



## Assessment Means Form: Emotional Literacy

**Assessment Overview:** Teachers should aim to assess students in the most naturalistic environment first (i.e., observation) before moving on to more intentionally structured activities (i.e., the Situations).

**What Teachers Need to Know and Observe:** Some important concepts regarding the development of emotional literacy are reviewed here to help teachers know what to look for so they can determine a child's learning status on the progression.

*Background.* Being emotionally literate is related to both social and academic success. Children who understand and can communicate about emotions tend to be accepted by peers, have better relationships with peers, and have better social skills than children who struggle with understanding emotion (Arsenio, Cooperman, & Lover, 2000; Boyatzis & Satyaprasad, 1994; Fine, Izard, Mostow, Trentacosta, & Ackerman, 2003; Mostow, Izard, Fine, & Trentacosta, 2002). In contrast, children that have difficulty recognizing emotions in others tend to have more difficulty establishing and maintaining friendships (Denham et al., 1990; Miller et al., 2005; Nowicki & Mitchell, 1998). Emotional literacy has also been linked to academic success, such as language and literacy, general academic knowledge, and mathematics, both concurrently and predictively (e.g., Denham et al., 2012; Izard et al., 2001). Emotional literacy is also tied to other emotional competencies that are known to impact academic and social functioning, namely emotion regulation. Emotional literacy can impact the ability to regulate by allowing children to make their internal experiences conscious, to think about the causes and consequences of their emotions and related behavior, and select more effective regulatory responses (Denham & Burton, 2003; Liew, Eisenberg, & Reiser, 2004).

### Key Terms

- **Emotion experience** refers to both the internal and the external experience or expression of an emotion.

### Notes About the Construct Progression

- For some skills, teachers may need to probe about why a child made a particular statement about an experienced emotion. There is no “right” answer as long as the child can produce a relevant justification for their answer. For example, a child explaining that he felt happy because, *it was raining and he likes to splash in puddles*, is relevant, whereas a child explaining that he felt happy because, *it's a happy thing to feel happy*, is not a relevant answer.
- Skills on the latter part of the construct progression require being able to use the social context for understanding emotions. Each social context in which an event and consequential emotional experience occurs includes a set of expectations, such as formal rules (e.g., school policy or classroom constitution), social norms (e.g., don't cut in line), and other local expectations, cultures, or traditions that may provide additional information that one might use to interpret or predict emotions in others. To be considered using the “social context”, the expectations should be familiar to both the teacher and the child. Social norms regarding the expression and interpretation of emotion may vary based on individual's cultural background.
- For several skills on the progression, the child will need to articulate his or her reasoning.
- The skills on the latter part of the construct progression also require the child to *justify* his or her interpretations and predictions about others' emotions in order for the skill to be observable. Justification could be made verbally, in written format, or through selection of response options.



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**General Teacher Instructions:** For many of the skills, determining the extent to which children understanding emotions will require an interaction, either between the child and adult, or between a child and peer. It will also require a communication modality in order to support and probe. For skills where the teacher asks the child to identify an emotion or the cause of an emotion in others, the emotion may belong to a character in a media format (e.g., story, movie, magazine). Skills on the latter part of the progression that ask children to justify their response (Skills H and I) rely more heavily on communication. Children may communicate verbally, through writing, or by selecting a response option presented to them.

**Observation Instructions:** The child can be observed at any point during the school day, during any setting, and in any group size. Teachers will likely need to interact with the child to obtain additional information about the child’s understanding. Common settings are listed in the table below. If teachers use materials to facilitate observing emotional literacy, content should be accessible, and appropriate for the ability and interest of the child.

