

# 5 Strategies to Unlock the Power of SEL with Middle Grade Books

By Monica Sherwood



# Hello there, friend!



Thank you so much for downloading **5 Strategies to Unlock the Power of SEL with Middle Grade Books**.

I'm guessing, if you've downloaded this guide, that you have had your fair share of social emotional learning concerns in your classroom. Or, if you're a parent or family member to a middle school aged kiddo, you've noticed shifts in their social life, communication skills, or are just overall concerned about how a year (more or less) without consistent in-person school and socialization may have impacted them.

Whatever the circumstances that led you here, I'm so glad you've arrived!

This guide is meant to help you integrate SEL into your existing ELA instruction regardless of the books your students are reading.

While I hope you'll find that *The Ice House*, my debut middle grade novel, is a great fit to pair with your in-class SEL discussions, you can use the questions and prompts I've laid out throughout this guide with ANY book you choose.

The idea is to make your life a tiny bit easier. I've been a teacher, and I know the ridiculous expectations placed on you. I know you care about your students' emotional well being. You know that if kids' emotional needs aren't met, they can't focus on learning.

But there isn't enough time, and you aren't given the resources you need. I've even heard of teachers being told they have to create their own SEL curriculum and fit it into their existing schedules.

If that's you – this guide will set you on the right foot. Each of the strategies outlined in this guide adhere to the SEL core competencies that SEL curriculums are based on.

Here's what you need to get started :)

*Monica*

## Strategy One

### Character Analysis and Empathy Building

One of the most powerful ways to integrate SEL into middle grade literature is through character analysis. As readers delve into characters' lives, thoughts, and emotions, they can develop empathy and understanding for others.

#### QUESTIONS

Encourage students to reflect on the experiences and perspectives of different characters, asking the following questions:

1. How does this character feel in this situation? Why?
2. What challenges does this character face, and how do they overcome them?
3. How do the character's emotions and experiences change throughout the story?

By engaging in these discussions, students can gain insight into the complexities of human emotions and experiences, helping them to build empathy and social awareness.

## Strategy Two

### Conflict Resolution through Story Themes

Novels revolve around conflicts and their resolution, which makes them perfect for teaching conflict resolution skills. As students analyze the ways characters navigate disagreements and misunderstandings, they can learn valuable lessons about communication, compromise, and problem-solving.

#### QUESTIONS

Ask students to identify the conflicts within a story and discuss the strategies characters use to resolve them.

Encourage students to reflect on the effectiveness of these strategies and consider how they might apply these lessons to their own lives.

## Strategy Three

### Collaborative Learning and Teamwork

Encouraging collaboration and teamwork in the classroom is an excellent way to foster SEL skills, particularly in terms of relationship building and social awareness.

## QUESTIONS

Assign group projects where students must work together to analyze a chapter of a book and create a creative presentation about it.

As students collaborate, they will need to communicate effectively, listen to one another's ideas, and compromise. Each of these tasks will help them build essential relationship skills and foster a sense of community in the classroom.

### Strategy Four

#### Developing Emotional Intelligence through Literary Themes

Middle Grade novels explore themes related to emotions, like love, grief, joy, and anger. Discussing these themes can help students develop emotional intelligence, as they learn to recognize, understand, and manage their own emotions and those of others.

## QUESTIONS

Engage students in discussions about the emotions portrayed in a story by asking the following questions:

1. How does the author convey the character's emotions through language, imagery, and dialogue?
2. How do the characters' emotions change throughout the story, and what factors contribute to these changes?
3. How do the characters' emotions influence their actions and decisions?

### Strategy Five

#### Encouraging Reflective Thinking and Self-Awareness

One of the most important aspects of SEL is self-awareness: a student's ability to recognize their own emotions, values, strengths, and limitations. To cultivate self-awareness in the classroom, encourage students to engage in reflective thinking and connect their learning to their own lives.

## QUESTIONS

Ask students to consider how they might respond to the challenges faced by a character or how the themes of a story relate to their own experiences.

This reflective practice can help students develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their emotions, fostering self-awareness and personal growth.

# Reading Awaits!

I hope these strategies will be a jumping off point that makes it a bit easier for you to hit these SEL competencies in your ELA classes. Integrating social emotional learning with middle grade books is an effective way to empower students with the skills they need to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

If you **are** looking for a book to pair with all of these amazing SEL talking points, I do recommend giving my novel, *The Ice House*, a read. And – to make your life even easier – you can check out *The Ice House Teacher Guide* I made with specific questions for students developed around SEL competencies as well as middle grade level reading and writing standards.

*Monica*

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- Booking me for an author visit
- Hiring me for a writing workshop
- Exploring my additional reader resources
- Get my SEL companion guide for *The Ice House*

