

IT'S A SCARY WORLD OUT THERE:  
CRAFTING PICTURE BOOKS TO HELP ANXIETY AND FEAR

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Lions, tigers, and bears are scary; but in the eyes of a child, so is the first day of school, a dark basement, leaving mommy's side, or monsters under the bed. Fear and anxiety exist at all ages, but helping children overcome this fear can be a challenge. Anxiety may interfere with daily life causing physical symptoms such as tummy aches, relentless tears, sleeplessness, or headaches. Counselors and doctors are important mediators, but bibliotherapy can provide comfort at home.

Bibliotherapy uses books to help treat psychological disorders. In *Inside Picture Books*, Ellen Handler Spitz states, "by reading to children, by turning pages together with them, we can learn bit by bit about what they are thinking and help them to negotiate the complex cultural messages that are continuously being given to them" (208). Children are sponges that soak up the world around them, good and bad. "They trust their feelings and react to them. Children read, listen, and observe with their hearts" (Whitford Paul 14). While waiting for access to professional help, bibliotherapy can be used by parents, educators, and counselors to provide comfort and reconcile a child's emotions.

Books specifically developed for bibliotherapy include self-help workbooks such as *What to Do When You Worry too Much* or *What to do When Your Brain Gets Stuck* by Dawn Huber PhD and *Don't Pop Your Cork on Mondays* by Adolph Moser EdD. These books target anxiety and stress with an educational format that challenges the reader to change their behaviors. The books encourage self-help exercises and role-playing in a didactic format.

Andrea Lichtsinn reported on a 2010 national survey of bibliotherapy

practices amongst counselors:

They found the majority of counselors surveyed used (79%) bibliotherapy with clients. The most common formats for implementing bibliotherapy reported by participants were assigning independent reading (96%), and reading with or to clients (92%). . . . The types of books counselors reported using most often were self-help materials (87%), workbooks (77%), and informational pamphlets. Picture books and fiction were less commonly used. (7)

Picture books can be valuable bibliotherapy and even better than self-help workbooks. As Spitz writes:

A book may focus directly and pointedly on a specific emotional and/or social problem, but if it cannot tell a good story, provide visual stimulation, and engage its audience in an imaginary world it will fall by the wayside. A book that can do all of the above, on the other hand, may teach the child wonderfully rich lessons about life and death, about goodness, sadness, evil, conflict, and so on. (9)

A parent or teacher can verify that children are resistant to preaching. Approaching fear and anxiety under the veil of a great picture book story may quietly benefit an unsuspecting child. An author that understands storytelling can touch a child's emotions, empathize with their fear, and provide a character hero to conquer an issue the reader shares. Workbooks used by counselors disregard the reader's imagination and use

didactic methods that talk down to a reader rather than allow a child to become immersed in a story that may provide therapeutic benefit.

An author's primary goal is to create a story with heart instead of generating a lesson guide. As writer and professor Phyllis Root says, "We need to care about the stories we write. Passion is the wand in the narrative sails" (Root, Hamline lecture). Picture books driven by an author's desire to reach children and written with well-devised craft techniques can reach an anxious child as they read in the comfort of their own home on a loved one's lap. Golding states that reading can "help [children] to feel understood and allow them to understand their own lives better through the context of the story" (3). A picture book chosen based on a child's conflict is then read in a warm environment safe from judgment. A picture book may help them realize they are not alone in their fear and follow the protagonist on their journey toward resolution. The non-threatening environment of picture books allows children to express their emotions, and picture books are fun and relaxing.

Authors address fear and anxiety in picture books because these topics exist and can be difficult for children to reconcile. The challenge is creating a story to draw in the reader, acknowledge their fears, and show children their stress can be manageable. And do this in a story children will enjoy. A picture book author can focus on fear and anxiety through the language of story by using craft elements such as character agency, humor, direct address, role reversal, repetition/rhyme, and devices.