Potential Opportunities for Observation	Potential Materials
<p>Time of day: Any</p> <p>Setting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom</li> <li>• Playground</li> <li>• Cafeteria</li> <li>• Hallways</li> <li>• During transitions</li> <li>• Special area classes (e.g., music, gym, art)</li> </ul> <p>Any group size:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole class</li> <li>• Small group</li> <li>• Pairs</li> <li>• Individual</li> </ul>	<p>Materials should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include opportunities to explore emotions</li> <li>• Introduce or demonstrate a topic of study to build background knowledge (prior to asking emotion-related questions)</li> <li>• Provide different emotional perspectives of subjects or characters</li> </ul> <p>Types of materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures or books with expressed emotions and reflect students’ diversity</li> <li>• Labels of emotions</li> <li>• Literature, magazines, or media describing situations that have or will have likely evoked emotions in the reader, story character, and/or individuals named in materials.</li> </ul>

**Placing a Child on this Progression:** With all progressions, the goal is to identify the level at which the child is solidly performing. If the child is inconsistent at a given level, as children often are when they are learning a new skill, the correct placement is at a lower level. The teacher needs to collect enough evidence to be confident that the child is correctly placed on the progression. This will include multiple pieces of evidence where the child demonstrates the skill level at which he/she is placed and at least one documented instance of allowing the child the opportunity to demonstrate his/her skills/behavior at the next highest level. It will be difficult to place some children on a progression. Children might be able to do many of these skills with the support of a teacher or peer. They should not be placed at the skill level until they can demonstrate the skill independently. Children who are not yet at Skill A should be marked as “Emerging” for that progression. Children who have reached the highest level of a progression should be marked at that highest level.



## Emotional Literacy Observation Instructions (by Skill-Level) & Examples

Skill	Skill Progression	Skill-Level Teacher Instructions	Examples
<b>A</b>	Expresses verbally or behaviorally a range of emotions	Observe the child (verbally or behaviorally) expressing a range of emotions in multiple contexts. This is an observation-only skill.	<i>A teacher observes Claire laughing with another student.</i>
<b>B</b>	Shows an awareness of own emotion through verbal or behavioral expression	Observe the child showing awareness of their verbal and/or behavioral expression of emotions in multiple contexts.  If the child expresses an emotion (verbally or behaviorally) without identifying the emotion, the teacher may ask, "Can you tell me more about what you were just doing?" to look for child's awareness of their behavior (the child only needs to identify their verbal and/or behavioral expression of emotion and not the emotion experienced).  A child at this skill level might be able to identify emotions in oneself and/or others (Skill C), but <b>only with the support</b> of an adult or peer.	<i>While the class is researching reptiles on the computer, Holly sees a picture of a snake, runs to the back of the room and hides under the teacher's desk. The teacher overhears Holly tell her classmate that she saw a snake and her heart was beating fast.</i>
<b>C</b>	Identifies emotions in self.	Observe the child independently identifying own emotions.  For additional information, the teacher may ask: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel during [event]?</li> <li>• Can you show me how you were feeling?</li> </ul> The teacher may use visual representation of emotions [e.g., feelings chart]) as well.  A child who is at this skill may be able to indicate that a response to an event can include one or more emotions, including conflicting emotions, within	<i>When the teacher asks Quincy how he is feeling about an upcoming chorus concert, Quincy goes to the feeling cards and selects a scared face to represent that he feels scared.</i>



