

# Willow series - Teaching Guide

## About the Books

The Willow stories perfectly capture the everyday triumphs of early childhood as the endearing title character makes her way in the world — finding her voice, speaking up for herself (and others) and learning self-awareness — and gains confidence with every challenge.

**WILLOW'S WHISPERS:** When Willow speaks, her words slip out as soft and shy as a secret. At school, her barely audible whisper causes her no end of troubles, but Willow is as resourceful as she is quiet. She fashions a magic microphone from items she finds in the recycling bin, but Willow's clever invention is only a temporary solution. How will this quiet little girl make herself heard?

**WILLOW FINDS A WAY:** Shy, quiet Willow silently wishes she could find a way to say no to her bossy classmate Kristabelle's demands, but the words never seem to come when she needs them. That is, until Kristabelle starts using the powerful threat of uninviting children from her "fantastic" birthday party to keep them in line. Willow decides she's finally had enough. Surprising everyone, even herself, Willow steps up and bravely does something shocking, and it changes the entire dynamic of the classroom.

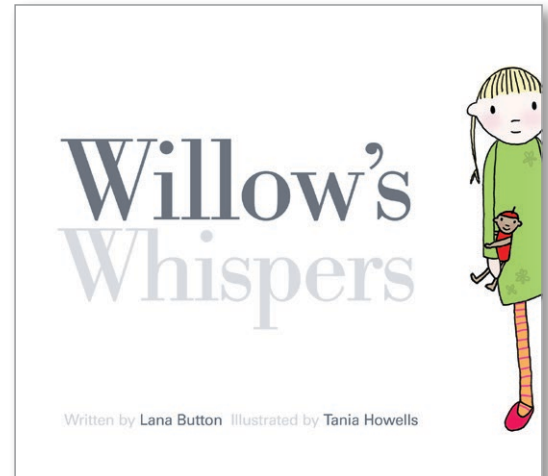
**WILLOW'S SMILE:** "Sometimes Willow smiled without even trying. But sometimes when she wished she could and knew she should, her smile slipped straight off her face." So when her teacher tells the class that Picture Day is coming, shy Willow starts to worry. What if she isn't able to smile for the camera? How can she have her picture taken without smiling? But then on Picture Day, Willow gets the opportunity to watch the other children being photographed. She sees that all of her friends' expressions are unique and perfect in their own way. By the time it's her turn, she realizes that she doesn't need to worry about smiling for her picture. She just needs to be herself.

## About the Author

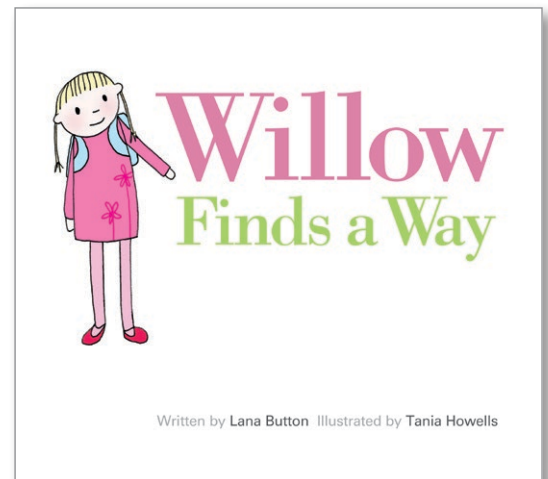
**LANA BUTTON** was born and raised in the tiny border town of St. Stephen, New Brunswick, where she transformed all of her rubber skipping ropes into microphones and sang to large crowds of imaginary people in her bedroom. Growing up, Lana took any opportunity to perform. She studied theater performance at Concordia University in Montreal and spent some time in Vancouver acting in TV and film.