An author writes a story hoping to carry the reader on a journey. When the reader deals with fear or anxiety, character agency is an essential craft element in picture books to demonstrate that journey has meaning. Character agency is essential in a book to help an anxious child because it may empower change in their behavior through the example of a likable character. *Oliver Finds His Way* by Phyllis Root is a warm picture book that a reader would choose for the adorable bear on the cover and the beautiful artwork, never knowing that this picture book may have hidden therapeutic benefit. Oliver simply wants the big yellow leaf. The story begins with Oliver in his own yard with Mama and Papa and he chases a yellow leaf “down the hill, around a clumpy bush, under a twisty tree, and all the way to the edge of the woods” (4-8). These pages show beautiful full-page spreads demonstrating his joy and focused attention only on the leaf. The soft, tranquil setting created by the author and illustrator resonates with the reader as safety and home. But soon Oliver realizes he is lost.

All alone at the edge of the woods, Oliver starts to cry.

Oliver is lost

Oliver cries

and cries

and cries.

But he is still lost. (14-16)

The use of white space, line breaks, and repetition emphasize his loneliness and helplessness. We also see that despite crying — an obvious childhood reaction to the situation — it does not resolve his situation. He is still lost. This aspect may resonate with

a child as they sense Oliver's fear in the woods and crying alone will not save him, he must do something more.

Oliver starts to think and think and soon, "Oliver has an idea" (18). He roars. With each subsequent page his roar builds and repeats as does the font size of the ROAR and the size of Oliver's picture on the page. Soon, "from far away, under a tree, around a bush, and up a hill, Oliver hears Mama roaring back. Oliver hears Papa roaring back" (25). He finds his way back to the comfort of his own yard as the author repeats his route and familiar sights, and he finds his parents' welcoming arms.

Oliver finds his way home through his own agency, and despite his fear, Oliver does not give up. He finds the strength and courage within and roars. He uses his mind to stop and think and uses his voice to overcome a scary situation. He finds his way back to his parents through his own agency and provides an example to readers of how to remain calm and use their head and think in a time of fear.

Another good example of character agency is in *Give Maggie a Chance* by Frieda Wishinsky. The author brings us into the classroom on the first day of school with Maggie the cat. "She skipped all the way to her new class" (5). The cat stands tall in her perfect dress with a bow on her ear showing her confidence. The illustrations boldly carry Maggie as she volunteers to read. "Maggie's hand shot up. She was good at reading" (6). But fear sets in and her anxiety is evident in her physical symptoms.

Her heart thumped like a drum.

Her knees quivered like jelly.

Her mouth felt as dry as a desert.

Maggie opened her mouth but nothing came out.

Not a word. Not a sound.

Not even a whisper. (7)

She panics. She wants to run away and hide, but she can't. Maggie sits back down as Kimberly the bossy, sassy cat reads out loud. After class, Kimberly taunts Maggie. Another cat, Sam, comforts her. "D...D...Don't. D...Don't let Kimberly bother you" (14). Maggie tries again the next day to read and fails again while Kimberly takes over. On the third day:

Mrs. Brown called on Sam.

"It's ss...ss...ss..." stuttered Sam.

Mrs. Brown waited. "Sss...sss..."

Sam tried again.

"What's the matter with you?" snickered Kimberly, "Can't you talk?"

Maggie couldn't stand it. She glared at Kimberly.

"Give Sam a chance," said Maggie. "Sam knows the answer."

"But he can't say it," sneered Kimberly.

"Oh, yes he can," said Maggie.

"Sss...six!" said Sam, popping out of his seat. (26-27)

Maggie stands up to Kimberly and this is the turning point of the story. She goes to the board and she no longer cares what Kimberly thinks. "It was if a

magician had whisked Kimberly away” (29). Sam’s confidence and friendship gives her strength to read in front of the class. And she does.

Introducing Sam as Maggie’s friend allows the reader to see that despite Sam’s stuttering, he doesn’t hesitate to volunteer. His courage and friendship helps Maggie to succeed. When Maggie stands up for Sam, she realizes her strength and sees Kimberly for the shallow person she is. Character agency carries her to the front of the classroom to overcome her fear. Her own decisions drive the story’s plot and provide a good example of courage.

