Lucy Takes the Stage: A Story for Children with Anxiety

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Lucy Takes the Stage: A Story for Children with Anxiety

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Abstract

Childhood anxiety is explored through the lens of child development as well as children’s literature. The book written for this integrated masters project was created to help engage children around age 5, recognizing that it could be for ages 5-7, in thinking about anxiety. Anxiety disorders in children can take many different forms, but the major distinction between a disorder and normal worries is that it causes stress that disrupts normal functioning. Additionally, read-alouds are a common and beneficial way to introduce children to literature in schools. Young children can learn to read, take another’s perspective, as well as gain comprehension skills through read-alouds. The literature review describes other children’s picture books that help students deal with their worries or other emotional experiences. With the review of children’s literature, the book written for the IMP is placed as a fictional book among the three categories of self-help books, fictional books, and books in between.

Lesley Koplow (2002) discusses the use of bibliotherapy as a means to help students with anxiety. The book written for this IMP can be used as a means of bibliotherapy to help students cope with their worries and anxiety. The book tells the story of a girl named Lucy who must read her story aloud in front of her family and her peers’ families on grandparents day. She overcomes her anxiety about reading to a crowd with the help of her sister Sam. In the end, she is proud of herself and realizes she did not need to be so worried. Use of the book in the classroom is described in this study to demonstrate the ways that teachers can use the book to guide classroom discussions.
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Rationale

For the purpose of my IMP, I chose to write a story about anxiety because I have had anxiety for many years. When I was younger, I was afraid of many things: thunder, fireworks, the dark, my house would burn down, and especially dogs. I always felt that I was different. I thought I had more fears than my peers, but was unable to understand what exactly was going on. I remember other kids laughing at me for being scared of thunder and fireworks at camp. I would be with my counselor crying while they were off having fun and not worried. Sometimes, I felt unable to voice my concerns for fear of being laughed at by my peers.

My parents worked hard to push me to overcome many of my fears. They took me to see fireworks and explained to me that they were very far away and could not hurt me, and they gave me a nightlight to provide a little light in my room at night. They even got a dog to try to help me get beyond my fear of dogs. When we went to pick out our new puppy, my brother, 3 years old, jumped into the pen and started playing with the puppies. I on the other hand, 5 years old, was trying to climb above my dad’s head to get as far away from the puppies as possible. Eventually, my parents’ plan worked. Though I am not a “dog person,” I am no longer afraid of dogs or them jumping on me.

I was able to overcome one of my major sources of anxiety with the help of my parents. In the story that I wrote for this project, I wrote about an experience where a child was able to overcome her fear with the help of a loved one and by developing confidence in herself. This story helps children realize that they can engage in activities that make them anxious, and it will help them grow stronger by facing the issue and coming out the other side feeling successful.

In my experience, anxiety can feel very lonely. According to D’arcy Lyness (2014), kids “may fear being judged or considered weak, scared, or "babyish"… This leads many kids to feel alone
or misunderstood” (para. 24). Even to this day, my anxiety gets worse as I worry that my feelings are unwarranted and that others will not understand. Children and adults alike who suffer from anxiety can feel they are the only ones feeling this way, which can be very lonely. Even as grown ups, people with anxiety have to continue to work to develop confidence and personal strength. I wanted to write a story to help students understand that they are not alone in their anxiety and that there is a hope of overcoming their fears.

As a teacher, I have had a few students with anxiety in my classes and have worked to help them. For example, I had a few students in my fourth grade class that got very anxious during math work and all formal tests. One student felt unsuccessful in math and always asked for help before even looking at the problems in front of her. She would always claim that she did not know what to do, but once she started, she was able to solve them successfully. The other student often received low grades and started to cry during exams. The school did not provide either student with the support and encouragement she needed. I wrote them an encouraging note that read, “You can do it! Love Ms. Beckman” in highlighter on a notecard. They kept it with them and I often saw them refer to it when they were having feelings of self-doubt. The note seemed to really help them as they faced their fears of beginning the work or test.

