

FEEL BRAVE TEACHING GUIDE



Avril McDonald

Illustrated by Tatiana Minina



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Preface

I have a bold goal – to give all children access to tools that can help them manage tough emotions and reach their pure creative potential.

I wrote the Feel Brave series of books (little stories about big feelings for 4- to 7-year-olds) with the hope that children might fall in love with the characters and stories, which also give them simple strategies to manage their feelings and help them to become more self-aware (without them even realising it!).

To support the Feel Brave books, I also wanted to create a treasure trove of ideas and activities as a source of inspiration for teachers, parents and caregivers who want to help children in their emotional development. This book provides some simple, practical and fun activities that support the messages from the books and which can be woven into their day.

These ideas have come from my own experience in learning to live with anxiety, from being a teacher and from being a mum. I have also drawn on the wisdom and inspiration of other experienced teachers and from the advice of Dr Stephanie Satariano (a British Psychological Society chartered educational and child psychologist specialising in paediatric neuropsychology) who has ensured that the activities in this guide reflect and support current academic theory, research and practice.

A text-free, illustrated set of children's books, for use in the classroom, together with a set of 12 emotion cards are available to download from www.crownhouse.co.uk/featured/feel-brave-teaching-guide. The yoga pose illustrations (pages 26–27) are also available. An additional video demonstrating the yoga poses is available at www.feelbrave.com.

So, whether you are a teacher looking to find fun activities to link into your school's personal, social and emotional health development objectives or you're a parent/caregiver who wants to integrate these activities into a child's life, I hope you will keep this guide close by to dip in and out of for inspiration from time to time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Avril', with a stylized flourish underneath.

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Chapter 1

Finding Calm



Chapter 1

Finding Calm

Having some awareness of how our brains work and practising calming techniques can help us to adjust to the demands of the modern world and thrive.

Why teach and practise calming techniques?

- ♦ To create positive responses in our brain that help to promote well-being.
- ♦ To improve our emotional regulation and cognitive focus (i.e. stress blocks learning).
- ♦ To find contentment within ourselves.

Key learning objectives

1. I am aware of how I feel (e.g. excited, nervous, stressed, upset, mad, happy, calm) and I know ways to calm myself down.
2. I understand how my brain responds to different emotions.
3. I enjoy just being with myself.

The Wolf and the Baby Dragon

This story can be used to open up conversations around how to manage a worried mind and calm down. Visuals for each page (which can be projected in the classroom while the story is being read) can be found at www.crownhouse.co.uk/featured/feel-brave-teaching-guide.

Stories and visuals on a large screen can be used for assemblies, with follow-up activities based around whatever your school focus might be at the time (e.g. celebrating calming down) or a particular school value which is relevant.

Page 5: **Deep in the forest at the tree house one day
Montgomery had something important to say.**

**He had heard of a cave far away to the west
Where a new baby dragon had hatched in a nest.**

**“We should go there,” he said,
“we could have such great fun.”
“Oh we *must*,” said Catreen, “get your things.
Quick, let’s run!”**

Page 6: **So they filled up their bags with some nice things to eat:
Some water to drink and some fudge for a treat.**

**Then marched off in a hurry with dragons in mind,
But forgetting poor Wolfgang ... who got left behind.**

Page 8: **His bag was so heavy it made him too slow.
Missing out on the dragon would bother him so.**

He yelled "Wait for me." No one heard him at all:
They were too far ahead and his voice was too small.

Page 10: Then he tripped on a rock and fell down with a thump.
On the top of his head grew a mighty great lump.

He had worries he couldn't stop thinking about,
That he'd packed in his bag and wouldn't let out.

He had always found worries too hard to let go
And he kept them a secret, his friends didn't know.

He had never had worries so heavy before,
Which is why he just couldn't go on any more.

So he lay on the ground under one big dark cloud.
Then something quite small
called his name out quite loud.