If a book does not show good character agency when a child reader is dealing with fear or anxiety, this would not provide an example for behavior change. A picture book that fails at character agency is *When No One is Watching* by Eileen Spinelli that describes a young girl with spunk and energy in the privacy of her own home but freezes and panics around others:

When no one is watching, I dance.  
I leap and I spin and I prance ‘round the room.  
I twirl with my pillow and whirl with my broom.  
When no one is watching, I dance. But . . .  
When everyone’s watching I hide.  
I hide like the cat alongside the big chair.  
I scrunch myself down and pretend I’m not there.  
When everyone’s watching I hide. (3-6)

The story demonstrates that when no one is watching she is brave, she cheers,



growls, stomps and sings. The pages are filled with images of her head held high when in the security of her own home standing tall and happy, but we see and feel her anxiety in a room full of people. She draws into herself and the images show her head and shoulders drop and she loses her power. She stares at the others in the room as if she wants to belong. The reader empathizes with her fear and wants her to be comfortable around others.

The story progresses after three repetitions of her fearful situations but then completely changes format and tone:

My best friend Loretta's shy too.

But oh we have fun when we go to the zoo.

When the animals watch, we just laugh.

We wave at the monkeys and stretch like giraffe.

We neigh at the pony and moo at the calf.

Together Loretta and I are cozy and comfy.

We are no longer shy.

We splash in the summer and read in the fall.

Together we don't care who's watching at all. (21-25)

The final image is the two little girls, back-to-back reading books ALONE in their bedroom. The previous rhythm breaks and the message falters.

A child reader may relate to the anxiety and stress of the protagonist and her social phobia as the author captures her fear and she hides from others. The previous expressions of her vibrant personality with the strong verbs are stolen by her anxiety. The

reader empathizes and jumps on board with the protagonist and feels her stress. The reader wants her to belong and be happy.

*When No One is Watching* sets up the story well but falls short with the resolution because it does not give the protagonist agency. The character's yearning to belong in a crowd is NOT resolved. The protagonist shows her vibrant potential — dancing, singing, growling — and we end with her reading quietly alone in a room with her shy friend Loretta. They seem resolved to sit quietly reading books at home. The conflict — their fear of the outside world and a crowd — is not resolved. An opportunity is lost to give the protagonist more character agency to show the world her personality and overcome her fear. The two new friends could read their books in a public park or in a group setting to show the power of their friendship to overcome their fear, rather than emphasize their isolation. This book may still provide comfort to an anxious child by showing that there are other shy children in the world and they are not alone. Using this book to help children with fear or anxiety would depend on the goal. If trying to encourage a child to reach beyond their comfort zone, this book does not encourage behavior change because it lacks agency. If needing to reassure children that their feelings are valid, then this book may provide comfort.

Authors can utilize a direct address structure to talk directly to the reader and may help approach fear and anxiety by involving the reader in the discussion. A picture book that uses direct address well is *There's a Big, Beautiful World Out There* by Nancy Carlson written on September 12, 2001 — one day after the World Trade Center bombings. She begins by talking to the reader and agrees with children “There's a lot to

be scared of, that's for sure" (3)! The wonderful illustrations show mean dogs, rollercoasters, thunderstorms, bugs, CLOWNS, and many relatable subjects that children may fear. Carlson writes it could "make you want to hide under your covers and never come out" (16).

The beautiful second half of the picture book relies on a cause and effect structure to show children the marvelous world they would miss if they stayed under their covers. Carlson suggests conquering your fears to see the world around you. "If you hide under your covers, you won't see the rainbow after the storm" (19). She takes each situation and turns it into a new adventure with appeal that a child may not realize. By spinning each scary situation into a pleasurable adventure, she challenges children to overcome their fear. This book is an excellent resource for anxious children because the story directly addresses their fear and empathizes with their stress. It involves the reader as if they are part of the story and immediately involved in the stressful situation, and then demonstrates the beauty and wondrous world around them if they are to overcome their fear. The direct address feels like the author walks in the shoes of the reader and guides them through their fear. By putting one step in front of the other, children may see *There's a Big, Beautiful World Out There*.