The inspiration for the plot in my story came from an experience while student teaching. In my first grade classroom, students were asked to share what they had learned about their reading book. Most of the students were excited to teach the rest of the class. When they stood before the rest of the class, some spoke with confidence, and others withdrew into themselves and tried to focus on anything but the class they were speaking to. This experience got me thinking about what it would feel like to have performance anxiety in a class where every other student loved to perform. I chose to write this story because there are many times during the day
when students are asked to stand in front of a class and speak as they develop their reading, comprehension, and verbal skills. For example, students are asked to read the schedule or message during morning meeting or share what they have written in writer’s workshop. I wanted to write a story that would provide a resource to support students who felt they were the only ones who were nervous about these experiences to realize they can overcome or at least understand and find strategies to help them cope with their own anxiety.

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (2016), one in eight children are affected by an anxiety disorder. Furthermore, “research shows that untreated children with anxiety disorders are at higher risk to perform poorly in school, miss out on important social experiences, and engage in substance abuse” (ADAA, 2016). Lyness (2014) explains, “the best way to help your child [with an anxiety disorder] is to acknowledge the problem in a supportive, nonjudgmental way. Talk openly about your child's symptoms and really try to understand how they are affecting everyday life” (para. 28). Books are a great way to open dialogue between a child with an anxiety disorder and a parent or teacher.

Lesley Koplow (2002) explains that bibliotherapy is a technique that helps children to reflect on important issues that are relevant to them. It is often used in early grades because read-alouds are common. She notes that bibliotherapy “invites children to recognize an issue and to explore its meaning for them through open-ended discussion and follow-up projects” (Koplow, 2002, p. 143). Giorgis & Glazier (2009) explain that books help children to develop and see prosocial behavior. As children read and listen to literature they are able to learn about others’ feelings and to see situations from other points of view (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009) and therefore understand their own feelings as well. This book can be used to address feelings of anxiety that are being felt by a few or many children in a classroom.
Age Group Description

The book written for my integrated masters project was created to help engage children around age 5, recognizing that it could be for ages 5-7, in thinking about anxiety. According to Piaget’s stages of development, 5 year olds are in the preoperational stage (Wood, 2007). This means that children are egocentric: they have difficulty taking the viewpoint of others (Wood, 2007). However, children learn prosocial behavior from models and experiences they have role-playing as well as perceived reinforcements. Books can help children to develop and see prosocial behavior. According to Giorgis and Glazer (2009), when children read books, they “...will make inferences about the feelings and intentions of others” (p. 128). Reading literature helps children to view a situation from another person’s point of view and learn about people who are different from themselves (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009).

The audience for this IMP, 5 year olds, are also bound by their senses, which means that they are unable to understand complex concepts that they cannot try out in front of them. Wood (2007) explains that children in this stage are able to focus on objects near them, but they have a hard time with the sweeping eye movements necessary to read efficiently. Literature can help children along the process of learning to read. Giorgis and Glazer (2009) explain,

As children begin to associate the print with the exact words, they go through a time when the number of words appearing on a page does not match the number of words they are using, particularly if they think of each syllable as a word. Knowing a story by heart allows them to go back again and again to a page, work on the problem, and teach themselves that long words have more than one syllable (p. 96). Children begin to understand the correlation between words on the page and what is being read to them as they have more and more experiences with literature.

Furthermore, according to Cohen (1972), the facility over language of children this age does not always match their maturity level. Therefore, they may sound as if they understand concepts that they do not have a full grasp of. Additionally, they may sound more emotionally
mature than they really are. Children at this stage use pre-logical thought. Their understanding and ideas are based on their own intuition rather than the cause and effect that they have seen play out in front of them (Wood, 2007). Therefore, children need sensory experiences to learn. They need to actively use their bodies rather than only sitting and listening. They use play to help them learn and understand the world through imitation of what they have seen and learned (Cohen, 1972). Therefore, it is necessary to allow children to respond to literature through different types of activities in order to give them a creative and meaningful extension to the story. Literature can also help children to build their imagination (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009). Therefore, I designed curriculum for this project to allow children to explore the book through many lenses.

Children at this stage of development are still uncertain about fantasy versus reality, which can affect children’s experiences with anxiety. They are still struggling to discriminate between what is real and happening in this world and what they are imagining or hearing about in stories, such as Santa Claus, the tooth fairy or experiences they hear about from other people (Cohen, 1972).