## About the Illustrator

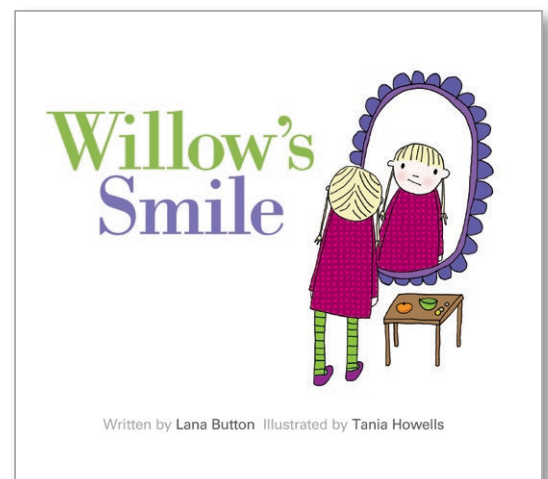
**TANIA HOWELLS** lives in Toronto with her husband and son, Finch. She graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1997 and has been a freelance illustrator for fifteen years. Tania has done work for clients such as *Today's Parent* magazine, *Chirp*, Holt Renfrew, the *National Post* and many others. She is currently a stay-at-home mom, and after bedtime, she works on her drawings.



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## Overview

Feeling empowered, knowing how to stand up for what is right and being an empathetic friend are all themes that are explored in this resource about Willow. Using the Willow series, the following activities allow children to think about the power of their own voice, how to stand up against social bullying, how to be empathetic and more.

	Grades	Theme	High-Yield Strategies
Activity 1	K to 3	Empowerment: <i>Designing a Magic Microphone to Find Your Voice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying similarities and differences</li> <li>Nonlinguistic representations</li> <li>Cooperative Learning</li> </ul>
Activity 2	4 to 8	Acceptance: <i>Creating Belonging</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying similarities and differences</li> <li>Nonlinguistic representations</li> <li>Cooperative Learning</li> </ul>
Activity 3	4 to 8	Social Bullying: <i>Standing Up for What's Right</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying similarities and differences</li> <li>Nonlinguistic representations</li> <li>Cooperative Learning</li> </ul>
Activity 4	2 to 3	Empathy: <i>Helping Others</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying similarities and differences</li> <li>Summarizing and note-taking</li> <li>Cooperative Learning</li> </ul>
Activity 5	4 to 8	Mental Well-Being: <i>Thinking About Anxiety and Stress</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying similarities and differences</li> <li>Summarizing and note-taking</li> <li>Cooperative Learning</li> </ul>

## Activity 1: Empowerment/Self-Advocacy/Developing Outer Voice

Before starting this activity, review the Guiding Questions on the last page of this guide.

### MATERIALS

- Willow's Whispers*
- Chalkboard or chart paper and markers
- Paper
- Building materials

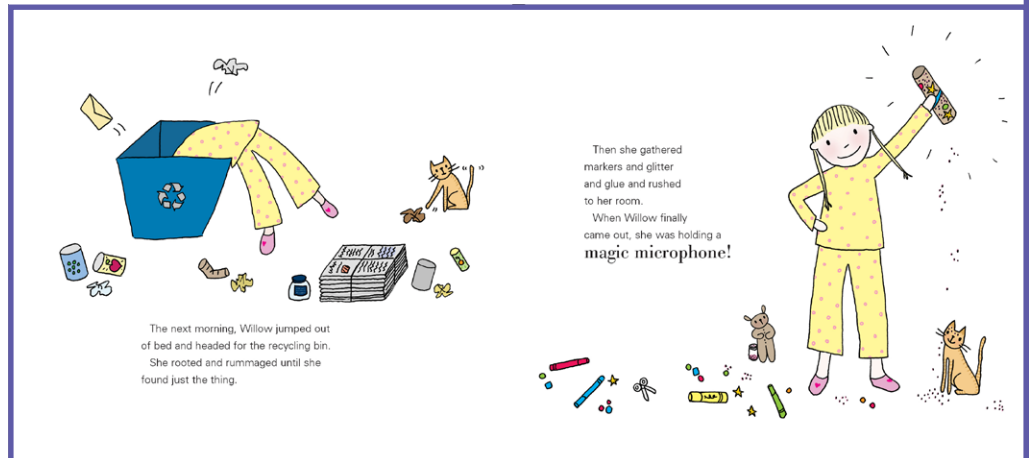
### OVERVIEW

Learning how to say things that are important is a struggle for Willow.

