

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) from Edutopia Magazine

11 Picture Books to Help Young Students Manage Their Worries

These engaging books and guided questions can help young learners manage back-to-school anxiety, as well as worries in general.

By [Kristin Rydholm](#)

August 15, 2022

The night before the first day of school was always a nightmare for me. I got very little sleep, consumed with worries about the following day. As a student, I was filled with equal parts excitement and general anxiety. As a teacher, I was excited, but I was now keenly aware of what I was anxious about: I was worried about children and their parents/caregivers worrying. (And oversleeping, of course.)

Worrying typically manifests itself as an internal monologue of what-ifs. For a young student, some back-to-school what-ifs might include these:

- What if I don't make friends?
- What if school is too hard?
- What if I do something wrong?

One way for teachers to facilitate a classroom social and emotional learning (SEL) discussion about beginning-of-school worries is to embed the conversation into a scheduled classroom read-aloud time (see the sample questions below). The first three titles in the book list specifically address first-day-of-school worries. These books are also excellent summer-reading suggestions for the weeks before school begins. Students benefit from repeated readings of any book, and most children would feel great relief hearing a familiar story in a new setting.

It's essential to revisit the theme of worrying throughout the school year, as young children confront new challenges and struggle with their confidence and abilities. The eight additional picture books feature characters consumed with what-ifs, and each book offers unique strategies for proactively addressing worrying.

General guided reading questions:

- What is the main character worried about?
- How do you know that the main character is worried? What do they do or say?
- Who helps the main character feel better?
- What does the main character do to try to feel better?

General discussion prompts:

- Have you ever felt worried about something at school?
- How did it make your body feel? Your mind?
- Who can you talk with when you feel worried?
- Can you think of something you could *do* to feel better when you feel worried?

BACK-TO-SCHOOL BOOKS

[*Mae's First Day of School*](#), by Kate Berube. It's Mae's first day of school, and she is absolutely not going. To emphasize the point, she climbs a tree right outside the school. Mae is soon joined by two others resolved not to go. The three tree dwellers discuss their first-day concerns and ultimately decide to give school a try. Spoiler alert: One tree climber is the teacher. (Preschool–grade 2)

[*Lena's Shoes Are Nervous: A First-Day-of-School Dilemma*](#), by Keith Calabrese, illustrated by Juana Medina. Lena is more than ready for her first day of kindergarten; her shoes are most certainly not. Lena's shoes are so nervous that she calls in her dad for support. Together they troubleshoot the situation until both Lena and her shoes are ready to seize the day. (Preschool–grade 3)

[*Wemberly Worried*](#), by Kevin Henkes. Wemberly worries every day, all day long. She worries about things that could happen as well as things that probably will never happen. The first day of school brings a fresh crop of worries, but a savvy teacher helps Wemberly find a friend. Wemberly discovers that having a good friend goes a long way toward keeping worries at bay. (Preschool–grade 3)

GENERAL PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT WORRYING

[*Don't Worry, Little Crab*](#), by Chris Haughton. Little Crab and Very Big Crab leave their tidepool home for a trip to the sea. Giant waves crash over them as they arrive at the ocean, and Little Crab has second thoughts about this endeavor. Supportive Very Big Crab encourages Little Crab, and soon Little Crab finds that life on the ocean floor is beyond wonderful. You can watch [Chris Haughton read *Don't Worry, Little Crab*](#). (Preschool–kindergarten)

[*The Worrysaurus*](#), by Rachel Bright, illustrated by Chris Chatterton. One summer day, Worrysaurus plans to have a picnic in the woods. A lizard alerts him to possible rain in the forecast, which makes Worrysaurus worry. Worrysaurus remembers his mother's comforting words, and he looks through his "happy things" tin and soon begins to feel

much more hopeful. He and the lizard ultimately enjoy a rain-free picnic. You can watch [Rachel Bright read *The Worrysaurus*](#). (Preschool–kindergarten)

[The Don't Worry Book](#), by Todd Parr. Todd Parr suggests that “worrying happens when you think too much about a problem or feel afraid that something bad is going to happen.” Parr identifies common worries that children (and some adults) have and proposes practical strategies for managing anxious feelings. You can watch [Todd Parr read *The Don't Worry Book*](#). (Preschool–grade 1)

[Jeremy Worried About the Wind](#), by Pamela Butchart, illustrated by Kate Hindley. Jeremy worries about everything, from the probable to the unlikely to the absolutely preposterous. What Jeremy is truly terrified of is the wind. One windy day he chases after his new friend Maggie and is blown away. Jeremy soon discovers that unpredictable events can also evolve into excellent adventures. (Preschool–grade 2)

[What If, Pig?](#) by Linzie Hunter. Pig is a kind and thoughtful friend. He decides to host a party and invites all of his friends but quickly becomes overwhelmed as he considers all of the potential party disasters. Pig's best friend, Mouse, takes him for a walk, and while they're gone, Pig's friends prepare a welcome-back surprise party for Pig. (Preschool–grade 2)

[Worries Are Not Forever](#), by Elizabeth Verdick, illustrated by Marieka Heinlen. This book in the *Best Behavior* series explains to children what worries might feel like and offers practical strategies for managing anxious thoughts. (Preschool–grade 2)

[Don't Worry, Murray](#), by David Ezra Stein. Murray the dog worries. With each turn of the page, Murray's owner suggests fun activities, but each activity also brings fresh concerns and misadventures. After a long day, Murray's owner praises Murray for trying so many new things and for being so brave. (Preschool–grade 3)

[My New Friend Is So Fun](#), by Mo Willems. Gerald's best friend is Piggie. Snake's best friend is Brian Bat. Gerald and Snake are initially pleased when Piggie and Brian Bat first meet and enjoy each other's company. However, soon they work themselves into a frenzy worrying that their friends might have too much fun without them. (Kindergarten–grade 3)