Five year olds are excited to have more physical power and control than they used to have. However, they are not fully able to control their new found physical power and can get cocky in their movements (Cohen, 1972). Additionally, this age needs a lot of opportunities for physical activity (Wood, 2007).

Socially, a five year old child’s main objective is “pleasing significant adults” (Wood, 2007, p. 58). They want constant validation and strive to please adults at this point rather than children around them. Children at this age are more exact and literal in their answers than the long stories of 4 year olds (Wood, 2007). Five-year-old children play with rules that are literal
and absolute. As they get older, their play becomes more complex (Wood, 2007). Their behavior can change very quickly even throughout a game. They will start playing well and then quickly change to arguing. They are constantly struggling because they want to be independent, but still need the help of an adult (Wood, 2007). They are also impulsive (Cohen, 1972).

Literature is an important aspect of children’s development. Monson & Sebesta explain that children in elementary school tend to like books about, “personified animals, about nature, about children their age or slightly older, and about daily life and familiar experiences” (as cited in Giorgis & Glazer, 2009, p. 22). They also tend to prefer illustrations that are representational and in color rather than abstract or black and white pictures (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009). Children usually read for the enjoyment and pleasure of the experience, which is made up of the “rhythm of the language, the excitement of the plot, and the feelings evoked” (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009, p. 24). Readers make meaning by interacting with the text from their own personal knowledge and experiences. Therefore, it is important to choose appropriate books for children based on the style of writing, the way the book discusses the content and the theme of the text (Giorgis & Glazer, 2009).

The focus of my independent masters project is childhood anxiety. It is normal for children age 5 to experiences fear and stress as they experience the world and new things. However, there is a point where the fear becomes too much and is considered to be an anxiety disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)-5 lists 9 anxiety disorders. According to Spence (1998) “anxiety disorders in children may present in a variety of forms, such as separation anxiety, social phobia, generalized anxiety, panic disorder with and without agoraphobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder and specific phobias “ (p. 545). According to the DSM-5 generalized anxiety is
(1) Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance). (2) The individual finds it difficult to control the worry. (3) For children, the anxiety and worry are associated with one (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms having been present for more days than not for the past 6 months): (a) Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge; (b) Being easily fatigued; (c) Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank; (D) Irritability; (e) Muscle tension; (f) Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restlessness, unsatisfying sleep). (4) The anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. (5) The disturbance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition (e.g., hyperthyroidism). (6) The disturbance is not better explained by another mental disorder (Nutter, 2017, para. 5).

Anxiety disorders in children can take many different forms, but the major distinction is that it causes stress that disrupts normal functioning. According to Albano et al (2003), “high and stable levels of anxiety are associated with severe impairment in functioning, expressed in its most disabling form through a child’s avoidance of such activities as school, peer involvement, and the attainment of stage-related developmental tasks” (p. 279). Anxiety can have a large impact on a child’s life. Furthermore, Nutter (2017) explains “children with GAD often seem overly conforming, perfectionistic, and self-critical. They may insist on redoing even fairly insignificant tasks several times to get them "just right." This excessive structuring of one's life is used as a defense against the generalized anxiety related to the concern about the individual's overall and specific performance” (para. 3). Children with anxiety may be overly concerned with being perfect in their work and fear performing in front of others.

Overall, children around age 5 are finding their way through a world that they still do not have a full grasp of. They have difficulty taking the point of view of others and therefore may have trouble relating to others, especially in games. They also want to be independent, but still need the help of adults around them physically, emotionally, and cognitively. When children have anxiety, the world can be an even more worrisome place. Literature is a way for children to
learn about themselves and others and to help guide them through discussions about topics that may be difficult to discuss, such as anxiety.
Literature Review Book List

