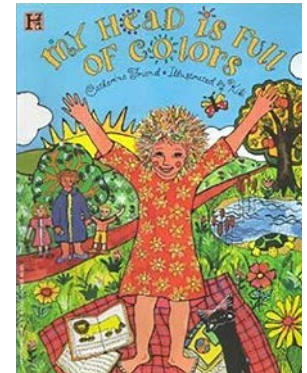


My Head is Full of Colors

Social/Emotional Learning Guide

BOOK SUMMARY

Maria wakes up one morning to find her usual brown, spiky hair filled with colors, inspiring the young artist to make beautiful, imaginative art. She wakes up on the second morning to discover that her hair is filled with books, inspiring her to read all kinds of books. Her supportive mom asks to borrow one. Next she finds her hair filled with live animals, which she treats kindly. Finally there are people in her hair, people from all over the world, some young, some old, some short, some tall. But one day she sees nothing in her hair. She sobs, and her mom comforts her, saying that all of these things are still there. When Maria looks again, she sees no more than her regular spiky hair, but she realizes that she still loves colors and books and animals and people. She skips down the hall and says, "Look Mom, my head is full of me!"



SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCUSSION

Identity and self-esteem:

Children form an identity much younger than many people realize. Between the ages of three and five, when they have limited information, children are trying to make sense of the world. Their emotional experiences and resultant self-esteem play a key role in developing a world view, such as "the world is a scary place and I should try to be invisible so I don't get hurt" or "the world is big and interesting and it's fun to explore." Their experience consists primarily of family, so the relationship between parent and child plays a key role in the child's self-esteem, and shapes her relationship with the world. Other adults, such as daycare workers and extended family, play roles as well but since the parents are generally the most important people in the child's world, his identity and self-esteem is mostly shaped by them.

If a child is told to "Be quiet—you don't have anything important to say," she may conclude that *she* isn't important. If told he can't do anything right, he may give up trying. A child who believes she's stupid isn't about to raise her hand in class. When parents encourage exploration, imagination, trying new things, and when the expectations they have for the child's behavior are age-appropriate, the child will likely have greater confidence and be able to better adapt socially.

A proportion of parents think of their children as little adults who should be able to sit still, color within the lines, and empathize with them when their child hasn't reached the developmental milestones to do this.

As facilitators we can't undo the messages children have been taught about themselves, but we can help them identify strengths, appreciate their uniqueness, and reinforce those strengths.

Young children have difficulty distinguishing fantasy from reality and will take the book literally. One child, when looking at a picture book, turned to his father and asked if he saw it when it happened. Looking puzzled, the father asked if he had seen what? "Did you see it when that cow jumped over the moon?" Older kids, generally 5 and up, will know that Maria doesn't literally have colors or books or animals or people in her hair, but will willingly suspend disbelief and enjoy imagining what Maria experiences.

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PROMPTS:

- Read the whole book to the children using facial expressions to show surprise at what Maria finds in her hair and delight at what she does with each discovery.
- Maria found color in her hair, books, animals and people. What was your favorite thing that she discovered?
- If someone says “colors,” ask that person if she likes **colors**. Do you use lots of different colors when you make pictures? Ask if they like **books** and if they go to the library often. (You may want to avoid asking what kind of books they like because that will take you off track. You’ll be able to ask particular kids later). If they say **animals**, you can ask about their experience with animals. With **people** you might ask which kinds of people she likes, and if he or she can talk to people as easily as Maria could?
- Ask the kids if they remember what Maria did when she woke up to find nothing in her hair. You may need to prompt them that she sobbed and ran to Mom.
- The facilitator can point out that everyone has things that make them special. Point out that we all have gifts and things we love and these make us special.
- The facilitator can ask if the kids know what things they’re good at or love and want to be good at. Give them some ideas so that they don’t just copy Maria. These should include activities as well as positive traits we want to foster in the child. Some of them might include:
 - ▶ Teeball, imagination, skating, playing well with others, caring, camping, softball, listening, taking care of pets, swimming, being a good brother or sister, singing, numbers, helping, teaching the things you know how to do, kindness, etc.

NOTE TO TEACHERS, PARENTS, LIBRARIANS, AND COUNSELORS

It’s becoming widely recognized in schools across the country that education can’t be limited to academia, but must also guide the child in developing social skills and a self-esteem conducive to learning. In fact, addressing social and emotional issues can be a precursor to other learning. Children have difficulty learning when they don’t feel safe. What’s more important to a child, the math problem on the board or the imminent fight slated to go down the minute school’s out? Dis-harmony in the classroom and school greatly diminishes the chance the child will learn.

