A SERIES ABOUT EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR BOYS

There are scores of books and series that talk about the emotional life of girls, that allow girls to explore how they feel about friends, family, school, boys, life, but very few for boys.

Yet, while boys also worry about friends, school and family, they’ll find it a lot easier to find a book on defending themselves against marauding dinosaurs than the sting of a friend’s rejection or the fear of not fitting in.

And so, the idea of a reflected reality series for young boys began to percolate in my mind.

Telling the everyday tales of the ‘every boys’ that make up the Year 5 class of Monvale Primary School, they are great stories by some of Australia’s best writers for young people about the stuff that happens to boys and their mates – and how they feel about it.

Kindlon and Thompson in Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys (Ballantyne Books, 1999) believe

‘[A] boy must see and believe that emotions belong in the life of a man. If we teach our sons to honour and value their emotional lives, if we can give boys an emotional vocabulary and the encouragement to use it, they will unclench their hearts.’

Stuff Happens is our contribution to that unclenching of boys’ hearts. We also think it is a series young boys will love. Because it’s about them. And their stuff. And that matters.

Susannah McFarlane (series editor)
EXCLUSIVE LOOK INSIDE DALE
BY ADRIAN BECK

Press-studs are evil. You know those plastic-button-type things on clothes that are meant to click together? But they don’t. I once had a pair of pants with an unreliable press-stud fly. And I also had fluoro-green undies. That combo led to a number of embarrassing moments, including an incident that got me banned from the Monvale milk bar. And I miss their blue heaven milkshakes like crazy. What the ‘blue heaven’ flavour is made of exactly I’m not quite sure, but it totally lives up to its name.

Well, it seemed press-studs weren’t done with me yet. In fact they were driving me crazy. I was in Monvale Primary’s new hall. Backstage. It was dark and I was surrounded by curtains, ropes and props. (Yes, props with an O. Not preps with an E. Props are objects used in drama. Preps are just crybabies with runny noses.) I knew about props because the school play was only a day away and we’d been learning heaps of stuff about the theatre.

I was super pumped about the play, even though I didn’t actually have a speaking part. Ever since I tried acting in a video for a school project with Monica and Ethan, I’d been hooked on the idea of performing. Whenever I talked about it with my grandma she’d say, ‘You’ve caught the bug.’ Which was weird because I haven’t had a cold in ages.

But I’d definitely have one soon if I didn’t get this costume on. I’d spent a little too long helping Michael get into his alligator outfit and now I was struggling to get changed myself. I was still in the boys’ changing area, while most of my cast mates were already gathered on the stage for another one of Mr Johnson’s pep talks.

Since Mr J became the play’s writer-director, detentions have gone through the roof. I felt a little sorry for him. He seemed stressed out to the max. I definitely didn’t want to get on his bad side, but I was all thumbs that morning.

‘Everyone to the stage, now, please!’ called Mr Johnson. ‘This is our one and only dress rehearsal. Let’s make it count!’

‘Come on! Come on!’ I yelled at the un-clicking press-studs that lined the front of my monkey costume. That’s right: monkey costume. Mr Johnson’s musical is titled The Schoolyard Jungle and I was playing the role of a monkey. Actually, Monkey #2. Look, it’s better than Lennie, Boaz and Sophie. They played a tree, a boulder and a stop sign . . . And no, I’m not sure what a stop sign was doing in a jungle either.

I kinda wished I’d been cast as a cow. Cows are awesome.
I told you I’m a loser. And now I’ve told you I’m not that crazy about talking out loud in class. And I’ve told you about my dad. Okay, it’s not that bad. For a boy who can’t kick a football and who has three sisters and a budgerigar I’m not totally lost. At my school, people do the L on the head thing, and call me Fatto and laugh when I try to run, but it’s not that bad. It sounds worse than it is. We all do it. Owen, who’s twice as tall as all of us, gets teased about it: ‘Hey – is it raining up there?’ The redheads are all rangas, the ones with glasses are four eyes – it’s just how it is. The worst thing is when parents and teachers catch anyone. Suddenly it’s this big thing and everyone has to worry about it. And we all feel like we’re really bad for doing it. Chelsea Seagram-Welsh, the rangiest of the rangas, said she didn’t really feel bad about being called ranga, until Fergus McNulty got into trouble. She didn’t even know it was a bad thing. She thought ranga was just a nice name for someone with red hair. But no, Fergus’s parents got brought in and then we all had to sit and have a lecture about how we might think it’s funny and no big deal but it can really hurt people to call them names.

I don’t know how you explain to teachers that we get all that, but that’s not what we’re doing.

Like I said, Owen is a giant and I call him the Stretchman like everyone else and I still sit next to him in the library.

And it’s not like I don’t have friends.

Because if Dan and his gang are getting picked for everything and winning all the sports then that leaves a lot of us who aren’t getting picked and winning things. So, yeah, I have friends. And we have fun. And we laugh. And we do stupid stuff.

Last weekend was Samuel’s tenth birthday. Laser tag. Awesome. We were in there at the same time as these old guys. And we totally blasted them. We knew where to hide, we knew when they were coming. It was easy as. They had no idea.

Then we went back to his house for a sleepover and a Lord of the Rings marathon. Harry says he watched all three. Maybe he did.

I was asleep. Last thing I remember was lots of orcs.

So I have a good time at school. I have friends and I like the teachers, pretty much. There’s just this one little thing. I can’t talk in front of everyone. I can talk to my friends. I can talk at recess. I can talk to my friends in class. I can talk to a teacher if everyone else is talking. But if a teacher asks me to talk and everyone’s quiet I go really weird. Can’t do it.
ACTIVITIES FOR DALE:

#1:
Pick one of the following characters from the book: Dale, Boaz, Dan.
Make a list of the page numbers whenever they feel:
- Happy
- Embarrassed
- Nervous
- Excited
What makes them feel each of these things?
What makes them change how they’re feeling?
Talk about your findings in groups, thinking about how each of the characters influences the way the others feel and act.

#2:
Draw three faces with different emotions and write a story with a character who goes through all of these emotions.

ACTIVITIES FOR LUKE:

#1:
Luke has a fear of speaking in front of a lot of people.
Who does Luke talk to about his fear of public speaking?
How do they help him?
When you need help with something, who do you ask?

#2:
There are many different kinds of fear mentioned in the book. Make a list of all the fears and their meanings.

#3:
Write a short story about a time you felt afraid. What were you afraid of? What did you do to feel better? Was there someone who helped you? Answer these questions to help you tell your story.

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