

Book Nook

Using Books to Support Social Emotional Development



Big Al

By Andrew Clements

Picture Book Studio, 1998

Big Al is a fish who wants to make friends! He tries everything he can think of to make friends, but nothing seems to work! The other fish are afraid of him because he is different. They all think that Big Al is very big and very scary! When Big Al comes to the rescue of the other fish when they get caught in a fisherman's net, they realize what a great friend he really is!

Examples of activities that can be used while reading *Big Al* and throughout the day to expand on social and emotional concepts:

- While reading the story, ask the children how they would feel if they were Big Al. How would they feel if they really wanted to make friends with someone, but no matter what they tried—it didn't work? Ask if they think Big Al is different? How is he different? Talk about how we are all different—some of us are tall/short, have blue eyes/brown eyes/green eyes, etc.—and just because we are different doesn't mean we can't be friends! Ask what they think they would do if Big Al tried to be their friend?
- Talk about the fact that Big Al solved his friendship problem by helping the other fish get out of the fish net when they were trapped. Helping each other is one way to make friends, but there are also many other ways. Ask what they think Big Al could have done to make friends with the other fish. Ask what they do to make new friends. Write their ideas on paper as they discuss ways to make friends and display the list in the room.
- Have a *Make a Friend Day!* and have the children use the ideas they came up with above and try to make new friends.
- Use rhymes such as the one below to practice rhyming skills and to talk about being friends:
Five little fish swimming in the sea
The first one said, "Come and play with me"
The second one said, "Do you know how to share?"
The third one said, "Let's show our friends we care!"
The fourth one said, "It's fun to play together!"
The fifth one said, "Let's be friends forever".

Reading the same book for several days in a row is a great way to give children a chance to experience more opportunities to feel confident and competent, which is an important part of social emotional development. They become able to talk about the story, predict what will happen



next, learn new vocabulary words, talk about their own experiences in relation to the story and even make up their own story! Try reading *Big Al* for several days in a row and emphasize a different concept/topic from the book that can be built on across the day (during small group, centers, snack, transitions, etc.). This will allow children the chance to really understand and practice the concepts that they read about in the story. An example is shown below:

Theme of the Day: Friends

Introduce the theme of friends by reminding the children that *Big Al* wanted to be friends with the other fish. He tried very hard to make friends, Ask the children if they remember what happened when *Big Al* tried to make friends with the other fish. Why was *Big Al* lonely? Why did he cry? Point out ideas from the “How to Make Friends” list that the children developed earlier. Tell them that today everyone is going to try really hard to be a good friend! Sing the Friend Song to the tune of “This Old Man”.

*Let's be friends, Let's be friends
Play and share and laugh with me
And we'll be friends forever you'll see
Play and share and laugh with me!*

Examples of Activities to Support the Concept—Friends (Remember to intentionally give specific feedback and encouragement as children use their friendship skills throughout the day!):

Art: Since the story is about a fish, the children can make a boat out of cardboard boxes. Explain that they are all going to work together to paint and decorate their boat. They can also make fish (*Big Al* and his friends!) that can be tied with string and hung from the ceiling. As the children work together to make their boat, emphasize that everyone is working together and sharing materials with their friends. Provide a variety of paints, brushes, pieces of decorative paper, glue and markers for children to make the boat and fish.

Make-Believe: Remind the children that one of the ways that *Big Al* tried to make friends was by disguising himself (make sure children know what disguising means—this is a great way to learn new vocabulary words!). Ask the children if they remember what happened when *Big Al* tried to disguise himself. Did it work? Tell the children that they can try to disguise themselves the way *Big Al* did. Encourage the children to pretend to be *Big Al* on the day he tried to disguise himself by covering himself with seaweed. Have green streamers and strips of cloth that children can use to disguise themselves. Have a mirror that they can look in to see if they can still see who they are. Do they look friendly (remind them that *Big Al* didn't want the other fish to think he was big and scary). Encourage them to “swim” around the room (or on the playground) as a group of friends.

Math: Provide books about different kinds of fish and the ocean. Talk about the different fish and how big they are. Have rope/string available so children can measure how long the fish are. For example, how big is a shark compared to the guppy in the classroom fish tank? Ask the children how big they think *Big Al* was. Have them use the rope/string to show how big he was. What about the other fish that *Big Al* wanted to be friends with—how big were they?