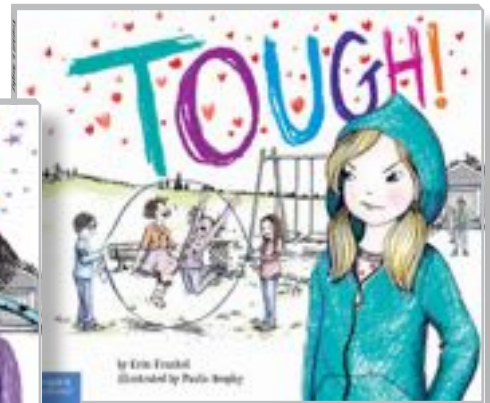
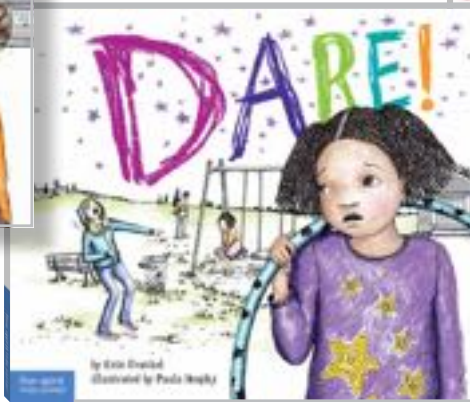
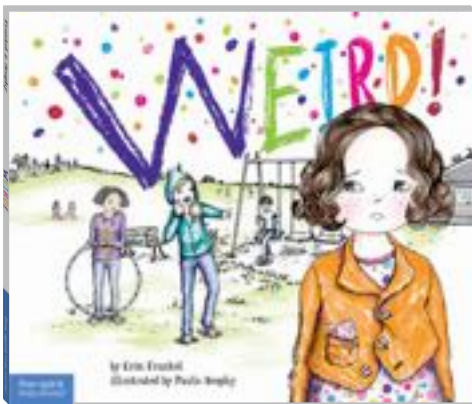


# A Leader's Guide to

# the WEIRD Series

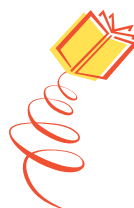
by Erin Frankel

illustrated by Paula Heaphy



Use this Leader's Guide with the books in the Weird series: *Weird!*, *Dare!*, and *Tough!*, written by Erin Frankel and illustrated by Paula Heaphy.

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Dear Leader,

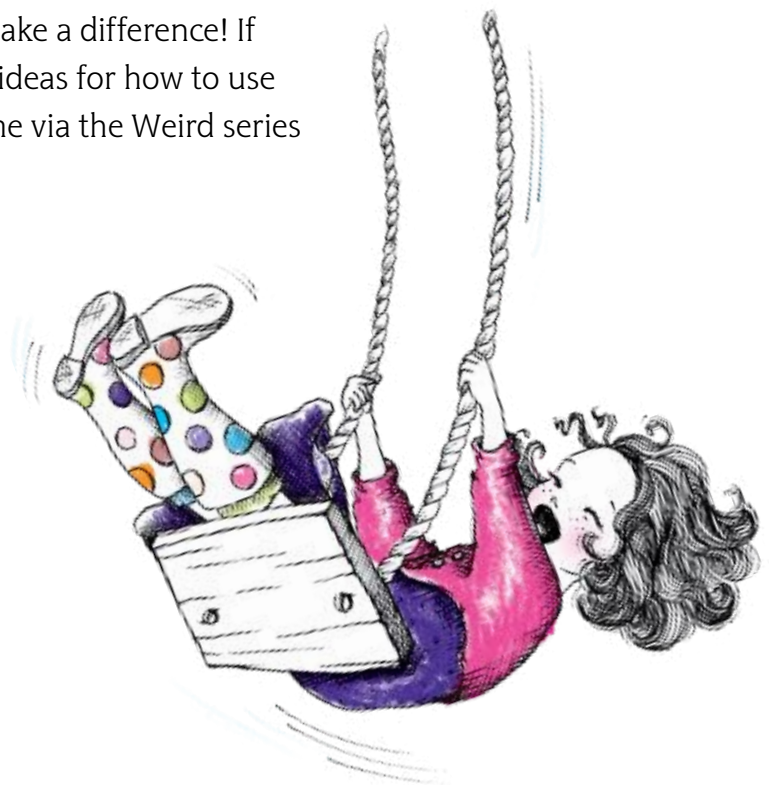
When I wrote the *Weird* series, I knew it was important to bring the role of the caring adult into the spotlight. It is a role too often left out of picture books on bullying in which child characters are left to find solutions on their own. The reality is that most children will need help when it comes to putting an end to bullying, and they will turn to the adults in their lives to help guide and support them.

