



## **Social Emotional Learning Through Film**

Curriculum Unit 22.01.03, published September 2022

by Carol Boynton

I teach in a self-contained classroom at Edgewood Magnet School in New Haven. I find the neighborhood/magnet setting a rewarding environment, with students coming to school each day from a variety of home circumstances and with differences in academic levels. As a result of these variables, the children have differing levels of background knowledge and life experiences. The classroom is a mixture of varied ethnicities, economic strata, and social and emotional strengths and weaknesses. Collaboration allows all students at all levels to learn in an inherently differentiated environment, learning new concepts and experiences through hands-on practices. Throughout the school year, the Kindergarten curriculum centers heavily on social development, which is certainly appropriate for five- and six-year-old children. Our school mission and vision statements focus on equity and inclusion, acknowledging and including everyone in our learning environment. This unit will be in direct alignment with my responsibility to design curricula that help our students learn social and community responsibility.

This six- to eight-week unit focuses on Social Emotional Learning, as students learn to identify and discuss the feelings and emotions of the characters in the various films they will view. Noticing their own emotions is a task students perform each morning - locating their emotions on a mood meter and thinking about how their feelings and emotions might change throughout the day and similarly how the characters in the books we read may also experience a variety of emotions. This unit will use the same approach: learning to recognize characters' feelings and how they change throughout a movie.

What do I hope to accomplish in bringing these films to my students? What do my students gain from viewing the selected films and how will they learn to analyze the emotions the characters experience? What strategies make the most sense for this unit and age group (primary students)? How will we build appropriate vocabulary and language to discuss the films? How do the characters' experiences help the children discuss their own emotions and feelings?

This unit will address two areas of focus: one Common Core State Standard (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) and the second, a Social Emotional Learning Target centered on Social Awareness. The goal for the standard CCSS.RL.K.7 is for students, "with prompting and support, to describe the relationship between images and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an image depicts)."<sup>1</sup> This particular Common Core standard translates easily from written text to visual literacy. Students build the understanding of the story and the vocabulary necessary to discuss the connection between the pictures and the text. As stated earlier, for this unit, students will use the same strategy to connect the images in the films to the

emotions they notice, recognize, and can name.

The second focus is Social Emotional Learning with the students working on the statement: I can understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.<sup>2</sup>

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of each day in the classroom and, indeed throughout the entire school setting. SEL provides all students the opportunity to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, recognize and manage emotions, feel and show empathy for others, build relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. This starts with the youngest learners, as they learn to express themselves and their feelings and identify those same emotions in others around them.

## Content

---

### Recognizing Emotions

The ability to read emotions from faces is an important skill to help us communicate. Basic emotions are associated with recognizable facial expressions and tend to happen automatically. As the title of his 1872 book, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, Charles Darwin was the first to suggest that emotion-induced facial expressions are universal. This suggestion was a centerpiece idea to his theory of evolution, implying that emotions and their expressions were biological and adaptive.<sup>3</sup> In fact, researchers have observed emotions in animals for several years, suggesting that they're also pivotal to survival in other species. Basic emotions are likely to have played a role in our survival throughout human evolution, signaling to those around us to react accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1970s, noted emotional psychologist Paul Ekman identified six basic emotions that could be interpreted through facial expressions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust.<sup>5</sup> Ekman is an American psychologist and professor emeritus at the University of California, San Francisco, and a pioneer in the study of emotions and their relation to facial expressions. He began his research in 1957, through fellowships, grants, and awards from the National Institute of Mental Health and focused his work over the next forty years on non-verbal communication, which include the study of facial expression, and emotions. While at UCSF, Ekman published many influential books, and in 2001, he teamed up with actor John Cleese for the BBC four-part documentary series *The Human Face*, which examines the science behind facial beauty, expression, and fame.<sup>6</sup>

### Social Emotional Learning

“Schools are social places, and learning is a social process.” Even the youngest students learn alongside and in collaboration with teachers and peers and must manage and understand their emotions to help with their learning. At school, a child's abilities to understand emotions of self and others, regulate emotion, attention, and behavior, make good decisions during social problems, express healthy emotions, and engage in a range of age-appropriate behaviors. It all works together to support a successful school experience. But SEL success may not be easy for children just entering pre-academic and academic settings because preschool and

kindergarten contexts are taxing for them to navigate— they are often required to sit still, attend, follow directions, and approach and enter group play, all of which may challenge their nascent abilities.<sup>7</sup>

This aspect of SEL includes the ability to take on others' perspectives, understand and empathize with their feelings, and appreciate others' similarities and differences from us. Children constantly attempt to understand their own and others' behaviors. The inability to interpret emotions can make the classroom a confusing, overwhelming place. Young children's emotion knowledge contributes to their overall social success.<sup>8</sup>

The State of Connecticut agrees with this view and states on its website that social-emotional development contributes to academic and career success by helping students understand and respect themselves and others, acquire effective interpersonal skills, understand safety and resilience skills, and develop into contributing members of society. Improving student academic and behavior outcomes requires ensuring all students have access to the most effective instructional, and behavioral practices and interventions. Schools need to create an environment ensuring that all students feel emotionally and physically safe.<sup>9</sup>

The integration of SEL is a vital component in K-12 education and it contributes to whole-child success. Connecticut officially defines SEL as “the process through which children and adults achieve emotional intelligence through the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.”<sup>10</sup>

As noted, our district follows the *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL), which has identified five core and interrelated competencies that comprise social and emotional learning.<sup>11</sup>

Self-awareness - The ability to accurately recognize one’s feelings and thoughts and their influence on behaviors (e.g., accurately assessing one’s strengths and limitations, possessing a growth mindset, a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy, and optimism).

