - What does it mean to be a friend? How does it feel to make a new friend?
 - What are some ways that friends can show kindness and comfort to each other?
6. Consider vocabulary that students might generate or that you might opt to introduce:
 - Feelings: sad, mad, upset, worried, disappointed, embarrassed, frustrated, nervous, ashamed, anxious, scared...

- Body sensations: blushing, shaking, stomachache, sweating, needing to go pee...
- Self-talk: I messed up. I ruined everything. I'm not good enough. It's all my fault. I'm the worst...