

Consider these suggestions as you assess what students have learned and how they are reacting to the texts. As you read aloud and invite initial responses, keep the following in mind:

Look for

- attention (bright eyes, nodding heads, sadness, window-gazing, inattention)
- obvious interest (or lack thereof) in hearing the text or seeing any illustrations
- focus or distractibility
- understanding or confusion reflected in body language
- positive or negative attitude

Listen for

- sounds of engagement (laughter, sighs, groans)
- questions
- “What ifs” and “Yes, buts”
- comments that indicate understanding or confusion
- informal conversations about the text after the read-aloud
- talk about the story and related issues
- connections and reflections
- thoughtful silence
- “Read it again!”

Talk about (in discussions, “grand conversations,” chats, or conferences)

- questions you and your students have about the text
- images brought to mind by the text
- thoughts that were aroused
- possible responses
- connections and reflections
- patterns that emerged

Notice

- who chooses the text for independent reading
- who uses something from the text in their writing
- who responds to the text in what way
- who chooses another text that is somehow related (same series, author, genre, etc.)

Setting up your classroom:

- Limit distracting visual and auditory stimuli. Aim for a calm and peaceful feel.
- Keep clutter under control. Model effective organization.
- Group noisier activity spaces and quieter ones so they do not interfere with each other.
- Have a special place for student-teacher or student-student conferences.
- Be flexible with seating arrangements and consider when students might need a place for calm and focused thinking or small-group work.
- Choose your transitioning signals carefully (e.g., a quiet drum, a subtle bell, music).
- Have a predictable (but flexible) routine to help students anticipate and prepare.
- Have available fidget toys or worry beads for calming.
- Keep track of triggers for hypo- or hyperactivity and make modifications to facilitate self-regulation.
- Create a safe and caring environment where students feel they have ownership.

Fostering emotional regulation:

- Familiarize yourself with resources on emotional self-regulation (e.g., CASEL, Edutopia, the Canadian Safe School Network).
- Encourage and reinforce cooperation, collaboration, tolerance, respectful behaviour, and kindness. Trust matters!
- Introduce relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, mindful awareness, and yoga.
- Modulate your own emotional responses and share how you do it.
- Help students to express their feelings using the directing, relating, and expressing functions of language (see pp. 27–31 of this resource).

Strategizing to enhance focus and attention:

- Be consistent in teaching and learning techniques and scheduling so students can anticipate, get prepared, and focus accordingly.
- Teach goal-setting and planning strategies directly.
- Build up attention span by eliminating unnecessary interruptions and providing appropriate breaks.
- Watch for indications of the need for some help, and indicate that students need to develop appropriate help-seeking strategies. Ask students to consider what they can do when they are stuck, confused, or need more information.
- Help students develop methods to self-monitor (e.g., lists, folders, sticky notes).
- Look for ways to make learning fun, motivating, and engaging.
- Provide concentration spots where students can go if they need extra quiet or limited distraction when working on something in particular.
- Deliver complicated instructions in more than one mode. Check for understanding.
- Give choice and ownership.
- Make sure that your demonstrations and modelling are clear.
- Help students develop personalized mnemonics that match their learning style and preferred modality.
- Aim for engagement. Motivation increases and self-regulation becomes easier.

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

We are starting a new literacy and mental health series called *Well Aware*! We will be reading interesting books written by exemplary Canadian authors. As we work with these books, we hope to come to understand more about how to be happy and healthy, make good choices, and reduce stress and anxiety. We also expect to improve our literacy skills.

The intent of this series is to use the skills of language, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, to address important ideas about positive mental health. The mental health of all of our children is critical to their social and emotional development, but it also plays an important role in their success at school.

Exploring ideas through literature is not new and it is not meant as an “add-on” to an already full curriculum. It is simply a way to use the strength of communication skills as a vehicle to help children not only manage and cope with their everyday lives, but also to “be the best they can be,” physically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally.