Page 12: "Wolfgang," said Spider from high in the tree.
"I know of your secret, it's safe here with me.

We all have our worries, some big and some small,
But too many worries are no good at all!

I can see you're unhappy, it's easy to tell.
Take a rest for a while with this magical spell ..."

*"Stars in the night gather near
Fairies fly and meet us here.
As we close our eyes and count to ten,
Breathe in and out and in again.*

*Wiggle your toes ... now make a smile.
Be very still and think a while ...
Who do you love and who loves you?
What's your favourite thing to do?
Where's the best place you've ever been?
What's the most magical thing you've seen?*

*Stir all these things around in your cup
And like a hot chocolate, drink them all up!"*

Page 14: It was lovely to think about things that were good.
He'd have done it all day if only he could.

But he heard lots of noise ... so he opened his eyes.
His friends had come back, what a lovely surprise!

He remembered another thing Spider had said:
"Don't keep worries inside, try to share them instead."

Page 16: "Hey Wolfgang," they cried. "Funny thing!"
"There you are!"

"We've found where the cave is. Up there! It's not far."

"Oh I do want to come but my bag makes me slow.
It's full of my worries, I can't let them go."

"Well, we'll help you carry them," said Daisy Pig.
"We could all take one each so your bag's not so big.

You might have some worries that we've all had too
If you share them with us we might know what to do."

Page 18: So they emptied his worries out onto the ground ...
They were all quite surprised at how many they found.

But they managed to sort them, and each friend took one.
Now the bag wasn't heavy and Wolfgang could run.

Page 20: They ran like the wind up the rocks to the cave
Wolfgang felt loved ... and a little more brave.

Page 22: When they got to the top, their hearts skipped a beat –
There it was in the cave, looking snugly and sweet.

But just as they spotted two cute fluffy paws ...
A great beast flew above them with frightful sharp claws!

Page 24: It looked angry and wild as it dived and then rose,
Blowing fire from its mouth and smoke from its nose.

There was certainly no chance of getting away ...
It was likely that they'd all be eaten that day.

Page 26: But the dragon did not want to have them for tea:
It just wanted to take all their worries, you see.

For a new baby dragon loves nothing more
Than to have some cute cuddly friends to adore.

Most worries seem ugly but they didn't mind:
These dragons were just not the worrying kind.

Page 28: They all laughed loudly and jumped with delight
(Which happens sometimes when you've had a big fright).

Page 30: Then back at the tree house they all felt so glad.
To be eaten by dragons ... that would have been bad!

They decided to try Wolfgang's new magic spell,
So the stars and the fairies all joined them as well,

Page 32: And their little hearts glowed as their minds took a rest,
While the evening sun set, far away to the west.

Talking about the story

Discuss Wolfgang's adventure to help the children deepen their understanding of the story and clarify the key message, which is to tell someone you trust when you have worries and that it's helpful to rest your mind from time to time.

Here are some questions you could ask:

- ♦ Why was Wolfgang slower than his friends?

- ♦ Did his friends not care about him? How do you know?
- ♦ What did Spider tell Wolfgang to do with his worries?
- ♦ How did he rest his mind from his worries?
- ♦ Can you name some people who might be good for you to share any worries with?

It's nice after this discussion to try one of the calming exercises from later in this chapter to demonstrate how to calm themselves down in similar situations – for example, by using Spider's 'Stars in the Night' poem (which is a gratitude exercise) or a mindful breathing exercise.

Bringing the characters and story to life

As a fun art and drama activity, get the children to make the characters from the story out of scraps (e.g. fur, material, wood, wool, outdoor bits and pieces from the forest). If you have some 'googly eyes' they are great in helping to bring home-made characters to life. Children can enjoy making the characters and then 'role play' the stories using the characters. Or the children could make a puppet show and showcase their characters, retell the story or make up new endings to the story, or (as an extension activity) they could tell the story from a different character's perspective.

