

Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.

—J.K. Rowling



## EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning

### Emotional Literacy and Mindfulness: The Rumpelstiltskin Effect

**Level:** Upper Elementary (3-5)

**Timeframe:** 20-30 minutes

**Concepts:**

- Emotional Vocabulary
- Emotions
- Mindfulness



### Big Ideas For This Lesson

In the story of Rumpelstiltskin, a magical dwarf gains power over a poor miller's daughter and eventually forces her to promise her first-born child to him. There is one caveat; if she can guess his name he will leave her alone. By naming the monster it ceases to have power over her.

**Emotional Literacy** is defined as, *"the ability to identify, understand, and respond to emotions in oneself and others in a healthy manner."*<sup>1</sup> Pretty straightforward right? Consider, however, that there are over 4,000 emotional words in the English language<sup>4</sup> and that we typically only express/hear a handful of these. This means there are a lot of "Rumpelstiltskins" lurking about that remain unnamed.

The real power in teaching **Emotional Vocabulary** is in fostering the ability to name our **Emotions**.<sup>2,5</sup> By naming our emotions we bring conscious awareness to our experience and thereby decrease the power of unconscious emotions to drive our thoughts and behaviors. Quite often the simple act of naming an emotion releases that experience and eliminates the need for any further action. This may sound counterintuitive and overly simplistic at first, but it really can be that easy. Awareness is a powerful tool in creating change. The ability to use emotional vocabulary is integral to our mindfulness practice. Through mindfulness we learn to become observers of our thoughts and emotions rather than letting our thoughts and emotions control us.

We can also understand this through the lens of neuroscience. The brain is wired for survival (lizard brain) and tends to fear what it does not know. Once a danger is identified, it can then be addressed by the frontal lobe and the brain's alarm system is deactivated. The primary purpose of every emotion is to motivate us to take action to return to homeostasis. The Latin root of emotion is actually *"to move out."* In this way we can understand that *all emotions are helpful*: sadness attracts attention, fear alerts us to danger, and happiness reinforces beneficial experiences. If we can name the emotion we can begin to understand what motivates our actions.



## Essential Vocabulary

Emotional Literacy  
Emotional Vocabulary  
Emotions  
Synonyms

**Teaching Note:** You may decide to add several new feeling words to this week's list of essential vocabulary (e.g., powerless, ecstatic, mournful, dejected, thrilled).



## Preparation

1. Take a quick inventory of your own emotional vocabulary and add a few words to the list before teaching this lesson.
2. Print and cut emotions sheets.

## Materials

- [Story of Rumpelstiltskin](#)
- [Emotions Sheets](#)
- 6+ Thesauruses (one for each group).



## Teaching Script

### BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

Begin by reading the story of Rumpelstiltskin. Before reading, ask students to reflect on this guiding question:

| *What does this story have to do with your emotions?*

After reading the story, pose the question:

| *What did the queen need to do to get Rumpelstiltskin to go away?*

Discussion may go as follows:

| *That's right! She had to say his name. Once she knew his name, did he still have power over her? NO.*

| *Could he steal her baby? NO.*

| *Did he go away? YES.*

| *The same is true of our feelings/emotions! When we know the true name of our emotions, they no longer have power over us.*

| *Does anyone know how many words we have for feelings in the English language?*

Take a few guesses from students.

| *There are actually over 4,000 words for emotions! However, most of us only use 5-10 of those words on a daily basis (e.g. happy, sad, angry, okay, good, bad). This means that there are thousands of emotions that we are feeling and not expressing. For instance, behind sadness there may be powerlessness or hurt; behind anger there may be fear, etc.*



## GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

*So, our job is to expand our vocabulary and learn new names for our emotions. Just like Rumpelstiltskin, when we know the names of our emotions they no longer have power over us. We can simply name them and then let them go. Let's practice.*

- a. Divide class into at least six groups. Explain that each group will be responsible for coming up with synonyms for emotions. Hand out the emotions sheets (e.g., angry, confused, sad, frightened, ecstatic and happy).
- b. Set a timer and allow each group time to generate alternative names for their assigned emotions. Offer help or make a thesaurus available for each group to facilitate brainstorming.
- c. When complete, hang emotion lists on walls and explain that the focus this week is on learning and using new names for our emotions. Each time a student shares emotions this week, encourage them to reference the wall and use a new word to express how they are feeling.
- d. As time allows, have each group share out their list of emotional vocabulary.



## REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

**Teaching Note:** The above exercises in Building Background Knowledge and Guided Practice provide a complete introduction to Emotional Literacy. The 'Emotions Charades' game below is offered as additional reinforcement and may be taught on the same day or as a follow up later in the week. Once students are familiar with emotions charades you can use it anytime to provide a fun brain break while supporting emotional literacy.

### Emotions Charades:

Use the following [guidelines](#) or create your own to facilitate charades:

- a. Divide the class into two or more teams.
- b. Teams will alternate turns. On each turn, a new team member will randomly select an emotion\* and have 1 minute to act it out (decrease or increase time to make the game more or less challenging).
- c. The player may use only non-verbal communication to act out the emotion.
- d. During each turn, only the team whose turn it is may guess. If the other team accidentally shouts the answer, the team whose turn it is will receive the point.
- e. If the team has not guessed the correct emotion by the end of the turn, the opposing team may have one opportunity to "steal" the point by guessing the correct emotion.
- f. Team members may refer to their emotions sheets, but will lose a point for arbitrary/random guessing.
- g. Once a turn is over the player must read the emotion and share a definition aloud. Students are encouraged to record interesting and useful emotions in their journal.