As with all curriculum initiatives, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this exciting new resource.

Thank you for your interest!

Sincerely,

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about positive mental health, we are learning to apply the skill of **active listening**. Ask your child to tell you what this means and how it is helpful.

Have a look at the lists below for ways to practise active listening skills. Tips that help all of us make our conversations more meaningful:

- **Eye contact:** Turn off and tune out all other media. Focus on the speaker.
- **Body language:** Nod, open your arms, and share the same “space” (e.g., sit down to reduce a height difference).
- **Pass it back:** Try statements that begin with *Are you saying that ...; So what you are telling me is ...; Oh, that must have felt*
- **Acknowledge:** Let others know you “hear” what is said.
- **Ask questions:** *What does that look like? feel like? sound like?*
- **Agree to disagree:** Let others know that you may not always agree with what is said, but that you both need to respect opinions.

Questions that help open the doors to communication:

- *Wow! You look excited! What’s up?*
- *I can tell that you are (sad, stressed, upset) by the expression on your face. Let me know if you want to talk about it.*
- *If you had to change one thing about the way today went, what would it be? Why?*
- *What’s something that you really enjoyed about school today?*
- *Did you experience a feeling of calm today at some point? What were you doing? What do you think made you feel calm?*

Thanks for your interest!

Sincerely,

Name: _____

The following is a list of basic emotions that research has shown are common to people of all ages and from all cultures.

See how many words you can think of that express the variations of each of these feelings. Try adding more examples as you come across them in your reading and viewing.

Fear	
Disgust	
Anger	
Surprise	
Happiness	
Sadness	
Amusement	
Excitement	
Contempt	

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our Language and Health curriculums, we have been working through a series titled *Well Aware*, which aims at developing critical skills to help our children understand, identify, and manage situations related to positive mental health.

The Blue Raven, one of the texts we have been exploring, is written by internationally renowned storyteller and bestselling author Richard Van Camp, who is a member of the Dogrib (Tlicho) Nation from Fort Smith, NWT. In this text that focuses on grief and loss, the main character (Benji) has several reasons to be grieving. His father has left the family home and now he finds that his bike, lovingly handed down to him from his father, has been stolen.

Written in the style of a graphic novel, this text opens the door for communicating about the following:

- Dealing with loss and grief
- Understanding the importance of friendship, family, and community
- Drawing support from culture and traditions

Through a variety of activities, students have the opportunity to strengthen their literacy skills as well as explore ways to cope with and thrive through challenging times. You may wish to ask your child to share with you what they have learned from this engaging and thought-provoking text.

Thank you for your interest and contribution as part of the team helping today's young people navigate important years in their development.

Sincerely,

LINE MASTER 7**Deal with It!**

Name: _____

Try using this tracking sheet to see what stressful moments you experience over a day or two. Here is a sample of how to record the information.

What Happened	When	My Feelings	My Plan to Deal with It
<i>Overslept</i>	<i>7:00 a.m.</i>	<i>panic</i>	
<i>Brother won't come out of bathroom</i>	<i>7:30 a.m.</i>	<i>angry, frustrated</i>	
<i>Mom seems angry about something</i>	<i>6:30 p.m.</i>	<i>nervous</i>	

My Stress List

What Happened	When	My Feelings	My Plan to Deal with It

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

As part of our learning about literacy and mental health, we have been using a series titled *Well Aware* that combines engaging texts written by award-winning Canadian authors with lessons that connect to strategies students can use on a daily basis to manage stressful situations.

One of these texts, titled *Todd on the Edge*, tells the story of a boy facing a significant family crisis. His stepfather's anger issues have compelled Todd and his mother to move to a shelter, and Todd is struggling with many extreme emotions. Through his experiences, he learns some important lessons about how to become resilient when faced with difficult situations that are beyond his control. In the end, he has a new sense of assurance and is no longer stuck feeling like he is "on the edge."