In this activity, students will think about words/phrases that really matter to them. Students will then have an opportunity to say these words/phrases after building a *Magic Microphone* to help them "project" their voice.

### LEARNING GOAL

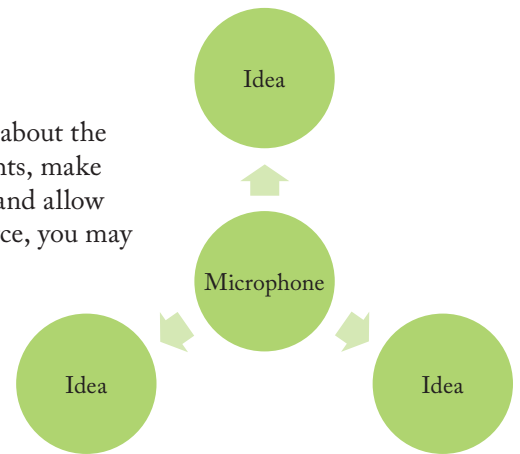
Students will determine three to five words/phrases that are important to them. Words that might help them learn to advocate for themselves or to create fairness and/or a feeling of belonging. Older students will also use the engineering design process to create their own *Magic Microphones*.



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## ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *Willow's Whispers*. Ask students to make predictions about the content of the story. **Note to Educator:** This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow. Based on your review of the last page of this resource, you may want to call on students who are not represented in *Willow's Whispers*.
3. Tell students you are going to read *Willow's Whispers*, a story about a girl who makes a discovery — her voice. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the ages of your students, you may want to discuss the concept of voice and the need to articulate (in a respectful way) one's wants and needs.
4. Prior to reading the book, put the word and/or picture of a microphone on the board/projector. Ask students to share as much as they can about microphones.
5. Let students know that there will be an important microphone in the story.
6. Read *Willow's Whispers*.

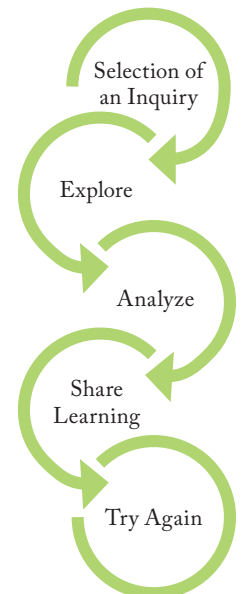


## ACTION

1. Ask students to share (in pairs/groups or to the whole class) the words that Willow was trying to say, and record for students to see.
2. Ask students to share (in pairs/groups or to the whole class) why it is important that Willow was finally able to say those words. **Note to Educator:** Point out to students that the words Willow says out loud are ones that create fairness and belonging. We want students to be assertive in a positive way.
3. Share with students how important it is for all students to be able to say important words/phrases out loud in an effort to self-advocate and to be assertive. **Note to Educator:** This would be a great time to show a clip from YouTube about students using their voices in positive ways.
4. As a class/group or individuals, have students identify words that they would like to practice saying out loud. **Note to Educator:** Depending on your context, these words/phrases could range from statements like “Sorry” to “No, thank you” to “I don’t like when you do ...” to needs such as “May I have a turn?” and “I feel left out when...”
5. For older students, put them in groups to give them an opportunity to collaborate on their words/phrases so that they can build on one another’s ideas. Have them record and summarize ideas that resonate with them.