Self-management - The ability to regulate emotions, cognitions, and behaviors to set and achieve personal and educational goals (e.g., delaying gratification, managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating one’s self, persevering in addressing challenges).

Social awareness - The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community supports.

Relationship skills - The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups (e.g., communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, seeking help when needed).

Responsible decision making—The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior, social interactions, and school based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.

These competencies contribute to better adjustment and school performance, including more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores. They are critical to academic success and positive adjustment in school and adult employment.<sup>12</sup>

This unit targets the core competencies of self-awareness and social awareness, as students learn from films

and film clips to name the emotions they experience themselves and that others are feeling.

## Children and Cinema

“Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate them; their vision is at any moment much richer, their apprehension even constantly stronger, than their prompt, their at all producible, vocabulary.”<sup>13</sup> This Henry James quote describes perfectly my goal - to provide a vocabulary for my students to translate their perceptions. The child pictures, and the sub-genre of the ‘child facial,’ are described by Lebeau as the “cinematic novelty of looking at the face: up close, enlarged, in motion.” This up-close look at the face gives the viewer (my students, in this case) a simple and focused example of expression and emotion. In the 1905 marketing of *Cry Baby*,

The expression on his little round face shows he is expecting something very good to eat. When he finds out he is not going to get it, his expression quickly changes from disappointment to grief. As he cries, he rubs his eyes with his chubby hands and the big tears roll down his cheeks. Very realistic.<sup>14</sup>

In films with children, the young actors and actresses must, of course, show emotion and have facial expressions that show that emotion. In *Ponette*, the young actress, Victoire Thivisol, is acting. She is pretending to have the feelings and emotions that we see her have. Alternatively, the boy who cries in *Where is the Friend's House?* when his homework is torn up is crying because the filmmaker tore up an actual picture from his mother that had great value to him. This raises the question of authenticity and of pretending as we watch a range of emotions from an actor. Students will practice this skill of pretending (or acting) while they consider how difficult it might be to generate a facial expression without experiencing the connecting emotion.

## Film Synopses

This unit includes a variety of real-life movies for which short clips are useful to highlight the faces of young children as they display expressions and emotions. *Ten Minutes Older* is a short video from 1978 by Herz Frank that shows toddlers and preschoolers appearing before the camera. They are all watching a puppet show that we do not see. All we see are the concentrated expressions of the little children. *Ponette* is a 1996 French film by Jacques Diollon that follows a four-year-old girl who is coming to terms with her mother's death. *Where is the Friend's House?* is a 1987 Abbas Kiarostami film from Iran in which eight-year-old Ahmed has mistakenly taken his friend Mohammad's notebook. He wants to return it, or else his friend will be expelled from school. A conscientious boy, he sets out to find Mohammad's home in the neighboring village.

Aamir Khan and Amole Gupte's film *Like Stars on Earth* is set in India. It follows an eight-year-old boy who is thought to be a lazy troublemaker until the new art teacher has the patience and compassion to discover the real problem behind his struggles in school. *To Be and to Have* is a documentary portrait of a one-room school in rural France, where the students from ages 4 to 11, are educated by a single dedicated teacher. This Nicolas Philibert film runs for one hour and forty-four minutes and, although not rated in the United States, would be appropriate to show in total to primary-level students. *Not One Less* is a 1999 film by Chinese director Zhang Yimou. The film centers on a 13-year-old substitute teacher, Wei Minzhi, in the Chinese countryside. Wei is told by the village teacher not to lose any students. When one of the boys takes off in search of work in the big city, she goes looking for him.

The use of film clips from these selections provides a window into each movie without necessarily knowing its whole story or message. They allow the focus to be on one moment, one image to analyze. Using this method

of viewing just a few frames can isolate a specific facial expression for close examination. There are many movies with children and childhood at the center but may not always be suitable for the age group in front of us as we teach. This is exactly where film clips can serve the need of showing emotions through facial expressions. It seems important to acknowledge that movies have ratings to ensure that viewers are of the appropriate age.

The choice to use two animated films in this unit is connected to the age of the students. The films align with the objectives and goals of the lessons and can be shown in my classroom, based on viewer ratings, thus parental and administrative approval. The animated movies selected, *Inside Out* and *Shrek*, show the characters with subtle facial expressions, as well as in very exaggerated forms. It will be important to highlight these differences as children learn the nuance of reading emotions.

