

Ellie and Her Emotional Dragons: Ellie's First Day of School

Joseph Goodrich

Traci Van Wagoner, Illustrator

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In the educational series picture book Ellie's First Day of School, a nervous elephant calf learns to cope with emotional challenges.

In Joseph Goodrich's picture book *Ellie and her Emotional Dragons: Ellie's First Day of School*, a kindergartner deals with new emotions, all with the help of her dragon friends.

Ellie is an elephant to whom four magic dragons appear when she's feeling strong emotions and is unsure about how to cope with them. The green dragon appears when she's scared; the blue when she's sad; the red when she's mad; and the orange when she's happy. She experiences each of these emotions on her first day: when she's nervous and waiting for the school bus; when she misses her parents; when she witnesses bullying; and when she makes a new friend.

The dragons ask Ellie why she is feeling the way that she is, helping her to track emotions to their root causes and then identify how to deal with the situations. Their methods include talking to a friend to release nerves, and taking deep breaths to cool anger. At the end of her first day, Ellie has navigated her circumstances and emotions well, and she understands her emotional reactions to events better.

The book's straightforward, even progression is fabulistic. Ellie's first day results in meaningful lessons about coping with emotions that are explained in approachable terms, and her exchanges with the dragons are empathetic and gentle.

Within the book's bold, colorful illustrations, body language is used to convey Ellie's emotions, as when she pulls her coat over her head to show that she's nervous. Elsewhere, streams of paint spatter behind a flying dragon suggest the gracefulness of its movements; more paint spatter, placed with purpose around Ellie's body, conveys the wildness of her strong emotions. Attention is also paid to detailing Ellie's sweet face, other cute animal characters, and the vibrant classroom setting.

In the educational series picture book *Ellie's First Day of School*, a nervous elephant calf learns to be self-aware as she develops coping mechanisms for her strong emotions.

AIMEE JODOIN (April 23, 2021)

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