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## Linking Social Emotional Learning and Literacy

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Honors Capstone

Linking Social Emotional Learning and Literacy

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**Table of Contents**

Abstract	3
Introduction	4-7
Materials & Methods	7-9
Results	9-10
Discussion	10-11
References	12
Appendix A: DESSA Social Emotional Data	13-14
Appendix B: Fountas & Pinnell Text Leveling Data	15
Appendix C: DIBELS 8 <sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency Data	16-17
Appendix D: Lesson Sequence	18-21

### **Abstract**

This capstone project explores the linkage between social emotional learning and literacy in a second-grade general education classroom. It provides details on the social emotional assessment tool, the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), and the literacy assessments, Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments and DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency Benchmark Assessments. This capstone discusses the social emotional literacy lessons that were implemented in the classroom between the collection of baseline and final data. It also reviews existing research that links social emotional learning and literacy. This capstone examines the results of this study and the direction future research should consider. This research finds that student reading levels and social emotional skills are directly related.

*Keywords:* social emotional learning, literacy, Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments, Oral Reading Fluency

## **Linking Social Emotional Learning and Literacy**

### **Background**

For this capstone project, I measured students' social and emotional skills and reading skills in my second-grade clinical practice placement at a suburban elementary school in Omaha, Nebraska. The second-grade class had twenty-three students: nineteen students were in-person, and four students participated remotely. For the purpose of this capstone, I only assessed and measured the progress of the students who were in-person. My class has eleven girls and eight boys. Twenty-five percent of the school population receives free and reduced lunch, whereas six out of nineteen (32%) of my students receive free and reduced lunch. None of the students have academic goals on Individualized Education Plans; however, three students have speech-related goals on their Individualized Education Plans and two students are on a tier two intervention plan. Four students receive guided reading intervention from either the school's reading interventionist or the special education paraprofessional. I utilized one assessment to measure their social and emotional skills and two assessments to measure their reading skills.

### **Social Emotional Learning**

According to Schlund (2019) from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) "Social emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (p. 2). Other common names for social emotional learning include soft skills, character education, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, personality, and noncognitive skills (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). The term "social emotional learning" is the most prevalent in policy and scholarly articles, as well as the term focuses on the growth of the skillset. According to CASEL, social

emotional learning encompasses the following set of skills: “*self-awareness*- the ability to identify one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and understand how they guide behavior; *self-management*- the ability to successfully regulate one’s own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations, and to set and work towards goals; *social awareness*- the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, and to understand social and ethical norms for behavior; *relationship skills*- the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed; and *responsible decision-making*- the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms” (Jones & Doolittle, p. 5, 2017).

Social and emotional learning is a topic of growing interest and research in the field of education. According to Durlak and Mahoney (2019), “27% of students have improved academic performance, 24% have improved social behaviors and lower levels of distress, and 22% showed fewer conduct problems” (p. 2). After decades of research suggesting that an emphasis on social emotional skills improves students’ attention, motivation, grades, math and reading skills, and reduces aggressive and disruptive behavior, many districts and schools have begun to implement social emotional learning programs (Daunic et al., 2013). Additionally, researching the connections between academics, specifically literacy, and social emotional learning is a growing subtopic of social emotional learning research.

Following decades of research suggest that explicitly teaching social emotional skills leads to improved academic performance, why are more schools, districts, and states not placing a bigger focus on social emotional learning? One reason is because explicit social emotional skills instruction takes a significant amount of time. Districts and states are increasingly focused

on academic test scores, so little time is allocated to social emotional learning, especially beyond the primary grades. The most successful social emotional learning programs include four main components: sequential instruction, opportunities for active learning, focused and sufficient time for individual lessons, and explicit learning goals (Durlak et al., 2011). Currently, all 50 states have social emotional standards for pre-kindergarten, while only four have social emotional standards for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). CASEL launched an initiative, the Collaborating States Initiative, dedicated to supporting states' development of policies, standards, and guidelines around social emotional learning (Jones & Doolittle, 2017).

It is essential that social emotional skills instruction is developmentally appropriate and matures as the students' intellectual and emotional capacities mature. Many students are entering kindergarten without the adequate social emotional skills (e.g. playing with others and appropriately expressing their emotions). As these students age, the lack of these skills can lead to disruptive behaviors and difficulties building friendships with peers. Teachers model social emotional skills, like decision-making, problem-solving, and relationship building, as they teach.