### ***Inside Out***

*Inside Out* is a 2015 American computer-animated film directed by Pete Docter from a screenplay he co-wrote with Meg LeFauve and Josh Cooley and stars the voices of Amy Poehler, Phyllis Smith, Richard Kind, Bill Hader, Lewis Black, Mindy Kaling, Kaitlyn Dias, Diane Lane, and Kyle MacLachlan. The film follows five personified emotions: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Anger, and Disgust. Inside the mind, they lead a young girl named Riley through life as she and her parents adjust to their new surroundings after moving from Minnesota to San Francisco. Docter conceived *Inside Out* in late 2009 after noticing changes in his daughter's personality as she grew older. During production, the filmmakers consulted psychologists and neuroscientists to ensure accuracy in their portrayal of the mind. *Inside Out* debuted in competition at the 68th Cannes Film Festival on May 18, 2015. It received positive reviews for its craftsmanship, screenplay, subject matter, plot, and vocal performances. The film was nominated for two Academy Awards, winning Best Animated Feature.<sup>15</sup>

A young girl named Riley Andersen is born in Minnesota. In her mind, which is commonly referred to as "Headquarters," five personified emotions are created over time: Joy, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, and Anger, each one being introduced in this specific order. The emotions (characters) are charged with reacting to Riley's circumstances and forming her memories, which are housed in spheres that produce a certain color depending on the emotion of the memory. The most important memories, which are known as "Core Memories," power five "Islands of Personality" that each reflect a different aspect of Riley's personality: Family Island, Friendship Island, Hockey Island, Honesty Island, and Goofball Island, clearly important aspects of her life.

Each emotion also has a defined purpose in Riley's life: Joy makes sure she is happy, Fear keeps her safe, Anger keeps her life fair, and Disgust prevents her from being poisoned, both physically and socially. No one understands the purpose of Sadness, as all she seemingly does is make Riley feel bad. As a result, she is constantly ignored and kept from using the Headquarters controls, mainly by Joy, who prefers to keep Riley happy as much as possible.

When Riley is eleven, her family moves to San Francisco after her father gets a new job. Joy tries to make the move a pleasant experience for Riley and the other emotions, but several events leading up to the move make the other emotions think otherwise. And Sadness messes things up further when she turns a happy memory into a sad one by touching it and causes a core memory to fall out of the container it is housed in. Aware that memories cannot be changed back once turned sad, Joy keeps Sadness occupied by having her memorize a stack of "mind manuals" all through the day and into the night.

On Riley's first day at her new school, Joy attempts to keep Sadness from touching anything by having her

stand completely still inside a circle of chalk. But Sadness ventures outside the circle and creates a new core memory after making Riley cry in front of her new classmates. Joy attempts to dispose of the new memory, but her struggle with Sadness leads to all the core memories being knocked out of their container. Before Joy can put them back, she, Sadness, and the core memories are sent up a memory tube and into the far reaches of Riley's mind. As Joy and Sadness make their way through "Long Term Memory," they run into Riley's imaginary friend Bing Bong, who is desperate to reconnect with Riley. When Bing Bong discovers that his song-powered imaginary wagon has been dumped into "the Memory Dump," a place where obsolete memories are erased, he breaks down in tears of candy and is comforted by Sadness as Joy watches on in confusion. Meanwhile, back at Headquarters, Anger, Disgust, and Fear attempt to take charge in the wake of Joy's absence. But they are unable to make Riley joyful, and instead, inadvertently instigate a heated argument with Riley's parents, and cause Goofball Island to fall into the Memory Dump. The three soon realize that tampering with Riley's personality will cause it to slowly destroy itself with potentially disastrous results. Joy, Sadness, and Bing Bong hatch a plan to ride the "Train of Thought" back to Headquarters and trek through the different parts of Riley's mind, unaware that Riley's life is slowly starting to crumble. She alienates both her parents and her former best friend, struggles in her new surroundings, and quits hockey after failing to do well in the first tryout. Anger reasons that the only way to restore Riley's personality and keep the remaining islands from falling into the Memory Dump is to persuade her to run away to Minnesota.

Later that night, while Riley is sleeping, Joy, Sadness, and Bing Bong arrive at the loading dock for the Train of Thought, only to realize the train does not run during nighttime. In an attempt to jump-start the train, the three infiltrate "Dream Productions", where Riley's dreams and nightmares are created. Onstage, they infiltrate a monstrous birthday clown named Jangles, who scares Riley and wakes her up. As Joy, Sadness, and Bing Bong board the Train of Thought and make their way towards Headquarters, Anger enacts his plan of running away. Riley is led to stealing her mother's credit card, which causes Honesty Island to crumble, destroying the Train of Thought in the process. Joy, Sadness, and Bing Bong take refuge on Family Island only for the island to begin to fall into pieces when Riley boards a waiting bus to Minnesota. Then, after a failed attempt to hitch a ride to Headquarters through a revealed memory recall tube, Joy and Bing Bong fall into the dump, leaving Sadness on her own.

Joy, in despair and on the verge of giving up, bursts into tears and sifts through Riley's memories, locating a sad one in which Riley missed a shot in a hockey game and cost her team the win. When she sees Riley's teammates and parents consoling her (which turns the memory into a happy one), Joy realizes what Sadness' function is - to act as a beacon to others to let them know when Riley needs help. Joy helps Bing Bong find his rocket wagon and attempts to jumpstart it only to realize it falls short of reaching the cliff every time. Bing Bong, in a moment of self-realization, starts the rocket again and jumps off before it flies away. Joy looks over her shoulder after barely making it to the cliff. Since Bing Bong is stuck in the dump and this might be the last time he will see Joy, he thanks her for letting him be important and fades away.

