

SEL STORIES FOR BIG FEELINGS

The Invisible Backpack

A Social-Emotional Learning Story & Activities • Grades 2-4



Includes:

- Storybook
- Comprehension Questions
- SEL Reflection Sheet
- Coloring Pages
- Writing Prompt
- Role-Play Ideas
- Bonus Activity
- Teacher Guide

By Alina Holovata

The Invisible Backpack

“Good morning, class!” said Ms. Tessa. “Before we start math, let’s do our feelings check-in.” She pointed to the big poster by the board.

Sunny.

Cloudy.

Rainy.

Stormy.

Four little weather pictures with faces.

One by one, kids walked up and stuck their clothespins next to a feeling.

Sunny.

Sunny.

Cloudy.

Sunny.

When it was my turn, I clipped my name next to Sunny.

Then I noticed Jayden.

Usually, he was the loudest kid in class.

Jokes.

Drum solos on the desk.

Cartoon doodles on every scrap of paper.

But today, his hoodie was pulled over his head.

His shoulders were slumped.

He stared at his desk like it was the most boring thing on Earth.

“Jayden?” said Ms. Tessa gently. “Do you want to choose your weather?”

He shrugged.

Very slowly, he walked to the poster.

His hand hovered over Stormy.

Then he slid his clip to Cloudy instead.

He went back to his seat and kept his head down.

Something felt... heavy.

Not in the room.

In him.

Like he was carrying a giant backpack I couldn’t see.

At recess, everyone ran outside.

Kickball.

Tag.

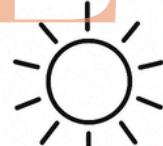
Swings squeaking in the cold air.

I grabbed a ball and looked around.

No Jayden.

I found him sitting alone on the low wall by the fence.

HOW ARE YOU
FEELING?



HAPPY



SAD



WORRIED



ANGRY

Then Julia reached into her backpack and pulled something out.

A small green crocodile.

Swish.

"He's spent a lot of time catching crumbs," she said. "But he's also good at holding feelings. Want to borrow him?"

Jayden hugged the stuffed crocodile.

"Is he heavy?" I asked.

"No," Jayden said. "He's exactly the right weight."

On the way out, we passed the feelings poster again.