An intervention taking place in classrooms is embedding social emotional skills lessons within the curriculum. One way to do this is to develop social emotional learning text sets, which are "collections of resources from different genre, media, and levels of reading difficulty that are designed to be supportive of the learning of readers with a range of experiences and interests" (Tussey & Haas, p. 30, 2020). Primary grades spend a large amount of instructional time on literacy, such as reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Therefore, integrating social emotional learning into literacy instruction is one way that schools are

addressing the lack of social emotional skills in their students and the lack of “extra” time in the day to specifically teach social emotional skills.

Literacy provides rich opportunities for students to express themselves, reflect on connections between self and literature, use reading and writing to build social relationships, and look at things from a different perspective. These are areas which my capstone project seeks to address.

### **Materials & Methods**

I used a total of three assessments to measure my students’ social emotional skills and literacy skills, one for social emotional skills and two for literacy skills. The assessment I used to assess their social emotional skills was the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)-Mini. To assess their literacy skills, I used Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessments and DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency Benchmark Assessments. Between collected baseline data in late August and final data in mid-November, I implemented ten literacy lessons with social emotional skills embedded. During my clinical practice, my school began a school-wide mindfulness initiative which enhanced my efforts.

#### **Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Mini**

The assessment I used to measure social-emotional competence of the students was the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA)-Mini. The DESSA uses 8 competency scales to measure students’ social-emotional skills including: self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management, goal-directed behavior, relationship skills, personal responsibility, decision making, and optimistic thinking. The full-scale DESSA is a 72-item standardized, norm-referenced, strength-based behavior rating scale to assess students in kindergarten through eighth grade. I utilized the DESSA-Mini to assess students’ social-emotional skills. The DESSA-Mini is



an 8-item version of the DESSA that provides a snapshot of students' social-emotional skills. Each item on the DESSA-Mini correlates with one of the broader competencies. The DESSA-Mini is often used as a universal assessment tool.

I chose the DESSA assessment tool because it is a standardized assessment that measures students' social emotional skills. It is a simple and straightforward assessment to administer, and it provides reliable data. The DESSA can be administered by teachers, parents, or other community member.

Many of the questions DESSA are based on teacher or parent observations; therefore, assessing in-person students is more reliable than including remote learning students. In order to collect reliable baseline data, I assessed my students using the DESSA in collaboration with my cooperating teacher. As a means of ensuring I collected equivalent data on each student, I did not have parents complete the DESSA. I collected baseline data on the second grader's social emotional skills in August.

### **Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment**

To measure students' literacy, I used the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment. The Fountas and Pinnell is a standardized measurement tool for reading and comprehension. The assessment has designated levels. The results of the assessment places students into grade levels. Second grade students often 'test' into the K through M levels. Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments are often used to group students in guided reading groups. I found this to be the best assessment tool to use because it measures multiple areas of reading skills. I collected baseline literacy data at the end of August and final data in mid-November.

**DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency Benchmark Assessment**

The second assessment I used to measure students' literacy was the DIBELS 8th Edition Oral Reading Fluency benchmark assessment. Oral reading fluency measures how many words per minute a student accurately reads. It does not measure students' comprehension as the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments do. DIBELS 8th Edition is often used as a universal screener, to provide teachers insight on which students meet the benchmark goals and who need additional support. I used DIBELS 8th Edition Oral Reading Fluency benchmark assessments because they were easier for people without a background in education to interpret the data with graphs and percentiles. I collected baseline literacy data at the end of August.

**Literacy and Social Emotional Skills Lessons**

In the timeframe between the collection of baseline data and final data collected in November, I implemented ten lessons that incorporated both social emotional learning and literacy. Each lesson included a book and a response in verbal or written form. I wanted to ensure I included each component of literacy, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, throughout my lessons. The book taught a social emotional skill or lesson, and the students responded to the skill/lesson. Intermittently they wrote about a time where they felt the same way as the main character, or they implemented the learned skill in role-playing groups. The sequence of these lessons can be found in Appendix D. The students were formatively assessed through anecdotal observations of conversations and evaluation of their written responses.

**Results**

Based off of the data collected in this study, I find students' social emotional skills and literacy skills to be directly related. Many of my students improved their social emotional skills and their literacy from August to November. No students regressed in their scores on the

DESSA-Mini, 100% of students improved or maintained their score, which can be seen in the table and graphs in Appendix A. All students improved their text level and 8 out of 19 (42%) students moved up a target level and 11 out of 19 (52%) students maintained their target level on the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment, as shown in Appendix B. All students read more words correctly per minute in November than in August, as shown in Appendix C, however many students' percentiles decreased. I believe this is due to a non-ideal testing environment, in the hallway or the back of the classroom instead of a quiet space without distractions. In the final baseline data collected in November, all students who were in the minimal or negligible risk categories on their DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency benchmark assessment scored normal or strength on their DESSA-Mini. Overall, I believe my capstone shows a link between social emotional learning and literacy skills.