Joy emerges from the dump and finds Sadness, who has concluded that her doings can permanently make Riley's life worse and flees her. Using a huge pile of imaginary boyfriends from Imagination Land, Joy launches herself towards Sadness with a large trampoline and grabs her before flying towards Headquarters, where Anger and Disgust work together to get them inside. Everyone then looks to Joy to save the situation, but she steps back and lets Sadness take control. Riley, now in control of her emotions, gets off the bus before it leaves the station and returns home to her parents, where she breaks down in tears after confessing she misses her old life. As her parents comfort her, Joy and Sadness create a new core memory together, which glows both blue and yellow, beginning the restoration of Riley's personality and a new area of Riley's mind.



With Riley now adapting to life in a new city and Sadness finally having to have found her place among her fellow emotions, everyone works together to help lead Riley to a happy life as she turns twelve.

As observed by Matt Zoller Seitz in his review of *Inside Out*, "the script initially seems as if it's favoring Joy's interpretation of what things mean, and what the other emotions ought to "do" for Riley. But soon we realize that Sadness has just as much value to contribute, that Anger, Fear, and Disgust are useful as well, and that none of them should be prized to the exclusion of the rest. The movie also shows how things can be remembered with joy, sadness, anger, fear, or disgust, depending on where we are in the narrative of our lives and what part of a memory we fixate on."<sup>16</sup>

### **Shrek**

Shrek is a 2001 American computer-animated comedy film loosely based on the 1990 picture book of the same name by William Steig. Directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson in their directorial debuts from a screenplay written by Ted Elliott, Terry Rossio, Joe Stillman, and Roger S. H. Schulman, the film stars Mike Myers, Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz, and John Lithgow. In the film, the ogre Shrek finds his swamp overrun by fairy tale creatures banished by Lord Farquaad. With the help of Donkey, Shrek agrees to rescue Princess Fiona for Farquaad to regain his swamp. *Shrek* premiered at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival, where it competed for the Palme d'Or, making it the first animated film since Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) to be chosen to do so. It was widely praised by critics for its animation, voice performances, soundtrack, writing, and humor, which they noted catered to both adults and children. *Shrek* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay and won Best Animated Feature.<sup>16</sup>

Shrek is a recluse who lives a fairly carefree life in his swamp. At first, he appears to like being by himself and enjoys scaring people, but not hurting them. One day in the forest, a talking Donkey enters Shrek's territory pursued by a group of knights. The head knight orders Shrek to be arrested, but Shrek effortlessly scares them off and saves Donkey. A grateful Donkey repeatedly thanks Shrek (to the latter's irritation) and convinces him to spend the night outside Shrek's house. More fairy tale creatures soon arrive and begin to overcrowd his swamp. Shrek demands to know why they have come and learns that Lord Farquaad has dumped them all there. Outraged, Shrek takes Donkey and goes to his castle to demand his swamp back.

As he arrives at Farquaad's castle, Shrek defeats every knight in a contest to determine who will rescue Princess Fiona. When he wins, Farquaad is intrigued and he cuts a deal with Shrek: If he rescues his princess, he will return Shrek's swamp to him. Shrek agrees and he and Donkey set out to the dark castle Fiona is locked away in, guarded by a fire-breathing Dragon. Once inside, Shrek orders Donkey to find stairs that lead to the princess while Shrek himself searches for the Dragon. While Donkey keeps the dragon occupied, Shrek meets Princess Fiona for the first time and leaves with her in tow.

After the three escape from the castle, Fiona insists that Shrek take his helmet off, and is repulsed by the fact that Shrek is an ogre. Shrek appears not to care and takes Fiona by force to Farquaad. As nightfall approaches, Fiona demands they stop for the night, but secludes herself in a cave for reasons unknown. That night Shrek confides in Donkey that he chooses to live alone because most people prefer to fear and stereotype him rather than try to get to know him. The next day, the trio continues and encounters the Merry men, where Fiona reveals her impressive martial arts skills.

Throughout the rest of the trip back to Farquaad, Fiona warms up to Shrek, and Donkey and Shrek begin to fall in love with Fiona. However, when bringing her a flower that evening after stopping to camp at an old mill, Shrek overhears Fiona talking to Donkey about how no one could love an ugly monster. Shrek thinks she's

talking about him and is enraged and hurt. Farquaad and his knights take Fiona to his castle and as promised, Shrek gets his swamp back and is by himself again. Shrek is still not happy, so after an argument with Donkey, they head out to get Fiona back. Shrek crashes their wedding and confesses to Fiona that he loves her. Fiona tells him that he's too late and prepares to kiss Farquaad. As the sun begins to go down, Fiona transforms into an ogre too, surprising Shrek and making him realize what he heard at the windmill. However, Farquaad is disgusted with her now and orders them arrested. But Shrek and Fiona kiss, breaking her curse and permanently turning her into an ogre. Fiona is still unsure about herself, but Shrek assures Fiona he still thinks she's beautiful, and they get married and head out in an onion carriage on their honeymoon.

