

April 1, 2014 3am 3pm 2am

Hi Everybody,

At the beginning of March we started reading some books about kids getting mad, not just miffed, seriously, investedly furious. Several of these describe with very graphic illustrations the highs and lows of kids dealing with anger. And the groups were spellbound. In one story the little girl explodes like a volcano, in another a different girl is transformed into an alien being called Bombaloo with pinwheel eyes and flashing teeth. In a third story a boy named Arthur ends up in outer space on his bed after destroying everything, and ironically he cannot remember what he was mad about. And in a fourth, there is the little girl whose huge profiled head open mouthed denounces her dolly to the point that the dolls hair is elevated as though in a hurricane. What is the girl hollering? "No dessert forever!" The rage, the release, the remorse; ever had a tantrum? Well, most of us have, and I still remember the day when I was four and stuck my tongue out at my mother. In these stories the emotions are so powerfully drawn that kids immediately are fascinated. At first, they don't necessarily relate them to their own experiences, but there is something disturbingly familiar. During Arthur one boy kept muttering, "I don't like this story." Surely their faces never looked like Bombaloos? "Is that a monster?"

Questions abounded after the first book. Why is she on fire? Why is she running? Why is she crying? Why indeed? So, we read a second one. This too was about a girl. We asked one group whether boys get mad. No, they responded. But then kids started remembering and expounding on what did make them mad at home. In one group we started a list about what makes you really, really angry? And most of the responses were about younger siblings taking things or bedtime interfering with pursuits, both included as plot in the stories, but also personally familiar. One boy in our youngest group vowed he would never get mad again because he didn't want his face to "scrunch up" like Bombaloos. And as earnest tears flowed down his cheeks, teachers tried to soothe the very strong emotions he was experiencing in the present, while still reminding him of moments when he had felt justifiable anger at school.

As the discussions and interest continued we decided to ask the kids if they would like to draw some mad faces, so for the last two weeks papers with the outline of a head and the word mad below have been at one of the tables, along with two mirrors. We've had a lot of attempts and interesting results. Many of the efforts include teeth or fire. These were prevalent in most of the books we read and we had posted examples of the illustrations. Quite a few kids were focused on just looking in the mirror and transforming their faces and a couple actually transferred the results to their paper. One girl drew the lines for her furrowed brow and pinched lips. The details on many were considerable, brows, lashes, a necklace, a ponytail, and others were minimalist; a thin trace of red fire around the head. Some decided to try a different emotion as well; happy or sad. Many kids made more than one attempt.

All of us can experience a range of heightened emotions on a daily basis: uncertainty, fear, sadness, excitement, and anger. Learning to comprehend and control them is something we work on our whole lives. It's part of the intellect that distinguishes us from the beasts, or so they say. We hope that this small exploration has helped your kids examine a little more closely the power of their own emotions and by doing so begin to understand them.

Here is a list of the books we read: 'When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry' by Molly Bangs, 'Sometimes I'm Bombaloo' by Rachel Vail, Illustrations by Yumi Heo, 'Angry Arthur' by Hiawyn Oran, Illustrations by Satoshi Kitamura, 'No Dessert Forever' by George Ella Lyon, Illustrations by Peter Catala Notto, 'Grump Groan Growl' by Bell Hooks, Illustrated by Chris Raschka.

Attention Everybody: As warmer weather approaches [we hope], we will try to have a walk around the block first, to see how the group holds together and then possibly some trips to the playground. Consider this when it comes to dress and shoes [practical, sturdy] and keep in mind how quickly the weather can change, so jackets etc.

Thanks,
Melinda, Anita, Sarah