As students work with this text, they will discuss the effects of anger and explore coping strategies that are helpful for individuals and families experiencing difficult situations or stressful changes. They will become informed about ways to support themselves and others when facing tough challenges—especially the important step of seeking and accepting help.

As caring adults, we all want to help our young people develop the skills necessary to be able to cope and thrive in all situations. This is why we continue to work to equip students with the tools they need to manage difficult challenges. As teachers, we cannot provide the appropriate care a child who is experiencing a crisis may need. What we can and will do, however, is open the doors to talking about coping and asking for help without shame, stigma, or judgment.

As part of our team, thank you for connecting with us concerning this important topic, and please feel free to contact me if you would like to discuss this work further.

Sincerely,

Name:

Read each statement below and discuss whether it is fact or fiction.

- 1. Alzheimer's disease and dementia are the same thing.**
- 2. Dementia can affect only people over the age of 65.**
- 3. Dementia is not a normal part of getting older.**
- 4. When a person with dementia mentions something from the past and thinks it is the present, you should correct them so they know the right facts.**
- 5. Dementia cannot be cured.**

1. Alzheimer’s disease and dementia are the same thing.

Fiction: Alzheimer’s disease is the most common cause of dementia, but the term “dementia” doesn’t refer to a disease. It refers to a group of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain.

2. Dementia can affect only people over the age of 65.

Fiction: Although dementia is more common among older people, it can occur as a result of brain damage due to a head injury, stroke, alcohol abuse, or brain infection, among other causes. These factors are not necessarily related to aging.

3. Dementia is not a normal part of getting older.

Fact: Almost 40% of people over 65 experience some degree of memory loss. But occasional forgetfulness and dementia are very different things. Dementia is a medical condition, not a natural part of aging. Many people live well into their 80’s and 90’s with little or no change to their memory.

4. When a person with dementia mentions something from the past and thinks it is the present, you should correct them so they know the right facts.

Fiction: Much of the time it isn’t necessary and can actually make things worse. Constantly being corrected can cause a person to become depressed or further confused. If a person mistakenly describes doing something yesterday that actually happened years ago, focus on asking about what they did, how they enjoyed it, etc., rather than on trying to explain that they’re mistaken.

5. Dementia cannot be cured.

Fact: Dementia currently has no cure. However, there are methods for helping people cope. These focus on managing the person’s symptoms and improving their quality of life.

Name: _____

Instructions: Locate the passages from *Minding Nana* listed below and reread them in your group. Then list the emotions you think that Tanya experienced in each case.

Situation #1 (pp. 5–6)

Tanya and her dad are driving in the car and she asks when Nana’s memory loss began. He relates a story about “the chicken farm” and then states that Nana had a “nervous breakdown” and was never the same after her experiences in a mental health facility. Tanya’s father was only five years old at the time. *What emotions do you think Tanya felt toward her Nana and what she had experienced? What emotions did she feel for her dad?*

Situation #2 (pp. 8–9)

Tanya’s parents are out and Nana is staying at the house. Tanya awakens with a fever and heads down the stairs, only to find Nana and not her parents. She chooses to not tell Nana what is happening. *What emotions do you think Tanya is feeling toward Nana? Why didn’t she tell her what was happening? How do you think Nana would feel if she told her?*

Situation #3 (p. 13)

When Nana’s pills need to be organized and given to her, Tanya is given the responsibility of making sure that Nana gets the medication she needs. *After rereading this passage, how do you think Tanya feels about this responsibility? How would you feel?*

Situation #4 (p. 14)

Tanya feels many emotions on page 14. First, Nana tells Tanya that she looks “smart.” This is not what Tanya wants to hear. She then talks about how difficult high school is. Finally, she talks about the home care nurses coming. *What emotions do you think Tanya is feeling in these situations? Why do you think she feels these emotions?*

Situation #5 (p. 17)

Tanya struggles to remember when Nana was healthy, but she has a hard time. *Reread the entire page. What emotions does Tanya experience as she talks about Nana? How would you feel if this was your family member?*