## ACTION, PART II

1. Once students have the words/phrases that they would like to start using, show them the materials that you would like them to use to build their *Magic Microphones*. Depending on their ages, the materials could range from found materials to LEGO and beyond.
2. Tell students that you would like them to build a device that would help them amplify their voice. This device should be used to help them say their important words/phrases. **Note to Educator:** This is a great opportunity to use the Engineering Design Model as shown to the right. Depending on the age group of your students, have them create a design prior to building, then build and rebuild to enhance their design.



## CONSOLIDATION

1. Ask students to use their *Magic Microphones* to say their important words in small groups, to the class or as a student-led assembly for other classes.
2. Depending on the age group, ask students to share their initial *Magic Microphone* designs and final creations.
3. Depending on the age group, have students analyze their learning when building their *Magic Microphones* and discuss what they would do differently if they were to build their *Magic Microphones* again. **Note to Educator:** This is a key component of the lesson. This is where students will challenge their own thinking and come up with different ideas. This is what an engineer does!
4. Based on your group, you may want to give students the opportunity to collaborate, respectfully, on one another’s designs.

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## Activity 2: Creating Belonging

Before starting this activity, review the **Guiding Questions** on the last page of this guide.

### MATERIALS

- *Willow's Whispers*
- Chalkboard or chart paper and markers
- Poster materials or iPads

### OVERVIEW

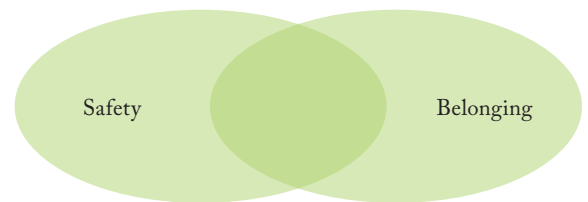
In *Willow's Whispers*, Willow discovers that she has many important things to say, things that allow her to feel “safe” and accepted in her school environment. Through learning how to say words such as “It is my turn to be line leader,” she becomes empowered and creates a sense of comfort and belonging. In this activity, students will have a critical conversation about words they can use to feel safer in their environment and, in turn, create a deeper sense of belonging. Students will then create posters/art/iMovie videos to be posted around the classroom or shared with one another.

### LEARNING GOAL

Students will articulate one phrase/word that, if used, would allow them to feel safer in their school environment and give them a sense of belonging. Students will also create a visual representation of their phrase/word.

### ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *Willow's Whispers*. Ask students to make predictions about the content of the story.  
**Note to Educator:** This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow. Based on your review of the last page of this resource, you may want to call on students who are not represented in *Willow's Whispers*.
3. Tell students you are going to read *Willow's Whispers*, a story about a girl who empowers herself to create a safer school environment where she feels like she belongs.
4. Prior to reading the story, create a Venn Diagram on the board with “Safety” in one circle and “Belonging” in the other. Ask students to tell what makes them feel safe or what makes them feel like they belong. Have students identify whether the concept belongs in “Safety” or “Belonging” or both. Record their answers in the Venn Diagram.
5. Read *Willow's Whispers* and ask them to think about ways that Willow creates a “safe” place of “belonging” for herself.



### ACTION

1. Using clips from YouTube, show examples of students articulating ways they feel they belong.
2. Depending on your age group, put students in groups of four and have them record three to five things that create safety or belonging. **Note to Educator:** Encourage students to think outside of the box (e.g., playing music, help with finding friends at recess, inclusion of their culture, etc.)
3. Have students create a visual that articulates (or shows or depicts) their examples. This could be anything from a poster to a PowerPoint/Prezi to an iMovie.

### CONSOLIDATION

1. Have students share their finished products.
2. Have students and the class brainstorm ways to implement their ideas in the classroom/school.



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## Activity 3: Standing Up for What's Right

Before starting this activity, review the Guiding Questions on the last page of this guide.

### MATERIALS

- *Willow Finds a Way*
- Whiteboard or chart paper, etc.
- Access to the internet
- Handout of the "Sandwich Technique"
- Copy of the pledge

### OVERVIEW

In *Willow Finds a Way*, Willow encounters social bullying, a common form of bullying more often utilized by females. In this activity, students will think about a strategy to use when they are experiencing social bullying. This could be a variation of the popular "Sandwich Technique" or another technique of your choice.