*You've Got Dragons* by Kathryn Cave also uses direct address to tell the tale of a young boy, Ben, plagued by dragons, because "Dragons show up when you least expect them. You turn around . . . and there they are" (3-6). The author talks to the reader in an instruction guide to help "you" with your dragon problem.

*You've Got Dragons* uses dragons as the metaphor for fear and anxiety.

Your heart thuds and your knees wobble and your hands shake and your head whirls and you feel hot and cold and you can't breathe and your tummy hurts and you can't believe it's really happening to you. But it is. It really is. You've got dragons. (7-8)

A child with anxiety can recognize the physical symptoms of anxiety to acknowledge the state of fear. The reader empathizes with Ben and feels his symptoms, and Ben directly addresses the reader as if he knows exactly what they are going through as well. "Nobody deserves dragons. YOU certainly don't. You didn't get them by being bad. All these people have dragons, and they're REALLY, REALLY good" (10). The author shows children that dragons (anxiety) exist and it's often hard to make others understand their presence. "You're worried that people won't understand. If you tried to explain, they might think you were weird. So you don't say anything" (18). Ben talks to others, screams at the dragon, but the author acknowledges the difficulty of battling dragons and sometimes "when you've got dragons, you need lots of hugs" (22).

Nancy Caves writes that dragons won't last forever, and patience and fortitude pays off.

Dragons don't stay forever. You think they will, but they won't. You ignore them and you run away from them and you hide from them and you pretend they're not dragons and you shout at them and you don't want to turn out the light and you pay attention to them and you tell them jokes and you can't think of anything else and then suddenly . . .

Hmm...something feels different. Dragons leave when you least expect

them to. You wake up and they're GONE. (28)

Ben celebrates and feels confident he will know what to do if his dragons return. The author uses direct address to connect to others plagued by anxiety (dragons). The structure serves as a manual for fighting dragons while providing an entertaining story about Ben's journey. It is not didactic because the reader empathizes with Ben's predicament and hope he defeats his dragon. *You've Got Dragons* serves as good bibliotherapy for an anxious child to recognize their fears, never give up hope, and keep fighting. An anxious reader will bond with Ben and acknowledge their similarities. Ben pulls the reader into his world with the direct address and shows others that they will survive and eventually dragons will disappear.

Humor is a craft element that many readers search for in picture books, but can also be used to alleviate fear and anxiety. Humor can allow a release from stress. *The Fun Book of Scary Stuff* by Emily Jenkins tackles a young boy's list of fears as he discusses it with his beloved pals, his two dogs. The friends joke with each other with fun quips on every page. The list of fears includes monsters, ghosts, witches and trolls.

#### GHOSTS

(Dog) What's so bad about ghosts?

(Boy) I hate the way you can see through them.

(Dog) But did you know they're scared of dogs?

(Boy) No joke?

(Dog) They're even scared of bitty pug dogs.

(Dog2) Yap! Yap! Yap! (8-9)

The dogs try to reassure the boy that they can scare ghosts away. They explain that he is scared of things that don't even exist. The boy then lists things that "definitely exist."

### BIG DOGS

I'm a big dog. You're not scared of me, are you?

I mean really big dogs. The kind that growl on the street.

I'm a big dog! I can growl.

Come on. You're a medium dog. (18-19)

The hilarious banter of the boy and his dogs holds the reader's attention while the illustrator pulls the reader into their world showing the scary subjects in the background. The story comes to its climax when they tackle his fear of the dark. The boy and his dogs go into a dark closet where "nameless evil could be lurking" (25). They all panic in the dark with the dogs barking and howling until the boy calms them down. "You guys. Calm down. It's okay" (28). He reassures his doggy pals that they are safe and turns on the light. He realizes he can be brave sometimes. The buddies forget their list and saunter off for snacks and dog biscuits.

