

# **Of Grizzly Bears and Yellow Labs: The Social- Emotional Lives of Gifted Boys**

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While we are waiting to begin, can you make a drawing from this doodle? It can be anything you want, real or imagined, and you can add words.

No rules.

No evaluation, and you won't have to share!



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**Mark Hess**

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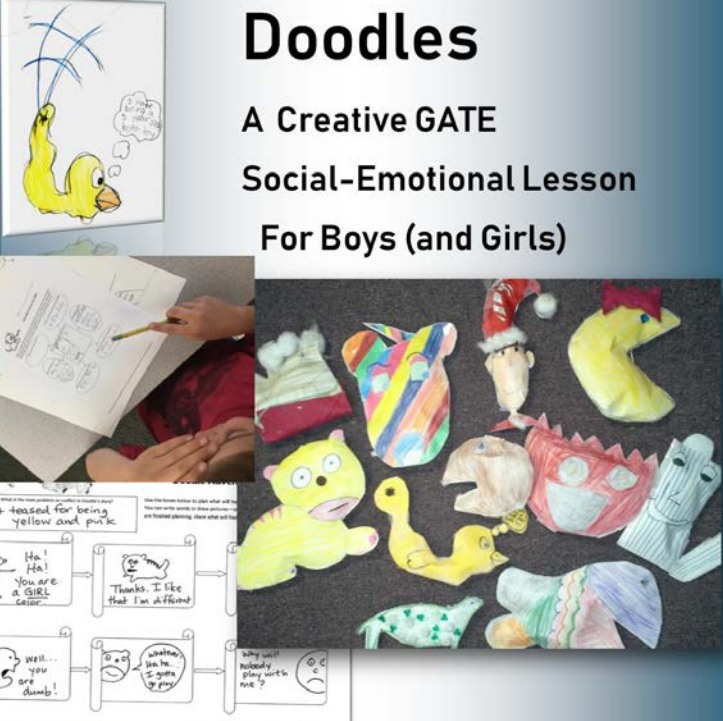
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# Doodles

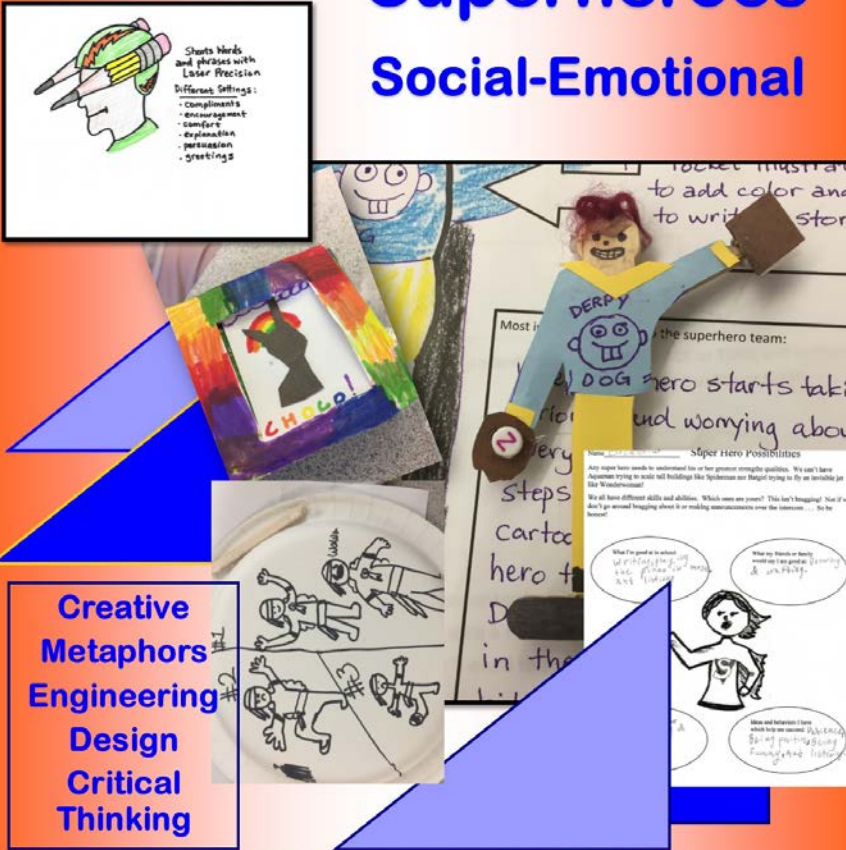
## A Creative GATE Social-Emotional Lesson For Boys (and Girls)



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**Creative Metaphors Engineering Design Critical Thinking**

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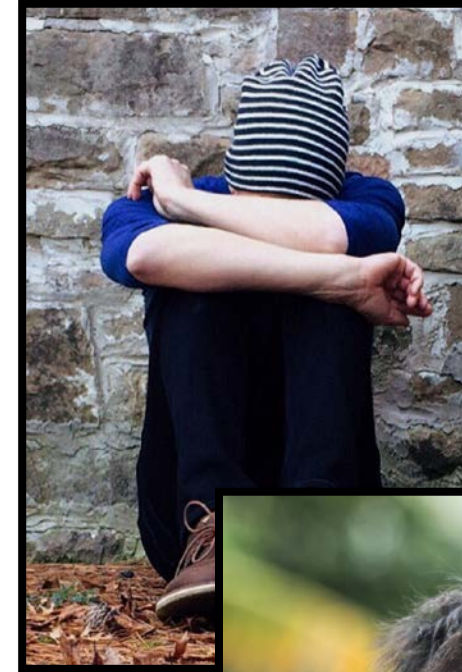


**By Mark Hess**



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# Meet Seth



Courtesy JC Laurio – Pexels.com

If you ask a boy the question, “How do you feel?” he very often won’t know how to respond. He’ll talk instead about what he did or plans to do about the problem. Some boys don’t even have the words for their feelings.

--Kindlon and Thompson, p. 4



I get to tell you stories about kids I know and love . . .

# Of Grizzly Bears and Yellow Labs . . . Gifted Boys

Sometimes you get the  
yellow Lab,





**And sometimes you  
get the grizzly bear.**

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# Finding One's Place in *Boy Culture*

## The Safety of Humor



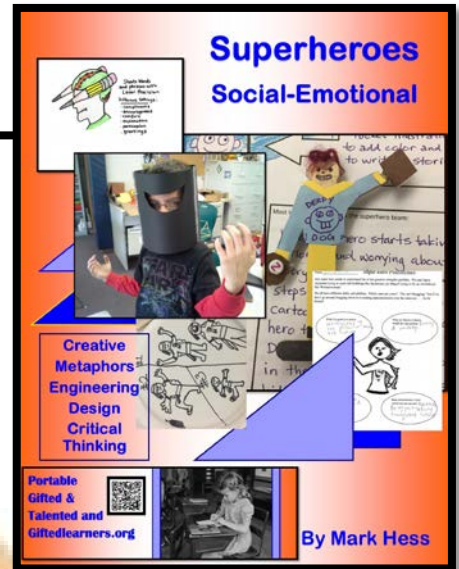
Photo by Victoria Borodina from Pexels







Wrapped in Intensities  
Sense of Justice and  
Superheroes

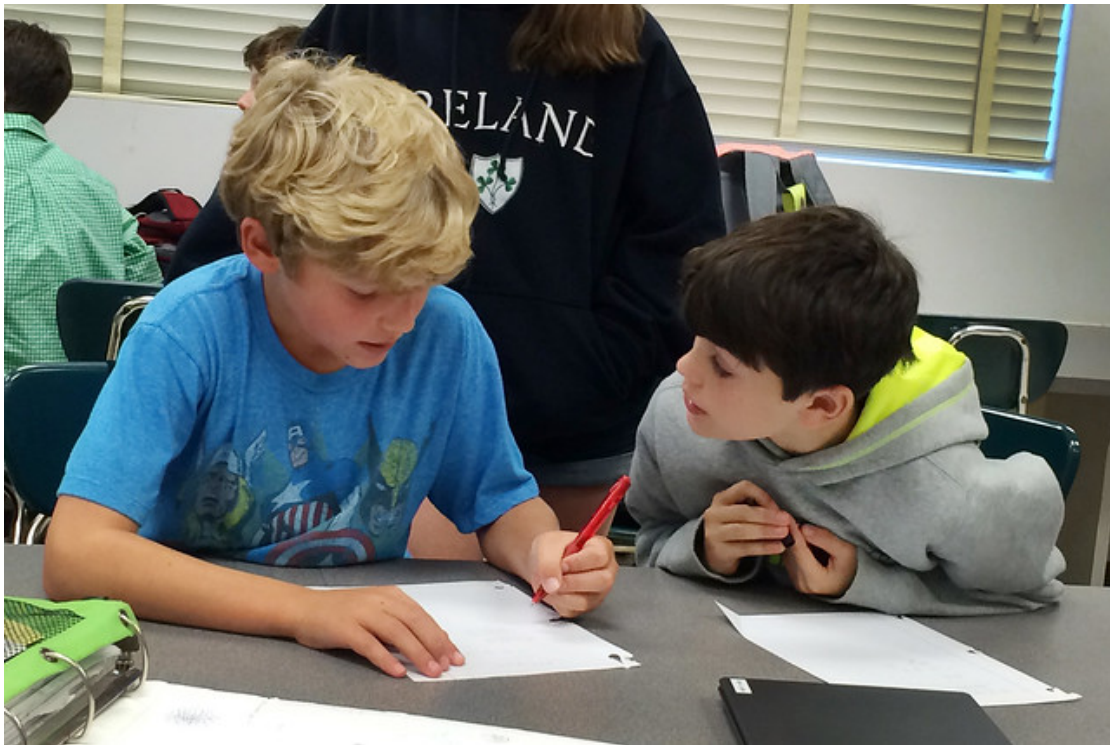






# Meet the Smoldering Boy, Super-intense Blue-eyed Boy, and

## I'm not crying! Part 1



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NAGC Blog: "I Used to be Gifted"