Building emotional literacy

Children often need help to build their emotional vocabulary. When we can notice and name a feeling, it makes it easier for us to process it and cope with it.

Choose three emotive words that relate to the story (e.g. worried, loved, brave). Talk about what each word means. Ask the children if they would like to share a time when they have felt any of these emotions. If you have made a 'kindness tree/garden' or a 'happy wall' (see Chapter 3), choose any happy words from the list to put up on the wall.

Extension activities

Ask the children to choose a word and then write a sentence using that word, or write a sentence for each of the three words above.

Or, as an art activity, give the children a piece of paper each. Choose one of the words (e.g. loved) and ask the children to draw what they feel. Have some uplifting music playing at the same time. Let the children be free with colours to interpret and express the words in whatever way they wish.

Getting to know our brains

If children can be introduced to just some of the ways in which our brains work from an early age, they can make a start on their journey of understanding themselves, why they might feel and/or do the things they do and learn how to self-regulate their emotions.

Although our brains are very complex, young children can be successfully introduced to the simple concept that we actually have two key different types of brain that we need to learn to work with:

1. The 'old brain' (the limbic area, which is sometimes referred to as the 'downstairs brain') that evolved millions of years ago and is similar to other animals' brains. This part of the brain is responsible for basic physical desires, motives and emotions, such as the fight, flight or freeze responses. It is an extremely powerful emotional machine and its reactions can be helpful or sometimes very unhelpful!
2. The 'new brain' (the frontal area, which is sometimes referred to as the 'upstairs brain' or rational brain) that evolved two million years ago and sets us apart from other animals. This part of the brain enables us to think, imagine and reason and gives us our sense of self.

Our new brain capabilities can easily be hijacked by our old brain feelings, emotions or desires. Much like a dog, the old brain is most useful to us if we can teach it and train it using our rational new brain. If we can learn to step back and just observe how we are feeling, then we can quiet the old brain

and choose how we respond to those feelings and emotions with our new brain. This is a major milestone in emotional development (and is easier said than done), but the earlier these concepts can be explored the better.

A fun way to introduce children to our old brain and our new brain is to refer to them as our 'cheeky monkey' and our 'wise old owl'. Explain this to the children along the lines of:

Did you know that our brains are very clever? They are like our engines. There are lots of different parts of our brain that do different things like help us breathe and eat without even thinking about it!

One part of our brain is a bit like a cheeky monkey. It's where all of our feelings come from like love, joy and happiness or fear and anger. Sometimes the cheeky monkey part of our brain can get a bit too excited, or if it feels scared or angry it might want to scream and run away. Or it can do things that might hurt other people like hit out or say unkind words without thinking.

The cheeky monkey part of our brain is a bit like a dog, we need to train it, just like we need to train a puppy. We can train our cheeky monkey to make sure that when it has feelings, it doesn't do anything to hurt others or ourselves. Or, if it gets too excited, we know how to let it rest and calm down.

Another part of our brain is like a wise old owl. It's clever and calm and cares and is full of good ideas on what to do with our feelings. Your wise old owl can train your cheeky monkey so that when a feeling comes up, you can do something really good with that feeling – even if it's a bad feeling.

Give the children some examples of when you were little (children love it when adults tell a story about when they were young!) and your cheeky monkey did something naughty. Then ask them what the wise owl would say to do. For example:

Would you like to hear a story about the cheeky monkey part of my brain?

When I was a little girl, my brother had a bike and I wanted to ride it. But he wouldn't give me a turn so I felt very angry and pushed him off it. Everyone was very upset with me for hurting my brother and I felt bad afterwards. My cheeky monkey just did that without listening to my wise old owl.

Ask the children to come up with ideas about how the wise old owl could help in this situation. Or ask the children to talk about a time when their cheeky monkeys did something that wasn't very nice with a feeling it had.