### LEARNING GOAL

Students will learn about, articulate and demonstrate competence using the Sandwich Technique or another technique.

### ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *Willow Finds a Way*. Ask students to make predictions about the content of the story.  
**Note to Educator:** This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow. Based on your review of the last page of this resource, you may want to call on students who are not represented in *Willow Finds a Way*.
3. Tell students you are going to read *Willow Finds a Way*, a story about a girl who encounters a form of bullying.
4. Prior to reading the book, ask students to identify different forms of bullying. **Note to Educator:** Students will usually mention physical, emotional and verbal. You may need to introduce social bullying.
5. Define bullying according to your school's/organization's definition.  
**Note to Educator:** Most definitions include the items to the side.
6. Define social bullying.

- **Social, or Relational, Bullying** is often a hidden form of aggression.
- There are no bruises to the skin; these bruises are on the heart.
- Social bullying occurs when children intentionally manipulate relationships to harm others.

- **Bullying** is when a more powerful person deliberately and repeatedly hurts or harms another person.
- Bullying is not "an accident" or "just a joke."
- Bullying can be physical, verbal, social and/or cyber.

7. Read *Willow Finds a Way* and ask students to think about all the ways that Kristabelle engages in social bullying.

### ACTION

1. Put students in groups of four or five and ask them to identify one quality that they look for in a friend.
2. Review the definition of social/relational bullying.
3. Have student discuss what social/relational bullying looks like in their school.
4. There are many anti-bullying clips on YouTube. View a few clips that are appropriate for your age group.
5. Create a handout of the Sandwich Technique.

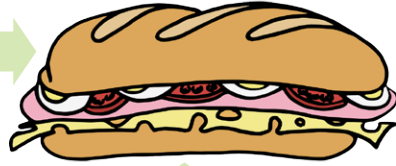


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6. Teach students the Sandwich Technique. It is important to articulate that STEP 1 must be honest, STEP 2 should use an “I” message and how the victim feels, and STEP 3 should be positive, but also articulate what the victim NEEDS in order to remain friends.

## STEP 1: Praise

(i.e., I am really glad that we are friends.)



## STEP 2: Criticism/Feelings

(i.e., I feel sad when you joke about my name.)

## STEP 3: Praise and Request

(i.e., I enjoy our friendship, but I don't want to feel sad, so I need you to stop joking about my name.)

7. In groups of four or five, give students age-appropriate examples of conflict to practice the use of the technique. Have students work in pairs so that they can compare, contrast, discuss and critique each other.
8. Have students record or summarize strategies they use when using the technique.

## CONSOLIDATION

1. As part of drama or oral presentations, give students situations where they can present the use of the Sandwich Technique.
2. Have students take a pledge to stand up against all forms of bullying. (There are many pledges online.)
3. Review the technique weekly so that the use of this strategy becomes part of the culture of the classroom.

## Activity 4: Understanding and Developing Empathy or Helping Others

Before starting this activity, review the **Guiding Questions on the last page of this guide.**

## MATERIALS

- *Willow's Smile*
- Chalkboard or chart paper and markers
- Paper
- Pencils, crayons, pencil crayons and/or markers
- Poster materials

## OVERVIEW

In *Willow's Smile*, Willow is very nervous about smiling on picture day. Despite her own worries and fears, she is able to identify with the worries of another student and demonstrates empathy. In this activity, students will think about what it means to be an empathetic friend.

## LEARNING GOAL

Students will identify acts of empathy and consider concrete ways to be an empathetic friend.

## ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *Willow's Smile*. Ask students to make predictions about the content of the story.  
**Note to Educator:** This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow. Based on your review of the last page of this resource, you may want to call on students who are not represented in *Willow's Smile*.