<http://www.nagc.org/blog/i-used-be-gifted>

# Real Boys and the *Boy Code* – William Pollack

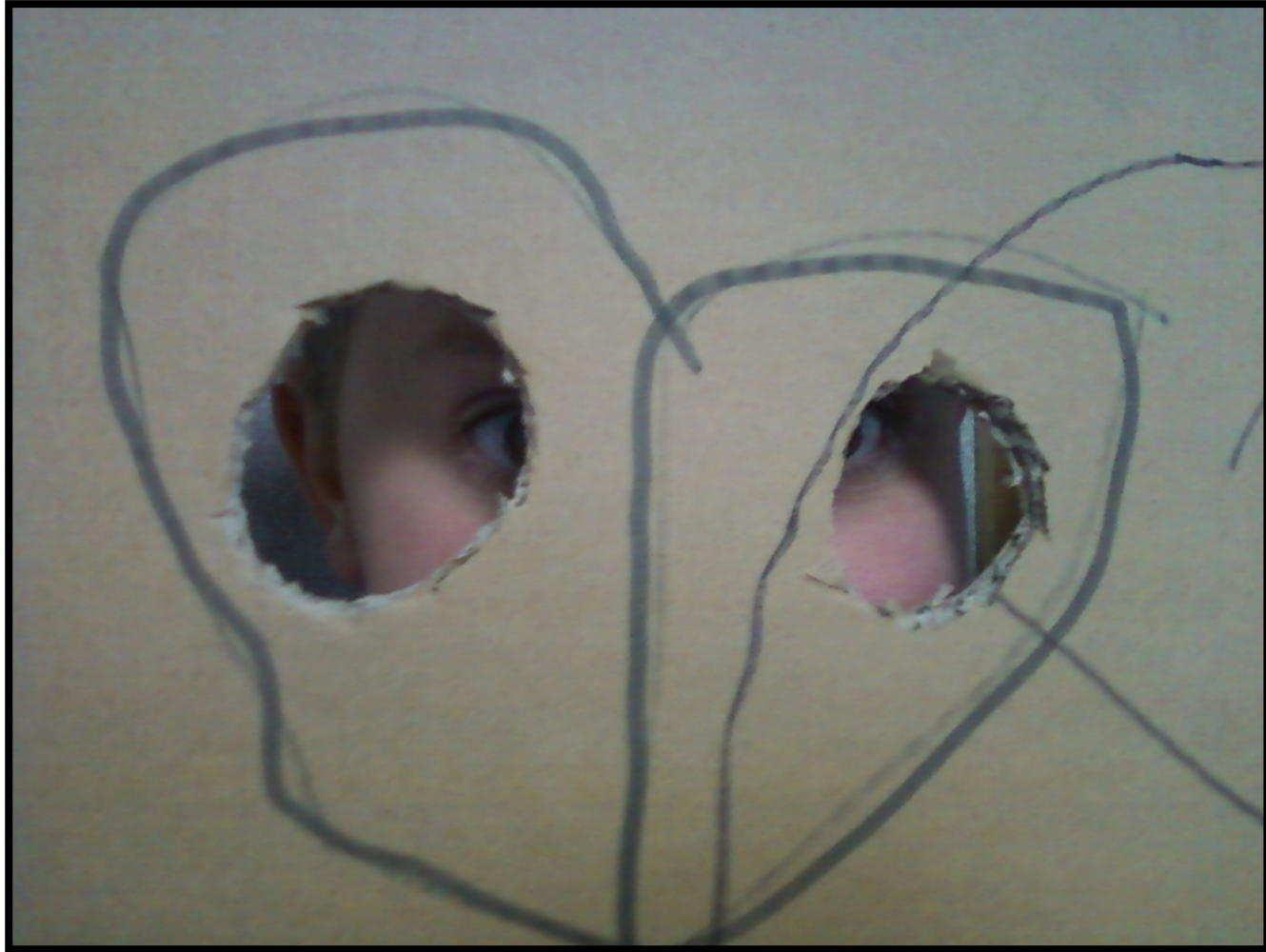
- The Sturdy Oak – never show weakness or emotion
- Give'em Hell! – act tough
- No Sissy Stuff – never show dependence, warmth, or sympathy

“Gifted boys may have a harder time shutting down their emotions. In addition, they may resent the idea that their intensity cannot be directed toward intellectual or creative activities if they are to be *real* boys. As a result, gifted boys often must take their strong feelings and intense interests underground. On the outside, they may be independent, tough, competitive leaders among boys, while on the inside they may long for an opportunity to exchange thoughts and feelings.”

--Barbara A. Kerr and Sanford J. Cohn in *Smart Boys*

**Your son's going to be all right, part 1**





**I'm not crying! Part 2**

**Your son's going to be all right, Part 2**



# Meet Brady

...yet I am crying



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4<sup>th</sup> grade: A desire to fit in, to be one of the guys, to prove that one is not weak nor can be taken advantage of, to show one's strength and independence – even our “he’s a great kid” can be sucked into this confusion.





Lacking an emotional education, a boy meets the pressures of adolescence and that singularly cruel peer culture with the only responses he has learned and practiced—and that he knows are socially acceptable—the typical “manly” responses of anger, aggression, and emotional withdrawal.

--Kindlon and Thompson, p. 5





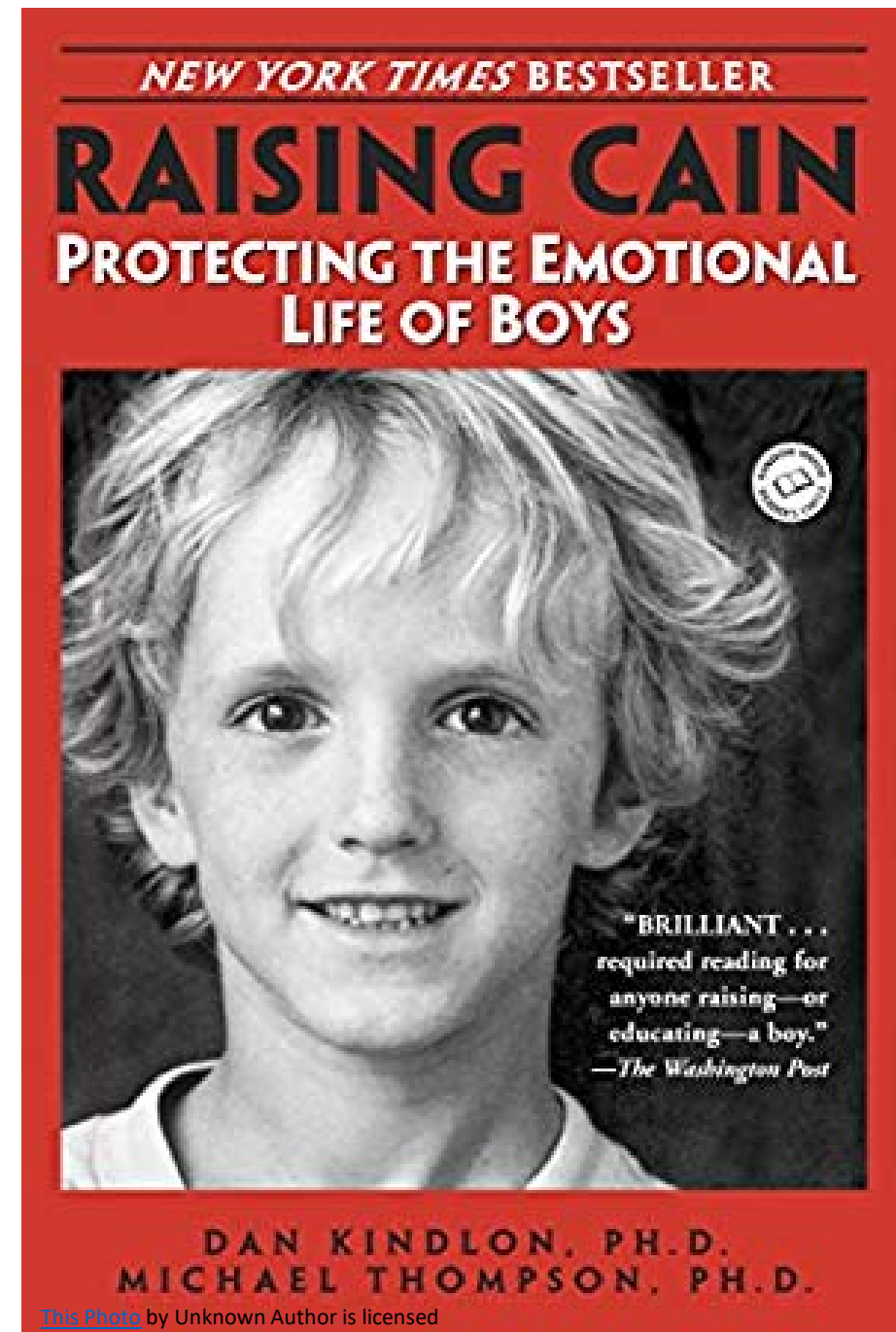
Of course, we all know Cupid is evil . . .