Then give them an example of when you listened to your wise old owl. For example:

When I was a little girl, my brother wouldn't share his chocolate with me so I wanted to hit him and scream at him. But then I listened to my wise owl reminding me that last time I pushed my brother off his bike and hurt him, it hurt me to see him so sad. My wise owl told me not to hit him this time. Mum was so pleased that I didn't hurt him, she gave me a chocolate too for being so kind, even though I felt mad, and that made me feel really good.

Encourage the children to talk about a time when something happened and they listened to their wise old owl instead of their cheeky monkey.

In future situations when a child is misbehaving, you can ask: 'Was it your cheeky monkey that just did that?' or 'What would your wise old owl do instead?' Alternatively, you can positively reinforce behaviour by saying, 'I like what you did just then. It looks like you listened to your wise old owl and made a really good decision about those feelings.'

To celebrate our good feelings (and the fun side of the cheeky monkey parts of our brains), you can put on some fun dance music and say, 'Let your cheeky monkeys go wild and dance and jump around!'

You can also explain how our wise old owls can help us 'change our channel' when we have a feeling like anger, so that we let the anger out but don't hurt anyone else (see the 'Change the channel' exercise later on in this chapter).

Little daily doses

Here are some ideas for 5–15 minute activities that teachers can link to their personal, social and emotional health education objectives and weave into the everyday classroom (ideal for circle time) or that you can do at home at any time (e.g. around the kitchen table, before bed).

Mindful breathing exercises

Mindful exercises have been proven to reduce stress and promote well-being. Mindful exercises involve being present and kind with yourself in the moment and just noticing what is happening in your body and mind. Focusing our attention on our breathing and what our bodies are feeling, to just notice how we are, can also help to reinforce that we have a choice about what we focus our attention on.

Slow and deep breathing makes us feel better, it releases happy hormones (e.g. dopamine), reduces stress hormones (e.g. cortisol) and can help children move into a positive mental state where they are ready to learn.

A helpful way to reinforce to children that deep and slow breathing is good for them is to say, 'Nice deep and slow breathing tells our brain that everything is okay.'

Blowing up a balloon

Get the children to lie down and close their eyes. Tell them to imagine they have a lovely coloured balloon in their tummy and that they are going to blow it up with three big slow breaths. Ask them to put their hands on their tummies so that they feel the balloon getting bigger as they blow it up (this helps them to breathe deeply from their stomach, rather than short breaths from their lungs). After the third big slow breath, tell them that they can now let all the air out of their balloon using the tiniest little hole. Get them to make a very quiet 'sssss' sound and see who can make that sound for the longest as they let the air out of their balloons.

When they have finished, ask them what they noticed. What colour was their balloon? How did their bodies feel when they let the air out of the balloon? What thoughts did they have?

Little chime time

Buy yourself a bell or chime that you strike from time to time as a cue for the children to relax. (I would recommend using a Zenenergy Chime which holds a lovely long note.) Strike the chime once as a signal for them to stop and get ready to breathe. Ask the children to breathe in and strike the chime

again. The children then breathe out until they can no longer hear any noise. Repeat three times.

When they have finished, ask them how they felt and what they noticed. Once the children become accustomed to this sound and learn to associate it with calm breathing, it can also be used as a nice tool to get their attention or trigger them to know to come and sit down together for some calming exercises.

A daily routine could be set in the classroom so that when the chime bell rings, it signals for the children to stop and listen until the chime stops, and then together everyone takes five deep breaths in and five breaths out.



Breathe in good

Get the children to lie down and close their eyes. They can put their hands or a block or a domino on their stomachs and watch it rise and fall as they breathe (this encourages them to let their tummies rise on every in breath). As you recite this poem, get them to make a 'ssssss' sound for as long as they can on every out breath.

Breathe in good (breathe in for three counts).

Breathe out bad (breathe out for five counts).

Breathe in happy (breathe in for three counts).