The following 15 books are organized into three categories: self-help books, fictional books, and somewhere in between the two categories. The books discussed in this review of children’s literature range from clear self-help books to fictional stories with a plot. The self-help books in this list range in the quality of text and illustrations. Some of the self-help books are obviously pushing an agenda, but would be useful to help students who can identify with the problems discussed in the book. However, other self-help books, such as Wilma Jean the Worry Machine, would be a fun read aloud even to a whole class to be a jumping off point for helping kids to discuss their own worries in a solo or larger group discussion. The fictional stories are engaging and fun for children to be read aloud because the stories are thoughtful and the topics are relatable for this age group. They would be wonderful as read alouds that can begin a short or longer conversation with the whole class, small group, or individual students. The books that fall in between the fictional and self-help category are books that have a clear fictional plot-line, but also have an agenda, like a self-help book. I created this category because I felt that some of the fictional stories could bridge the gap between the two categories, and wanted a third category to address the overlap. The book that I wrote for this Master’s Project falls in the fictional category. The story has a clear plot line that subtly addresses the issue of anxiety.

Self-Help Books


This book is written in the 2nd person point of view. It describes what a worry is, and how it feels. For example, Wolff & Savitz explain that a worry could be having a hundred elephants come to tea, but having no tea bags, and “A worry can feel like a heavy sack is on your back”
The book is written more as a self-help book than a story with a singular plot. The book describes fictional worries that include elephants coming to tea and how you can make the worry go away.

This book could be used as a way to discuss how no worries are too silly or embarrassing, but that there are always ways to get rid of the worry. The book can also be used as a way to breach a discussion of what a child’s worry is. The illustrations in this book are in dark colors throughout the text, which serves to enhance the worries mentioned in the book.


David and the Worry Beast is about a boy who begins to worry after he misses a shot in his basketball game. Once he begins to worry, his worry beast appears and continues to grow as his worries grow. He worries about basketball and his math test and finally gets so anxious that he wants to go home because his stomach hurts. He and his mother meet with the school psychologist who tells David there are ways to help, especially telling his worries to others. As he confronts each worry, his worry beast gets smaller.

This story is written with a plot, but has many aspects of a self-help book. The book explicitly discusses the idea of worry and how a child can confront it. Additionally, the back of the book includes tips for kids and parents to help with anxiety. This book could be read-aloud to a whole group, or with an individual student to address anxieties and coping mechanisms.
The illustrations are done in bright colors, mostly shades of yellow, orange, and blue. These colors help to make the book more comforting and appealing to children even when the ideas discussed may be anxiety-provoking.

**Fictional Stories**


*Wemberly Worried* is a fictional story about Wemberly, the mouse. She worries about everything, especially starting school. However, once she gets to school, she meets another girl who worries just like her. Before she knows it, the school day is over and she is excited to go back the next day.

This book is written as a fictional story that can be used to teach about anxiety. This story can be used as a read aloud for the whole class or one-on-one to talk about how everyone has worries, especially about going to school. It demonstrates that finding others who are similar to you can help alleviate anxiety. The book also demonstrates that finding something to distract from the worries, like friends and having fun at school, can help.

Kevin Henkes’ illustrations are done in watercolor paints and a black pen. They show the characters illustrated as mice. This choice brings humor and a feeling of distance that makes the book less overwhelming for children.


*First Day Jitters* is a funny book about Sarah’s first day of school. It describes her anxiety and unwillingness to go to a new school. The end of the book provides a funny twist when we learn she is really the teacher of the class. The watercolor illustrations provide extra humor with scenes of what would happen if she did not show up and her getting ready for school.
This book would be enjoyable to many kids and shows that everyone, including teachers, get nervous for their first day of school. It could be used by parents or teachers on the first day of school with individual children or the whole class to calm anxiety about entering school. The book is written as a story that labels feelings of worry and anxiety.


Molly Lou Melon is short, has buck teeth and a terrible singing voice, but her grandma told her to be proud of who she is. When she moves to a new school, she is bullied for all of these attributes, but she follows her grandma’s advice and is proud of her differences. Eventually, the bully feels foolish for making fun of her and stops being mean.

This is a storybook with a plot and a clear moral. The book could be used as a read aloud to discuss respecting each other’s differences and being proud of who we are.

According to Publisher’s Weekly, “Catrow’s full-bleed pencil-and-watercolor illustrations, awash in ripe colors and animated by slapstick exaggeration, radiate a winningly eccentric elegance” (2001). The illustrations also lend a silly feeling to the book.


