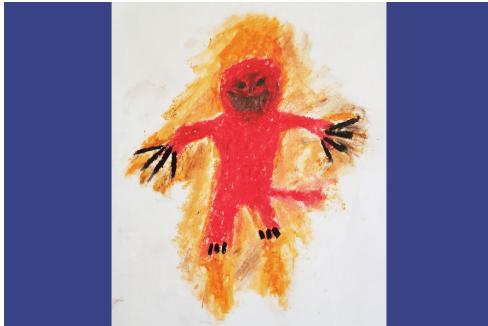


Inside Out Activity: The Frustration Monster!

Written by Hannah Beach (April 7, 2020)

<https://hannahbeach.ca/the-frustration-monster/>



This is a great activity for kids ages five to eleven. (These ages are approximate and are suggested guidelines only.)

What's the benefit?

This activity can help a child think about frustration and what it feels like inside of them. It can also help children express their frustration, as it gives them the permission to draw a really ugly picture. Often children are expected to make “nice” drawings, and this activity gives them the space and room to do otherwise.

This activity can support children to:

- release their pent-up frustration, which can otherwise lead to outbursts of aggression.
- connect to, reflect on, and express their feelings of frustration in a safe way. This helps them to build consciousness around their feelings, which is essential for them to develop impulse control, emotional maturity, and resilience, as well as embark on a path of self-discovery.

What do you need to make it happen?

- A piece of paper per child
- Crayons/markers for each child (if none available, a pen or pencil will do)
- Background music (optional) Music suggestions below

How do you do it?

- Ask your students to remember a time when they felt really frustrated.
- Then ask them to imagine that their frustration was a MONSTER!
- Ask them to draw the monster. Give them some verbal prompts, like:
 - “Can you draw what your frustration monster looks like? Make it as wild and ugly as you wish!”
 - “She is a mad monster! Show me how frustrated she is!”
 - “What colour(s) is your monster?”
 - “How ugly can you make him?!”
- If a child cannot remember a time when they felt frustrated, then let them know that they can just make it up: “That’s okay—just invent a frustration monster and make him as frustrated and ugly as you can!”

Facilitating this online?

- Ask your students to have paper/crayons ready for that class. For younger students, this would mean emailing the family ahead of class time so that they can have the materials ready.
- Once online with your students, check that they have paper/crayons beside them and won't need to leave to find them after you start. If they don't have them ready, give your students a few minutes to gather materials. (And if there are no crayons to be found in the house, they can simply use a pen or pencil!)
- Talk to your students every once in a while during their drawing time to reassure them that you are still there with them and to hold the space for them, especially if you sense restlessness. 10 minutes is a long time to not hear your teacher's voice, especially if you are not physically together or if your students are younger. ("Now I am changing the music so we can listen to a different piece" or "Oooh...my monster is getting very ugly, I'm looking forward to seeing yours!" You can also adjust how long the activity is to meet your student's needs.

Let your students know that:

- everyone is going to have 10 minutes to draw their frustration monsters.
- you are going to play some music for them while they draw. (This really helps to keep kids engaged in the activity. It can also help them to tap into their feelings.)
- NOT to show anyone else in the class their drawings until you ask them to.
- that if they finish their drawing before you ask everyone to return, that they can just doodle or draw whatever they want to.
- that they can begin when the music starts. And that you will be drawing your monster too!

Note: You could also do this activity by explaining the activity to the children and then ask them to do it in their own time and return to the online class at a specific time/day to share their drawings. If you do it this way, make sure to remind them that when they return to the computer, to NOT show anyone else their drawing until you invite them to.

Helpful tips:

- If your students don't know what "frustration" means, tell them to think of a time that they really wanted something but couldn't get it, and it made them feel really mad. This explanation will resonate with most kids.
- It is best to not tell children that this kind of activity is "good" for them as it may make them feel self-conscious or even resistant to participating in the activity. Instead, just introduce it casually, as in:
"I thought that before we did our math lesson today that we could all draw together for a bit. Today we are going to be drawing frustration monsters! Here is how it is going to work..." (And then go on to explain the next steps.)
- This activity works best if the music you select feels energetic: think big music, strong emotions.

Music suggestions: (To fill 10 minutes of time you would need both of these pieces.)

Title: "The Final Countdown" (Live version)

Artist: Melo-M

Album: Live at Riga Congress Centre

Title: "Moving Worlds"

Artist: Secession Studios

Album: Epoch

Ideas for how to share them with one another:

BEFORE the kids show them to one another, let them know that it's OK if their frustration monster looks completely different than everyone else's!

There are no rules about what it should look like:

- It's OK if they did just the head, or they drew the whole body.
- It's OK if they only had a pencil or not many colours as it is hard to go shopping right now, so not to worry if theirs isn't as colourful as other peoples.

Ask them to all turn their sound off so that they can hear you, but they can't hear one another. (I don't know about you, but I have been teaching online now for a few weeks and have found it much easier to teach when my students sound is off and then they each turn their sound on one at a time. Otherwise we can't hear one another for all the background noise.)

Depending on what you feel is best for the students you work with, you could:

- invite all the children (and you) to hold up their pictures at the same time to show one another. This can feel less vulnerable than everyone's eyes being on one picture at a time. You could then make global comments about the group's pictures: "Wow! Yikes! These are crazy monsters!"
- let them know that they can hang this up in their own home if they want to, or crumple it up in a ball and recycle it!

* This activity is from the **Inside-Out handbook**; the experiential companion guide to *Reclaiming Our Students: Why Children Are More Anxious, Aggressive, and Shut Down Than Ever—And What We Can Do About It*, co-authored by Hannah Beach & Tamara Neufeld Strijack.

Warmly,
Hannah Beach

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