Breathe out sad (breathe out for five counts).

Breathe in calm (breathe in for three counts).

I feel glad (breathe out for five counts).

You can finish the last breath out by hitting a chime that the children might become used to as a sound they associate with breathing and calming down. They should try to keep breathing out making their 'ssssss' noise until they can no longer hear the chime.

Other mindful exercises

Mindful walk with mindful listening

Take a walk and ask the children to be very quiet, to feel their feet touching the ground and ask them to silently fill up their imaginary baskets with all of the sounds they hear and the things they notice. The aim is to just notice what is outside and use their senses to smell, see, hear and touch what they notice. When you get back to the classroom, ask the children to share what they have in their baskets. Or, as an art activity, get children to draw what they noticed.

The children could take a mindful walk with actual bags and collect things (e.g. leaves, feathers, stones) and then present them to the class. They could make a collage with what they have found by sticking their treasures onto some paper and drawing things that they couldn't bring in (like the sky). Alternatively, they could make some leaf rubbings while listening to nice calm music.

Thought clouds

Get the children to lie down outside and look up at the clouds passing by. Tell them to imagine they are the calm big blue ocean, lying still and just looking up at the sky above and the clouds drifting by. Ask them to imagine that the clouds are their thoughts. Watch the clouds silently for a while and then get the children to close their eyes and take three big breaths as they

imagine their thoughts just passing by above them as they relax as the beautiful clear blue ocean.

When they have finished, ask them what they noticed. Did they notice their thoughts just passing by? What did they see or hear or feel? Doing this exercise outside helps the children to call on the experience and successfully repeat it inside.

Mindful hearing

Bring in a bag with some objects hidden inside that make interesting sounds (e.g. some rice in a container, a tuning fork, a water bottle that you shake). Get the children to breathe in, relax and close their eyes (perhaps using the 'Blowing up a balloon' exercise or ringing a chime as they breathe out). Ask the children to listen to each sound carefully. Choose one child to say what they think the sound was and how it made them feel. All the children should then close their eyes again (you can repeat the breathing exercise) and listen for another sound.

Change the channel

This activity helps us be aware of and 'tune in' to how we are feeling and to change our moods if and when we need to. Introduce the idea to the children that if we have feelings that are making us feel bad, moody or angry, there are ways that we can 'change the channel'. Just like on television, we can change the channel with our own feelings.

Suggest some ways that we can change the channel (e.g. walking or dancing can make us feel better), and then ask the children what helps them to feel better and/or calm down. Suggestions could include:

- ♦ I can run.
- ♦ I can take a walk with a friend.
- ♦ I can dance to fun music.
- ♦ I can do some yoga.
- ♦ I can rip up an old book.

- ♦ I can scream into a pillow.
- ♦ I can read my favourite book.
- ♦ I can go to the 'calm down box'.
- ♦ I can do my mindful breathing.

You could draw a big TV on the wall and write down all of the ways the children suggest to change the channel inside the TV, so they are always available for them to look at and try when they need to change their channel.

If the general mood in the classroom is low from time to time, you can change the channel by taking them out for a mindful walk or doing a few quick stretching exercises (e.g. the 'I am a tree' exercise in Chapter 2). The children might also like to be chosen to pick one of the change the channel exercises from the wall for the whole class. Or you could make a lucky dip-style 'change the channel' box that a child is allowed to choose from and then the whole class does the fun activity that is pulled from the box.

What's the weather like with you?

This activity reinforces the idea that while we might not be able to change the weather outside, we can change the weather inside (i.e. our feelings).

Ask the children, 'What's the weather like outside?' Then ask them, 'What's the weather like inside you? How do you feel – sunny, stormy, grey, hot, strange?' Make a cardboard sun, some grey clouds, some rain and thunder and offer the children the chance to come and put their own weather up on the wall. They can either share their feelings or if they don't want to, the other children can suggest a nice activity to 'change the weather' if they want to shift any unpleasant feelings. They could use some ideas from the 'change the channel' box or a 'calm down box' (explained later in this chapter).