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Skill	Skill Progression	Skill-Level Teacher Instructions	Examples
		themselves or another person (Skill G), but <b>only with the support</b> of an adult or peer.	
<b>D</b>	Identifies emotions in others.	Observe the child Independently identifying emotions in others.  A child who is at this skill may be able to indicate that a response to an event can include one or more emotions, including conflicting emotions, within themselves or another person (Skill G), but <b>only with the support</b> of an adult or peer.	<i>Magee is reading a book to Arturo during a paired reading assignment. The instructions are to describe the hare in the story after he loses the race. She says, "Look at how sad the rabbit is!"</i>
<b>E</b>	Independently indicates a response to an event can include one or more emotions, including conflicting emotions, within themselves or another person.	Observe the child independently indicating that a response to an event can include one or more emotions within themselves or another person.  A child at this skill may be able to indicate that the same event can cause different people to experience different emotions (Skill H) but <b>only with the support</b> from an adult or peer.	<i>The teacher overhears Krista telling a classmate about her weekend. Krista told her classmate that while watching a movie, she was happy because her mom let her watch the movie, but scared because the clown turned out to be a bad guy.</i>
<b>F</b>	Indicates the same event can cause different people to experience different emotions.	Observe the child independently indicating that different people or groups of people had different specific emotions in response to the same event.	<i>The teacher overhears Franklin telling a classmate about his weekend. Franklin told his classmate that he and his sister jumped off the high dive for the first time, and he was really excited, but his sister was really scared.</i>
<b>G</b>	Indicates knowledge of how the social context relates to his/her own and others' emotion experience.	Observe the child independently indicating knowledge of how the immediate social context relates to their own and others' emotion expression and experience.  A child who at this skill may be able to interpret or predict the emotional experience of others using the social context but <b>only with the support</b> of an adult or peer.	<i>After reading Green Eggs and Ham to the class, the teacher points out that Samantha's friend felt different than Samantha about her food. He asks his students if they can remember a time when they had an emotional response to an event that was very different from a friend or family member. A student recalls, "I heard everyone cheering when we won a pizza party from the cookie sale. They must have been happy, but I was disappointed because I'm allergic to dairy."</i>
<b>H</b>	Interprets the emotional experience of others using the	Observe the child independently justifying an interpretation of the emotional expression and	<i>During gym, the class is picking teams to play soccer. Codie notices that Jaden looks mad when he was not</i>



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Skill	Skill Progression	Skill-Level Teacher Instructions	Examples
	<p>social context (e.g., provides justification that includes social information and inferences about others' intentions).</p>	<p>experience of others (which may not be the same) using information about the social context and inferences about others' intentions.</p> <p>If an opportunity presents itself during the day, the teacher may ask a child, "How do you think [another person] is feeling/will feel?"</p> <p>The teacher may continue to probe for more information without providing additional information that would direct the child to make an interpretation or prediction (e.g., Tell me more).</p>	<p><i>picked on the team that his friends were on. She says to her friend, "I know he likes this game, but he always gets mad when his friends are on the other team."</i></p>
I	<p>Predicts the emotional experience of others using the social context (e.g., provides justification that includes social information and inferences about others' intentions).</p>	<p>Observe the child independently justifying a prediction of the emotional expression and experience of others (which may not be the same) using information about the social context and inferences about others' intentions.</p> <p>If an opportunity presents itself during the day, the teacher may ask a child, "How do you think [another person] is feeling/will feel?"</p> <p>The teacher may continue to probe for more information without providing additional information that would direct the child to make an interpretation or prediction (e.g., Tell me more).</p>	<p><i>Maddy tells the teacher, "Ellen is going to the computer station and Danielle is already there. Danielle might get angry." The teacher asks, "Why do you think Danielle will get mad?" Maddy replies, "Because she doesn't like to let other people take turns with the computer. She got mad at me last week when I tried to get on the computer."</i></p>



## Emotional Literacy Situation #1

### How Does the Character Feel?

**Purpose:** This situation corresponds with the skills in Understanding 2 (Skills C & D). In this activity, the teacher prompts children to explore characters in a story and asks them various questions to determine if the child can identify expressed emotions or identify their own emotions. As opposed to skills later in the progression, the child does not need to be able to identify *why* an emotion occurred or *why* they would feel a certain way if they experienced a particular event. If you think that the child or children can readily identify emotions in self and others, you may want to start with Situation #2.

**Situation Instructions:** While reading a book aloud (e.g., *Caps for Sale*) to a small group of children, the teacher pauses at different times to ask an individual child how he/she thinks [the character] is feeling (e.g., scenes in the book where the character would be expected to experience clear emotions). If the book contains specific emotion words, the teacher may ask a child to demonstrate the typical behaviors that are associated with that emotion. At an appropriate time in the book, the teacher may also ask a child, “How would you feel if this happened to you?” The teacher may ask the child to draw a picture that represents how the character is feeling. If the child does not independently describe the emotion of the character, the teacher may ask any of the following questions:

- Can you tell me more about your picture?
- Can you tell me more about your choice of color in your picture (e.g., why did you choose red?)
- Can you tell me more about what is happening here (while pointing to a specific part of the picture)?