The author chooses fear children can relate to and addresses them with humor. The author uses fun language incorporating dog sounds and witty banter to hold interest and make the reader laugh out loud. The book's hidden power is that each fear is not truly reconciled, but it is made tolerable when accompanied by friends. It may encourage children to talk about their fear and realize some fears "don't exist" when pointed out by two cute dogs. And that they can be brave sometimes too.

A picture book filled with humor can also show children there is *No Such Thing*, as written by Jackie French Koller. Children often fear the dark or monsters under their bed, and parents often reassure children that everything is fine, turn on the light, and show them nothing exists under their bed. In *No Such Thing*, Howard loves his old house with many places to explore “until it got dark” (7). Like most children, Howard fears a monster under his bed. He tells his mom, but when she comes into his room, he gets the response of most mothers, “You know there is no such thing as monsters. Now, be a good boy and go to sleep” (9). The interesting twist to this story is that under Howard’s bed, Monster’s mommy is kissing him goodnight. Monster says; “I think there’s a boy on top of my bed” (10). Of course, Monster’s mommy reassures him there is no such thing. The author uses this interesting twist of humor to introduce an actual monster under the bed, but the reader immediately empathizes with Monster because he shares the same fear as the child and is also disregarded by his parent.

Howard hears the Monster “snurkle”, the Monster hears the boy sneeze. They each call to their mothers only to be told there is no such thing. The author shows the boy with a teddy bear and the monster with his pet tarantula. Similar security animals also bond Monster and Howard and would also be a relatable action to a child reader. The boy and Monster hear each other cry and peek over the bed and see each other. When Monster sees the boy’s scared face and the boy sees the Monster’s sad face they talk:

“Were you crying?” Monster asked.

“Yes,” said Howard. “Were you whimpering?”

“Yes,” said Monster.

“Why?” asked Howard.

“Because I’m scared of you, said Monster. Boys eat little monsters.”

“Eat little monsters!” Howard tumbled back on his bed and laughed. He laughed and laughed. “Where did you get a silly idea like that?” he asked. “Boys don’t eat monsters!”

“They don’t?” asked Monster.

“Of course not,” said Howard. Then he stopped laughing. “But monsters eat boys. Are you going to eat me?”

Monster started to sniggle. He sniggled so hard that he rolled back on the floor and kicked his feet in the air.

“Monsters eat boys!” he cried. “That’s the funniest thing I ever heard. Where did you get such a crazy idea? Did your mommy tell you that?”

“No,” said Howard. “My mommy says there are no such things as monsters.” (28-30)

This passage allows Howard and Monster to realize they are both justified in their worries about something under/over the bed, but it is not scary. The story acknowledges a child’s fear with humor and adds a new twist with a friendly, relatable monster. It shows a likeable childlike Monster with similar fears. The child reader can empathize with Monster and would not fear him if he truly lived under his or her bed. The story ends with Howard and Monster teaching their parents a small lesson as they swap places in bed and yell, “Mommy, come quick” (32)! one last time. The realistic setting of the child’s bedroom helps children relate to the character and the common parent-child bedtime conflict and the language resonates with the reader. The structure of the story ending with the children pranking their parents leaves the reader laughing as we imagine the parent’s surprise. The picture book takes a common fear and uses humor to



demonstrate to the reader how a child conquered his nighttime worries.

Role reversal is a craft technique also used in writing picture books to address fear and anxiety, and role reversal can be fun for children to read over and over. “When characters act contrary to our expectations, it can surprise us – and often make us laugh. We feel like we’ve been tricked, but in a good way” (Ashman chapter 8). Julie Dannenberg uses the fear of the first day of school and spins a unique tale in *First Day Jitters*. Sarah does not want to get out of bed as Mr. Hartwell says; “You don’t want to miss the first day at your new school do you” (3)? Sarah crawls under the covers and mutters she hates school. The reader sees a mass of blankets and messy hair buried under the covers, but Sarah is not given a face. The reader hears Sarah voice her fear of not knowing anybody at school, and the illustrations show a classroom of staring strange children. These notions mirror a scared child’s feelings going to a new school. Sarah’s head hurts and her hands are clammy. “She couldn’t breathe” (10). The reader sees the scene through Sarah’s eyes as she walks into the crowded school with eyes glued to her and feels her fear. The surprise ending of the book is seeing Sarah for the first time “Class I would like you to meet...your new teacher, Mrs. Sarah Jane Hartwell” (32).