In Roger Ebert's review in May 2001, he stated that "the movie is an astonishing visual delight, with animation techniques that seem lifelike and fantastical, both at once. No animated being has ever moved, breathed, or had its skin crawl quite as convincingly as Shrek, and yet the movie doesn't look like a reprocessed version of the real world; it's all made up, right down to, or up to, Shrek's trumpet-shaped ears." Ebert explains that "Shrek" unveils creatures who have been designed from the inside out so that their skin, muscles, and fat move upon their bones instead of seeming like a single unit. They aren't "realistic," but they're curiously real. The artistry of the locations and setting is equally skilled--not lifelike, but beyond lifelike, in a merry, stylized way." <sup>17</sup>

### ***The Red Balloon***

A boy makes friends with a seemingly sentient red balloon, and it begins to follow him. It follows him to the bus stop, school, and church. They play together in the streets of Paris and try to elude a gang of boys that wants to steal it.<sup>18</sup>

The Red Balloon is a 1956 French fantasy written, produced, and directed by Albert Lamorisse. The thirty-five-minute short, which follows the adventures of a young boy whom one day finds a sentient, mute, red balloon, was filmed in the city of Paris. Lamorisse used his children as actors in the film. His son, Pascal, plays himself in the main role, and his daughter, Sabine, portrays a young girl. The film won numerous awards, including an Oscar for Lamorisse for writing the Best Original Screenplay in 1956 and the Palme d'Or for short films at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival. It also became popular with children and educators. It is the only short film to win the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay. The film follows Pascal (Pascal Lamorisse), a young boy who discovers a large helium-filled red balloon on his way to school one morning. As he plays with it, he realizes it has a mind and will of its own. It begins to follow him wherever he goes, never straying far from him, and at times floating outside his bedroom window, as his mother will not allow it in their apartment. The balloon follows Pascal through the streets of Paris, and together, they draw quite a bit of attention and envy from other children as they wander the streets. At one point the balloon enters his classroom, causing an uproar from his classmates. The noise alerts the principal, who locks Pascal up in his office. Later, after being set free, Pascal and the balloon encounter a young girl (Sabine Lamorisse) who is holding a blue balloon that also seems to have a mind of its own, just like his. On Sunday, the balloon is "told" to stay home while Pascal and his mother go to church. However, it follows them through the open window and into the church, and they are led out by a scolding clergy. As Pascal and the balloon wander around the neighborhood, a group of older boys, who are envious of the balloon, grab it while Pascal is inside a bakery; however, he manages to retrieve it. Following a chase through several narrow alleyways, the boys finally catch up to them. They hold Pascal back as they bring it down with slingshots before one of the boys finally stomps on it. The film ends as all the other balloons from all around France come to Pascal's aid and take him on a cluster balloon ride over the city.



## Teaching Strategies

---

The core idea of project-based learning is that real-world concerns capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience. Project-based learning helps prepare students for thinking and collaboration skills.

Organized around open-ended questioning, project-based learning helps focus the students' work and deepen their learning by centering on significant issues or problems. Projects begin by presenting students with knowledge and concepts and then, once learned, allow them to apply them. It requires inquiry to learn and/or create something new - an idea, an interpretation, or a new way of displaying what they have learned.

Most importantly, it requires critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and various forms of communication. Students across grade levels and content area learning need to do much more than remember information—they need to use higher-order thinking skills. They also must learn to work as a team and contribute to a group effort. They must listen to others and make their ideas clear when speaking, be able to read a variety of material, write or otherwise express themselves in various modes, and make effective presentations. The format of this approach allows for student voice and choice. Students learn to work independently and take responsibility when they are asked to make choices. The opportunity to make choices, and to express their learning in their own voice, also helps to increase students' educational engagement.

Within the activities in this unit, literacy strategies partnered with social-emotional learning skills will help students understand what they see and feel. They will identify how language, structure, and facial expressions contribute to meaning; draw inferences such as characters' feelings, thoughts, and motives from their actions and image; and justify inferences with evidence. Writing strategies will focus on students planning their writing by identifying the audience for and purpose of the writing (creating illustrations to support a story), selecting the appropriate form, and locating similar writing as potential models for their drawing and painting. as they share their ideas, experiences, and imagination.

## Classroom Activities

---

### Instructional Overview

This unit begins with gathering some background information to determine the level of understanding among the students. Developing a set of terms and vocabulary will be essential to having meaningful discussions about the images, clips, and films the students will be analyzing and explaining to each other. From that foundational session, students will then begin to view film clips that provide clear images of facial expressions depicting the six emotions that are the focus of this unit.

For example, among these clips, are some from *Ten Minutes Older*, which show very young children's faces as they watch a puppet show that we, the film viewer never see. Only the children's expressions are shown in the

frames. These clips will produce a great discussion on what emotions the children at the puppet show were experiencing. The students will themselves practice making similar facial expressions in small hand-held mirrors. This will help them experience how our faces feel, and how our muscles move when we produce different facial expressions. The unit then turns to the film, *Inside Out*, where students will learn that we all have lots of emotions, which we can learn to identify, manage, and understand in ourselves and others. The movie, *Shrek*, will give students an opportunity to observe and identify how emotions change over time, through a variety of experiences. Finally, students will make a personal photo album that will include their own facial expressions that demonstrate the emotions of happy, sad, afraid, angry, surprise, and disgust.

## Essential Questions

What is the relationship between images of the characters in the films and the stories in which they appear? How can we describe what moment within a story an image depicts?