Jake: Reflection of the gifted boy.  
“I felt ashamed and confused.”



Puberty is around the corner, and the stakes are about to be raised. **ANYTHING** a boy says or does can and will be used against him in the culture of cruelty where a boy is “tutored” away from trust and empathy . . . And a boy’s ability to survive in the culture of cruelty has everything to do with his emotional resources.

--Kindlon and Thompson, p. 73-89





**Boys come to school 2 years behind their girl peers, and we ask them to do the two things they are least able to do: sit still and learn to read. --Kindlon and Thompson**



**“We treat boys in the educational system like dysfunctional girls.” -- Dr. Richard Cash**







Let's take a minute here to talk about the corpus colossum ...

**And empathy.**

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 Mark Hess  · a day ago · 9 min read 

## This is How Boys are Tough

By Mark Hess.

Lucas, a 3rd grade student, has missed a day of school because of a stomach ache. He returns on Thursday and Friday but manages to stay inside for recess. His stomach hurts all weekend, and he doesn't want to go back to school on Monday. On Monday morning, his mom discovers the cause of the stomach ache. Another boy in his grade has been taunting Lucas at recess, and he does not want to go back to school *ever again*. "I don't understand why someone would treat someone else like that," he tells his mother.

3rd grader Nolan runs the last few strides into the classroom. He perches atop a desk, impatient for instructions and eager to get started on a project. "What are we going to do today?" He interrupts. He hushes his classmates with that loud *boy voice* my teaching colleagues know all too well at this age. "Come on, guys! Listen up! Listen up so we can get started! It's not fair that the other class has gotten to start on their projects already!"

Jamison competes in gymnastics. He has been repeatedly warned not to perform a flip from atop the bench on the playground, yet he can't seem to resist. This parkour move from the

Gifted boys, like all gifted children, are wrapped in intensities. Emotional intensity in the gifted is, as Lesley Kay Sword so poetically describes it, "vivid, absorbing, penetrating, encompassing, complex, commanding—a way of being quaveringly alive." Gifted boys and girls alike are able to make connections others cannot, are able to see another's perspective at a young age, can understand struggles other people experience, and are masters at pinpointing injustices. Because of these intensities--most beautifully--gifted children carry a vast capacity for empathy.

A gifted boy's ability for insight and empathy are quite likely unmatched by their male classmates. With the proper guidance, gifted boys are poised to become leaders.

**What if we dedicated some of our time in gifted and talented instruction to help gifted boys understand they are not alone?**

**What if we used some of our time to help gifted boys understand that there are many ways of being tough?**

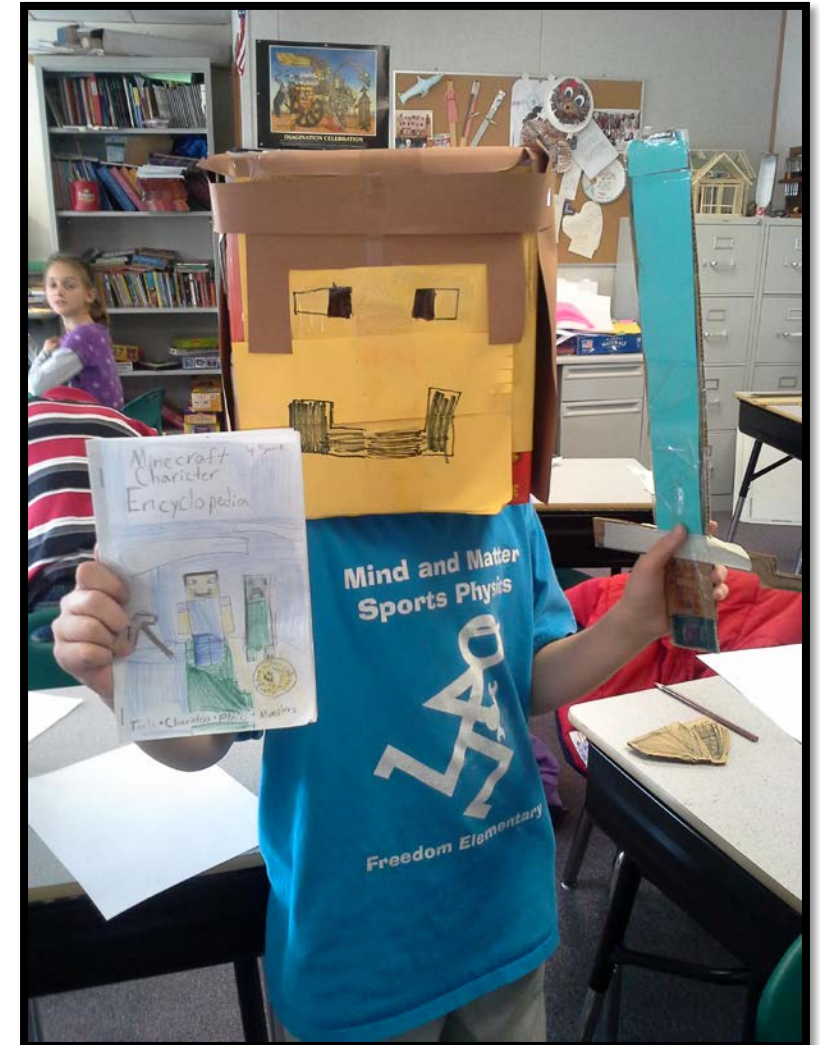
**How about exploring topics like humility, patience, gratitude, compassion, and challenges?**

**What if we helped them understand that the toughest boys are the boys who are tough enough to be kind and understanding?**

**What if we helped boys understand that the toughest people still might cry in frustration or sorrow?**



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**“You are the only  
teacher who has  
ever liked me.”**

**--5<sup>th</sup> grade boy**



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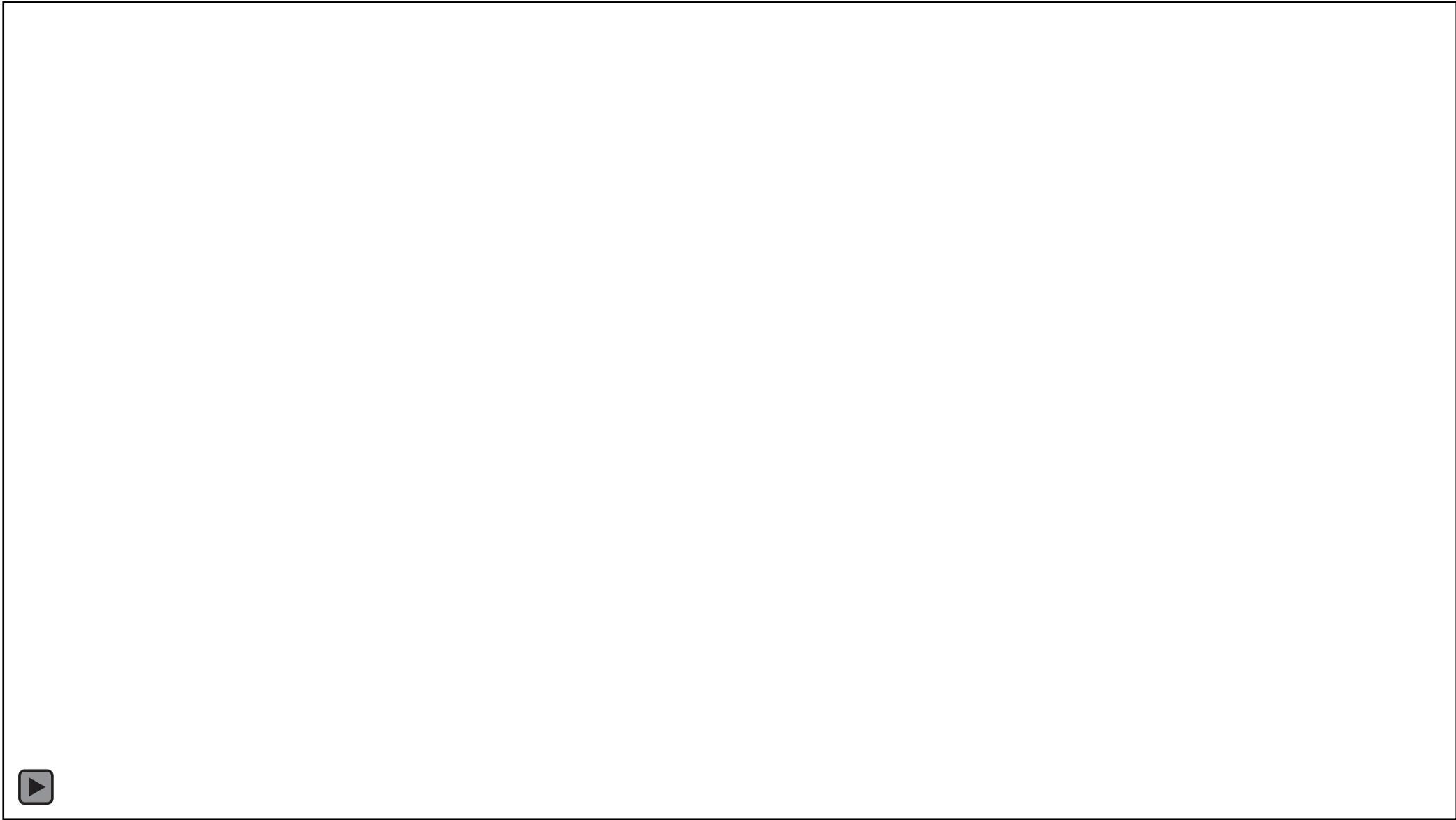






