

Polly and Buster: The Wayward Witch and the Feelings Monster

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Create a cause and effect flow chart to look at the way feelings influence our actions and the feelings of others
- Make a feelings body map and think about the connection between feelings and the different parts of our body
- Keep a feelings journal
- Learn about the connection between text and illustrations
- Learn to explore reality using imagination and storytelling.

About the story

Polly Progett is terrible at spells. Her teacher, Miss Spinnaker, tells her that she just needs to be patient and to practice, but while everyone else in her class is making a spell to melt the warts *off* toads, Polly ends up creating one that causes more *and* makes the toad explode! Worse still, Polly has a terrible time keeping a cool head. When Malorie Halloway teases Polly for her mistake, Polly feels a fiery rage, and flings the potion all over Malorie's face!

The one person that makes Polly feel as if she fits in is her best friend, Buster. Buster and Polly have been friends forever – they have a secret call, a special meeting spot, and Buster always knows how to make Polly feel better. Buster feels what Polly feels so strongly, that he shrinks when she's sad, and blows up, big and pink, when she's happy. But Buster is a monster. And everybody knows that witches aren't friends with monsters. Polly and Buster have to keep their friendship a secret.

At Polly's house, Polly always feels like the odd one out. Her sister Winifred is good at everything, and is always sucking up to their mother. And her mother makes her eat horrible healthy food. But at Buster's house she feels welcome and at home. Buster's mother is always looking after extra monsters saying, 'It's all very well to love monsters who are lovable, but it's the unloveable ones who need it the most.' And Buster's mum doesn't care if monsters are

friends with witches. Polly doesn't understand why monsters and witches can't just be friends.

One morning, Polly wakes up to bright yellow sunshine, it's going to be a beautiful day. But things go wrong, fast, and by the time Polly gets to school for an excursion to the National Gallery. Polly gets paired with Malorie Halloway for the excursion. At first, neither of them are happy about it, but when they start working together, Malorie is impressed by Polly's artwork – she even offers to help Polly with her spells in exchange for drawing lessons. It looks like Polly might be making friends.

But things go wrong when a busload of monsters arrive at the museum too. Buster is so excited to see Polly that he calls out to her loudly. Polly is angry. Buster knows they can't be friends in public! So she ignores him, and tells Malorie that they're not friends. Buster is so sad at Polly's reaction, he changes colour and begins to shrink. The other monsters in the group gather around Buster, watching his strange behavior. Polly grabs Malorie and gets out of there as quickly as possible.

Polly is angry at Buster for embarrassing her, and relieved that Malorie didn't realise that the two of them were friends. But when Polly and Malorie go back through the room that the monsters were in, there's a huge commotion. The other monsters are still gathered around Buster, and are pointing, laughing and teasing him. Polly has never seen Buster so small, or so grey. She calls out to the monsters to stop, but this just makes things worse, because when Buster hears her voice, he turns a hopeful shade of pink, making the others tease him even louder for loving a witch. Polly feels her head fizz. The noise gets louder and louder until her arms fly upwards, and a shower of sparks shoot from her fingertips. She roars STOP, and when she opens her eyes the monsters have all been flung against the walls of the gallery.

Polly faints, and wakes in the sick bay. She tells Miss Spinnaker how frightened she is by what happened, and about her friendship with Buster. She's surprised to find out that Miss Spinnaker has monster friends herself, and doesn't think there's any reason monsters and witches can't be friends. Even so,

Polly is relieved to find out that Malorie thought Polly's spell was to protect her, and not Buster. In Malorie's mind, Polly is a hero!

Buster sneaks up to Polly's window that night to see if she's ok. Polly's so happy to see him, and relieved that he's ok. But when Buster finds out that Polly is still keeping their friendship a secret, he can't hide his disappointment. Polly's sad that she's disappointed Buster, but relieved that they're still friends. Plus she's got a friend at school. It seems as though things are looking up.

When Polly returns to school, she's a hero. There's even been a newspaper article written. The article makes Polly sound fantastic, but it makes monsters sound horrible, and when Polly sees Malorie and her friends, she's dismayed to find out that they've started a club 'Witches Against Monsters.' Polly is sick of having to choose between her friends, but she doesn't know how to make Buster feel better without becoming an outcast herself.

Things escalate fast. Soon Buster isn't talking to Polly, and Polly's new friends are taking every opportunity to remind her that being friends with a monster would be a big mistake. Outside of school, groups of witches are starting to rally together to control the monster problem. Polly wishes she could talk to her dad, but all she has left of him is a small pouch of gemstones.

Polly is at home alone with Winifred when she discovers that a group of witches are on their way to Buster's house to confront him. Polly knows she needs to get Buster to safety, and to fix this terrible mess, but she doesn't even know where to start. When she gets to Buster's house, she finds him curled up on his bed, gray and pale. She tries to convince him to come with her, but it's too late, the house has been surrounded by witches, and they're demanding that Polly give Buster up. It's like the museum all over again. Polly's anger boils up inside her, and she climbs out onto the windowsill to tell the world that Buster is her best friend. When the older witches don't listen, Polly loses control, and another spell bursts from her in a flash of light.