This is a story about a boy named Ronald. Things are not going his way all day at school: he eats the wrong lunch, he reads his book incorrectly during reading groups, and he loses his ice cream money. He feels really bad about himself all day, but when he goes home his teacher sends him home a note that tomorrow will be a good day. He is proud that he can read it and feels much better.
This book is written as a story and can be read to show that sometimes people have a bad day, but that does not mean they are a bad person or are not smart. Ronald feels even worse about his day because his peers make fun of him. The book can demonstrate the effect that other people’s words have on you.


*Alexander and the Terrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* is about a boy named Alexander whose day goes all wrong. He describes all the terrible things that happen to him: his friend says that he is only his third best friend, the shoes he wants don’t fit, the dentist finds a cavity in his tooth, and there are lima beans for dinner. All day he says he wants to move to Australia, but at the end of the day his mother tells him that sometimes people have a bad day, even in Australia.

This book is a story with a plot that demonstrates that everyone has a bad day. The book discusses events that are silly, but also relatable for children. The book demonstrates that sometimes people have a bad day, and that is normal. The illustrations are done in black and white ink sketches (Alyson, 2011), which lends to the gloomy feeling of the book.


In this book, a girl finds a camera and wants to keep it. Another child in the class says its his, but she lies to her teacher about getting the camera for her birthday. She feels very bad and is scared to tell the truth. All day she is nervous. She cannot pay attention at school or eat her favorite dinner. However, once she does tell the truth to her teacher, she is forgiven and everything is better. The illustrations in this story are made by pencil and acrylic paint on
watercolor paper. They are realistic even though the book is about animals. The illustrations are “repertorial pencil-and-acrylic pictures to underscore the emotional and moral stakes” (Publishers Weekly, 2007) in the story. The illustrations help to enhance the fictional story element of the story.

This story is another example of a fiction story that can be used as a jumping off point for a class discussion about respecting each other’s property and empathy. It could be used if there is already a problem between children or with the teacher or as a reminder that it is important to understand that each person has their own things and we cannot take or break them. Additionally, the story highlights the teacher’s empathy and forgiveness once Ruthie tells the truth. The story could also be used to discuss the impact on all people involved in a lie.


This book is loved by my kindergarten class because of the illustrations. The glossy paper and vivid colors draw them in and almost appear to be photographs, which adds to the humor of the story.

The story is about a girl who is embarrassed that she loves lima beans. She has to stay at home because she is a distraction in school as her skin changes color based on what her peers say. She is poked and prodded by doctors who cannot figure out why she is changing colors, shape, and sprouting things from her body. In the end, she just needed to be herself and enjoy her lima beans.

This is a wonderful read aloud that has a funny, engaging plot, but also an important moral about not being afraid to be your true self. The story can be used on-on-one in a conversation about accepting differences and the special things that make you, you.

George in the Dark tells the story of a boy who is afraid of the dark. He loses his bear “in the scariest and darkest place,” under his bed. In order to retrieve it, he must be very brave and face his fears. Once he gets the bear, he is no longer scared of the dark.

The illustrations for this book were drawn on watercolor paper with graphite, gouache, and colored pencils rendered in nighttime colors. The colors used in the illustrations help to emphasize the fears of the boy.

This book could be used as a read aloud or one on one with a child to talk about overcoming fears of the dark or other fears in general. Similar to my story, this book demonstrates how it is scary to face your fear, but once you do, it is no longer as scary.


Illustrated by Jon Klassen

In Lemony Snicket’s The Dark, the dark is personified as something that lies in the main character Laszlo’s house. Laszlo is afraid of the dark and hopes it will never visit him in his room. One night, the dark comes to his room and leads him to the basement, where the dark lives. The dark directed Laszlo to a cupboard, where Laszlo found many light bulbs. After that, Laszlo was never bothered by the dark again. It is explained that we need the dark in order to know if we need a light bulb. This book is another story that shows that standing up to our fears makes them less scary.

The illustrations were done digitally and in gouache and show the contrast between dark and light.
Somewhere in Between


Illustrated: anita dufala

This is a fictional story about a girl and all her worries. It lists all her worries and describes how she feels when she worries. Her worries take over her life so her mom calls her teacher. Her teacher helps her come up with a plan to help her not worry so much.

