

# B IN THE WORLD



ACTIVITIES AND LESSON PLANS  
APPROPRIATE FOR GRADES 1-3 BY AUTHOR  
SHARON MENTYKA

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# OVERVIEW

In this document, author Sharon Mentyka offers four activities and lessons intended to complement her chapter book, ‘B in the World” to meet the needs of students from grade 1 to 3.

The activities and lesson plans have been designed with the Health Education Standards of the Washington State Health Education K-12 Learning Standards in mind, in particular:

- Communication
- Decision-Making
- Safety
- Self-Identity

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# 1. A BOWL OF LEMONS

B loves lemons! And he knows a lot about them. Let's see how much we can learn about lemons (p 4).



**Learning Goal: Sometimes we judge others by the way we look, or how we dress, when inside, everyone is really all the same.**

1. Divide students into small groups. Put the bowl of lemons (or oranges) in a bowl, and give a bowl to each group. Then ask each student to pick one from the bowl to be their own special lemon. You might want to review some of the what B knows about lemons, just for fun (p 4).

2. After each student selects one lemon, put the others aside and say, "Now, take a good look at your own special lemon. Feel the skin, smell your lemon. Examine your lemon very carefully. Look at it with the magnifying glass, and see if your lemon has any marks that will help you pick it out of the bowl later when it gets mixed up with the others. Maybe write down a word or too to help you remember what you've noticed."

3. After getting acquainted with his or her lemon, put the lemons all back in the bowl with the others. Remind the students that it was important for each to get to know their lemon, because later, they'll need to pick it out from all the rest."

4. After a few hours or the following day, cut the lemons in half and put them all together in the bowl. Show the students the cut lemons and challenge them to find the two parts of the ones that were their special lemon.

Of course, your students will probably complain that they can't tell which one is theirs because now they can't see the peel. What happened? This is a perfect opportunity to explain, "You're right! And people are like lemons. We may look different from each other on the outside, but if you look on the inside, you'll find we're all quite alike. And after all, the most important part of the lemon is the inside, because that's what we use to make lemonade! And the important part of a person is the inside, too."

## 2. EMPATHY JOURNALS—IN ACTION!

Empathy is a very powerful emotion. When we become aware of the and understand the feelings and thoughts of others, without them actually telling us, we are practicing empathy.

When B learns that Mia’s parents won’t be coming to see her perform in the Spring play, he begins to understand that she might be acting mean to cover up her feelings of sadness (p 67).

**Learning Goal: Empathy is a key element of Emotional Intelligence, the link between ourself and others. It is how we understand what others are experiencing as if we were feeling it ourselves.**

Explain that building empathy is a skill, and that like all skills, we get better at it when we practice and reflect on what we may have done in the past. We all do things that we are not proud of, say things that we don’t really mean, and sometimes act in ways that we normally wouldn’t when trying to impress someone. This is where keeping an empathy journal can help.

### **WEEK 1-2: EMPATHY JOURNALS**

1. Have students write 2-3 times a week for 10 minutes on a prompt related to empathy (see examples below). This activity forces students to think about their own actions and how they may impact others. It also allows teachers to gain insight into how students are responding to one another. When students are forced to be reflective, they may not always like what they see. This is where empathy begins.

Prompts can be as simple as:

- Were you nice to your classmates today? How?
- What did you do to help someone at home yesterday?
- How would you feel if someone called you names or picked on you?
- How would you feel if you found out one of your classmates came to school every day without eating breakfast?

This link offers some great additional suggestions on prompts for building empathy:

<http://www.momentsaday.com/empathy-game/>

### **WEEK 3-4: EMPATHY IN ACTION!**

1. After 1-2 weeks of empathy journaling and class or small group discussions, it's the perfect time for students to practice their new skills by creating real-life empathy opportunities.

Here are a couple of examples :

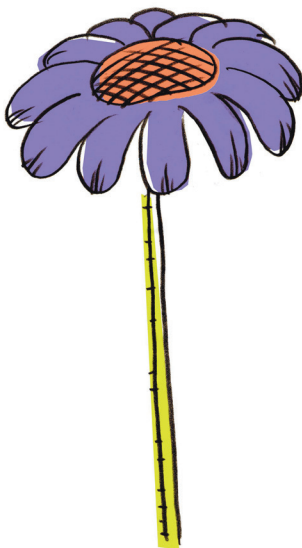
#### **Get to know your classmates!**

Teachers and parents often regularly focus on helping children get along despite their differences. But what about students' similarities? Often empathy breaks down because students do not see how much they are alike. Having your students get to know each other can be done in a low-risk way (and can involve writing practice as well).