This time when she wakes up, she and Buster are floating high in the starry night sky. Buster has forgiven Polly, but she still needs to fix the feud she's created between the witches and the monsters. They are found on a rooftop by Miss Spinnaker, who helps Polly see that she is an especially powerful witch, and

that her power is made stronger by her friendship with Buster. Polly is afraid of what's ahead, and she knows that she'll have a lot of work to do to make witches accept monsters....

'But somehow, knowing Buster will be by her side makes everything feel ok.'

About the author/illustrator

Sally Rippin was born in Darwin, but grew up mainly in South-East Asia. As a young adult she lived in China for three years, studying traditional Chinese painting. Sally has over sixty books published, many of them award-winning, including two novels for young adults. Her most recent work includes the highly acclaimed children's novel *Angel Creek* and the popular *Billie B Brown* books, which became the highest selling series for 6-8 year olds in Australia within the first year of their release. In 2015, Sally was Australia's highest selling female author and her *Billie B Brown* books have sold more than 2.5 million copies since first published.

Sally is a popular presenter in schools and at literary festivals both in Australia and overseas and has a regular program on 3RRR interviewing children's authors and industry professionals. She is a passionate ambassador for the *100 Story Building* creative writing centre for marginalized youth and has mentored many emerging writers and illustrators. Recently, she and her partner co-founded *Story Peddlers*, a hand-made performance tent that packs away into a custom-built bike, with the aim of bringing back the art of the roving storyteller.

From www.sallyrippin.com

Themes

- Feelings
- Friendship
- Loyalty
- Acceptance
- Magic

- Family

Reading Questions

Chapter One

What are the ways the Polly struggles when she is trying to do a spell?

Look at the picture on page four. Can you tell how Polly feels by looking at this picture? What are the clues in the picture that make you think this?

Why doesn't Polly ask Valentine for help?

When has feeling embarrassed stopped you from doing something?

Chapter Two

Why do Polly and Buster pretend not to be friends with each other?

What is Polly and Buster's secret call? Have you ever had a special call or code that you've used to communicate with friends?

What makes Buster notice that something's wrong with Polly?

What happens to Buster when he feels happy and sad? Could his reactions be a metaphor for how big you feel when you're happy or sad?

How does Buster make Polly feel better?

How are Polly and Buster the same? How are they different?

Chapter Three

How does Winifred make Polly look bad? Why do you think she does this?

Why doesn't Polly's mum want Polly to play with Buster?

How do you think Polly feels around her family?

Chapter Four

How is Buster's house different from Polly's house? How does this make her feel?

What does Buster's mum say about unlovable monsters?

Do you think monsters (at least in this book) are bad? Why do witches feel ashamed of being seen with them?

Chapter Five

When Polly gets home from Buster's, what is on the television? What does this tell you about Polly's mum and sister?

How does watching *Nastiest Witch on the Block* make Polly feel? What is unusual about this?

Have you ever felt different from everyone around you? Did it feel bad, or good?

Should Polly try harder to fit in with other witches?

Chapter Six

What makes Polly think that this will be a good day? What other things make you think of a good day?

What words does the author use to show how Polly is feeling?

What is the first bad thing to happen?

What do you think a monsters 'place' is in the sentence 'After all, a monster must always know their place'?

Chapter Seven

Why do you think no one ever sits next to Polly on the bus? How does this make her feel?

What is Polly good at?

Why does Polly think she's bad at spells? What does Miss Spinnaker think will help?

What does Polly learn about Miss Spinnaker that surprises her?

What are the rules for Polly's school excursion? What rules do you have when you go on an excursion? Why do we have these rules?

Why do you think Miss Spinnaker puts Polly and Malorie together at the head of the line?

Chapter Eight

Who is on the new bus? Why does it make Polly anxious?

What does Miss Spinnaker say about monsters?

What does Polly notice in the painting? What is unusual about this?

How do Malorie and Polly work together?

Chapter Nine

Why does Polly want to go upstairs when she sees the monsters?

What makes Buster shrink?

Do you think that Polly is right to be angry at Buster?

Why are the other monsters teasing Buster? What does Polly do when she sees this happening?

Chapter Ten

Why is Polly afraid of her power? What does Miss Spinnaker say about it? Where do you think it came from?

How does Miss Spinnaker feel about monsters mixing with witches?

Who did Malorie think Polly's spell was to protect? Who was it really for?

How does Miss Spinnaker define 'being a hero'? Can you think of other qualities that would make someone a hero?

What will the Committee think about the unsupervised monsters at the gallery?

What could this mean for Polly and Buster?

Chapter Eleven

How did Buster look when Polly pretended not to know him?

Why does Winifred suddenly take an interest in Polly?

Is Winifred being mean to Polly? Why?

Chapter Twelve

Why does Buster come to check on Molly? How is this visit different to when Winifred checked on her?

