

Ellie and Her Emotional Dragons

Joseph Goodrich

Traci Van Wagoner, Illustrator

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With its beautiful and expressive art, this picture book about understanding your emotions provides lessons about positivity and awareness.

A sensitive elephant faces everyday challenges in *Ellie and Her Emotional Dragons*, Joseph Goodrich's sweet picture-book fantasy about learning to take life as it comes. Complemented by Traci Van Wagoner's imaginative, expert illustrations, the book features four friendly dragons who offer Ellie much-needed advice.

Having moved to a new home, Ellie is jumpy. The floorboards creak. The radiator hisses. Her father is leaving for work. A new friend accidentally rips her drawing. But when her father returns, the day's mishaps melt away, and Ellie enjoys an outdoor game before dinner and bedtime.

Each major point features one of the dragons. They live in Ellie's closet and are visible only to her. Each dragon is a different color: green, blue, red, or orange. The colors loosely map onto the Zones of Regulation. Caregivers, therapists, and kids who are familiar with that framework will notice that, in the book, blue similarly stands for sadness, and red represents anger, while green takes on its own meaning, and orange is a creative addition. By identifying feelings with colors, Ellie has an accessible, visual language to help her reflect.

The dragons' advice ranges from empowering—to conquer fear by saying "I am not scared of you anymore"—to practical. In a gentle nod to any parent who has ever tried to calm their child, one scene features Ellie in a yoga pose, counting breaths. That Ellie is receptive to new ideas seems ideal, but she's an atypical, willing learner.

The slice-of-life approach is comforting, though it results in unsurprising events. This is a solid concept book on emotional intelligence that fills a niche; it best serves as a teaching example. At times the writing includes unnecessary descriptions of information that is also conveyed by the book's art; the text could be leaner.

The art is excellent and elevates the book. Each dragon has its own flair, and a paint-splattered style carries throughout. The splotches lend the dragons an otherworldly magic, beautifully emphasizing how feelings color Ellie's world. The book strikes a thoughtful balance between two-page spreads and smaller scenes. Ellie herself is rendered as an adorable purple character with a wide-eyed, expressive range.

For preschoolers and early readers, Ellie's growth in the span of one day provides a lesson in self-awareness. *Ellie and Her Emotional Dragons* is a picture book that impresses that being positive is a choice that leads to thankfulness.

KAREN RIGBY (December 20, 2018)

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