This book is written about a fictional character and with a plot so it is more relatable to children. However, unlike some of the other books on this list, where the message is not as obvious, this book comes off more as a self-help book. It demonstrates that kids can have lots of worries, but if you talk to someone, they can help you find ways to not feel as overwhelmed by them. The illustrations are bright and silly and help to add engagement and humor to the story.


When Sophie gets angry, really really angry is about a girl and what she does when she gets angry. The story is written as a rhyme and tells how someone gets angry and how she gets over it. The illustrations in the book are painted with guache in strong, bold, bright colors that help to demonstrate Sophie’s feelings, such as the roar of red.

This story can be used one-on-one to start a conversation about anger: what causes it and how we can make it go away. It can launch a discussion about coping strategies, but also that you are still loved even you get angry.

It’s OK to be different is not about anxiety, but is an example of a book that addresses an important topic in a manner that is relatable to children and can open an important discussion with them. Students who experience anxiety may feel that they are alone, and this book demonstrates that everyone has something that may set them apart, but they are not alone. It is a book about differences between people. The book lists both serious and silly things that distinguish people such as losing mittens or helping a squirrel collect and being embarrassed or adopted. The illustrations lend a silly feel to the book, which may allow children to feel less pressurized or overwhelmed in discussions because they can discuss the issues in terms that feel removed from their personal lives.

This book could be used as a read-aloud to open a discussion about respecting each other’s differences. The book is not written as a story, but also does not feel like a self-help book. The illustrations make the book fun and approachable to children.


Today I feel Silly is a book about moods. The story is written in rhyme and discusses the mood the main character is in that day. Each page describes a different feeling: how it looks on her face and why she is feeling that way. The end of the book explains that moods change and that is okay. The illustrations in the book are bright and colorful and add to the humor.

This book could be used with children to discuss and label their own moods and feelings. It could be a discussion starter about understanding that sometimes we are happy and sometimes we are not, and that is normal. Though it is not directly about anxiety, the story may help students with anxiety to label how they are feeling in that moment and to use it to discuss their
anxiety. The book is not written as a story or a self-help book. Instead, similar to It’s OK to be different, it labels different moods in a fun and engaging way.
Lucy Takes the Stage

By: Rachel Beckman
Illustrated by: Emily Rourke

Lucy was sitting quietly on the rug in her first grade classroom as the students around her chatted excitedly. Their teacher, Mrs. MacIntyre, asked all the kids to settle down and began her announcement. “Yes, you know, Grandparents’ Day is in 2 weeks and I would like to announce something very special. You are all going to get to share a piece of your work from this year in front of everyone!”

Lucy hoped she had heard Mrs. MacIntyre wrong. She had to read in front of the whole class, her family, AND everyone else’s families!?!

The entire room seemed to spin as Lucy’s heart started beating faster and faster and her palms started to sweat. She hated talking in front of the class, let alone in front of all those people!
Lucy's best friend Abby turned to her and said, "That is so fun! I can't wait for my grandma to hear my poem about butterflies!" Lucy just nodded and tried to make herself as small as possible.

As the day passed, all the students were discussing which piece they wanted to read and how they were going to read it.

Lucy kept watching as the hands of the clock seemed to move slower than usual. She kept imagining herself walking to the front of the room and tripping or forgetting all the words and everyone in the audience laughing at her.

Before they went home, Mrs. Macintyre reminded the class, "Make sure you practice at home. You can read your piece a bunch of times and then practice in front of your family."
When Lucy got home and told her family about grandparents’ day, everyone got very excited. Her theatrical sister Emma told Lucy that she should remember to speak loudly and enunciate. “If you get nervous just picture the audience in their underwear,” her elder brother added.

On Saturday, Lucy’s mom suggested that she practice reading in front of the family. “It will make you more comfortable if you practice first,” she said.

Lucy wanted to tell them that she did not want to do it, but they were all so happy that she just let them keep talking.

Everyone gathered in the living room and Lucy began. “Once upon a time there—there—there! Lucy could not remember what came next. She looked up at all their expectant faces and ran to her room. She was so embarrassed that she had forgotten her own story!”
She curled up in her bed and started to cry.