- Collect "Five Fun Facts" about a classmate they don't know well
- Eat lunch with a classmate they don't know well, and present what they've learned to the class as a team

#### **Start a Random Acts of Kindness project:**

Once a week (or several times a month, depending on what time allows) have students show and report to the class on a random act of kindness they have offered to another person. This may be a classmate, or someone else in the school or outside community. It can be as simple as writing a letter thanking someone for what they do, helping a sibling with homework, or inviting someone new to eat lunch with them. Use the reflective empathy journals to have students reflect on how it made them feel to show, and how their kindness may have impacted the other person(s).



Here are some additional helpful links:

[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)

[www.startempathy.org](http://www.startempathy.org)

[www.ripplekindness.org](http://www.ripplekindness.org)

### 3. IS THAT ME OR YOU?

B likes to cook and bake, especially lemon cupcakes. Sometimes, he also likes to play dress-up in his sister Patti-Anne's clothes (p 7), and would love nothing more than being selected to play the Mermaid in the Spring play.

But some of B's classmates don't expect a boy to like to cook, and Mr. Ross wants a "special young lady" to play the Mermaid. (p56-59) Is this fair?

**Learning Goal: Learning to overcome gender stereotypes—widely held but fixed and oversimplified ideas of how a boy or girl should be—by recognizing their own traits.**

1. Explain that they will be talking about gender stereotypes—generally accepted ideas about how boys and girls should act or be. Emphasize that identifying a stereotype does not mean you believe it's true. You might begin by asking students to define both the word "stereotype" and allow them to share a few examples of stereotypes they know. If students are confused, provide a few simple examples, i.e. "Women are good at cooking; Men are good at building things," or "All tall people are good at basketball."

2. Have prepared two pieces of paper with a large square drawn in the middle. Write "Girl" at the top of one; and "Boy" in the other. Divide students into two groups. It is important not to segregate the groups by gender. Give one group the chart paper marked "Girl" and the other group the paper marked "Boy," along with several markers. Challenge students to think of as many gender stereotypes as possible to write, or draw, inside each square. Some examples to get them started might be "love pink" for girls or "like race cars" for boys.

Guide groups as they work to make sure the discussions stays on topic and address a variety of questions. Ask: "How are all girls/boys supposed to behave? What are they supposed to like or dislike? How are they supposed to look, think and feel? What are they supposed to be good at?" As the groups work, ask students to think about where these stereotypes come from. Explain that you will talk about this later in the lesson or series.



3. After the students have had enough time to work on filling the squares, explain that now they should write or draw some ideas **outside of their square**. Ask, “What might make a girl or boy outside of the box?” An example could be a boy like B who likes to cook, or a girl who likes motorcycles. Many student examples may focus on dress or taste, which is important and valid. But try to get them thinking about personality and behavior expectations as well.

4. Point out that although some people seem to fit into gender norms or stereotypes more than others, almost everyone has times or parts of themselves that are outside the box.

Ask student partners to share one time they felt like they were “inside the box” and one time they felt like they were “outside the box” for their gender. Ask for volunteers to share with the class.

5. Have students come together as a group to look at and share their responses, then discuss the different ideas they share. Explain that being inside or outside a box are gender stereotypes, or ways that other people think men or women should act. Help students begin considering where some of these stereotypes come from. Ask them what might be helpful and harmful about these stereotypes. Discuss a conversation about the ways these stereotypes might be unfair or limiting to children as they as they grow up and decide what they like to do, what careers they strive for, what sports they want to play, and so on. Discuss the importance of accepting others who may not fit stereotypes. Ask: “How might a boy feel if he wears pink clothing to school and people make fun of him? How might a girl feel if she wants to play basketball and boys tell her she won’t be good at it?”

6. Finally, ask students to form a circle. Let each student take a turn and share one character trait he or she has (or wishes to have) from the square of the other gender. Other essential questions:

- What are some real-life situations where people get teased or bullied for not fitting into gender stereotypes? Why?
- How does it feel to be teased and bullied because you’re “outside the box”?
- What can we do to stop from teasing and bullying people who don’t fit into gender stereotypes?