The unexpected ending of *First Day Jitters* takes a child’s typical fears and symptoms on the first day of a new school and suddenly shifts the dynamics to the teacher. The author flips the typical and expected story into a fun and surprising ending. The characterization of the anxious protagonist makes the reader empathize with her fear. But realizing Sarah is a teacher may help an anxious child realize they are not alone in their fears and even adults worry! The child may bond with a new teacher at school with

similar anxieties or simply see that teachers are human and not scary. The role reversal provides a fun story with humor to grab the reader and want to read it again.

As demonstrated earlier, *No Such Thing* also uses an aspect of role reversal. The monster under the bed acts contrary to our expectations and is a sweet, empathetic creature. The unexpected twist of a monster fearful of the little boy lying on top of the bed provides humor and spins a unique tale. By using this role reversal technique, the monster is less scary and may alleviate children's fear of bedtime.

Repetition and rhyme are often used in picture books, but can also demonstrate effectiveness in combatting fear and anxiety. *Oliver Finds His Way* uses repetition as well as character agency demonstrated earlier. When Oliver's crying doesn't work, he has no other option than to figure it out on his own. He roars, roars, and ROARS. The repetition and the building font on each page of Oliver's roar demonstrates that despite being the cute, cuddly baby-figure of the story, he has the power to save himself by finding the ROAR hidden within. His persistence is shown in the repetition and emphasizes that this is an important quality that leads to his rescue. The structure of the book also demonstrates a circular form that provides a feeling of completion and comfort. Oliver starts the book chasing his yellow leaf into the woods, but also ends repeating "with tumble-down hugs . . . and a big yellow leaf just for Oliver" (Root 30-32).

*There's a Big Beautiful World Out There* also uses repetition to emphasize her message. Nancy Carlson takes each fearful situation including bugs, storms, rollercoasters, and clowns and repeats the same situation from a different perspective. She demonstrates that not everything is scary, and the illustrations and text spin the

situations into a fun adventure.

Authors can also use lists as craft devices to attract readers and to address fear and anxiety. A device can expand the point of view and provide insight into a character's personality. *Scaredy Squirrel* by Melanie Watt effectively uses lists as a device as she introduces us to a likeable character fearful of the world around him. "He'd rather stay in his safe and familiar tree than risk venturing out into the unknown" (5). An entire page list of Scaredy Squirrel's fears with associated illustrations emphasizes that he is afraid of killer bees, tarantulas, poison ivy, germs, sharks, and green Martians. Scaredy lists the advantages of never leaving the tree, emphasizing his safety and his great view. Many pages are dedicated to listing the disadvantages of Scaredy Squirrel never leaving his tree because "every day is the same and everything is predictable" (15). She uses illustrations to show the monotony of his sheltered life in the tree. His isolated setting and daily routine is key to the story.

When a killer bee approaches his tree, Scaredy Squirrel unexpectedly leaps out of the tree without his emergency kit. "This was NOT part of the plan" (27). But as Scaredy Squirrel glides through the air, he discovers he is a flying squirrel. "He feels overjoyed! Adventurous! Carefree! Alive" (31)! Scaredy Squirrel takes the initiative (though inadvertently) to change his environment, and he discovers excitement while also realizing nothing scary happens to him in the unknown. He changes his daily routine to include a jump into the unknown every day.