...and this is  
our story.



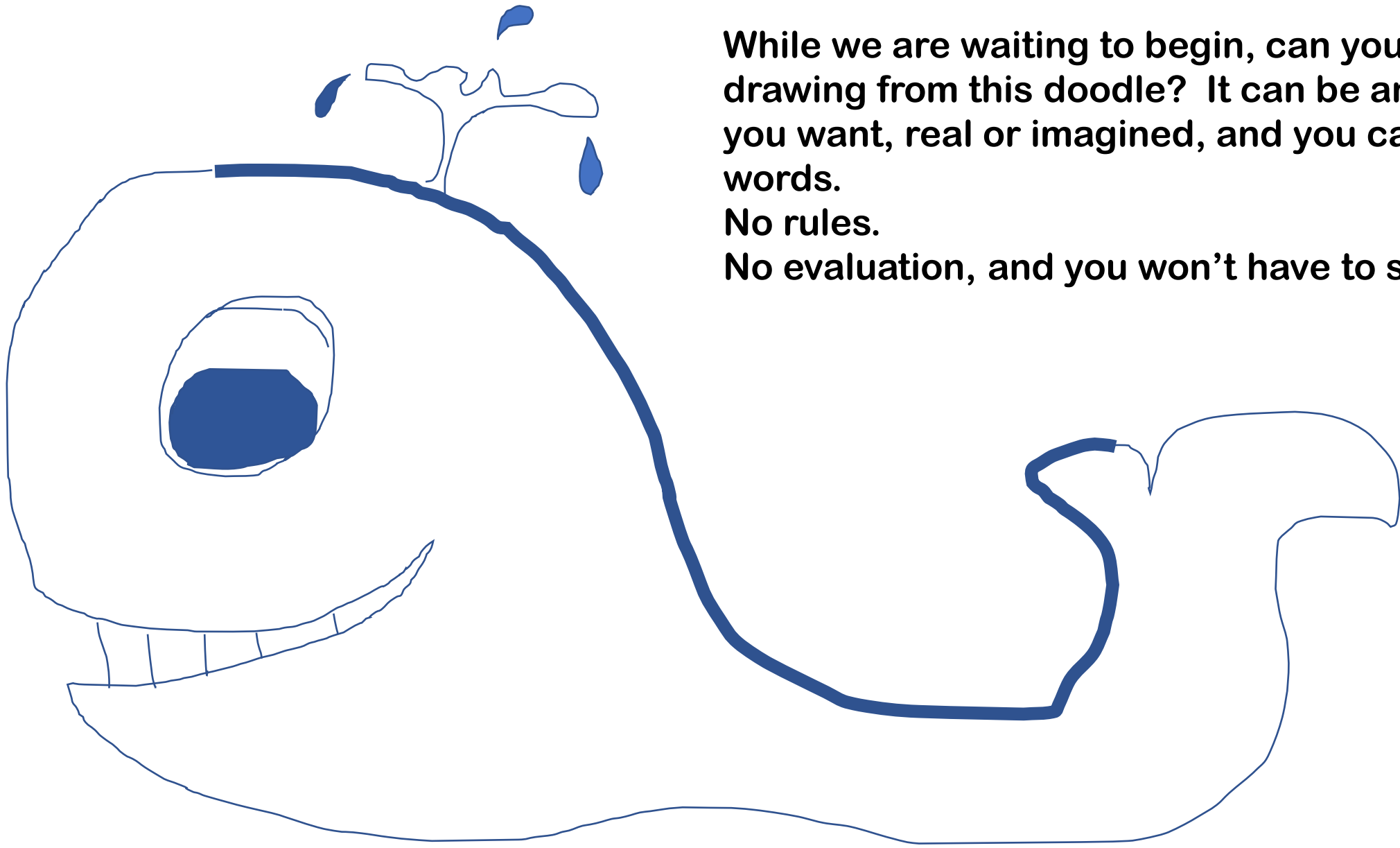


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No rules.

No evaluation, and you won't have to share!





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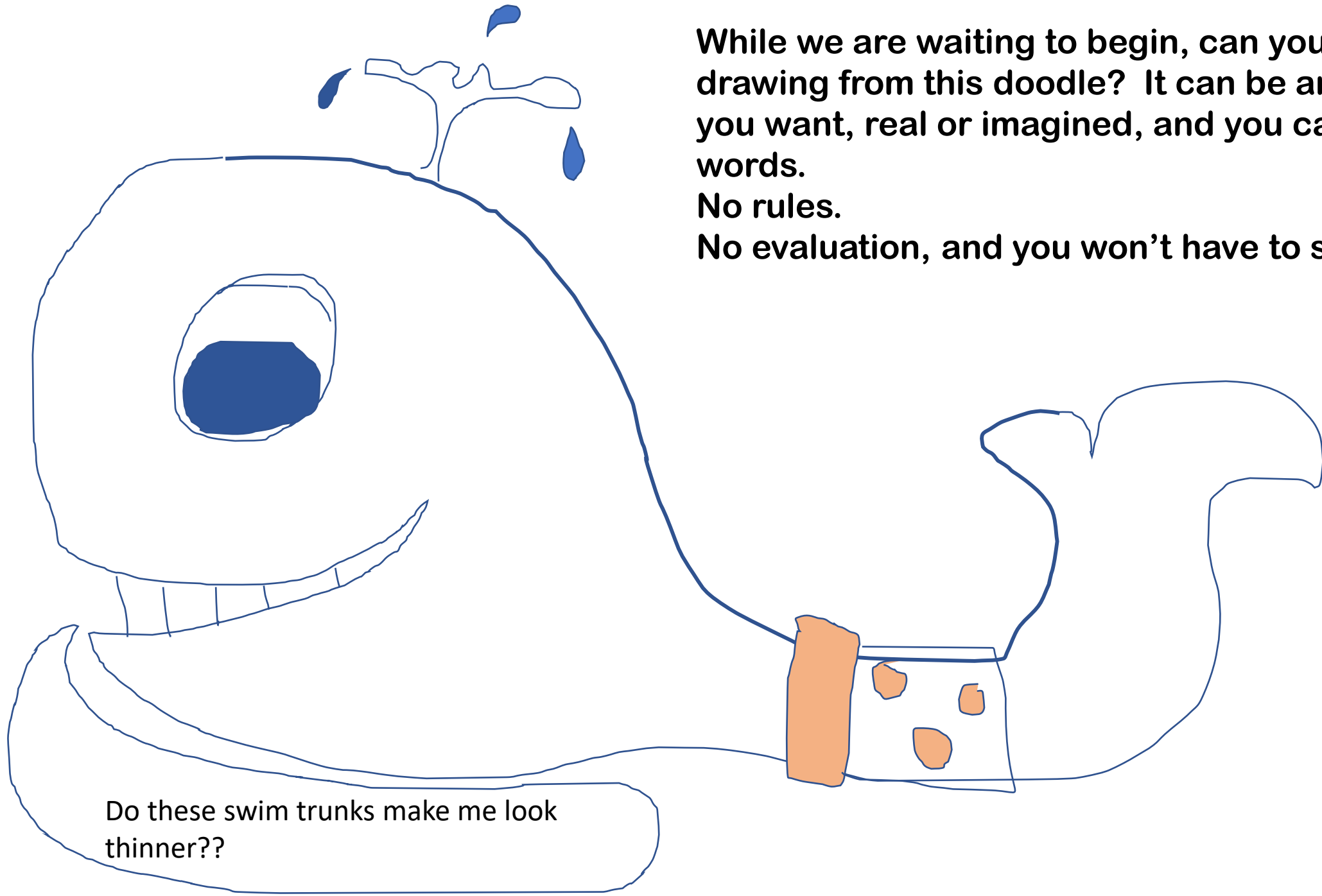
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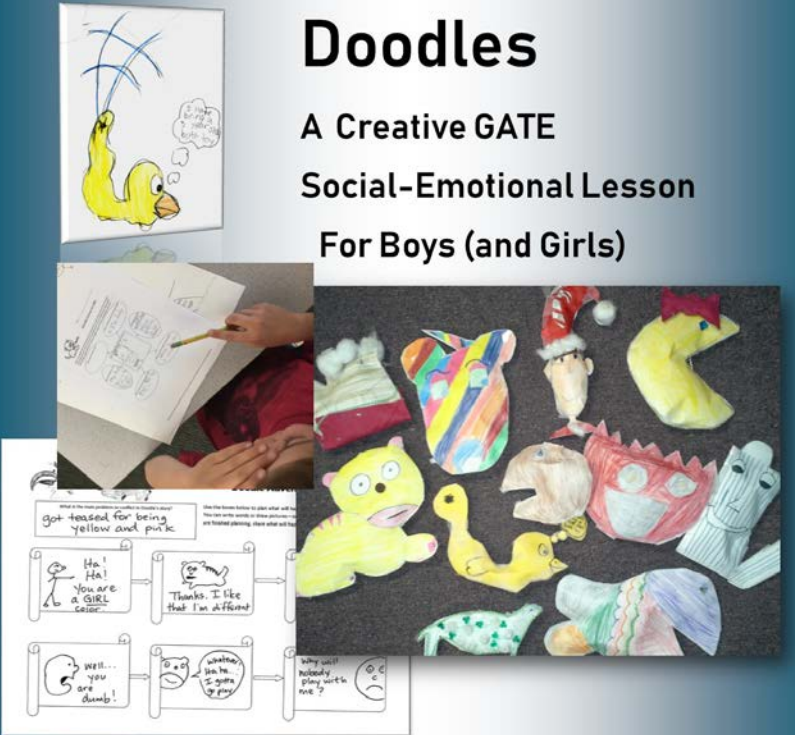
No evaluation, and you won't have to share!