Each of the three books in the *Weird* series, *Weird!*, *Dare!*, and *Tough!*, shows main characters as well as peripheral characters interacting with adults who support and help them in finding solutions to bullying. Placing adults in the books was a leap of faith. I had to believe that if a child reading these books had the courage to reach out to adults about bullying, those adults would respond with compassion and commitment. When it comes to bullying, teachers, parents, and other caregivers need to be willing and prepared to help.

It is my hope that the additional discussion questions, activities, and suggestions in this guide will help foster a caring community of learners in your classroom, school, and community. You will find additional activities in the back of each book in the series, as well.

Thank you for taking the time to make a difference! If you have any questions or need extra ideas for how to use the series, please feel free to contact me via the *Weird* series website: [www.theweirdseries.com](http://www.theweirdseries.com).

Sincerely,  
**Erin Frankel**

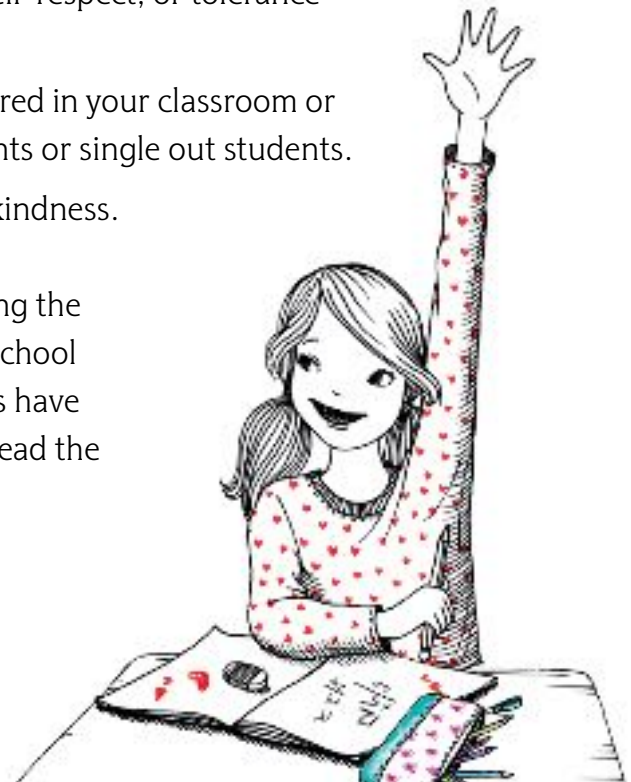


# Integrating the Series into Your Classroom Routine

The three books in the *Weird* series can be read in any order. You may choose to start with *Weird!*, told from the target's perspective; *Dare!*, told from the bystander's perspective; or *Tough!*, told from the perspective of the child initiating the bullying. Each book is packed with opportunities for discussion and reflection. I like to begin with *Weird!*, told from the target's perspective, because it sets the stage for a powerful question: *How did Luisa get back to being herself?* No matter which book you choose to start with, I suggest taking your time with each, rather than trying to race through all three books in one reading. There are many ways to integrate the *Weird* series into your classroom schedule and curriculum. Some ideas include using the series:

- at the beginning of the school year when working with students to define what will make your classroom a caring community.
- as a lead-in to National Bullying Prevention Month, No Name-Calling Week, or other national or local anti-bullying initiatives.
- during character education units on courage, compassion, empathy, kindness, truthfulness, fairness, confidence, self-respect, or tolerance (just to mention a few).
- when specific instances of bullying have occurred in your classroom or school. *Note:* Take care not to name participants or single out students.
- as a reminder throughout the year to choose kindness.

However you use the books, consider revisiting the characters and their challenges throughout the school year to discuss the choices they made. If students have forgotten details, it is often nice to go back and read the books again.



# Discussing the Stories

## Meet the Main Characters

This is a pre-reading activity designed to introduce students to the characters in the *Weird* series. It also serves to initiate a general discussion on bullying-related vocabulary and concepts. The activity will help children obtain a working vocabulary to discuss bullying, while also providing an opportunity to consider some of the words and labels we use when talking about bullying. Students may not know what a *bystander* is, or that the word *target* refers to a child who is being bullied. In contrast, the word *bully* will likely be familiar to them. Explain that you will be referring to the bully as “the child who is doing the bullying.” Tell them that labeling someone a bully is never a good idea, because it’s a negative term and can be harmful to a person who is trying to change his or her behavior. Also, a child who acts as a bully in one situation may well be a target or bystander in another.