Her oldest sister, Sam, knocked on the door. “Can I come in?” she asked. “If you want to,” whimpered Lucy.

Sam sat next to Lucy on the bed. “Did you know that I had to do the same thing when I was in first grade?” She told Lucy. “I hated talking in front of people too. I kept imagining that I would mess up and everyone would laugh.”

Lucy looked up at her sister, “so, what did you do?” she asked.
"Everyday before I went to bed I practiced in the mirror. I practiced what I
would say, how I would say it, and what I would do with my hands and body
as I talked." Sam explained.

"Did it work? Did you mess up?" asked Lucy. "I had practiced so much that I
knew I would be able to do it. I remember when I walked in front of the audience
I was so nervous, but I looked at mom and she smiled. I knew I could do it if
I pretended that I was just talking to her. It went great! I read it perfectly. And I
know you can do it too. Just pretend that I am the only one in the room and you
are just reading to me." Lucy smiled at her sister and decided she could do it if
she practiced everyday.

Lucy stood in front of the mirror that night and read her story.

The next morning, she looked into the mirror and read her story.
For the next 2 weeks she practiced in front of the mirror.

Every morning,

And every night.

Grandparents' day arrived. All the kids in the class walked into the classroom with their families. Everyone was standing around the room, talking and enjoying the food and drinks.
Lucy couldn't eat. She felt like she was going to throw up or cry, or both. She just wanted to run back home and skip the whole day.

Finally, Mrs. Macintyre asked everyone to take their seats for the presentations.

Abby went first and everyone clapped at the end of the poem. As she walked past Lucy's desk, she said, "Good luck! It's so fun!" Lucy wasn't sure how speaking in front of all those people could be fun.

Lucy was going over her story again in her head, when Mrs. Macintyre called her name.
She walked up to the front of the room and looked at everyone watching her. She almost ran out of the room, but she noticed her sister smiling at her. She remembered what Sam said, "just pretend I am the only one in the room and you are just reading to me" Lucy took a deep breath and Sam smiled reassuringly.

Lucy began to read her story, "Once upon a time there was a princess...." Before she knew it, she had finished the story!

When she looked up from her paper, the whole room was clapping and smiling. She did it!

As she walked back to her seat, everyone in her family got up to hug her. "You did so well!" Her grandma said, "That was so wonderful!" exclaimed her mom.
Sam gave her the biggest hug out of everyone. "See, it wasn't so scary! I'm so proud of you!" Lucy smiled and walked over to eat some cookies with her friends. She knew that next time she had to speak in front of a crowd she wouldn't be so nervous.
Applications

For the purpose of gaining insight to children's perspectives on this IMP book project, I read the book to both of my kindergarten classes. The students in the class range from 5 to 6 years old. The students were very engaged in the read aloud and seemed to enjoy the book as evidenced by their exclamations that they “LOVED the book!” or that the illustrations were well done. However, I had explained to them beforehand that I wrote the book and my friend illustrated it, so some of their enthusiasm may have been based on that.

I previewed the read aloud by asking students about something that someone they know is scared of. I received a range of responses from both classes, but all the students were invested in the conversation. It was interesting to note that the first comment made in both groups had to do with a fear of someone they knew. For example, one student explained that her friend is afraid of the toilet flushing. However, the comments soon turned to personal fears. Children explained that they were afraid of the dark, ghosts, sleeping alone without their parents, and in one class many agreed they were afraid when someone tried to scare them as a joke. Though these fears are not directly related to the plot of the story, they were useful to help students begin to relate to the experiences of the main character.

During the story, students made a few comments about the illustrations and the plot. One question that was asked in both groups was about the Roman numerals used on the face of the clock. If I were to go back and give feedback to the illustrator, I would suggest she use Arabic numerals, which are more familiar to kids of this age group. Another aspect of the story that kids seemed to enjoy was the comment by Lucy’s sibling that she should imagine the audience in their underpants. I think this line allowed for comic relief for the students at a moment when they were feeling nervous for Lucy.
Once I finished reading the book, many of my students told me how much they loved the book. Then I asked my students why they loved the book. One girl explained, “when you are scared you just have to be brave.” In order to continue this conversation I asked my students, “we talked about what people are scared of before, how could this book help them?” My students gave a range of answers. In the first group, students began to share stories about times when they experienced stage fright or a situation similar to Lucy’s. Many talked about being scared before their pre-k graduation. When I asked how this book might help someone who is scared, one student explained that the book could help them if they are scared of their pre-k graduation. Another student explained that she was scared on the first day of kindergarten and that reading this book would have helped her.

