



SOCIAL /EMOTIONAL GUIDE

## *Bulldozer's Big Day*

### **Of concern to educators, parents, librarians, and counselors ...**

What's more important to a child, the math problem his teacher just put up on the board or the fight he's heard is going to go down after school and hopes he can escape? How much comprehension can a teacher expect a child to have when reading an assignment if that child has been told she's too stupid to learn? And how can a child be expected to express feelings appropriately when he doesn't recognize his own feelings or have a vocabulary for them?

It's becoming widely recognized in schools across the country that education can't be limited to academics but must consider the basic social and emotional needs of a child.

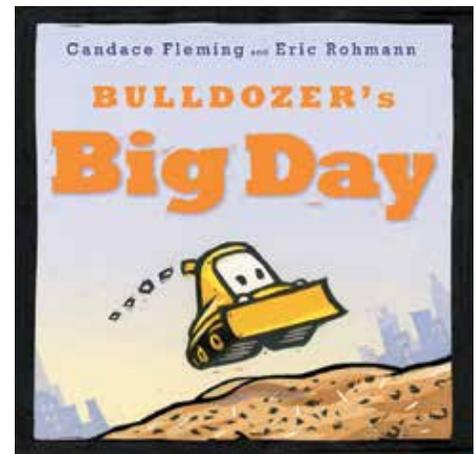
Picture books like *Bulldozer's Big Day* are perfect tools to aid the facilitator in helping children identify and label feelings, develop a positive self-esteem, and foster positive social relationships.

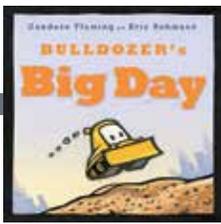
### **Book Summary**

The reader learns on the first page that it's a big day for Bulldozer and he wants to invite his friends to his party. He starts by asking Digger Truck if he can guess what day it is. Digger says it's a scooping day. Dump Truck says it's a sifting day. And so it goes, with Cement Mixer calling it a stirring day. Scraper must fill, fill, fill, and grader must chop, chop, chop. Roller calls it a mashing day. Finally, Bulldozer asks Crane, with a sigh, if he knows what day it is. Crane says he does and Bulldozer raises his blade hopefully – but Crane says it's a lifting day.

Everything changes when the construction whistle blows. Then more whistles blow and Bulldozer discovers that they've planned a birthday party surprise.

The only feeling word in this book is "hopefully," but the author, Candace Fleming, subtly implies Bulldozer's feelings by carefully selected word choices throughout and the illustrator, Eric Rohmann, does an amazing job showing Bulldozer's disappointment and hurt through the positioning of Bulldozer, and minor changes in facial expressions.





## Exploring and Identifying Feelings

Feelings for which the child has no vocabulary roil around inside him and often are expressed inappropriately. We've all heard of the child or adult who kicks the dog when he's angry at his wife or starts a fight in a bar or on the playground. This person may not have identified the anger until he starts swinging. He either hasn't recognize the anger until it comes out inappropriately, or doesn't have skills in expressing feelings appropriately.

When I worked with children in therapy we would call these unidentified feelings "goobligosh." Children were able to identify the yucky feeling of goobligosh before they could recognize the feelings that created it.

Then there's identity. It often surprises people to know that children form rudimentary identities at very young ages, often between 3-4 years of age.

By this stage they have begun to recognize the various roles and how certain kids are pegged by important adults. For instance, my big sister is the smart one and my little brother is the clumsy one. I'm the kid who can't do anything right and makes everyone mad. She decides who she is from something as simple as that, and always bases her identity on important people in her life, generally her parents and siblings.

It's sad to think children determine their identity and purpose based on such limited information, but they can only work with what they've

experienced and the feelings associated with the identity-determining experiences. A child who has decided that he is bad or not enough, useless, unlovable or only loved if he's perfect will feel rejected. She might not remember the incident or incidents that caused her to feel this way, but the negative feeling becomes her home base and she'll unconsciously create situations over and over to stay in her emotional "comfort zone," because "unloved" is how she believes she's supposed to feel.

Facilitators can't undo these feelings and beliefs, but they can add positive self-concepts to what the child knows about himself by helping him uncover positive traits and skills that can challenge his identity.

The following questions and exercises are not intended to be used all at once. The facilitators can pick and choose which points to emphasize. The questions and activities can also be separated over several days.