The author uses lists as a device multiple times in this book to show Scaredy Squirrel's fears, the advantages and disadvantages of leaving the tree, the contents of his

emergency kit, and his daily routine. The lists give the reader insight into the ordered and anxious mind of Scaredy Squirrel. A powerful image in the end is seeing the image of his daily list change to include “9:37 a.m. jump into the unknown, 9:45 a.m. play dead, 11:45 a.m. return home” (30). By seeing the list of his daily routine, we see Scaredy has overcome his fear and adventures outside his comfort zone now daily. The lists alone tell of Scaredy Squirrel’s journey from his lists of fears, the first aid kit, his daily routine, and then now a list of a new routine to show his growth and change. The devices demonstrate his agency and ability to change.

*You’ve Got Dragons* uses list as a device to help the protagonist, Ben, overcome his fear. The author uses a list for “BEN’S TOP TIPS FOR WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU’VE GOT DRAGONS” (Cave 25). Ben reconciles fears by giving advice about battling your dragons. The author also includes an advice column written by Ben as a device:

*Dear Ben,*

*I have been trying to hide from my dragons for forty-three years, eight months, and four days. Can you recommend a foolproof hiding space?*

*Hopefully,*

*Dad*

Dear Dad,

Try under the stairs. It’s more comfy than under the bed. (I always wondered what you were doing there.)

Your loving son,

Ben

P.S. Say “Hi” to your dragons when they find you. They will. (23)

Ben’s advice column acknowledges his dragon plague and he decides to help others with his knowledge. The letter from his dad also demonstrates to a child reader that anxiety and fear is not only a childhood issue. Dragons find adults too – a notion echoed in *First Day Jitters* when we find out Sarah is the teacher.

Anxiety can be pervasive in children and interfere with daily growth and normal interactions. Picture books are more useful than didactic workbooks or textbooks to help children adjust to a scary world because a child is more invested when story is involved. In the picture books examined, issues such as the first day of school, generalized anxiety, and monsters under the bed are issues that children can relate to and can trigger worry. Authors approach issues of anxiety and fear through well-crafted stories that hold the attention of children. Picture books encourage children to use their imagination while they follow likable characters through potentially stressful situations real to life. Picture books work because they provide a safe and appealing space for children and can soothe stress. By emphasizing character agency picture books encourage behavior change when faced with a relatable situation. Picture books are one tool that parents and psychologists can use for an anxious child to validate their fear and provide possible resolutions.

Writers use many craft elements to stimulate the imagination and address fear and anxiety in unique ways. By writing a story first and a lesson second, authors ensure there is heart in their work. Children receive guidance by teachers all day and parents all night, but a picture book is a chance for a child to learn and grow while they escape into the

pages. Writing stories with heart, but also one that carries the reader on a journey of enlightenment or empowerment would be the goal of a book used for bibliotherapy to relieve anxiety. Using humor, direct address, role reversal, character agency, repetition/rhyme, and devices authors can grasp the reader's attention while also addressing fear or anxiety under the guise of a great story.

Reading a picture book may bring forth emotions difficult for a child to navigate, and discussion helps process their feelings in productive manner. Bibliotherapy can be used at home by parents to address minor issues such as monsters under the bed or fear of school, but the recommendation is to use bibliotherapy in conjunction with counseling when deeper issues such as death, bullying, and anger become problematic.

A child's nature is to inquire and reading raises questions. Discussing these difficult topics with your child as they arise can alleviate anxiety and stress that may not be obvious. "Through the imaginative process that reading involves, children have the opportunity to do what they often cannot do in real life—become thoroughly involved in the inner lives of others, better understand them, and eventually become more aware of themselves" (Shechtman 39). Parents have the option to help their own children alleviate stress and anxiety while bonding over a book.

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## **Appendix**

Some excellent resources for bibliotherapy booklists grouped by specific topics such as anxiety, death, anger, fear, etc:

<http://clearlakechildrenscenter.com/resources/bibliotherapy/#.ViuOx4SZbdI>

<http://www.best-childrens-books.com/bibliotherapy.html>

<http://www.carnegielibrary.org/research/parentseducators/parents/bibliotherapy/>

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