### **Discussion**

#### **Reflection**

Through completing this capstone project, I have learned more about using standardized and norm-referenced assessments to measure students' progress. I also learned how to effectively integrate social emotional skills into literacy lessons. I became more confident teaching whole-group reading lessons and aligning my lessons to the district curriculum and state standards. In order to accurately assess their social emotional skills using the DESSA-Mini, I had to build relationships with my students. My students loved the lessons I taught that integrated social emotional learning into literacy. They started to enjoy and be engaged in reading and writing lessons. I believe building relationships with them and fostering a love for literacy contributed to the improvement of their DESSA-Mini, Fountas and Pinnell, and DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency scores.

One of my strengths of this capstone was my thoroughness. I wanted to ensure I had reliable and equivalent data collected for all assessments and students, so I only assessed in-person students and did not have parents complete the DESSA-Mini. Students were all assessed using the Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessment and the DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency within the same week for both baseline and final data. I pinpointed areas that my students needed help with, either social emotional skills wise or literacy skills wise.

### **Future Directions**

Future studies could include a larger test pool, with multiple classrooms in multiple schools with varying demographics. They could also have control classes to compare to the experimental group after implementing lessons that integrate social emotional learning with literacy skills. All experimental group classes would need to implement the same lessons within a designated time frame. Future studies may also explore using multiple tools to assess students' social emotional learning and literacy, beyond the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment-Mini, Fountas and Pinnell benchmark assessments, and DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency benchmark assessments.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I think implementing literacy lessons integrated with social emotional skills improved my students' social emotional skills and literacy skills. All of the students maintained or improved their DESSA-Mini scores, Fountas and Pinnell text level, and DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition Oral Reading Fluency. Students demonstrated proficiency of the social emotional and literacy skills learned in the classroom. These skills will help my students to continue to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

### References

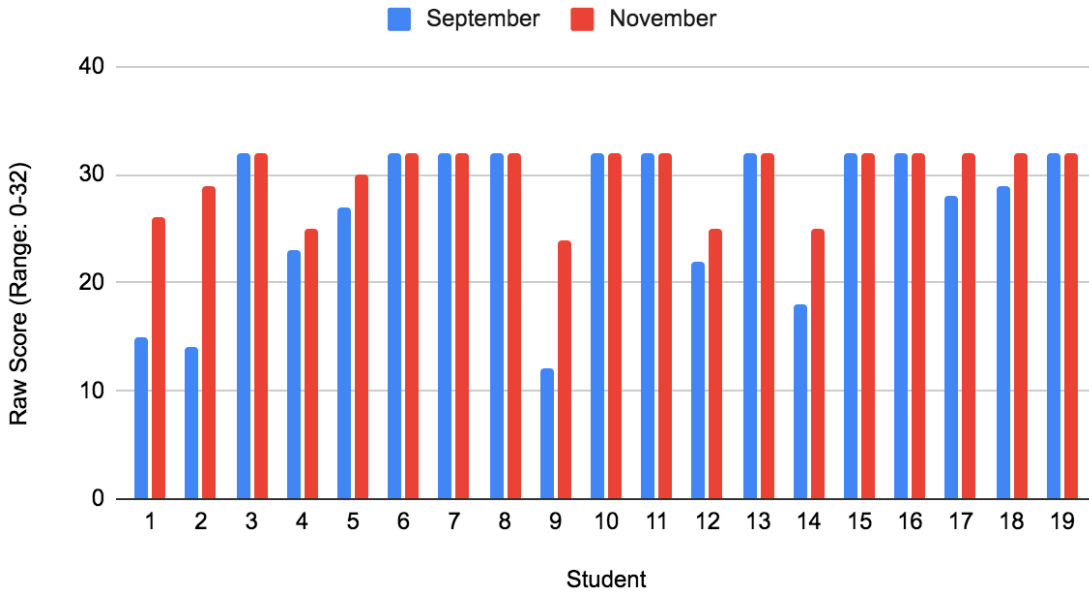
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**Appendix A: DESSA Social Emotional Data**