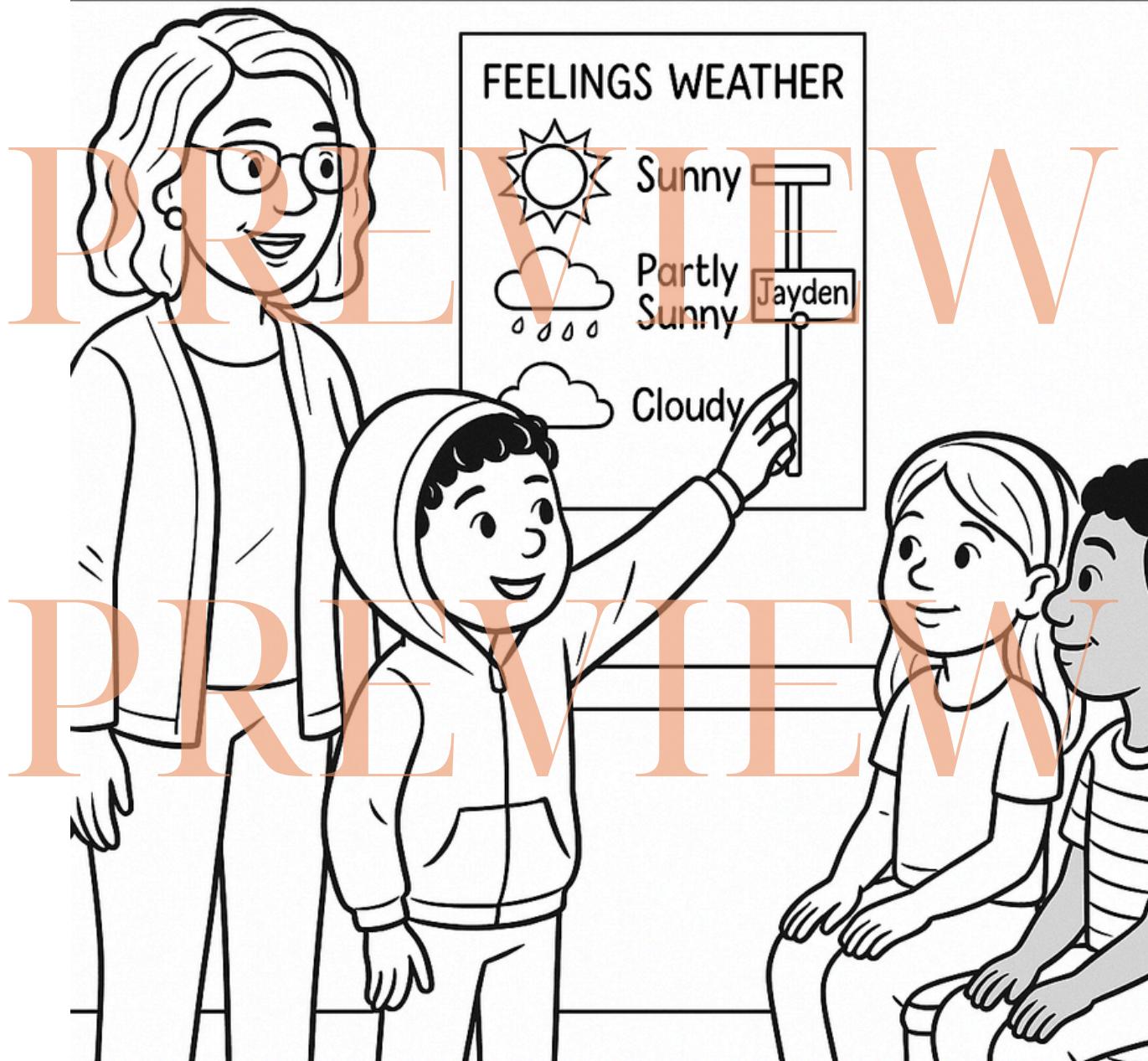
Jayden slid his clip from Cloudy to Partly Sunny—a little drawing Ms. Tessa had added between Cloudy and Sunny.

"Maybe tomorrow I'll be Sunny," he said.

"And if you're Stormy," I said, "we'll just check your backpack again."

He grinned.

"Deal," he said.



SEL Reflection Sheet – The Invisible Backpack

Name: _____ Date: _____

Think about the story and answer the questions:

1. How do you think Jayden felt when he said his invisible backpack was “full of heavy stuff”?

2. What did the narrator do that showed empathy toward Jayden?

3. Have you ever felt like you were carrying an “invisible backpack” of worries or big feelings? What was inside it?

4. Who are some safe people you can talk to when your “backpack” feels heavy?

5. What are some healthy ways to “lighten” your invisible backpack? (For example: talking, breathing, drawing, moving your body.)

6. Draw a picture of your own invisible backpack. What’s one feeling or worry inside—and one thing that helps you feel better?

- In the box, draw your backpack and what’s inside. Then write 2–3 sentences to describe it.



Coloring Page



Writing Prompt – My Invisible Backpack

Name: _____ Date: _____

Creative Writing – The Invisible Backpack

Imagine you have an invisible backpack that holds your feelings and worries.

- Who or what helps you carry it?
- What is one “rock” (worry) inside?
- What is one “tool” that helps you feel better?



Write a short story (5–7 sentences).

My Invisible Backpack

If I had an invisible backpack, it would feel... _____

Inside it, there would be worries about... _____

One person who helps me carry my backpack is... _____

One tool that helps me feel better is... (for example: talking, deep breathing, drawing)

When I use my tools or ask for help, my backpack feels... _____



Bonus Activity — “Feeling Tools Coupons”

Goal

Help children recognize that they have choices and tools to manage big feelings, and that they can support each other with those tools.