**Suggested Group Size:** Appropriate for a small group of children, including an individual child

**Situation Prompts:** If the child needs any support to identify a character’s emotions or his or her own emotion, the teacher may use any of the following scaffolds and then re-ask the question:

- Direct the child to the information in the book that best represents that emotion (illustration, descriptive text, a character's facial expression).
- Remind child of a past experience that is similar to what is happening in the book (e.g., Remember when we read the other book in class and we talked about the emotions of [a character])
- Provide the child with a set of familiar pictorial representations of emotions from which to select (the teacher says the matching emotion word while s/he pointing to each picture).

#### Materials

Any age appropriate book that provides opportunities to discuss a wide range of emotions related to a specific event.



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- If the child's response was not as anticipated, follow-up with a probe of why s/he identified that emotion
- Some children may not have the precise vocabulary to articulate the feelings, so the teacher intentionally listens for approximations and looks or gestures that convey the same meaning.
- A question with a "yes" or "no" response should be followed by a question that requires a more descriptive response.

When working with children, avoid the following:

- Do not identify the emotion for the child (e.g., "Was [the character] angry?")
- Do not ask if they agree or disagree with another child's identification of an emotion.
- If drawing a picture is part of the situation activity, do not ask child to draw a picture that predicts how the character will feel later in the story.



## Emotional Literacy Situation #2

### Why Do You Feel...?

**Purpose:** This situation corresponds with the skills in Understanding 3 (Skills E & F). In this activity, the teacher prompts children to explore characters in a story to determine if the child understands that emotions are linked to events, and can communicate about that event (i.e., the cause of an emotion or emotions). During the activity, the teacher observes the child's ability to identify a specific event that caused an emotion(s) as opposed to being able to simply label an expressed emotion(s) in oneself or another person (Skills C & D).

**Situation Instructions:** While reading book aloud (e.g., *On Monday, When It Rained*) to a small group of children, the teacher pauses at different times to ask an individual child how he/she thinks [the character] is feeling (i.e., scenes in the book where a response to the event can include one or more emotions, including conflicting emotions, within a character or where the event can cause different people to experience different emotions) and why the character is feeling that way.

The teacher may also pause at these different times to ask the children if any of them have ever experienced the event or something similar. If so, the teacher can ask the child how s/he felt. To allow each child to provide a response to a specific scene in the book the teacher may ask the children to draw a picture that represents how the character[s] is/are feeling. The teacher can walk around and ask individual children about their picture. If the child does not independently describe multiple emotions or different characters experiencing different emotions in response to the same event, the teacher may ask any of the following questions:

- Can you tell me more about your picture?
- Can you tell me more about your choice of color in your picture (e.g., Why did you choose red?)?
- Can you tell me more about what is happening here (while pointing to a specific part of the picture)?

To allow each child to provide a response to a specific scene in the book the teacher may ask the children to act out the scene and then ask a specific child why they (or another child) portrayed a character the way they did. If a child (during the book discussion, drawing activity, or dramatic activity) is unable to identify conflicting emotions or indicate that different people experience different emotions to the same event, the teacher may ask the following questions:

- How else might the character feel?
- Do you think [character A] feels the same way as [character B]?
- You said that Character A was [emotion] because of [the event]. How do you think Character B feels because of the [event]?"

#### Materials

Age-appropriate books that provide opportunities to discuss conflicting emotions or different people experience different emotions in response to the same event

Emotion discussed should be expected to be familiar to and experienced by a child at the given grade level.



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**Suggested Group Size:** Appropriate for a small group of children, including an individual child.