\*Alternatively, you can provide class time for students to create "emotions cards." Using notecards or scrap paper, instruct students to write an emotional vocabulary word on one side of the card and the definition on the reverse side of the card. Once complete, collect all notecards and use this as the "pot" for charades. When students learn a new word, they can create a card and add it to the pot - creating an easy way to extend this lesson and support emotional literacy throughout the school year.



## EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

### *Reflect on it*

- *How are our emotions like Rumpelstiltskin?*
- *Why do you think naming your feelings is helpful?*
- *What are some of your new favorite feeling words?*
- *What feeling words do you use most often? What new words can you use instead?*

### *Journal it*

Think of a time when you said you were feeling an emotion like anger, happiness, or sadness; perhaps you were really feeling something else (e.g., powerless, ecstatic or hurt). What emotion were you really feeling? Why was it difficult to express this emotion?



## EXTENSIONS

### *Classroom*

- Incorporate emotion words into vocabulary lessons; this will support students on a personal level and directly supports descriptive writing.
- Challenge students to come close to identifying 4,000 emotions words! Consider making over-used words 'off-limits,' (happy, sad, mad, etc).
- Make "check-ins" a part of your daily routine or circle time. Use I-Statements and feeling words to reinforce lesson concepts.
- Here is an extensive list of emotions words: [Emotions Word List](#).

### *School-wide*

- Post emotion words and definitions in public spaces.
- Combine emotional literacy with foreign language acquisition and post feeling words in other languages.
- Consider how identification of emotions can be incorporated throughout the school day or even discipline practices, (e.g., Ask students to identify their feelings before proceeding with disciplinary action).



## REFERENCES

1. Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning. (2009). Fostering Emotional Literacy in Young Children: Labeling Emotions. doi:10.4135/9781446214534
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SMUG

### Synonym

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



HOPEFUL

### Synonym

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



LONELY

### Synonym

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.





HAPPY

## Synonym

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



FRIGHTENED

## Synonym

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



ENRAGED

## Synonym

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## STORY OF RUMPELSTILTSKIN

(Source: <http://shortstoriesshort.com/story/rumpelstiltskin/>)

Once there was a poor miller who had a very beautiful daughter. One day, he went to the king's court and claimed that his daughter could spin straw into gold. The king ordered the miller's daughter to come to the palace. He took her to a room full of straw and said to her, "You must spin all this straw into gold tonight or you shall die!" The miller's daughter was locked in the room alone. She did not know what to do and began to cry. Suddenly, a dwarf came out of nowhere and asked her, "Why are you crying?" When she told him the story, he said, "Don't worry, I will spin the straw into gold, but what will you give me in return?" "I will give you my necklace!" she promised. The dwarf spun all the straw into gold.

The next day, when the king saw this, he was astonished and pleased. He became greedier. He took the girl to a bigger room and said, "Spin all this straw into gold or you shall die!" She was locked inside again and once again she began to cry. The tiny man came into the room once more. He said, "If I spin all the straw into gold, what will you give me this time?" She gave him her gold ring. He sat through the night and spun all the straw into gold.

The third morning, the king was very happy to see the room full of gold. He took her to the biggest room filled with straw and said, "If you spin all this straw into gold, you shall become my wife!" The girl was locked up and once again, she began to cry. This time, when the little man came to her, she said, "I do not have anything to give you, sir! What will I do?" He said, "Promise me that you will give me your first born child when you become the queen!" The girl agreed to do so, because she was not expecting to become the king's wife. The tiny man spun all the straw into gold in the night. The next day, the king was pleased to see the gold. He married the girl and soon they had a baby.

The tiny man came to the queen to take her baby away but she had forgotten about the promise. She cried and begged him to leave her baby alone. The tiny man said, "I will not take your baby if you can guess my name! I will give you three days!" Saying this, he disappeared. The queen tried to remember all kinds of names. The next night, when he came, she told him all the uncommon names she could think of, "Perhaps your name is Shortribs, or Sheepshanks, or Laceleg," but he always answered, "That is not my name." The next day the queen sent her servants all over the country to get all the possible names of the people. That night, the dwarf came to the queen again but she could not guess his real name.

On the third day, one of the queen's servants went into the forest to find the little man. Deep in the woods, the servant found him dancing and singing happily in front of a fire. He sang, "Today I bake, tomorrow I brew, the next I'll have the young queen's child. Ha, glad am I that no one knew, that Rumpelstiltskin I am styled!" The servant went back to the palace and told the queen the name of the dwarf.

That night, when the little man came to the queen, she was already prepared. The tiny man challenged, "Do you give up? Shall I take your child away?" The queen smiled and replied, "Is your name Harry? Is it Conrad? Perhaps it is Rumpelstiltskin!" Hearing his name, the tiny man screamed, "How could you possibly know my name?" Saying this, he ran away, deep into the forest never to be seen again.