Story Connection

In The Invisible Backpack, Jayden’s worries feel like heavy rocks. With help, he “sorts” them and **learns tools to make the backpack lighter. Students now turn these tools into coupons they can use for themselves or offer to a friend.**

How to Run It (Step-by-Step)

1. Explain the activity

Tell students they will create Feeling Tools Coupons—little cards that say: “When my backpack feels heavy, I can use this tool.”

2. Brainstorm tools together

On the board, list examples such as:

- “Take 5 slow breaths.”
- “Ask an adult for help.”
- “Draw or write my feelings.”
- “Take a movement break.”
- “Talk to a friend I trust.”
- “Hug my stuffed animal or favorite toy.”
- “Listen to calm music.”

3. Create the coupons

- Give each student 2–3 small rectangles (about 2.75×1.6 inches / 7×4 cm).
- On each coupon, they write or draw one tool.
- Add borders, backpack icons, or weather symbols for decoration.

4. Personal use or sharing

Students can:

- Keep coupons in their desk or a “calm toolkit,” or
- Place one coupon in a class basket labeled “Need a Tool?” that anyone may borrow.

5. Debrief

Discuss:

- Which coupon would you use most often?
- How do these tools help your invisible backpack feel lighter?
- Can we use our tools only when we’re stormy, or also when we’re cloudy or sunny?

Materials

- Coupon templates (printable)
- Markers, crayons, scissors
- A small box or envelope for “tool sharing” (optional)

Skills Developed

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Help-seeking
- Empathy & peer support

When my backpack
feels heavy, I can use
this tool.



When my backpack
feels heavy, I can use
this tool.



PREVIEW

When my backpack
feels heavy, I can use
this tool.



When my backpack
feels heavy, I can use
this tool.



PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

Bonus Activity — “Swish’s Backpack Tips”

Activity Goal

Encourage students to think of practical, kind ideas for supporting classmates with heavy “invisible backpacks,” using Swish the crocodile as a friendly SEL mascot.

Story Connection

Swish appears again in *The Invisible Backpack* as a comforting toy Jayden can hold. Students will now imagine Swish giving advice about feelings and support.

How to Run It (Step-by-Step)

1. Create or reuse Swish

Use a stuffed toy, printed picture, or simple drawing of Swish.

Place Swish in a corner of the room with a sign: “Swish’s Backpack Tips”.

2. Explain to students

Say something like:

“Swish knows a lot about invisible backpacks. He wants to collect tips that help when feelings are heavy.”

3. Students write or draw tips

Each child writes or draws one tip on a backpack-shaped card or a speech bubble, for example:

- “Ask, ‘Do you want to talk?’”
- “Offer to walk with someone at recess.”
- “Say, ‘It’s okay to feel that way.’”
- “Remind them to ask a grown-up for help.”
- “Sit next to someone who looks lonely.”

4. Display the tips

Attach the tips around Swish on a board or wall.

This becomes a Backpack Support Wall that students can read when they need ideas.