## A Discussion about Bulldozer's Feelings

**Note:** What follows demonstrates ways the facilitator can talk to children to elicit thoughts and feelings. The feeling words are highlighted so you can easily identify them. It will be helpful to keep the book out and show the pictures associated with each encounter.

- ▶ In the beginning of the book, Bulldozer “can’t wait to invite all his friends to his party.” See how Bulldozer’s wheels are off the ground? What do you think he’s thinking? What do you think he’s feeling?

**Note:** Kids will often say “good” as a catch-all for positive feelings. Encourage the words *excited*, *eager*, and *hopeful*.

- ▶ Do you ever feel *so excited* about something that it seems like your feet are off the ground?

**Note:** Children four and younger may think this is a silly question because they’re literal in their thinking.) Some may have heard this expression.

Point out that Bulldozer’s wheels are off the ground on the next pages, too. And that his motor is humming, his blade is held high, and he zooms across the construction site.

- ▶ What do you think he’s thinking? Point out that these are happy actions and sounds. He’s *so excited*, and *eager* and *hopeful*.

**Note:** Repetition of feeling words helps kids remember them. Asking them to feel those feelings helps to anchor them. Learning different words for how they’re feeling will help them talk to you.



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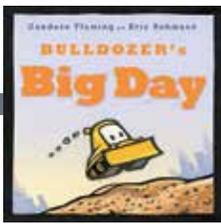
- ▶ Imagine that you’re Bulldozer. You’re excited and eager and hopeful just like he is. You are looking forward to a great celebration. Let’s take a moment to hum like Bulldozer. What do you think he’s thinking?

- ▶ Bulldozer holds his blade high. When does a person hold his head high?

**Note:** Encourage kids to say something similar to, “*when he’s proud, feels safe, is happy.*”

- ▶ Can you guess what would make Bulldozer feel proud? *It’s his birthday and he’s a year older.*

- ▶ Feel safe? *He has good friends and they look after him.*

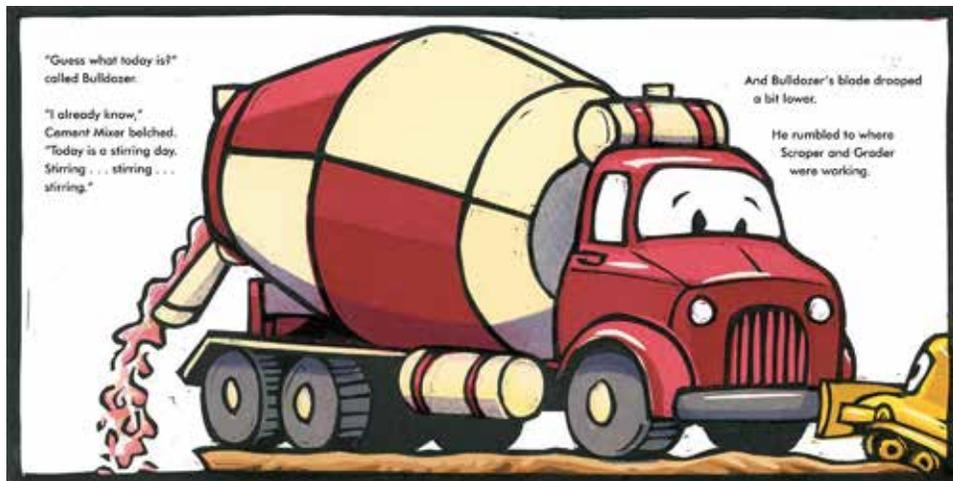


- ▶ But when Bulldozer whoops “Guess what today is!” Digger doesn’t guess, he booms, saying that today is a scooping day. Who can show what a booming voice sounds like? Encourage the words: *Mad, angry, threatening, scary.*

Take note of the picture of Bulldozer. He seems to be sinking in the dirt.

- ▶ What made Bulldozer feel like he was sinking inside? Imagine what it’s like to feel that you’re sinking inside. What do you think he’s thinking? How do you think he’s feeling?

Note: He may be thinking that Digger is mad at him. He may be wondering what he did wrong. He may be feeling *disappointed, discouraged, hurt, sad, unloved.*



“Guess what today is?” called Bulldozer.

“I already know,” Cement Mixer belched. “Today is a stirring day. Stirring . . . stirring . . . stirring.”

And Bulldozer’s blade drooped a bit lower.

He rumbled to where Scoper and Grader were working.