Gratitude exercises

Gratitude exercises have been proven to increase happy hormones (e.g. dopamine) and help us to change how we view things. They encourage us to focus on the positive which helps our overall well-being. Gratitude is

something that needs to be practised, so it's a good idea to introduce these as regular daily routines.

Stars in the Night

Ask the children to lie or sit on the floor as you recite this poem. The children can do the actions to the words as you go along. When they have finished the exercise, the children might like to share some of the things they put into their cup.

Stars in the night, gather near (wiggle your fingers like twinkling stars)

Fairies fly and meet us here (join your thumbs like a butterfly and flap your hands like wings)

As we close our eyes and count to ten (close your eyes and whisper 1, 2, 3 ... up to 10)

Breathe in and out and in again (breathe in and out)

Wiggle your toes ... now make a smile (wiggle your toes)

Be very still and think a while ...

Who do you love and who loves you?

What's your favourite thing to do?

Where's the best place you've ever been?

What's the most magical thing you've seen?

Stir all these things around in your cup (pretend to stir with your hand)

And like a hot chocolate, drink them all up! (pretend to drink a hot chocolate)

Ask the children to smile or wiggle their fingers up high if they feel happier than they did before. Have they changed their own channel?

Thankful stone

Introduce a 'thank you' or 'gratitude' stone or crystal to the classroom in a special bag. Pass the gratitude stone around the class. Whoever is holding the stone should share something they are grateful or thankful for.

Feel Brave app

The Feel Brave app can be downloaded from the Apple or Google Play app stores. Just search for 'Feel Brave' and look for Wolfgang the Wolf. To learn about calming down through storytelling and games, the children can have independent information and communication technology (ICT) time listening to and playing with *The Wolf and the Baby Dragon* read-aloud story and/or playing the Feel Brave emotion game, 'Can you guess how I feel?'



Finding calm activities

Here are some ideas for 30–60 minute activities that teachers can link to their personal, social and health education objectives or school values or that can be done together at home.

Calm down box

Make a calm down box (or calm down area) for children to go to when they need to have some peaceful time out. Include things like lavender scented

play dough, mindful colouring templates (such as mandala templates or some of the wonderfully detailed colouring in picture templates which you can now find and download from the internet), some soothing music on head phones, calming books and so on.

You may also like to have some ideas or pictures on the wall of ways to calm down that you have brainstormed with the children. This means that if situations arise where a child needs to relax, you can ask them to choose a way to calm down from the wall.

Lavender scented play dough



Lavender scented play dough has such an amazing colour and the smell is divine. The children tend to relax when they play with play dough that has a lovely calming scent.

You can make this in advance for your calm down box or calm down area, or you can make it with children. This recipe involves cooking (to avoid stickiness) so careful adult supervision is required if you are doing this with the children.

You need:

2 cups of flour

1 cup of salt

1 tablespoon of cream of tartar

1 tablespoon of glycerine

2 cups of warm water

Food colouring

Lavender oil (or other calming essential oils)

Put all the dry ingredients together in a saucepan. Mix in the food colouring along with one of the cups of water and then add the second cup of water. Warm over a low to medium heat until the mixture turns play doughy (roughly 5–10 minutes), and if you put your finger into the mixture it doesn't stick. Tip the dough out onto a clean work surface, add the scented oil and then knead the dough until it is cool. Store the play dough at room temperature in an airtight container. You can add other textures to the dough (such as glitter) either while you are heating it or at the same time as the scented oil.

Note: Always supervise young children with lavender scented dough to ensure they don't put it in their mouths. Lavender oil should not be ingested.