**Situation Prompts:** If the child needs any support connecting emotions to an event, the teacher may use any of the following scaffolds and then re-ask the question:

- Direct the child to the information in the book that best represents that connection (illustration, descriptive text, a character's facial expression).
- Remind child of a past experience that is similar to what is happening in the book (e.g., Remember when we read the other book in class and we talked about how [a character] felt after [event] happened?)
- Provide the child with a set of familiar pictorial representations of emotions from which to select (the teacher says the matching emotion word while s/he pointing to each picture).
- If the child's response was not as anticipated, follow-up with a probe of why s/he connected [emotion] to the event.
- Some children may not have the precise vocabulary to articulate the feelings, so the teacher intentionally listens for approximations and looks or gestures that convey the same meaning.
- A question with a "yes" or "no" response should be followed by a question that requires a more descriptive response.



## Emotional Literacy Situation #3

### Feelings in Social Context

**Purpose:** This situation corresponds with the skills in Understanding 4 (Skills G-I). In this activity, the teacher prompts children to explore characters in a story to determine if the child understands that emotions are dependent on the social context, and use that information to make inferences about or interpret others' emotions. The teacher will look for the child's ability to independently provide evidence to support their interpretation and/or prediction, and provide supports as necessary.

**Situation Instructions:** After reading a passage, watching a video, or listening to a read-aloud, the child is asked to interpret a character's emotional expression and experience within the social context and/or predict a future emotional expression and experience. For this situation, the teacher uses literature in which the children can identify with the characters and the emotions they express and experience (e.g., *Charlotte's Web*). At the beginning of the activity, the teacher sets-up the purpose for the reading to inform children of what to be listening and looking for in the text that is being read (e.g., "Remember yesterday, Wilbur heard some news. You are going to listen today for how Wilbur, Fern, and the barn animals are feeling about the news he received.") While reading aloud to the children, the teacher can pause at different times to ask an individual child how he/she thinks [a character] is feeling (e.g., scenes in the book where a character would be expected to experience identifiable emotions). The teacher identifies a passage in the book where a child will have an opportunity to make a prediction about a character's emotional expression or experience (e.g., when Charlotte creates a message in a web for Wilbur). At the appropriate time the teacher asks, "How do you think [the character] will feel when [a scene in a book]?" (e.g., "How do you think Wilbur will feel when he sees the message in the web?"). At an appropriate time in the book, the teacher may also ask a child "How would you feel if this happened to you?"

#### Materials

A range of materials (e.g., social studies, literature) that provide an opportunity to discuss emotions and feelings.

Ideal material might include instances where an expressed emotion is ambiguous, absent, or conflicting with an internal experience.

The teacher selects appropriate materials based on the child's prior knowledge and ability level. Prior to beginning the activity, it may be helpful to the teacher do any of the following:

- Identify appropriate scenes in the selected material where complex emotional interactions between the characters take place.
- Identify appropriate scenes in the selected material that lend themselves to making a prediction.
- Make a list of the characters/people and the emotions being expressed or experienced in a specific scene.
- Include instances where a character/person may internally feel one way, but display a different emotion if applicable.

Prior to beginning the activity, it may be helpful to do any of the following:

- Identify appropriate scenes in the book where complex emotional interactions between the characters take place.



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- Identify appropriate scenes in the book that lend themselves to making a prediction.
- Make a list of the characters and the emotions being expressed or experienced in a specific scene.
- Include instances where a character may internally feel one way, but display a different emotion.

**Suggested Group Size:** Appropriate for a small group of children, including an individual child.

### Situation Prompts:

If the child needs any support to connect the social context to the expression or experience of emotions, justify an interpretation, or justify a prediction, the teacher may use any of the scaffolds:

- Ask the child, “Why do you think [the character] is feeling that way?”
- Direct child to a sentence, word, or text feature in the passage that would provide a clue to the social context or a character’s emotion expression or experience.
- Remind child of a past experience (e.g., personal experience, or an experience that they read) that is similar to what is happening in the book (e.g., Remember when we read the other book in class and we talked about the emotions of [a character]).

Avoid using the terms “interpretation,” “justification,” and “prediction” if the child has not been exposed in regular instruction. Avoid using other children’s responses to help the targeted child formulate a response.