**1. Introduce the books.** Tell students that you will be reading a picture book series together, but don’t tell them what the books are about. If you are working with a large group and have access to an electronic whiteboard or projector, show the cover images in large size so that the entire class can see them in detail. Alternatively, invite students to sit in a reading circle so that they can see the books clearly as you hold them up for discussion.

**2. Show students the covers of the books.** Let them take their time looking at each cover, but explain that you will not be looking inside or at the back of the books yet. If you plan to pass the books around, tape a sheet of paper over the back of each book so children will be able to see only the front cover.





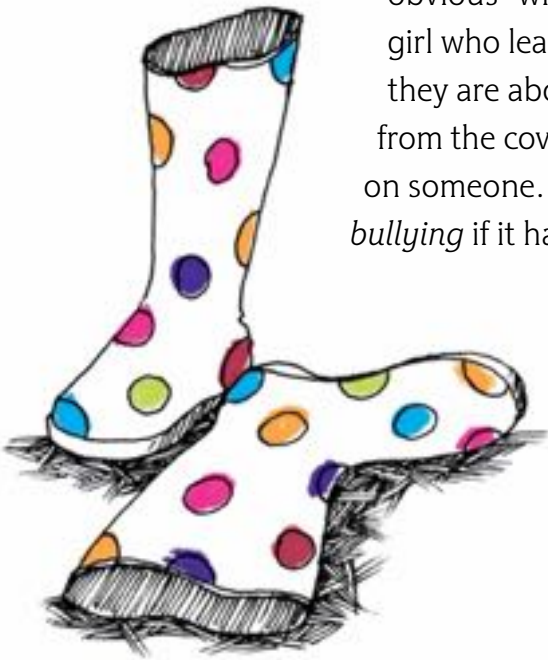
**3. Talk about the books.** Use the following questions and talking tips to get the discussion going. For each book, ask:

**What is happening on the cover of this book?**

*Talking Tip:* Without knowing the names of the characters, students will resort to other ways of describing the characters, such as “the girl with the hoodie sweatshirt,” “the girl with the polka dots,” or “the girl with the hula hoop.” Use this opportunity to introduce the characters to the students. For example: “The girl with the hula hoop is Jayla,” “The girl with the hoodie is Sam,” or “The girl with the polka dots is Luisa.” Encourage students to continue to talk about what is happening on the covers, now using the characters’ names. Referring to the characters by name will give students a sense that they already know the children in the story before opening the books. They will want to know more about them. Point out details on the covers that students might not pick up on at first. For example, on *Dare!*, we can see Luisa’s polka dot boots in the trash can. Ask: “Why would Luisa’s boots be in the trash?” Be open to all the ideas students suggest. Again, students will look forward to finding out the answer.

**What do you think these books are about?**

*Talking Tip:* Children may focus on the titles of the books, as well as the pictures. If they do, discuss what clues the titles and pictures give to what each book is about. Prompt students here if they get stuck. Describing what a book is about in a word or a sentence is not an easy task, particularly for younger students. You might ask obvious “wrong” questions, such as: “Do you think they are about a girl who learns how to ride a bike for the first time?” or “Do you think they are about a girl who just lost a pet?” Students are likely to infer from the covers that the books are about teasing or someone picking on someone. This is a perfect opportunity to introduce the word *bullying* if it hasn’t already come up.



### How do you think the children on the cover are feeling?

*Talking Tip:* Encourage students to consider how each individual character is feeling. Ask: “What makes you think [character’s name] is feeling that way?” For example:

Student referring to *Dare!* cover: *The girl on the swing, I mean Luisa, she looks sad.*

Teacher prompt: *How do you know that she is sad?*

Student: *She has her head down. She isn’t swinging.*

This type of activity will help students focus on nonverbal cues that signal how someone is feeling. It is a building block to empathy.

### Are these children friends? Do they like each other?

*Talking Tip:* Help students focus on cues that indicate something about the relationship among the three main characters. For example, you might ask: “On *Dare!*, Jayla is jumping rope with Luisa, but what is Jayla doing on the cover of *Weird!* and *Tough!?*”

**4. Summarize:** Finally, sum up what you have learned from the covers of the books. For example:

- The books are about bullying.
- Luisa is the target (she is being bullied).
- Jayla is the bystander (she sees the bullying and even joins in).
- Sam is the child who is doing the bullying.