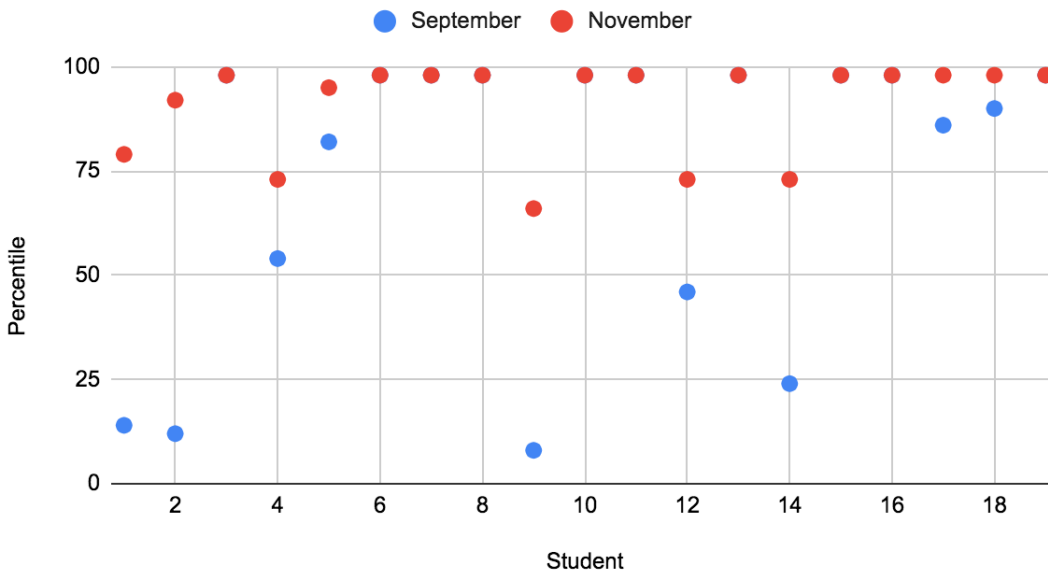
Student DESSA-Mini Raw Scores and Percentiles				
	August Data		November Data	
Student	Raw Score	Percentile	Raw Score	Percentile
1	15	14	26	79
2	14	12	29	92
3	32	98	32	98
4	23	54	25	73
5	27	82	30	95
6	32	98	32	98
7	32	98	32	98
8	32	98	32	98
9	12	8	24	66
10	32	98	32	98
11	32	98	32	98
12	22	46	25	73
13	32	98	32	98
14	18	24	25	73
15	32	98	32	98
16	32	98	32	98
17	28	86	32	98
18	29	90	32	98
19	32	98	32	98

Color Key
Strength
Normal
Low Normal
Need

### Student DESSA-Mini Raw Scores



### Student DESSA-Mini Percentiles



**Appendix B: Fountas and Pinnell Text Leveling Data**

Fountas & Pinnell Reading Levels		
Student	August	November
1	K	M
2	B	G
3	F	I
4	I	K
5	M	O
6	L	M
7	M	N
8	K	M
9	J	L
10	G	J
11	J	K
12	H	K
13	E	H
14	C	F
15	F	I
16	E	H
17	E	G
18	C	H
19	G	J

Color Key
Above Target
Target
Approaching Target
Below Target

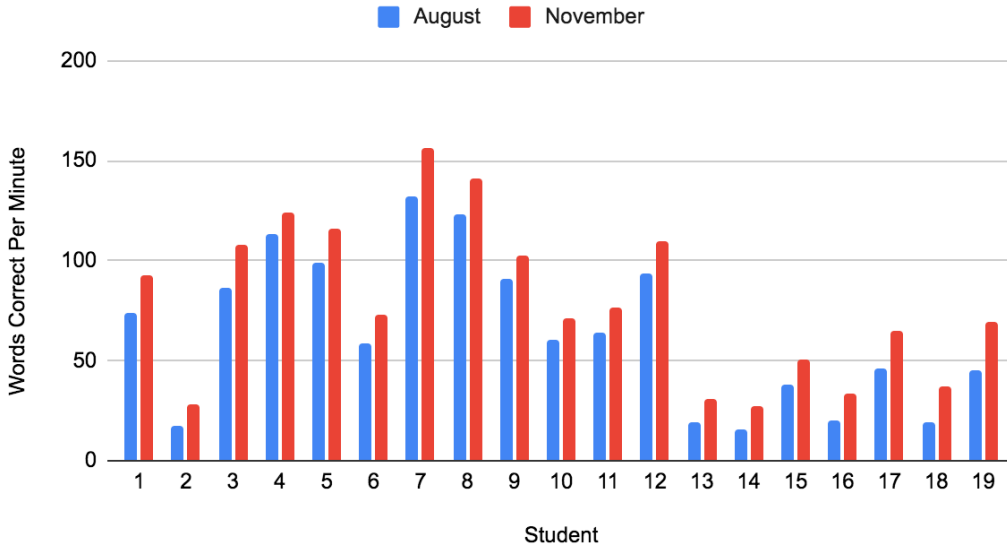


Appendix C: DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Oral Reading Fluency Data