Do these swim trunks make me look thinner??




# Social-Emotional Lessons for Gifted Boys



## Doodles

A Creative GATE  
Social-Emotional Lesson  
For Boys (and Girls)

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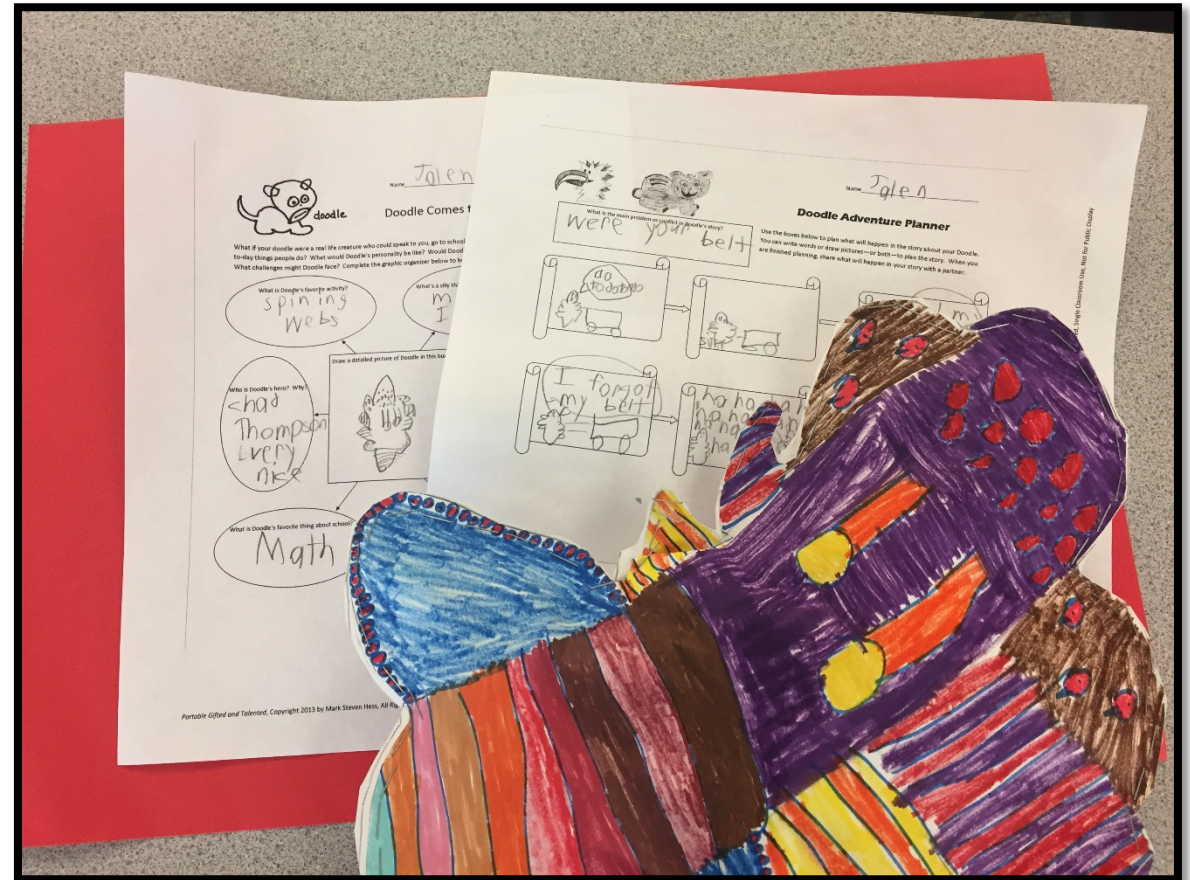
Designed to speak in *boy language* (*but good for girls, too!*): this unit is built to help boys communicate feelings and participate in a GATE social-emotional activity. The unit is effective for a number of learning styles and abilities: visual-spatial, for nonverbal ability, for English language learners, for twice-exceptional, and fun for everyone.



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According to Michael Thompson, Ph.D. and Teresa H. Barker in *It's a Boy* (p. 210), 4/5<sup>th</sup> of elementary school instruction is language-based. Many boys say they hate reading and writing—gifted boys included. Boys need to move around, to use humor, to use improvisation and act out situations: “The central issue for boys, no matter what subject is being taught, are movement, control of choice, variety, (and) interaction with the group” (Thompson and Barker, p. 217).



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# How did your doodle turn out?



**What would you tell someone who told another person they didn't "like" that other person's imagination?**

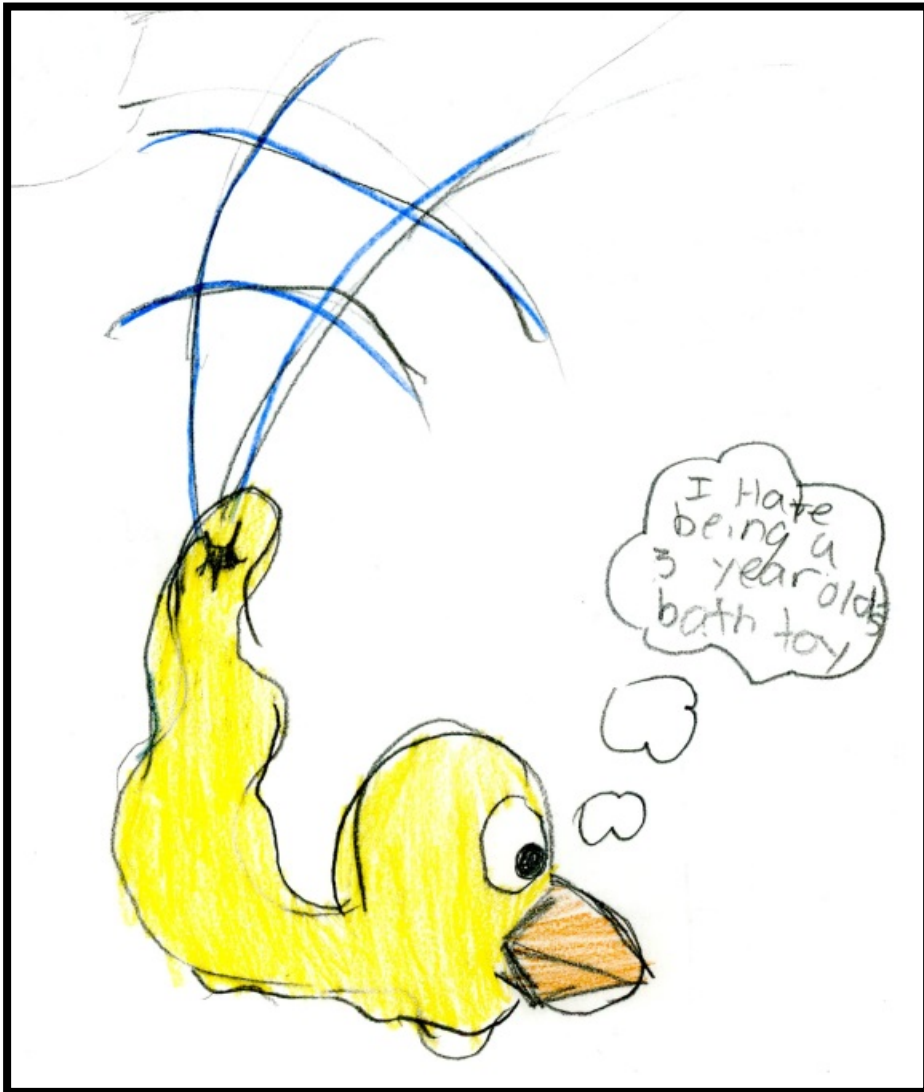
**What would you tell a student who insists they "can't think of anything" to make from the doodle "starter?"**