Name: _____

Situation #6 (pp. 18–19)

Tanya has been given the responsibility of serving Nana her lunch on Wednesdays. *Reread these two pages and identify the various emotions that Tanya is feeling. Would you feel the same way?*

Situation #7 (p. 20)

Tanya's cousin comes for a visit and the topic of dementia comes up. *Read page 20 and identify what emotions Tanya is feeling during this discussion. Would you feel the same way as Tanya and her cousin? Why?*

Situation #8 (pp. 22–33)

Nana has gone for a walk and lost her way. Reread the chapter. *How would you describe what Tanya is feeling in this chapter? Who else is feeling the same way? What would you suggest the family do?*

Situation #9 (pp. 24–25)

Tanya goes through a variety of experiences in this section. Reread the chapter. *Identify the emotions that Tanya feels as she goes through these experiences. Do you notice any changes in the way Tanya feels about her Nana? What are they? How do you feel for Tanya now?*

Situation #10 (pp. 26–27)

Reread the chapter. *Tanya experiences many emotions during this difficult time. What are they? If you were her friend, what could you do to help her?*

Here are some guidelines for interviewing and research:

- Plan your questions with your goals in mind. Know what you want to learn. What facts are you looking for? Do you want to learn your interviewee's opinions about certain ideas, information, or events?
- Plan the order of the questions to help you follow the conversation and cue your notes.
- Sometimes your "questions" could be statements: for example, "That sounds like it was a big change for you."
- Use language that your interviewee understands. Sometimes you will have to rephrase a question to clarify.
- Focus your questions so that they ask one thing at a time. Make them short.
- Be friendly and open so that trust will develop.
- Don't interrupt. Listen carefully and mindfully.

Use strategies that demonstrate you really are listening and you care about the information you are gathering. How can you apply what you already know about being an active listener?

Name:

My name is: _____

My dream is: _____

To help me reach this dream, the people I want on my Dream Team are: (Please also explain why each person on the team is important)

Team member:

Reason selected:

What will you need to research and learn about your dream?

Name:

Interview your partner using the following questions as guidelines. Be sure to take notes as you will have to summarize the interview later.

What is your dream that you hope to accomplish?

Why have you selected this dream?

Has anyone inspired you to follow this dream? Who and how?

What obstacles do you think might challenge you on your way to accomplishing your dream?

Name:

What do you think you will do when these obstacles threaten to stop you from achieving your dream?

What qualities do you think you will need in order to achieve your dream?

Name: _____

You have identified at least one dream that you would like to become reality. Now you need to set up a simple plan to see that happen. As a starting point, complete the table below.

Something I have always wanted to do or be is:	
What strengths do I already have in this area?	
What steps can I take to improve my skills in this area?	
Who can I count on to support my dream and help me along the way?	
How will I know when I am getting more proficient in my skill?	
What will I do if I become discouraged?	
What do I do if my dream changes along the way?	

Name: _____

Pick one of the situations below. Imagine you are the person described and use a form of art to express what you are feeling but can't seem to say. You can choose any format, medium, or method to convey your message in your own way.

Consider how you might use any of the following (depending on your chosen format) to get your message across:

- different colours, shapes, fonts
- music
- facial and physical expressions
- creative movement

Situations:

Tara's closest friend, Martine, had just moved away. They had been friends since kindergarten and Tara felt terribly lonely, but nobody seemed to understand.

Ali's friends loved playing Brain Bender and were all close to level 20. He tried and tried, but he just couldn't get past level 5. He felt so frustrated because they just laughed at him and called him "lame brain."

Manuela was shorter than all of her classmates. They would tease her all the time and call her names like "short-stuff" and "peewee." She would try to act as though it didn't hurt, but inside, she felt so sad.

Cheng hated being the last pick for every game the guys played during lunch break. He tried to control his anger, but he just didn't know how. Couldn't they see how angry he was?