How does the expression on the faces of characters tell you what they are feeling? What emotions can we recognize and name to describe those feelings?

## Activity One - Introduction to Feeling/Emotions

Objective: Students will share their background knowledge of what emotion is connected to a facial expression.

Materials: large chart of the graphic below, student copies of graphic below, colored pencils

Discuss the words *feelings* and *emotions*. Ask what students know about the two words and how could the class determine definitions for them. Document the responses for continued reference throughout the unit. Introduce each “feelings” word in the graphic one at a time, work together to define it, and have students give examples of times they have experienced that feeling. Using the icon-style faces, such as the traditional “smiley face,” draw a corresponding facial expression for each emotion. One reference source for examples is “emojis,” the icons used to indicate mood in texting or emailing. Students will have great familiarity with these choices. If possible, project some options on a smart board to decide as a group how to “design the face.”

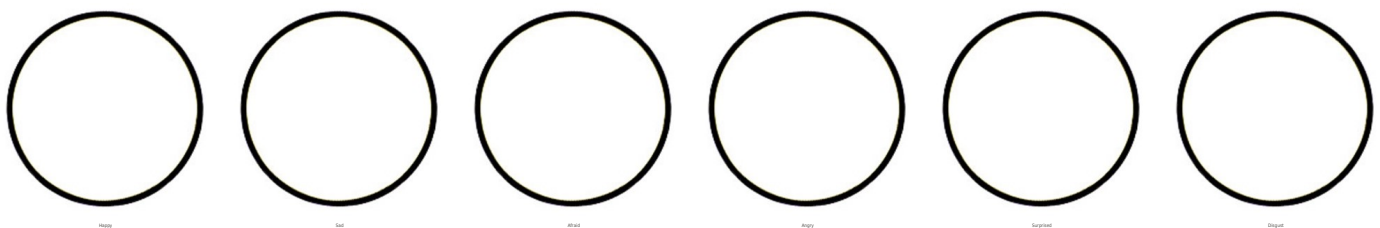


Figure 1: Chart for drawing and characterizing facial expressions

## Activity Two - Recognizing Facial Expressions

Objective: Students will connect their facial expressions to an emotion

Materials: Small hand-held mirrors, one per child, access to films and film clips

Clip from *Ten Minutes Older* (1:38 – 5:12)

Clip from *The Red Balloon* - 34 minutes

Trailer for *Ponette* - 2:28 minutes

Trailer for *Where is the Friend's House?* - 2:41 minutes

Trailer for *Like Stars on Earth*, 1:15 minutes

*To Be and to Have*, 0:00 - 20:00 minutes

Trailer for *Not One Less*, 1:30 minutes

Students will view the selected film clips and make determinations about emotions. For films not readily available or ones that need subscriptions for viewing, use the trailers located on the IMDB website. Most are a few minutes at most and have moments in which the characters are in close-up shots and can be paused for analysis and imitation.

The clips from *Ten Minutes Older* follow one child who is viewing a puppet show. Students will notice the various emotions the child shows through his authentic reactions to what he is watching. After viewing the first film, discuss the many feelings the child was experiencing. How do you know? How was his face changing throughout the clip? Using the small mirrors, have the students imitate the facial expressions they saw from the boy in the film. Have them watch how their own faces change as they practice each emotion.

Repeat the experience with the selections listed.

### **Activity Three - We Have Lots of Emotions (*Inside Out*)**

Objectives: In this lesson, students will work to:

Identify their own feelings.

Think through what it means for emotions to have context.

Acknowledge the value of having a range of emotions.

Connect their own personal experiences to the movie's messages.

Identify their own perspective and be curious about the perspectives of others.

Think about the ways they currently self-regulate and explore possibilities for other ways.

Think about helpful versus unhelpful responses to emotions from themselves and others.

There are several options for viewing clips and connected activities and discussions. Choose some or all to discuss how Riley experiences her emotions. Most of my students have seen the movie in full. Screening the whole movie before these activities and discussions would be helpful for understanding and continuity.

Clip #1: When Dad says Riley can't have dessert if she doesn't eat her broccoli, Anger "blows his top."  
(3:48-4:06)

Use this scene to talk about idioms. Have kids draw another emotion-related idiom (ex. cry your eyes out,

bent out of shape, spaced out, down in the dumps, etc.).

Clip #2: Riley sees her new house, and she experiences a range of emotions. (8:43-9:50)

Discuss: How do emotions influence how Riley feels about the new house? How can she go from feeling sad about her new room to feeling excited about how it will look? The room didn't change -- what did change, and how?

Clip #3: A joyful memory becomes sad, as Riley remembers a moment from the trip. (11:51-12:54)

Explain to students that this movie was inspired by a real 11-year-old. Her dad wanted to show her what it's like to have complicated feelings as you grow up. Ask students: Do you think he did a good job? What would you do differently?

Clip #4: Joy argues with the other emotions about how Riley should feel on the first night after the move, using the phrase, "It could be worse." (16:01-17:14)

Riley has her own room in a house in San Francisco, which is more than many people have. Ask students: Is Joy right -- could it be worse? Should Riley not feel angry, sad, or scared? Does thinking about how things could be worse change how you feel? Why or why not?