**What would you tell another student who has quit the activity because they said none of their ideas are any good?**

The *boy* focus: Boys love to be problem-solvers and prefer to lend advice to others over talking about their own feelings. These last three questions open a social-emotional discussion about acceptance of others, diversity, and perseverance as well as perfectionism.



# And then magic happened . . .



## The Magic of the Examples from the Teacher

Use examples which are social-emotional topics, and watch what happens!

While demonstrating the planning stages of the lesson, I discovered a *magical* method for engaging boys in a social-emotional lesson. I thought I was simply using humor to engage 2<sup>nd</sup> grade boys (and girls) and mixing in some discussion items, but it grew into much more.

You can see my two examples below. I used humor and then planned a story in which *Doodle* is teased on the playground for my storytelling adventure. *Doodle* deals with the teasing with a lighthearted attitude and humor, and the bully doesn't know what to do.

Magic.

The students mimicked my example. They created *Doodles* and conflicts in similar ways. They loved it. They giggled through plans, and they giggled through artwork. They giggled through stories, and they giggled their way through social-emotional lessons. More examples are provided further below.

Wow! I had stumbled upon several effective ways of engaging boys in the important work of social-emotional lessons: Meeting gifted boys on their own *boy* terms because in so many important ways they are just like all other boys. Understanding that gifted boys may need help finding language to discuss feelings. Understanding that they may not be willing to discuss feelings directly. Crafting safe avenues of discourse. Using humor and creativity and storytelling. Allowing boys to perform improvisations, move around, and role play and pretend they are not themselves. We encourage them to talk about what *other* boys—fictional boys or *Doodles*—might do. We encourage them to counsel fictional boys through difficult situations on the playground, at home, and inside their own thoughts and feelings.

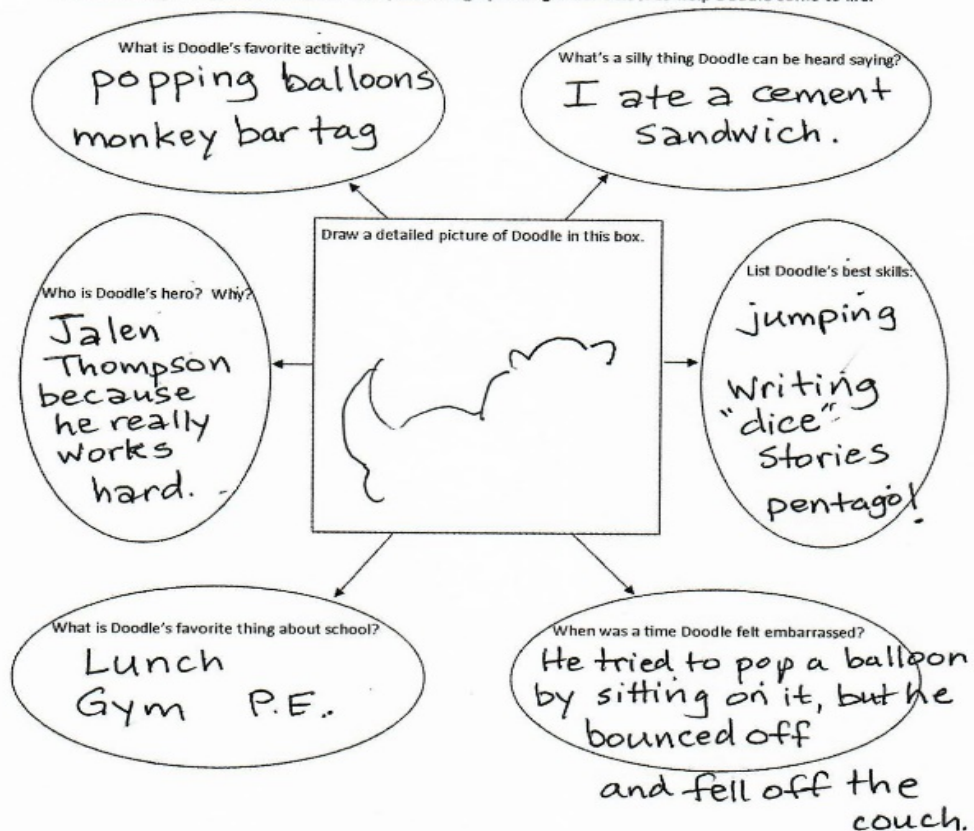




Name Mr. Hess

## Doodle Comes to Life!

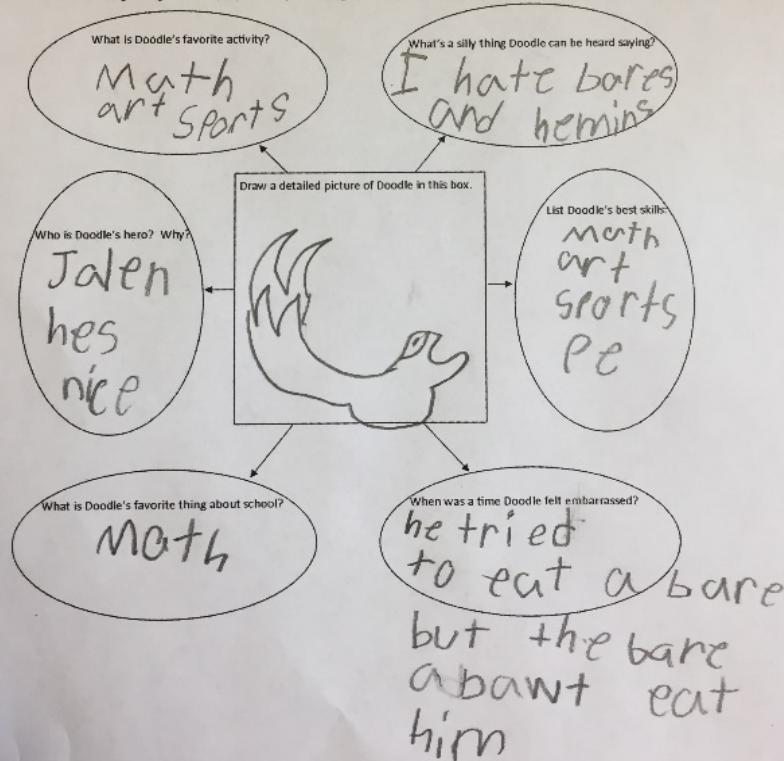
What if your doodle were a real life creature who could speak to you, go to school, and do all the normal day-to-day things people do? What would Doodle's personality be like? Would Doodle have any special skills? What challenges might Doodle face? Complete the graphic organizer below to help Doodle come to life.



Name Logan

## Doodle Comes to Life!

What if your doodle were a real life creature who could speak to you, go to school, and do all the normal day-to-day things people do? What would Doodle's personality be like? Would Doodle have any special skills? What challenges might Doodle face? Complete the graphic organizer below to help Doodle come to life.