Likewise, children who possess a negative self-esteem, especially as regards intelligence, and their ability to learn, won’t take in what’s being taught. It’s important to address the child’s social and emotional status in order to help create a positive social environment and guide the child in developing self-esteem conducive to learning.

Picture books can be a wonderful tool for helping children socially and emotionally. Catherine Friend’s delightful book *My Head is Full of Colors* is perfect for guiding teachers, parents, librarians, and counselors in addressing self-esteem, identity, and positive cross-cultural relationships.

Though the book is slated for 4- to 7-year-olds, it can be used with older children as well.

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The following exercise can be done immediately or the facilitator can use it as a follow up within the next few days. If used a bit later you may want to ask the children to continue thinking about their own strengths.

Activity

Give each child a piece of paper that has been folded so that there are six squares. To do this, fold the paper in thirds as if you were going to put it in a letter-sized envelope. Then fold it in half again. This will create six squares of equal sizes. Bring out markers or crayons, but not enough for everyone to have all the popular colors at the same time. This will promote sharing. The facilitator will want to praise good sharing and gently correct failure to share.

- Ask the kids to draw pictures of things they like or are good at.

As the facilitator you are likely to know some of the children's strengths and qualities. You may want to say them out loud so everyone can hear or approach the children individually and whisper in their ears. Either can be quite powerful tools. One woman in her 80's told me that in second grade her teacher read something the woman had written in front of the whole class. When she was finished she beamed at the girl and said, "Audrey is going to be a writer someday." Audrey took those words to heart and worked hard at writing all through school. She eventually wrote two books that were published.

- If the children know each other, you may want to ask them to help come up with qualities for one another. If you do this, be prepared to prompt the kids.

After the exercise, you can let kids share what they put down, but only if they choose this.

Give them another piece of paper folded in the same manner as the first. This is for them to keep and add to as they recognize more qualities in themselves.

Now the children have something tangible that reminds them that they have positive qualities.

IDENTIFY, LABEL, AND EXPRESS FEELINGS APPROPRIATLY

In order to manage feelings, kids have to be able to recognize what it is that they're feeling, possess the vocabulary to express those feelings, and the knowledge of how to express them appropriately. In the exercise below, the facilitator can address the feelings inherent in *My Head is Full of Colors*, without eliciting personal information about the child's feelings. This is the beauty of story books. Talking directly to the child about anything that might be sensitive can result in her quickly shutting down and becoming unapproachable. It is less threatening to the child to imagine how the character might be feeling.

In this particular story the best way to address feelings is to consider how Maria must feel by her Mom's responses to her experiences. What the facilitator demonstrates by the questions below is that Maria's feelings about herself parrot those Mom must feel. Since these are all positive emotions, we can be more direct with the children than we would be with negative emotions they won't want to personalize.

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Prompts

- How do you think Mom feels when she notices that Maria is using beautiful colors?
 - ▶ Kids will generally say “good,” but we want to help them be more specific. Use words like: **proud, delighted, supportive, encouraging, complimentary, appreciative** (or words like this).
- How do you think Maria feels when Mom likes her bright colors?
 - ▶ She feels: **proud, delighted, supported, encouraged, praised, complimented, appreciated.**
- How do you think Mom feels when she sees all those books in Maria’s hair and even borrows one?
 - ▶ You might comment that Mom must love to read because she borrowed a book from Maria.
- How do you think Maria feels when Mom notices that Maria has learned a lot about spiders from her books?
- How do you think Mom feels when she notices that Maria “is gentle and kind with animals”?
 - ▶ Point out that Mom must care and appreciate animals and that’s why she encourages Maria.
- How does Mom’s reaction make Maria feel?
 - ▶ By now the kids will be able to label the feelings.
- How do you think Mom feels about Maria when she says “you certainly have a way with people”?
 - ▶ More practice for the kids giving the same responses. Point out that Mom asked Maria to ask all the people to breakfast. This shows that she appreciates all kinds of people, too, and gives Maria **permission** to do the same.
- How does Mom’s reaction make Maria feel?
 - ▶ The big one here is “encouraged.” Mom clearly gives **permission** to Maria for her love of people.

Mom’s reaction to what Maria does is: **proud, delighted, supportive, complimentary**. She **encourages** Maria to **appreciate** each of the opportunities shown in her hair and Mom clearly appreciates what Maria does with each of them.