Clip #5: Mom thanks Riley for being their "happy little girl" and wants them both to keep smiling for Dad. (17:10-18:06)

Riley isn't feeling happy when her mom calls her their "happy little girl." She wants Riley to "put on a happy face." Ask students: Have you ever kept smiling even when you weren't happy? What did it feel like? Did it help the situation? Did it help you?

Clip #6: Joy asks Sadness to stay confined inside of a circle and not participate in Riley's first day at her new school. (20:50-21:27)

Joy wants to keep Sadness in a tiny circle during Riley's first day at her new school. Ask students: What's the result? In real life, can we keep our emotions exactly where we want them?

Clip #7: Riley starts crying in class as she talks about her home in Minnesota, and Joy tries to prevent a sad memory from becoming a core memory. (22:09-26:08)

Even though she didn't want to, Riley cries in class. Ask students: How much control do we actually have over our emotions?

Clip #10: Riley suddenly feels angry while talking to her friend from Minnesota. (36:00-36:36)

Ask students: After Riley slams her computer, how do you think her friend felt? When we lose control of our feelings and do something that hurts someone else, we may not have meant to hurt them. If we didn't mean to, are we still responsible? What can we do next?

Clip #11: Both Joy and Sadness try to comfort Bing Bong when his wagon is thrown in the dump, and Sadness is the one to succeed. (47:04-49:39)

Having empathy is about understanding what someone else is feeling. Ask students: Why does Bing Bong

respond to Sadness but not Joy? Ask students: Why are movies great ways to see other people's perspectives and practice empathy?

Clip #12: Joy and Bing Bong are stuck in the memory dump. Joy feels sad herself (and realizes that emotions work together), and Bing Bong sacrifices himself to make sure Joy can escape. (1:06:27-1:13:35)

Introduce students to the idea of nostalgia. Ask them: How do you feel when you think about happy memories from when you may be fading?

#### **Activity Four - Character's Feelings and How They Change (*Shrek*)**

Objective: Students will recognize that characters' feelings change with time and experiences.

Materials: Large chart for class, student copies of graphic below, pencils, colored pencils

Students will view the film in 15-minute increments. The film will resume at the paused location for each subsequent session. After each session, the students will note, either by word or drawing, the emotion each character is experiencing at that moment in the film.

Character	15 min	30 min	45 min	60 min	75 min	90 min
Shrek						
Donkey						
Fiona						
Lord Farquaad						

Figure 2: Chart for tracking characters' feelings throughout the film *Shrek*

#### **Activity Five - Optional Culminating Project**

Writer's Workshop Project: Personal Photo Albums of Feelings/Emotions

Objective: Students will demonstrate an understanding that facial expressions are connected to emotions.

Materials: Small booklet, purchased or school-made, photo printing access for 7-8 pictures per student, digital device (phone, camera, iPad) for taking pictures

Because this activity will require a financial component, use this project if it works in your current classroom situation.

## **Resources**

---

### **Films**

Adamson, Andrew and Vicky Jensen, dir. *Shrek*, 2001.

Docter, Peter and Ronnie Del Carmen, dir. *Inside Out*. Emeryville, CA: Pixar Animation Company, 2015.

Doillon, Jacques, dir. *Ponette*. France: Les Films Alain Sarde, 1996.

Frank, Herz, dir. *Ten Minutes Older*. 1978, YouTube.

Kiarostami, Abbas, dir. *Where is the Friend's House?* Iran: Ali Reza Zarrin, 1987.

Khan, Aamir and Amole Gupte, dir. *Like Stars on Earth*. India: Aamir Khan Productions, 2007.

Lamorisse, Albert, dir. *The Red Balloon*. Paris, France: Film Montsouris, 1956.

Philibert, Nicolas, dir. *To Be and to Have*. France: Maia Films, 2002.

Zhang, Yimou, dir. *Not One Less*. Guangxi Film Studio, 1999.

### Books, Journals, and Websites

Bergala, Alain. *The Cinema Hypothesis: Teaching Cinema in the Classroom and Beyond*. Wien: Synema, 2016.

This is considered the seminal text about the possibilities and problems of bringing film into the classroom. Bergala uses his own experiences teaching film, promoting the idea that film should be taught as its own art form and not just as a supplement to teaching other subjects.

Denham, Susanne A., Hideko Bassett, Melissa Mincic, Sara Kalb, Erin Way, Todd Wyatt, and Yana Segal. "Social-Emotional Learning Profiles of Preschoolers' Early School Success: A Person-Centered Approach." *Learning and Individual Differences* 22, no. 2 (2012): 178-89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2011.05.001>.

This research examined how aspects of social-emotional learning (SEL)—specifically, emotion knowledge, emotional and social behaviors, social problem-solving, and self-regulation—in groups of children who differ in their motivation to learn, participation in the classroom, and indicators of early school adjustment and academic success.

Dusenbury, Linda and Roger P. Weissberg. Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School: Preparation for Success. *Education Digest*, Vol 83, no. 1, 2017.

The article discusses the importance of emotional learning for elementary students in the U.S. to be socially, emotionally, and academically successful. It finds that SEL competencies will enhance their capacity to understand and manage their emotions.

Ebert, Roger. "Shrek Movie Review & Film Summary (2001): Roger Ebert." movie review & film summary (2001) | Roger Ebert. Accessed July 25, 2022. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/shrek-2001>

This article provides a history of the making of the film along with Ebert's summary and insightful review.