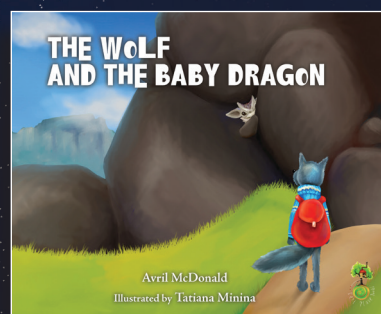
Keep a gratitude journal

Research has shown that gratitude exercises can increase our happy hormones (e.g. dopamine) and encourage us to view things more optimistically. By focusing on the positive we can improve our overall well-being. Gratitude needs to be practised, so it's a good idea to introduce this activity as a regular daily routine.

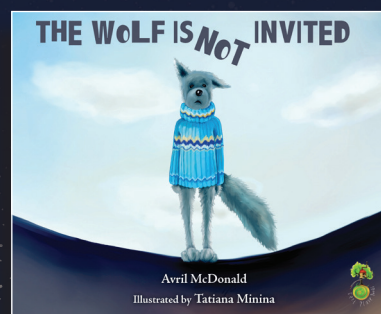
Ask the children to record something that they are grateful for each day in a gratitude journal – they can either draw it and colour it in or write it (if they are able to) and draw a picture of it. You could play relaxing music when they have their gratitude journal time.

The *Feel Brave Teaching Guide* is the perfect companion to the Feel Brave series of books, which is designed to help 4- to 7-year-olds explore emotional intelligence, positive psychology and some of the challenging feelings which they might experience in everyday life in an engaging, creative and non-threatening way. The books help children deal with anxiety, confidence issues, bullying, fears, change, loss and grief. These “little stories about big feelings” will help children develop the resilience they need to cope effectively with these important issues as they grow up.

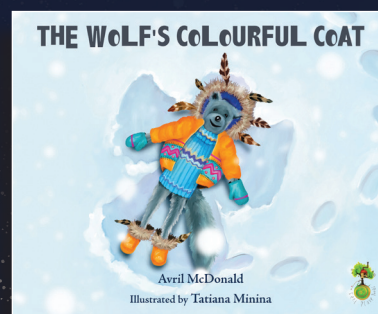
The teaching guide is split into five sections, covering the themes addressed in the individual books and provides activities and guidance on how to explore these issues in the classroom. Activities include guided visualisations, physical exercises, drama games, mindfulness exercises, craft activities and card games. The teaching guide includes the text from the five books meaning they can be read aloud in class. The illustrations from them are available to download so that they can be projected onto a screen or whiteboard.



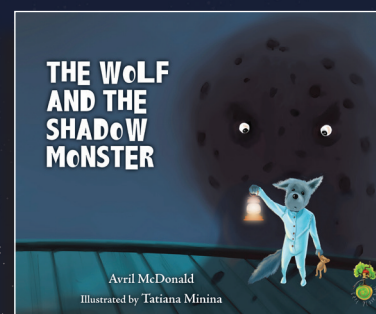
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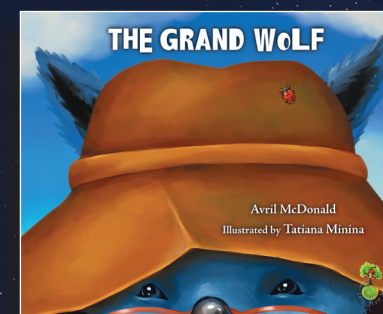
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Avril McDonald has a Diploma of Education from Wellington College of Education, New Zealand, where she trained as a primary school teacher majoring in music and dance. She has had a varied career in digital entertainment. She launched Feel Brave to help teachers and parents find solutions to help children learn to deal with their emotions and to reach their potential. www.feelbrave.com

Tatiana Minina is a Massachusetts based visual artist and illustrator. She studied art in Vladikavkaz, Russia. Her full-time artistic career started in 2010 after she relocated to the United States. Tatiana works in watercolour, acrylic, oil, ink, pencil and digital media. She specialises in illustrating children's books.