## Meet Everyone Else

When reading the books, encourage students to consider what the other characters (besides the three main ones) in the stories are doing and feeling. Refer to these characters by name as well, if they are named. Doing so will make the stories more engaging and help students make connections. Here is a little introduction to other repeating characters and some of the places you will find them in the three books:

**Thomas** is the boy wearing glasses on the covers of *Weird!* and *Tough!* Thomas can be seen throughout all three stories. Thomas has been bullied before, as can be seen in *Dare!* on page 3.

**Will** is wearing a jacket with his name on it on page 8 in *Weird!* Will is also seen in *Dare!* on page 19 standing up for Emily who is being bullied, and on page 24 in *Tough!*

**Patrick** is the boy in the background on the cover of *Dare!* In *Tough!*, page 21, Patrick notices that Jayla made a choice to be kind and tells her that’s “cool.”

**Emily** is the girl on the cover of *Tough!* who is turning the jump rope for Luisa and Jayla. Emily can also be seen being bullied in *Dare!* on page 3. Emily is a key character in *Tough!*

**Alex** is Sam’s older brother. We first see him in *Tough!* on page 7.



**Mr. C.** is the caring teacher throughout all three books in the series. See page 3 in *Weird!* for his first appearance.

Also, ask students to consider the actions and feelings of other characters in the books who are not named, such as: Luisa’s mom and dad in *Weird!*, Jayla’s dad in *Dare!*, the female gym teacher in *Dare!* and *Tough!*, Luisa’s two female friends at the lunch table in all three books, the boys teasing Thomas in *Dare!*, the girls teasing Emily in *Dare!*, the boys teasing Emily in *Tough!*, and the boys teasing Sam in *Tough!*

# Story Activities

Following the story, each book in the *Weird* series includes a set of activities that you can use in the classroom to reinforce what children have learned. Here are some additional activities that relate to the ideas in the books.

## Be Yourself!

The object of this activity is to help children reflect on what it means to “be yourself.” While you can use the activity before reading the books, waiting until after allows students to consider what it means for Luisa, Jayla, and Sam to “be themselves.” Putting the focus on someone else first will serve as a stepping stone for self-reflection.

**1. Turn to the dedication page.** Notice the dedication page at the beginning of each book. Explain that a dedication is a special part of a book where the author can state who the book is especially for or point out a really important idea from the book. Read the dedication out loud. Here is the dedication from *Weird!*:

*For all children young and old who have been bullied. Don't lose sight of who you are. Know yourself. Be yourself. And always listen to your heart.*

Ask: “What does it mean to be yourself?” This question may seem abstract for children who haven’t considered before what makes them unique and special. Tell students that you are going to explore what this means by looking at the *Weird* series main characters: Luisa, Jayla, and Sam.

**2. Focus on the characters in the story.** Ask: “What does it mean for Luisa to be herself? What are some of the things that make Luisa special?” Consider reading the story several times so that students can reflect. Repeat the same process with the other two books.

**3. Focus on the artwork.** Each of the three main characters has symbols associated with her: polka dots for Luisa, stars for Jayla, and hearts for Sam. Have students focus once again on the dedication page, only this time point out the artwork. Discuss how the symbols relate to the characters. For example, for *Weird!* you might point to the polka dots and ask: “What symbols are these? Why do you think the illustrator chose polka dots here? What do the colorful polka dots say about Luisa?” Repeat for the other two books.



**4. Make personal “Be Yourself” dedication pages.** Tell students they are going to make their own “Be Yourself” dedication page. Provide colorful markers and standard size paper or large drawing paper. Have students draw a large circle in the middle of their paper. Then ask them to draw or write things that they like about themselves inside the circle. When they are finished, ask students to decorate the rest of the page with a picture or pictures that they think describe something special about who they are. Invite them to share their dedication pages with the rest of the class, if they choose, or to bring them home to show their family.

## Poster and People Power

Point out the “Stop Bullying” poster that Patrick is hanging on the wall in the hallway scene from all three books (*Weird!*, page 21, *Dare!*, page 27, *Tough!*, page 25). Use this illustration as a starting point for discussion. Ask students: “Why do we put up posters like this one? How can they help?” After discussing this, also ask: “Are posters the solution to bullying? If someone is being bullied and I hang up a poster, will the bullying stop?” The goal here is to point out the usefulness of posters as a reminder of school rules and behavior, while also highlighting how it takes more than just a poster to truly make a change—it takes people, both adults and students, to do this. Then start your own “Poster and People Power” activity:



**1. Investigate.** Look around your classroom and take a trip through the school to see if there are any anti-bullying posters. Read the poster messages out loud and photograph or write them down so that you can discuss them when you get back to class.

