

Build SEL Concepts with Literature



Students who have demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional learning (SEL) skills show positive short- and long-term outcomes, including increased social and emotional competence and a significantly improved school climate. Books are an excellent tool for identifying SEL elements and connecting them with students' lives in a concrete way. Here are some ideas for supporting these skills through literature.

..... HOW

Choose good books.



- Books with rich characterization and an engaging storyline provide openings for meaningful conversations.
- Picture books work for any grade level with images that evoke feelings and brief text that leaves room for reader interpretation.
- Biographies, how-to books, and histories show real-world examples of perseverance, struggle, and change.

Help students see themselves in the protagonist.



- Not every character will be just like you, but you can still find a way to relate to every character.
- Characters do not just have one personality trait, just as we do not.
- Use SEL words (concerned, proud, hopeful) to identify the character's feelings and connect to students' lives.

Identify plot elements.



- Trace the character's journey together.
- Identify the story's central conflict and notice how characters respond to frustrations.
- Recognize what the character did to persevere.
- Discuss the climax of the story, where an important decision was made.
- Identify the outcome of the decision and evaluate the choices the character made.

..... WHY

Practice self-management.



- By tracing a character's journey through a book, you teach students that facing conflict is a process.
- Recognizing that conflict resolution is a process will prepare students to face and make decisions, evaluate what went well and what didn't, and move forward.
- Knowing how to end a conflict and create a new beginning is a skill students will use throughout their lives.
- Not all books result in tangible accomplishments, and that's OK.

Build empathy.



- Sharing culturally diverse literature ensures that all students see themselves reflected in books and travel beyond their world and experiences.
- Conversations about our similarities and differences occur naturally while reading, not as part of a more isolated discussion of diversity.
- When students feel invested in a character's journey, they will more closely identify with the build-up to the resolution and the resulting closure.

Help students find their voices.



- Literacy is not just reading but taking action as a result of what's read.
- After reading books with similar themes, students can use what they've learned and create content to share with others in the school community.
- Discussing a book is an opening to teach the basics of "argument" – developing a position, then considering the opposing viewpoint.
- With structure and support, students can learn that positive communication results in positive outcomes.

View book lists built around the CASEL framework, featuring character education, mindfulness, and more. **Start here.**



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