- Ask the following: “When someone says that you are using beautiful colors does that make you want to do more coloring? When they say “yes,” you can say, “Of course! That’s because **compliments** make us feel more **confident** in our self.” Compliments **encourage** us to do more of what we were doing when we receive the compliment.

Make the point that Mom and Maria’s feelings are the same because Mom is giving Maria permission to love the things she loves. As facilitator, you will want to use these new words with the kids frequently as they apply to the child’s everyday life.

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- Do you think Maria will want to read more or less after Mom notices that she has learned a lot about spiders from her books?
 - ▶ When the children say, “more,” you can ask them “why?” But the children are still unlikely to remember the new feeling words they’re learning. Again you want to point out that Mom is **encouraging, complimentary, supportive**, and she seems **proud** of Maria. Use the same words to address Mom’s reaction to Maria being “gentle and kind with animals.” And again when Mom says “You certainly have a way with people.”

Now the facilitator will want to ask the children if they remember what happens when Maria wakes up to find that she has nothing in her hair. She sobs and runs to her Mom. “My head is empty,” she says. “There’s nothing there.” She throws herself into her mother’s arms.

- Why do you think she cries?
 - ▶ She misses the things her head was showing her. Maybe she feels lonely without them.
- How do you think she feels?
 - ▶ The kids are likely to say “bad,” because that’s the simple word that embodies a plethora of negative feelings. You will want to help them with more descriptive and accurate words: **lonely, disappointed, devastated, hurt, sad**, etc.
- Why do you think she throws herself into her Mom’s arms?
 - ▶ Maria must feel **safe** in her Mom’s arms. She must **trust** her Mom to **comfort** her. Maybe she thinks her Mom can fix it.
- She holds Maria by her shoulders and tells her that something must be wrong with Maria’s mirror because she still sees lots of things. Maria runs back to the mirror but sees nothing.
 - ▶ Point out that Maria is sad because she thinks she’s lost the things she loves. But did she really lose them?
 - ▶ Hopefully the children will say “no.” You can remind them that they’re inside of Maria just as the things they love, or are good at, are inside each of them.

At this point the facilitator may choose to go outside of the story and ask the group to consider what it’s like when someone **discourages** you. The main reason to do this is in consideration of children who don’t receive compliments but are **criticized, belittled, made to feel “less than.”** Children in this position need to have their experiences and feelings validated.

Old time television shows like *Leave it to Beaver* (currently running on *TVLand*) depicted parents as being “perfect.” They were always attentive, never seemed to have problems of their own and discipline consisted only of semi-stern conversations with the children. They easily doled out emotional support, never yelled, swore at, or hit their kids. When watching the show many child viewers--whose parents

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were nothing like this--reported that they felt ashamed of their family. Many expressed that they felt somehow to blame that their families were so different.

Shame is a feeling most of us bury deeply. You know your students. Perhaps there are unsupportive parents among the children in your classroom. A discussion might be in order. This can be accomplished in a very short time with minimum focus on the subject.

The facilitator might ask the kids how Maria would feel if Mom was critical instead. She might say something like "These walks are taking too much time because you talk too much! Or "you don't have to talk to everyone all the time." Ask the group if Maria would feel **discouraged or encouraged**. Ask if Maria would think that talking to people was a good thing or a bad thing.

Tell the children that Maria's mom may sometimes be crabby for all sorts of reasons. Even if this happens, Maria may know inside that Mom loves what she loves and is getting better at the things she loves with practice.

Appreciate Diversity

When Maria discovers all kinds of people in her hair, she doesn't just pick out people to talk to who look like her, or are about her age. She appreciates everyone— young people, old people, short people, and tall people from all different cultures. And Mom suggests she ask them to all stay for breakfast.

- The facilitator should recognize that Maria accepts everyone and is friendly with everyone. She has the opportunity to learn about how people live in different cultures. Point out that we all can learn from people who are different from us.
 - ▶ The facilitator can discuss this as much or as little as she deems appropriate. The important thing is that the book addresses diversity as a positive. The facilitator might want to point out that Maria can learn a great deal about other cultures because of her interest in all kinds of people. The facilitator might want to ask if the children know a lot of different kinds of people.
- Do you know any old people? Babies? Tall people? Short people? African American? Caucasian? Hispanic? Do you get to know them?
 - ▶ You can focus on the positive aspects of the people they know, respecting both similarities and differences.