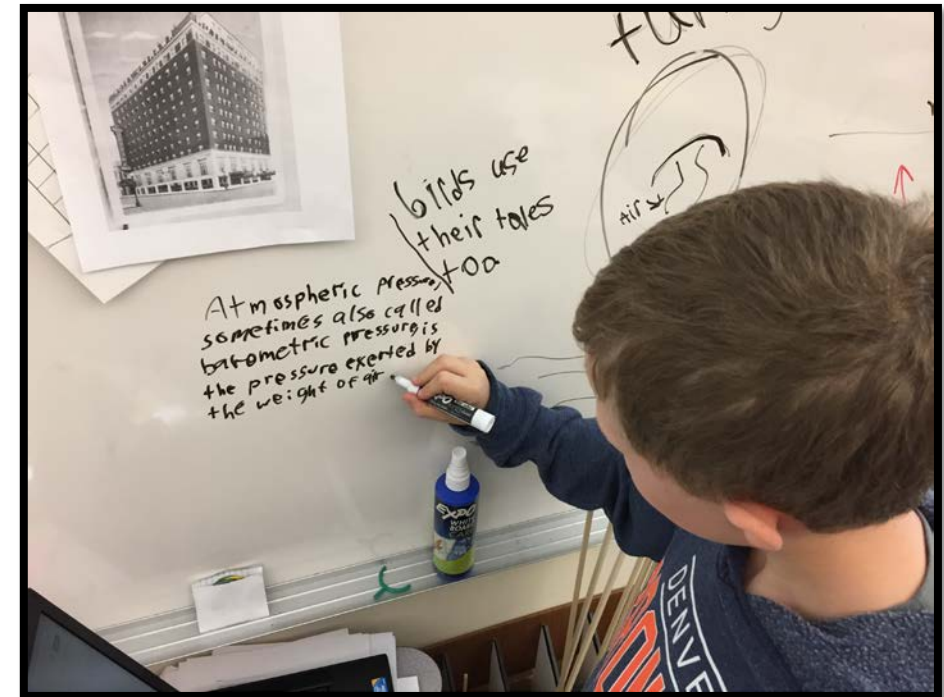
**“The greatest gift to a boy’s identity is a boy like himself, who confirms that he is all right.”**

--Thompson and Barker, p. 204, *Raising Cain*

# Pre-load the Story with Social-Emotional Prompts



1. Doodle gets in trouble at school because of a misunderstanding.
2. Doodle solves a conflict at recess.
3. Doodle feels bad about things in the world and tries to help out.
4. Doodle makes a new friend.
5. Doodle feels different from everyone else.
6. Doodle feels like a failure and needs advice.
7. Doodle takes a challenge and feels victorious.





# Then follow up with an example:

What is the main problem or conflict in Doodle's story?  
got teased for being yellow and pink

Name Mr. Hess

**Doodle Adventure Planner**

Use the boxes below to plan what will happen in the story about your Doodle. You can write words or draw pictures—or both—to plan the story. When you are finished planning, share what will happen in your story with a partner.

Ha! Ha!  
You are a GIRL color.

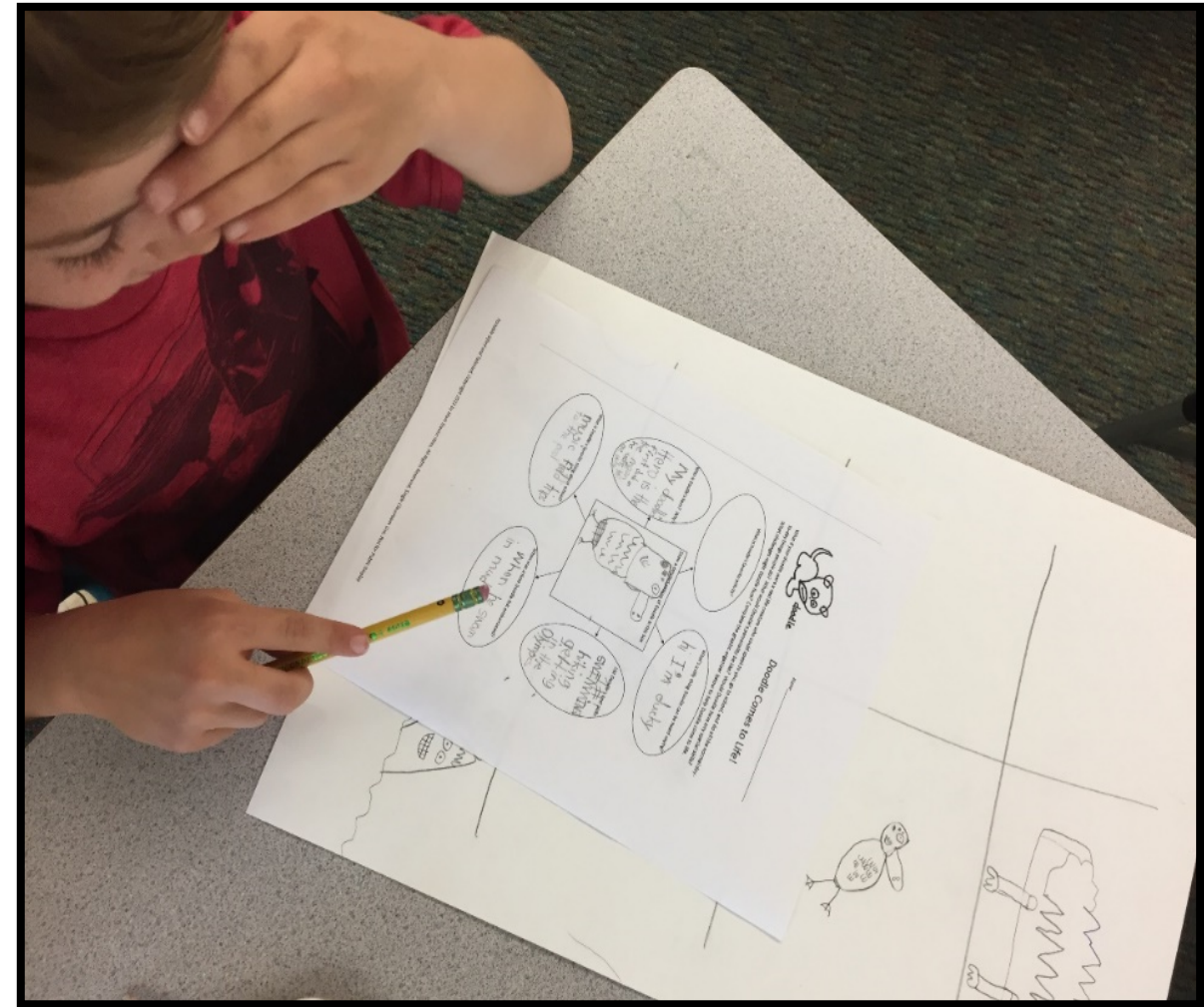
Thanks. I like that I'm different

??

Well... you are dumb!

Whatever! Ha ha... I gotta go play

Why will nobody play with me?