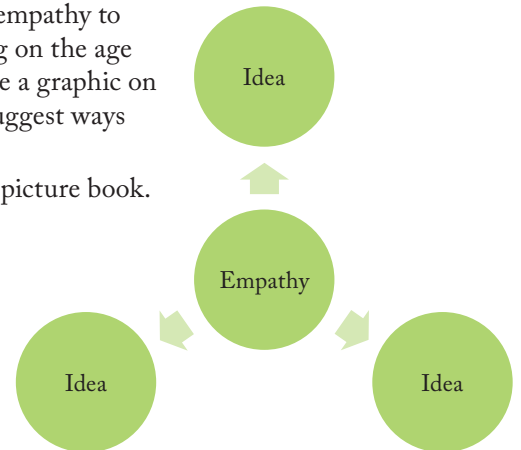


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- Tell students you are going to read *Willow's Smile*, a story about a girl who ultimately realizes that she is already perfect just the way she is. Along the way, she shows empathy to a classmate who is also worried about picture day. **Note to Educator:** Depending on the age group of your students, you may want to discuss the concept of "empathy." Create a graphic on the board with the word "Empathy" and ask students to give synonyms and to suggest ways that they have seen empathy in the classroom.
- Read *Willow's Smile*. Ask students to think about examples of empathy from the picture book.

## ACTION

- Review the steps in the Jigsaw Technique (a cooperative learning strategy) with your students.
- In Expert Groups (of four or five, based on your class size), have students define empathy.
- In Jigsaw Groups, have students share and compare their definitions. **Note to Educator:** Students should take away and add to their original definition based on the knowledge from the other students. This is an important collaborative piece where students really think about and consider what empathy is and internalize other definitions. This is also a critical piece where students will push one another's thinking.
- Individually have students engage in creative writing from the part of the story where Willow shared her ribbon. Instead of Willow sharing her ribbon with Tianna, have her NOT share. Have students write about the impact of this decision. For younger students, have an open discussion about this.
- As a whole class, have students brainstorm ways that they can be an empathetic friend.
- On chart paper, record and summarize ideas that resonated from the brainstorm.
- As individuals or in groups, have students create posters of what empathy would look like in the class, hallway and outside.



## CONSOLIDATION

- Give students an opportunity to share their posters and/or stories.

## Activity 5: Dealing with Anxiety and Stress

Before starting this activity, review the Guiding Questions on the last page of this guide.

### MATERIALS

- Willow's Smile*
- Chalkboard or chart paper and markers
- Paper
- Pencils, crayons, pencil crayons and/or markers

### OVERVIEW

In *Willow's Smile*, Willow is very nervous and anxious about picture day. The picture book highlights how what some see as insignificant, others might view as quite significant and the cause for much trepidation. In this activity, students will investigate and select strategies to use when feelings of anxiety arise.

### LEARNING GOAL

Students will research strategies to combat anxiety and present the strategies to the class or group.



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## ACTIVITY

1. Review the last page of this resource.
2. Show students the cover of *Willow's Smile*. Ask students to make predictions about the content of the story.  
**Note to Educator:** This will allow students to share thoughts, make predictions and make connections. This is one way to activate prior knowledge and allow interest in the book to grow. Based on your review of the last page of this resource, you may want to call on students who are not represented in *Willow's Smile*.
3. As a class, give students the opportunity to explore what they know and what they wonder about anxiety.
4. In small groups, have students define anxiety, in their own words.
5. Establish a working definition as a class.
6. Tell students you are going to read *Willow's Smile*, a story about a girl who is feeling anxious about picture day.
7. Read *Willow's Smile*.

What We Know	What We Wonder

## ACTION

1. In small groups, have students make a list of things/situations that can cause anxiety, and strategies that they already use to combat anxiety in these situations. **Note to Educator:** It is empowering for students to realize that they already have a number of strategies that they use and upon which they can build.
2. Have students record and summarize their top three strategies. You may want each student to create a strategy book or a classroom poster in which students can continue to add new ideas.
3. Let students know that you would like them to research, record and summarize three more strategies that make sense for them to add to their list or book.
4. Give students an opportunity to research and record.