What is Buster getting called at school? What does it mean? Is it a nice name?

Why is Buster disappointed?

Is Polly being a good friend to Buster?

Chapter Thirteen

How does Polly feel about seeing Doctor Firestone?

What is Samba?

What instructions does Doctor Firestone give Polly to make her feel better?

Chapter Fourteen

Who is Polly's visitor?

What parts of the newspaper article about Polly are untrue?

What does Malorie give Polly as a gift?

Is Malorie Polly's best friend?

How does Malorie act when she realises that Buster and Polly are friends? Is this the way a best friend would act?

What does Polly say to make Malorie still like her? Why is it so important to her to be friends with Malorie?

Chapter Fifteen

What new club has Malorie started? What kinds of things do you think the club will do?

How do you think it will make Buster feel if he sees Polly wearing a badge?

Are monsters dangerous? Why do Malorie and her friends believe they are?

Chapter Sixteen

Why does Polly feel lucky? Is she really lucky?

When does the attention start to make Polly feel uncomfortable? Why do you think this is?

How does Polly feel when she gets tagged as a monster in the game? Is it really just a game?

Chapter Seventeen

What makes someone a true friend? Why is Malorie not a true friend? Has Polly been a true friend to Buster?

What does Polly do to show that she is a true friend to Buster?

How do other students show Polly that she isn't alone?

Chapter Eighteen

What happens when Polly calls Buster? Why doesn't he come?

Why does Polly feel that the meeting at the Town Hall is her fault? Is there anything she could do to make things better?

What is the special gift that Polly's father left her? What makes it so precious?

Chapter Nineteen

Why is Buster in trouble?

Why does Winnie want Polly to help Buster?

What does Polly think will happen if the witches see the bite on her arm?

Where do you think Polly's magic comes from?

Chapter Twenty

What does Polly notice about Buster when she opens her eyes? What does this mean?

How does Polly know that Buster has forgiven her?

Chapter Twenty-One

What do Polly and Buster need to keep them afloat?

How did Polly and Buster rescue each other?

Why is Polly glad when Miss Spinnaker shows up? What do you remember from earlier in the book that helps her know it is safe?

Chapter Twenty-Two

Why is Miss Spinnaker angry that Mrs Halloway pointed a wand at Polly?

How many spells has Polly done outside of school? What will happen if she does three?

Can you guess what the special thing Polly's father gave her was?

Chapter Twenty-Three

What are the stones that Polly's father gave her?

What does Polly realise when she holds the stones?

What is special about Polly and Buster?

Activities

- Feelings. In Chapter One, Polly feels **embarrassed** at the thought of having to ask Valentine for help, she feels a **fiery rage** when Malorie laughs at her, and she feels **ashamed** at having let Miss Spinnaker down again.
 - Make a list of the ways the author describes these feelings in the text. Look for clues about how Polly feels physically and the kinds of words used to describe her feelings.
 - For each of these three feelings, make a cause and effect flow chart using the prompts below
What happens? > How does it make Polly feel? > What does she do in response to her feelings? > What impact do her actions have on the way others feel?
 - Think of a time when you've felt the way Polly has felt. Make a cause and effect flow chart of what happened. Use this to write a scene as if you were the author telling a story. Think about the way the author of Polly's story has described Polly's feelings. Share your stories with your classmates and talk about how you could have handled your feelings differently to change what happened after.
- Create a body map of your feelings. In Chapter Two, the author writes that Polly cares 'secretly, deep down in that small place at the bottom of her tummy...'
 - On a large piece of paper draw the outline of your body.
 - Make a list of ten feelings, using a different colour to write each one.
 - On your piece of paper, colour in the part of your body you feel each feeling in, using the same colour you used to write them.
- In Chapter Four, Squishy asks what makes diamonds legal or illegal. Either individually or in groups do a research project on diamonds (this could be done as a blog post, poster or oral presentation). See if you can find out the answer to Squishy's question, and also any other interesting facts about diamonds – why are they so valuable?

- Keep a feelings journal.
 - Make a list of the feelings you read about in the book. Write each feeling at the top of a new page.
 - Whenever you feel one of the feelings, write (or draw) the memory into your feelings journal.
 - At the end of the project, choose one example from your feelings journal that you would like to illustrate and share with the rest of the class.
- Pictures in a book can help us understand what's happening in the story more. In *Polly and Buster*, we can see what Buster looks like when he is sad in the pictures, or we can imagine the night sky when the writing becomes white on a black page. Choose a scene from the story and illustrate it, thinking about the hints that you've been given in the text that tell you what the picture should look like. What can you add to your picture to make readers understand what's happening in the story by looking at it?
- Witches and monsters might not exist in real life, but we feel a connection to Polly and Buster because we have similar experiences in our own lives. Talk about empathizing with others in class, and about the importance of being able to imagine yourself in someone else's shoes. Think of something that's happened in your life, and try to turn it into an imaginary story like *Polly and Buster* – the characters could be animals, you could include magic – just use your imagination!