**Kids will start to share stories  
even before they are done ...**

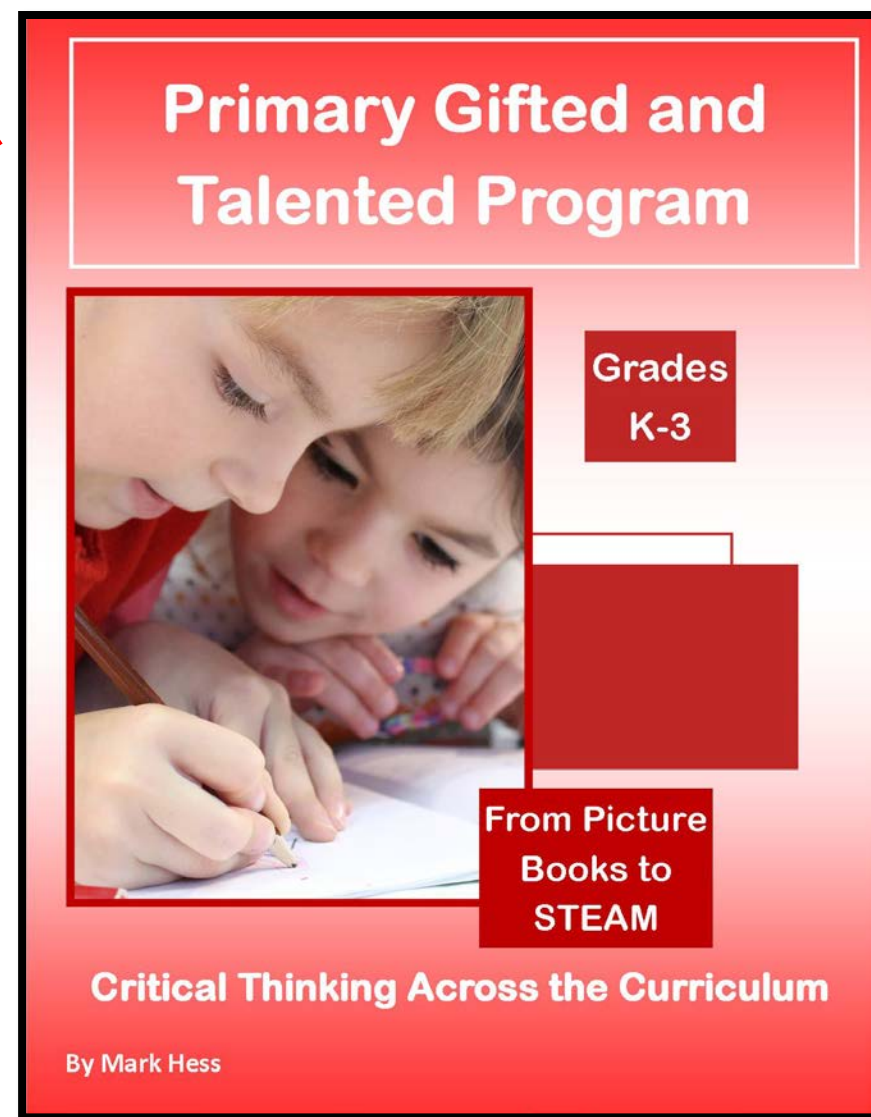
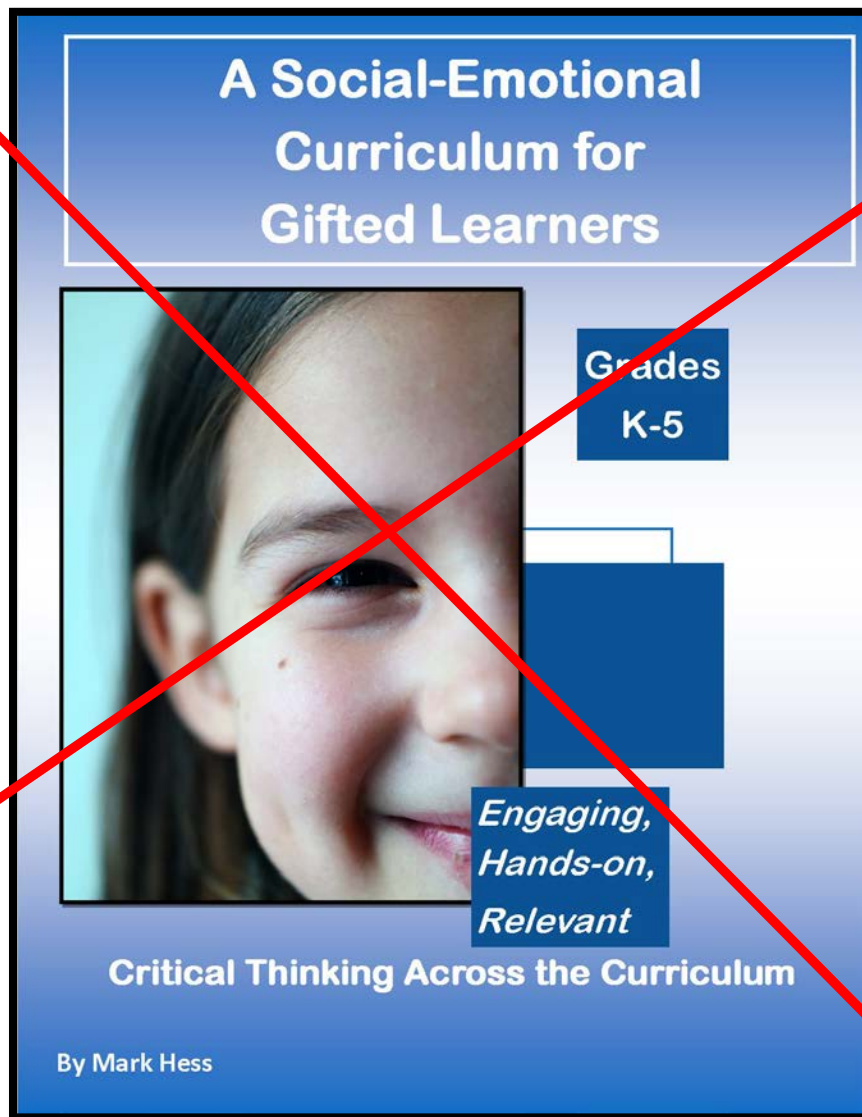


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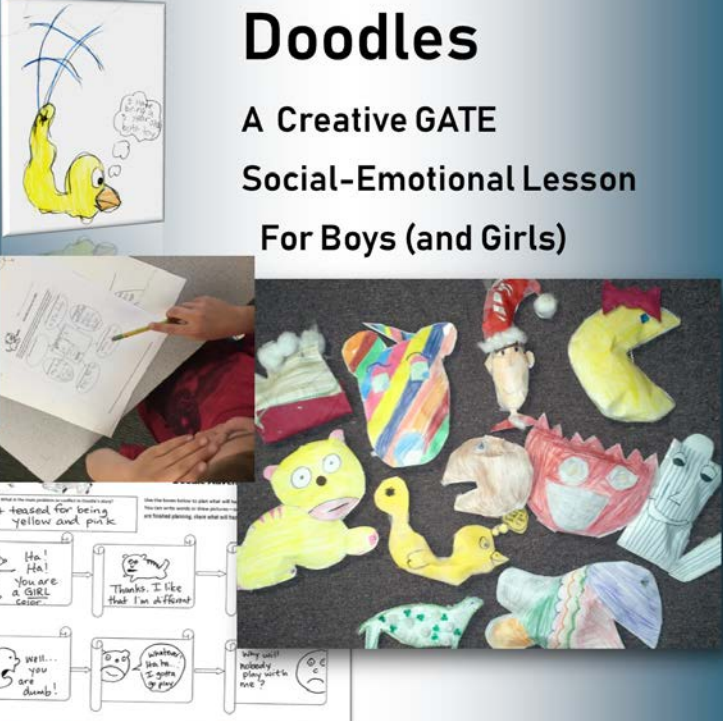


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# Doodles

## A Creative GATE Social-Emotional Lesson For Boys (and Girls)



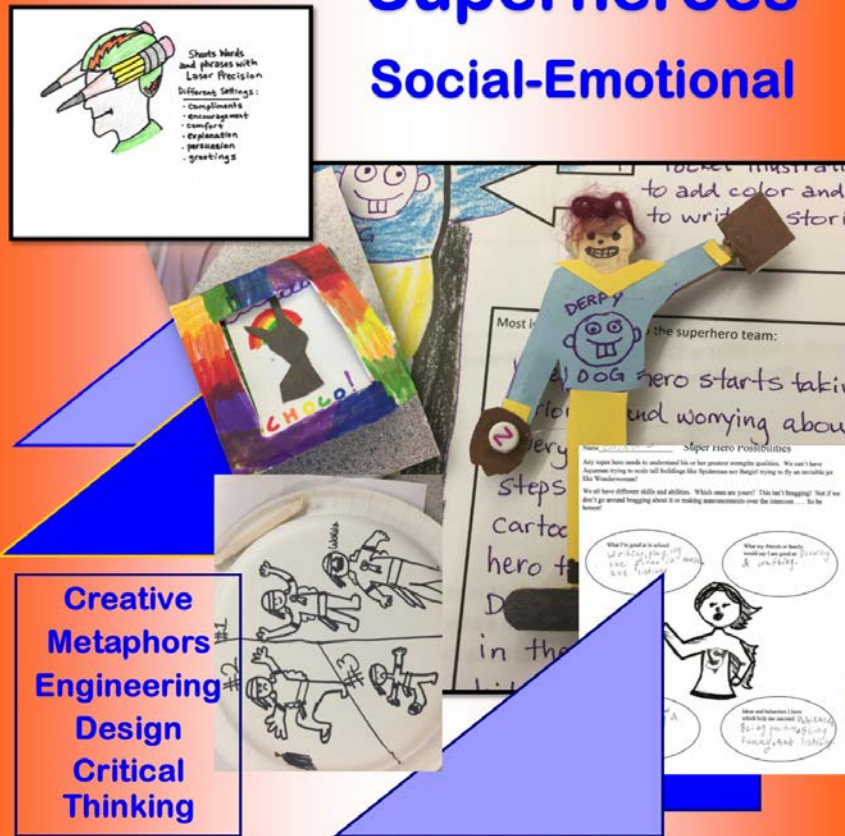
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**Creative Metaphors Engineering Design Critical Thinking**

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**By Mark Hess**



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**Every boy has an inner life.  
Their hearts are full.**

**--Kindlon and Thompson, p.  
20**





## Resources

*It's a Boy!* by Thompson and Barker, 2008

*Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* by Kindlon and Thompson, 1999-2000

*Smart Boys: Talent, Manhood, and the Search for Meaning* by Barbara Kerr and Sandord Cohn, 2001

*Six Ways Parent can Stay Connected with the Teen Sons*, The Washington Post, Phyllis Fagell, 4/18/17

*9 Tips for Communicating with your Teenage Son* by Gregory L. Jantz, Ph.D., 4/11/14

*How to Improve Communication with Teen Boys*, US News, Barabara Greenberg

*Sparkle Unicorns and Fart Ninjas: What Parents Can do about Gendered Toys*, NPR, Anya Kamenetz and Cory Turner, 3/26/19