5. Keep it alive

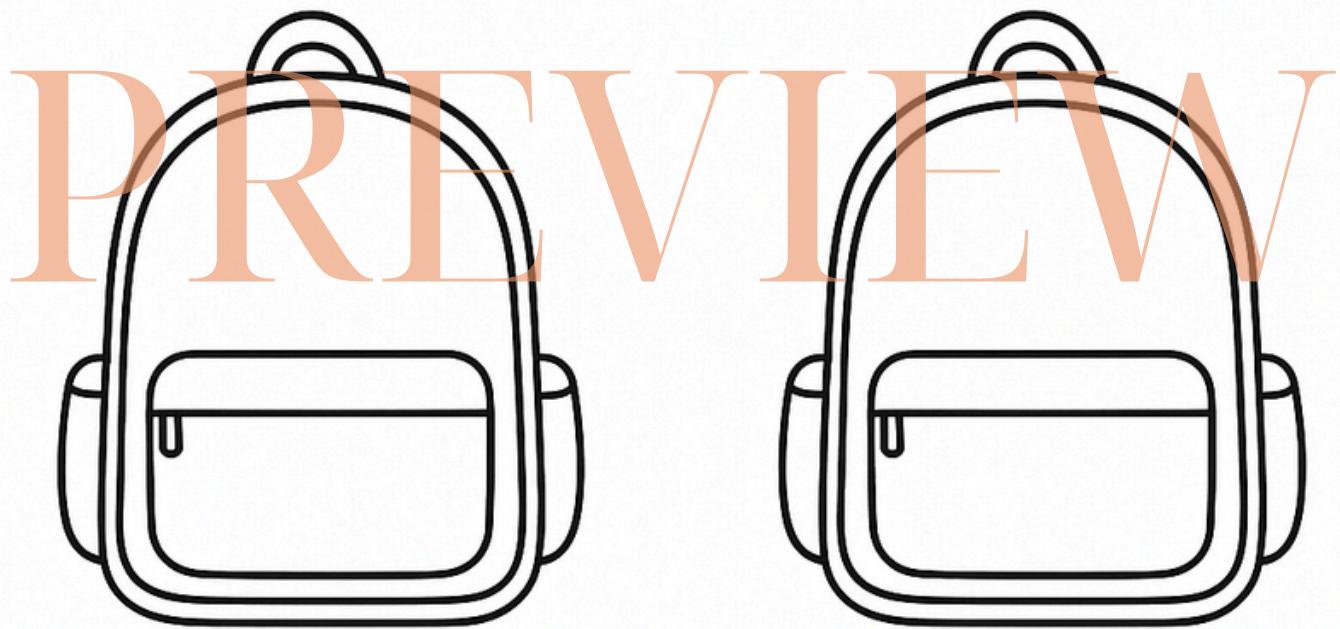
- Add new tips each week.
- Choose a “Swish Helper” who picks one tip to read to the class each morning or once a week.

Materials

- Swish plush or picture
- Backpack-shaped paper or speech bubbles
- Markers, tape or magnets
- Sign: “Swish’s Backpack Tips”

Skills Developed

- Empathy & perspective-taking
- Problem-solving
- Classroom community
- Emotional vocabulary





Teacher Guide – The Invisible Backpack

(Grades 2–4)

Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Describe the metaphor of an “invisible backpack” and identify at least one personal “worry rock.”
- Recognize signs that someone might be carrying heavy feelings.
- Practice empathy by listening and responding kindly to a peer’s emotions.
- Name and choose from several healthy tools for managing big feelings.
- Create a short written response connected to self-regulation and emotional awareness.

Standards Alignment

- **SEL Competencies:**
 - Self-Awareness
 - Self-Management
 - Social Awareness
 - Relationship Skills
 - Responsible Decision-Making
- **ELA Standards:**
 - Reading Comprehension (identifying key details, character feelings, story events)
 - Speaking & Listening (sharing ideas, participating in discussions, role-playing)
 - Writing (short narrative and reflective responses)

Materials Needed

- Printable storybook “The Invisible Backpack” (PDF)
- Comprehension questions worksheet
- SEL reflection sheet
- Writing prompt worksheet
- Coloring pages (2)
- Role-play ideas page
- Bonus activity templates:
 - Feeling Tools Coupons
 - Swish’s Backpack Tips
- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Optional: small foam or paper “rocks,” sticky notes, a feelings poster

Lesson Plan Overview

- **Warm-up** – Quick discussion: “What does it feel like when your day is heavy?” (5 min)
- **Story Reading** – Teacher reads The Invisible Backpack aloud. (10 min)
- **Discussion** – Use comprehension questions to guide conversation. (10 min)
- **Reflection** – Students complete the SEL reflection sheet. (10 min)
- **Creative Task** – Writing prompt + coloring page. (15 min)
- **Role-Play Activity** – Practice noticing and supporting someone with big feelings. (10 min)
- **Bonus Activities** – Choose one (10 min) or both (20 min):
 - Feeling Tools Coupons
 - Swish’s Backpack Tips
- **Wrap-up** – Share 1–2 strategies that help “lighten” our invisible backpacks. (5 min)