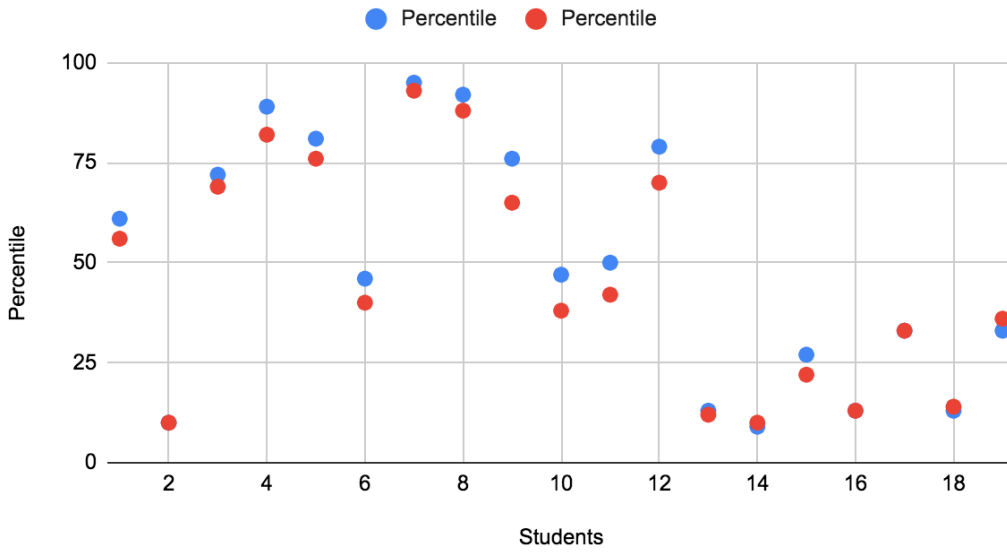
DIBELS 8th Oral Reading Fluency				
	August		November	
Student	WCPM	Percentile	WCPM	Percentile
1	74	61	93	56
2	17	10	28	10
3	86	72	108	69
4	113	89	124	82
5	99	81	116	76
6	59	46	73	40
7	132	95	156	93
8	123	92	141	88
9	91	76	103	65
10	60	47	71	38
11	64	50	77	42
12	94	79	110	70
13	19	13	31	12
14	16	9	27	10
15	38	27	51	22
16	20	13	34	13
17	46	33	65	33
18	19	13	37	14
19	45	33	69	36

Color Key
Negligible Risk
Minimal Risk
Some Risk
At Risk

### DIBELS 8th Oral Reading Fluency



### DIBELS 8th Oral Reading Fluency



**Appendix D: Lesson Sequence**

	<b>Lesson #1</b>	<b>Lesson #2</b>	<b>Lesson #3</b>	<b>Lesson #4</b>	<b>Lesson #5</b>
<b>Book(s)</b>	How Full is Your Bucket? For Kids by Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer	The Invisible Boy by Trudy Ludwig	The Caring Me I Want to Be by Mary DiPalermo Try a Little Kindness by Henry Cole What Does it Mean to be Kind? By Rana DiOrio	I Like Myself! by Karen Beaumont	Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell
<b>SEL Skill</b>	Kindness	Kindness, Bullying	Kindness	Self Love	Self Love
<b>Reading Skill(s)/ &amp; Standard(s)</b>	Cause & Effect LA 2.1.6.i- Construct and/or answer literal and inferential questions and support answers with specific evidence from the text or additional resources.	Main Idea & Detail, Make Connections LA 2.1.6.d- Retell major events and key details from a literary text and/or media and support a prompted theme.  LA 2.1.6.l- Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to identify text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections before, during,	Main Idea & Details LA 2.1.6.d- Retell major events and key details from a literary text and/or media and support a prompted theme.	Main Idea & Details LA 2.1.6.d- Retell major events and key details from a literary text and/or media and support a prompted theme.	Make Connections LA 2.1.6.l- Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to identify text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections before, during, and after reading.