The other class was able to use the book to help them think of other strategies to help in a scary situation. When I asked them how the book could help someone who was scared, one student explained that you could think of a good memory. Someone else said to think of something fun. Another boy laughed and said, “you can think about people in their underwear!” Though the comment was silly, he was also listening to the book and repeating a strategy that is suggested to Lucy. Other students noted that if someone is scared they can read this book and it will help them not to be scared.

Overall, I think my students were able to listen to the story and relate to Lucy’s experience. One class was reliving experiences that were similar to Lucy’s while the other was thinking about other ways that could help someone to not focus on their fears in the moment.

**Teacher Use**

Teachers could read “Lucy Takes the Stage” as a read aloud for a whole class or a smaller group, depending on the need of the students. The book could be used with students who
suffer from anxiety or for students who are in a general education classroom because all children at this age are worried about something.

The book could be used to start a larger discussion about fears or worries that students in the class have, or it could be used to help think of solutions to one student’s or many students’ fears. A teacher could use the book to begin a discussion about the idea that everyone is afraid of something and that is totally fine. If students share their fears with each other it will begin to normalize those worries and help students to feel closer to one another and not embarrassed by their anxiety.

A teacher could also utilize the story to help students prepare for an upcoming event or to help them think of solutions for their own anxiety. For example, a teacher could read the story and pause before Sam gives her suggestion to Lucy. The teacher could ask students to brainstorm their own ideas for how Lucy can prepare herself or deal with her fear. Students will then be able to help each other think of ideas in a non-threatening way because they are speaking about Lucy instead of themselves. The teacher could then continue reading the story and ask for further ideas once the students have heard Sam’s suggestion and seen Lucy overcome her own worries. Finally, the teacher could help students turn the discussion to their own fears and worries in order to help them find solutions that best fit their own individual needs.
Conclusion

I found this process to be very enlightening. Throughout my courses at Bank Street I have read and spoken about the importance of read-alouds and literature in education. Through my research and work on my IMP book, I have come to realize the truth of this idea for myself. Literature, especially picture books for young children, allows students to learn about themselves and the world around them as well as gain important comprehension skills. Read-alouds can be used for many different purposes in the classroom and at home, one of which is to help them to better understand themselves and their anxieties. Through my IMP, I found many different types of books that allow students to explore their own worries and anxiety in a non-threatening manner, and even had the opportunity to write one to add to the collection.

I appreciated the opportunity to read through many different types of children’s books and look at them through a new lense: how they relate to self-help and anxiety. It was very interesting for me to go through and understand what a self-help book for a child might look like and how it might be utilized. I noticed there was a range of self-help books from those with explicit questions and suggestions at the end of the book, to those having the whole story explain the idea of a worry or a feeling. Additionally, reading through suggested read-aloud lists online and going through my classroom’s library, I realized that many of the stories that I found relevant to this topic and used in my literature review were stories that were familiar to me as a child. These books that were read to me by my parents or teachers growing up for pleasure can also be used to help students understand more about themselves and their own worries. For example, “Alexander and the Horrible No Good Very Bad Day” was a popular children’s book when I was a child, but I do not think I ever made the connection between the story and the way that children can relate to it on a therapeutic level, until I began working on this project.
One of the most amazing aspects of this project was seeing the text I had written come alive through my friend’s illustrations. Though they were not necessarily what I had imagined, it was a wonderful experience to be able to see my work through someone else’s eyes. Through her illustrations I was able to see which aspects of the book were the most important to her based on what she chose to highlight in her artwork. Additionally, I believe that having illustrations made the read aloud more powerful for my students. They were able to experience the story as a picture book rather than just through words.

Overall the experience was a wonderful learning experience. I was able to learn more about and combine my knowledge of child development, literature and its importance in education, as well as anxiety.
References