**2. Make posters.** Students will enjoy putting what they have learned from the *Weird* series to good use in creating one or more bullying prevention posters for your school. Brainstorm ideas and look for ways to dig for deeper meaning before agreeing on the posters’ messages. For example, if students suggest writing “Be kind to each other,” ask: “What does it mean to be kind?” Find examples from *Weird!*, *Dare!*, and *Tough!* and ask students to think of examples from their own experiences as well. Students can have fun decorating the posters with hearts, stars, and polka dots, or with their own symbols that they came up with from the “Be Yourself” activity.

**3. Display the posters.** When you are finished making your posters, decide as a class where the best places might be to hang them. Look for places in the *Weird* series where bullying took place. For example, in the cafeteria, on the playground, in the gym, in the bathroom, and on the bus. Ask students why they think there is more bullying in these places than in others. Talk about why it's important for both students and adults to see the posters in these areas of the school. (Research tells us that these places are generally less monitored by school staff and therefore bullying behavior is more likely to occur. Talk with your administrator and colleagues to make sure a system is in place at your school to monitor these bullying hot spots.)

Once you have selected the spot or spots for display and have obtained permission to post them, hang the posters in the areas you've selected.

**4. Talk about what else can be done to prevent bullying.** Discuss with students what else they can do, besides hanging the posters, to help stop and prevent bullying.

## I Think It Means . . .

Use the following quotes from *Weird!*, *Dare!*, and *Tough!* to get students reflecting on what the characters mean. Invite discussion with questions like: "What do you think Jayla means when she says that? Why do you think Sam feels that way? Have you ever felt like Luisa? What happened? What did you do?"

### Luisa (*Weird!*)

- "Guess I'll just be quiet." (page 5)
- "It's strange. I keep changing what I do, but she doesn't change at all." (page 12)
- "It seems like *weird* is the only word she knows, and I don't know any words." (page 12)
- "I don't even feel like myself anymore." (page 14)
- "The more I act like I don't care what she says, the more I really don't care. And the more she thinks I don't care, the more she leaves me alone." (page 27)



### **Jayla** (*Dare!*)

- “I never thought I would be the one just standing by.” (page 9)
- “Now I feel bad for Luisa and bad for me. This isn’t the kind of person I want to be.” (page 11)
- “She keeps acting tough and making dares. Maybe she knows that I feel scared?” (page 15)
- “Now instead of feeling scared, I feel prepared.” (page 23)
- “The more I act like I’m not scared, the more I really don’t feel scared . . . and the more Sam thinks that I’m not scared, the more she leaves Luisa and me alone.” (page 29)



### **Sam** (*Tough!*)

- “Keeping things cool at school is tough, but I’m pretty good at it. I get lots of practice.” (page 4)
- “The way I look at it, people need to be tough. You know, learn how to take a joke.” (page 8)
- “I act this way to keep things cool. So people won’t mess with me.” (page 19)
- “Changing is tough, but the more I act like my real self, the easier it gets.” (page 24)
- “When I show people I care, even just a little bit, they show they care back.” (page 29)

## Helpful or Hurtful Words

Use this activity after you have shared all of the books with your students and have completed other activities. It is designed to help children reflect on the power of hurtful and helpful words.

**1. Begin by rereading *Weird!* with the group.** As you read, pause as appropriate and use the following general discussion prompts.

- What happens when Sam calls Luisa *weird*? How did it make Luisa feel?
- Is *weird* a helpful or hurtful word? Why?
- How can one word make someone feel so bad?
- Can you think of a way to use *weird* as a helpful word?
- What are some helpful words in this book?
- Do you think one word, or a few words, can make someone feel really good? Can you think of some more examples of “feel-good” words?

**2. Read through *Dare!*** Ask students to listen for examples of helpful and hurtful words as you read. When students hear an example, ask them to raise their hand, say the word (or words) and tell you if was hurtful or helpful, and why. If it was hurtful, you might ask what the characters in the story could say or do to help the person it hurt.

**3. Read through *Tough!*** Again, ask students for examples of helpful and hurtful words as you read. Encourage them to explain their reasoning.