## CONSOLIDATION

1. Give students an opportunity to share and compare strategies. **Note to Educator:** This should be a non-threatening activity. Instead, it should be an opportunity for students to refine and create new strategies. This is where the critical thinking emerges.
2. Have students add three more strategies to their list/book.
3. Review strategies weekly so that these strategies begin to become habit for students.

... that all of her friends were standing behind Mr. Corbett!

They were waving and calling out the silliest names!

Hey, Mrs. Tickle Toes!

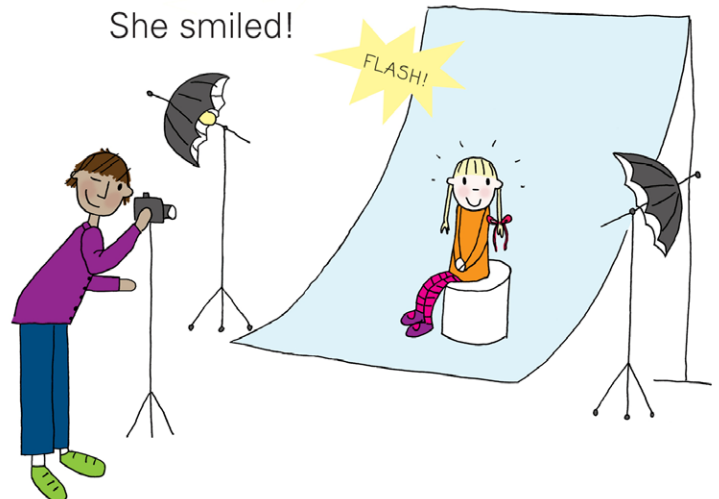
Hi, Silly Billy!!

Over here, Sparkle Sandwich!!



Willow couldn't help it.

She smiled!





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## Why Use This Teaching Guide?

This resource strives to support educators who want to give students the tools to critically read the world. It embraces a *critical pedagogy* that engages dialogue with students about how social, political and economic factors impact them and others. Through the activities provided, educators will empower and support students to challenge social inequities and create a better world.

This resource uses high-yield instructional strategies (e.g., making comparisons, cooperative learning, reinforcing effort, etc.) as a tool to increase students' skill sets and create a platform for relevant inquiries. Literature has the power to engage children and promote imagination, and it can also maintain stereotypes or interrupt them. This resource aims to offer young people the opportunity to think critically and to problem-solve — life skills that will equip them to navigate various life circumstances.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS WHEN USING PICTURE BOOKS

	Questions to think about PRIOR to using a picture book	Questions to plan for PRIOR to the activity
<b>Awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you know your own biases?</li> <li>• Do you know what stereotypes and biases are present in the book?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are you prepared to challenge the stereotypes and biases in the book?</li> </ul>
<b>Connection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will connect most with the images in the book?</li> <li>• Who will connect most with the content and themes in the book?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you support all students to make a personal and meaningful connection to the book?</li> </ul>
<b>Perspective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whose voices are present?</li> <li>• Whose voices are missing?</li> <li>• Who has the power and privilege? (Think in terms of gender, race, ability, economic class, religion, etc.)</li> <li>• What is the historical context of the book?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you include the missing voice?</li> <li>• How can you address issues of power and privilege?</li> <li>• How can you contextualize the book?</li> </ul>
<b>Social Action and Challenging Inequity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can issues of social justice be taken up through the use of this book? (Every book has an avenue where we can consider issues of social justice. For example, if the book is set in a middle-class community, what are some of the injustices for those who do not live in a middle-class community?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can you help students to think about taking action that is meaningful to them (i.e., older students have more playscape time, the absence of a community center in the neighborhood, factors that cause poverty in the community/other countries)?</li> <li>• How can you equip students to take action against inequities?</li> </ul>

## RESOURCES USED IN WILLOW SERIES TEACHING GUIDE

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