## 4. PINK OR BLUE—WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

B favorite colors are yellow and pink. But he knows that “wearing pink is tricky” (p 4) When Grace steps us to help, she announces: “B is a boy. He likes to wear pink and doesn’t want any trouble about it.” (p 25-26)

**Learning Goal: Developing the confidence and ease to stand up for ourselves and others when challenged on gender stereotypes.**

Sometimes boys and girls make fun of each other because they wear something or cut their hair in a certain way that isn’t what their gender usually does. Someone might make fun of a boy for wearing a pink, “girls” shirt. But boys and girls should be able to dress any way they want to, or do anything to their hair that they want, no matter what their gender. Making fun of people because they act differently is just another type of bullying.

1. Ask the students for suggestions on what they think they should do if someone says their clothes, hair, or what you like are wrong because they don’t fit with your gender? Be positive and encouraging, but try to lead them away from blaming the other person, to what they can do that is positive.

2. Then, in groups, have the students practice some simple answers, that allow them to stand up for themselves in a positive way: “There’s no such thing as boys’ or girls’ \_\_\_\_\_.”

- Samantha is really excited because she got a fancy new haircut. It’s very short, like her mother’s. At school, Marcus says, “Why do you have a boy’s hair cut?” Samantha answers: “I can have very short hair and still be a girl!”
- Carey goes to school wearing her brother’s old shirt, pants and shoes. Jose sees her outfit and says, “Why are you wearing boys’ clothes?” She answers: “There’s no such thing as boys’ or girls’ clothes!”
- Rick goes to school wearing a pink shirt. Beth says, “Pink is for girls.” Rick answer: “Colors don’t belong to just boys or girls!”





# 5. NAME THAT EMOTION!

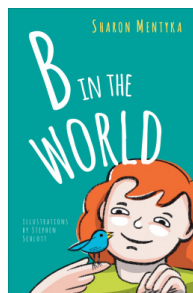
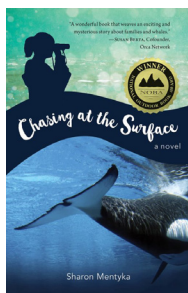
Sometimes B has trouble explaining how and what he is really feeling. This is where words matter! With the right word, “I feel —” or “That makes me feel—” can be a great way for children to learn positive ways to communicate what they’re feeling inside.

**Learning Goal: When children learn to match a word to an emotion, they’re better able to express how they are feeling in a calm, understandable manner.**

1. Review the emotions listed below and ask students if they can think of any more they want to add.
2. In pairs or groups, have students to show each other what expression or physical movement they might make with their body to match up with some of the words.
3. Challenge students to come up with situations they can remember feeling one of these emotions. Have them practice using their words to explain how they were feeling. What might they say?

Angry	Calm	Curious
Mad	Adventurous	Disappointed
Frustrated	Caring	Generous
Nervous	Cheerful	Ignored
Happy	Moody	Impatient
Sad	Peaceful	Important
Embarrassed	Clumsy	Jealous
Strong	Cruel	
Friendly	Relaxed	
Excited	Sensitive	
Lonely	Secure	
Tense	Envious	
Timid	Gloomy	
Scared	Smart	
	Confused	
	Frightened	

**Sharon Mentyka** divides her time between teaching and writing for children. Her stories grow from small kernels of truth that explore common themes of fairness, transitions and helping the less powerful find their voice. Her middle grade novel “Chasing at the Surface” was the 2016 Children’s winner of the National Outdoor Book Award (NoBA). Her experience as a member of a non-traditional family helped inspire “B in the World.” See more about her writing projects at [www.sharonmentyka.com](http://www.sharonmentyka.com)



## **CURRENT SCHOOL VISIT PRESENTATIONS**

### **The Tail Behind the Tale: How the Story of a Pod of Trapped Orcas Became a Children’s Book**

**Grade level: 1–6 (50 minutes)**

Kids often wonder how writers get the ideas for their stories.

Sharon will take your students on a journey, showing how writers—and kids—can use ordinary events they know and learn in real life and turn them into extraordinary stories. Students also get a behind-the-scenes peek at how a story turns into a physical book.

### **Write What You Know, Even When You Don’t Know It Yet**

**Grades 4–6 (50 minutes)**

People will sometimes tell you to only write about things you know. But sometimes admitting what you don’t know is the first step to learning what you really care about. This presentation and writing workshop builds confidence and gives students tools to research and explore ways they can write about things they want to learn—and maybe even want to change!

### **Is That Me — or You?**

**Grades 1-3 or Grades 4–6 (30-50 minutes)**

What would it be like if one day you woke up, looked in the mirror and saw somebody else? In this fun writing workshop, students role-play what it would feel like, inside and out, being that “other” person. Using one of a writer’s most important tools—show, don’t tell—students learn how sensory detail can enliven writing, gaining a good dose of empathy along the way!

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