Ekman, Paul. *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*. New York: Owl Books, 2007.

This book provides a clear, foundational explanation of how we read faces. Renowned psychologist Paul Ekman explains the roots of our emotions—anger, fear, disgust, sadness, and happiness—and shows how they



cascade across our faces, providing clear signals to those who can identify the clues.

*English Language Arts Standards. Reading: Literature " Kindergarten."* Common Core State Standards Initiative. Accessed June 25, 2022. <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/K/>.

The standards establish guidelines for English language arts (ELA) as well as for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Our district currently follows Common Core Standards.

Jack, Rachel E., Oliver G.B. Garrod, Hui Yu, Roberto Caldara, and Phillippe G. Schyns. "Facial Expressions of Emotion Are Not Culturally Universal, PNAS." Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1200155109>.

This article looks at cross-cultural comparisons of the standard universal understanding of the six basic internal emotional states and how these are presented through facial expressions. The basis of this examination stems from Charles Darwin's writings on this subject in his 1872 book, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*.

"Fundamentals of Sel." CASEL, March 11, 2022. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>.

This website provides the framework and fundamentals of the Social Emotional Learning approach referenced in this unit. It clarifies the specific skills students will learn and how the program fosters knowledge, skills, and attitudes across the five areas of social and emotional competence.

Matsumoto, David and Hyi Sung Hwang. "Reading Facial Expressions of Emotion." American Psychological Association. American Psychological Association. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2011/05/facial-expressions>.

This article was very helpful. It discusses a collection of data from many studies. The authors found the results from different researchers around the world in different laboratories using different methodologies with participants from many different cultures all sharing similar results. This demonstrates strong evidence for the universal facial expressions of seven emotions - anger, contempt, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise.

Lebeau, Vicky. *Childhood and Cinema*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.

This book examines how children have been part of cinema since it began. Lebeau shows, through the analysis of early to contemporary cinema, how childhood is used as a reflection of many human themes - language, death, sexuality, and difference. Her explanations and questions throughout provide a solid foundation for thinking about children in films, particularly films not appropriate or suitable for children themselves to see.

*Portrayals of Children in Popular Culture: Fleeting Images*, edited by Vibiana Bowman Cvetkovic and Debbie C. Olson: Lexington Books, 2014.

This book is a collection that examines images of children and childhood in popular culture, including print, online, television shows, and films. The seven chapters in Part Three of the book were most helpful, as they specifically cover children in film. Chapter 11 discusses the representation of children in Pixar films.

Seitz, Matt Zoller. "Inside out Movie Review & Film Summary (2015): Roger Ebert." movie review & film summary (2015) | Roger Ebert. Accessed July 15, 2022. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/inside-out-2015>.

Wojcik-Andrews, Ian. *Children's Films History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory*. New York: Garland, 2000.

Although the entire text was useful, Part One on defining a “children’s film” and Part Five on pedagogy was most helpful.

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

---

In the English Language Common Core State Standard, CCSS.RL.K.7, students will, with prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an illustration depicts). As students learn to view the selected films with a specific focus on facial expressions and emotions, they will understand that the image created by the characters helps depict the moments in the story. Reading these expressions helps students have a greater understanding of the story by realizing the emotion experienced by Riley in *Inside Out*, the various characters in *Shrek*, as well as the many children in the real-life films. Being able to describe the relationship requires a set of vocabulary which the students will learn through the first two activities, where the students learn the names of emotions and practice creating the corresponding facial expression themselves after watching film clips from *Ten Minutes Older*, *The Red Balloon* and others films listed in the lesson. As the students develop the ability to identify various emotions, the connection to the actions of the character in the film and the images they see becomes clear and understandable.

Social Emotional Learning with the students working on the statement: I can understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. The activities provide opportunities for the students to take the perspective of the characters in the film and understand the experience they are having, thus empathizing with them.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup>*English Language Arts Standards*. Reading: Literature " Kindergarten.

<sup>2</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Social-Emotional-Learning/Social-Emotional-Learning>.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ekman. *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel E. Jack, Oliver G.B. Garrod, Hui Yu, Roberto Caldara, and Phillipe G. Schyns. Facial Expressions of Emotion Are Not Culturally Universal.

<sup>5</sup> Ekman, Ch 1.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.imdb.com>

<sup>7</sup> Susanne A. Denham, Hideko Bassett, Melissa Mincic, Sara Kalb, Erin Way, Todd Wyatt, and Yana Segal. Social-Emotional Learning Profiles of Preschoolers' Early School Success: A Person-Centered Approach.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Social-Emotional-Learning/Social-Emotional-Learning>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Fundamentals of Sel, CASEL.

<sup>12</sup> Dusenbury, Linda and Roger P. Weissberg. Social Emotional Learning in Elementary School: Preparation for Success. *Education Digest*, Vol 83, no.1, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Vicky Lebeau. *Childhood and Cinema*,16.

<sup>14</sup> Lebeau, 37.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.imdb.com>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/inside-out-2015>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.imdb.com>.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Ebert, Shrek Movie Review & Film Summary, 2001.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.imdb.com>.

---

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit [https://teachers.yale.edu/terms\\_of\\_use](https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use)