		and after reading.			
<b>Activity Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss the actions in the book that either filled up someone's bucket or drained it. Discuss what we can do at school to fill up someone else's bucket.</li> <li>- Make a list of what we can do at school.</li> <li>- Each student gets a sticky note to write a kind note to an adult in the school to fill up their bucket.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss how the character felt in the beginning versus the end. Why did that change?</li> <li>- Discuss the main idea of this book and what supporting details prove that.</li> <li>- Ask students if they can make a connection to the boy, a time when they felt invisible.</li> <li>- Students write about a time when they felt invisible and color a picture of themselves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students are purposefully grouped to do a jigsaw activity. Students are in original groups of 3. Each student in that group reads a different book in a small group of 6 students.</li> <li>- The group of 6 students read the book and discuss the main idea and details. They write down the main ideas and details.</li> <li>- Students then go back to their original groups of 3 and verbally summarize the book their other group read.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss what the main idea of this book was and what supporting details prove that</li> <li>- Students will make a list of things they like about themselves.</li> <li>- Students will receive a sticky note with someone else's name on it, and they will write at least 3 things they like about that person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the books aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss the main idea and details of the book.</li> <li>- Does this book sound similar to a book we've read before? Discuss the similarities and differences between Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon and I Like Myself!</li> <li>- Discuss how you may be similar to Molly Lou Melon, and how you might be different.</li> <li>- Students will fill out a venn diagram about how they are similar to and different from Molly Lou Melon.</li> </ul>

	<b>Lesson #6</b>	<b>Lesson #7</b>	<b>Lesson #8</b>	<b>Lesson #9</b>	<b>Lesson #10</b>
<b>Book</b>	I'm Happy-Sad Today	Ruby Finds a Worry by Tom Percival	I Am Peace: A Book of	What Does it Mean to be Present?	Those Shoes by Meribeth Boelts

	by Lory Britain		Mindfulness by Susan Verde	by Rana Diorio	
<b>SEL Skill</b>	Managing Emotions	Managing Emotions	Managing Emotions, Mindfulness	Self Awareness	Gratitude
<b>Reading Skill(s) &amp; Standard(s)</b>	Main Idea & Details LA 2.1.6.d- Retell major events and key details from a literary text and/or media and support a prompted theme.	Literary Devices LA 2.1.6.c- Identify and explain why authors use literary devices (e.g, simile, alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, rhythm, personification).	Literary Devices LA 2.1.6.c- Identify and explain why authors use literary devices (e.g, simile, alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, rhythm, personification).	Author's Purpose LA 2.1.6.a- Identify author's purpose(s) (e.g., explain, entertain, inform, persuade) to support text comprehension.	Making Predictions LA 2.6.1.n- Make predictions and inferences about a text before, during, and after reading literary, informational, digital text, and/or media.
<b>Activity Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss the character's emotions throughout the book.</li> <li>- Students discuss in small groups the main idea and details in the book.</li> <li>- Share the main idea and details in whole group.</li> <li>- Students write about a time when they felt two</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss what Ruby's worry meant. How was it shown in the book? What does the blob mean? Can we really SEE other people's worries?</li> <li>- Discuss the personification of her worry.</li> <li>- Students draw what their worries look like, and list at least 3 people they</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss what "the anchor" is.</li> <li>- The anchor is a metaphor for what brings you back to peace.</li> <li>- Explain what a metaphor is.</li> <li>- Discuss different things one might do to anchor themselves when overwhelmed with worry.</li> <li>- Students choose 2 things they could do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Discuss what it means to be present.</li> <li>- Discuss why the author wrote this book? What did they want people to know? How can knowing this help us at school?</li> <li>- Relate being present to our school-wide PBIS framework,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read the book aloud.</li> <li>- Stop throughout the book asking students to make predictions about what they think will happen next. Students will record their predictions in their flipchart and confirm or reject their prediction.</li> <li>- Discuss the main idea and details of the book.</li> </ul>

	<p>or more emotions at once.</p>	<p>can talk to about their worries.                      - Then, role-play with students how to tell someone about your worry and what to say when someone tells you about their worry.</p>	<p>to anchor themselves and verbally share with a peer.</p>	<p>SOARing.                      Being present looks like SOARing.                      - Students write a goal they have to to present/ SOAR better (listen, participate, etc.).</p>	<p>- Discuss wants versus needs. What are some things we need? What are some examples of what we want?                      - Discuss what grateful means.                      - Students write 3 things they are grateful for and verbally share with a peer.</p>
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