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- ▶ Do you remember the work that Cement Mixer does? Stirring. When Bulldozer asks him to “Guess what today is?” he belches his answer. Look at the picture of Cement Mixer. Can you guess why the author said he belched his answer?

Note: Answers might be similar to “*Because his tummy is stirring and stirring and this may make his tummy feel better.*”

Now Bulldozer’s blade droops a little lower and he rumbles to where Scoper and Grader are working.

- ▶ What do you think rumbling and drooping tell us about how Bulldozer is feeling? *Disgruntled, let down, hurt, sad, unimportant.* What thoughts might be in his head?

Note: “Nobody cares. Everybody forgot about me.” Yet he goes on to Scoper and Masher.

- ▶ Scoper is too busy doing what \_\_\_\_\_? *Filling.* And Grater is busy doing what \_\_\_\_\_? *Chopping.*



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Bulldozer's blade drops lower still.

- ▶ He bumps to where Roller Truck is. Roller admits that he doesn't even care what today is. He's too busy doing what? *Mashing*.

Bulldozer's blade droops so low it almost touches the ground. He's clearly feeling worse and worse.

- ▶ Name the feelings that we've been talking about. He is feeling the same feelings but they're getting stronger. He's more disappointed, and what else?

Note: Encourage words such as *discouraged, hurt, sad, unloved, let down* and *disgruntled*.

You will probably hear "unhappy" but ask for other words to describe those feelings.

- ▶ Do you think he feels hopeless?

Note: Explain that he probably feels *almost* hopeless, but if he lost all hope of anyone remembering his birthday he would give up. When someone feels hopeless he gives up. But Bulldozer doesn't give up. He continues on. But Bulldozer is so down that he crawls to where Crane Truck is working.

Crane says he does know what today is. Bulldozer's blade raises "hopefully." But, of course, crane just tells him the work he's doing.

- ▶ What work does Crane do? Lifting.

Now Bulldozer gives up. He feels hopeless. "No games." He snuffles. "No friends. No Party."

- ▶ Would you cry if everyone forgot your birthday?

Bulldozer is so discouraged that he doesn't even respond when he hears a whistle.

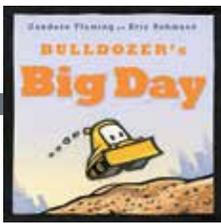
He feels all the feelings he had before, but now there's another feeling he must have because none of his friends remember his special day.

- ▶ Prompt children to say *abandoned* or *left out* or *forgotten* or *not important*. None of his friends remember his special day.

But his friends sound all their whistles. And Bulldozer realizes that he does still have friends and that his friends really did remember his birthday after all. Bulldozer raises his blade high.

- ▶ Now what do you think he's feeling? *Surprised, excited, joyful, relieved*, and *special*. He knows his friends didn't forget him. He knows he's not abandoned, left out, forgotten.

- ▶ Why did Bulldozer's friends act the way they did toward Bulldozer if they knew all along that this was his special day? *To surprise him*.



- ▶ Some were abrupt, stopping the conversation with a few words. Some are even crabby, like when Masher says he doesn't care what today is. Why do you think they were abrupt and crabby?

Note: Most kids will need help with this. Suggest that they acted abrupt and crabby to hide their own excitement over Bulldozer's birthday, so they wouldn't spoil the surprise.

- ▶ Do you like surprises?

Note: Some kids will say "yes," others "no." A surprise can feel good or bad depending on what it is and how it's presented. It's not a good surprise for a friend to cancel a sleepover.



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## Going Outside the Story

- ▶ What if Bulldozer became angry instead of sad and hurt when he believed his friends didn't remember his birthday? What if he yelled at his friends before he found out about their surprise?

Note: Ask for a volunteer to role-play Bulldozer yelling at his friends. Ask the other children to imagine themselves as the friends. The "friends" shouldn't respond until you tell them to.

- ▶ Ask "Bulldozer" what he's thinking before he begins yelling. He'll most likely shrug his shoulders.

Note: The facilitator should role-play the thoughts Bulldozer is likely having. Say something like: "These guys aren't really my friends. Friends remember your birthday. I don't care if they hate me. I'm not going to play with them anymore."

- ▶ Now Bulldozer can do his (or her) yelling. Stop him if his soliloquy gets too long.



► Ask the friends for their reaction. What were they thinking when Bulldozer yelled at them? Kids aren't used to reflecting, so think out loud for them. "Oh no, this isn't the way it was supposed to turn out. We just wanted to surprise him." Does that sound right, friends? How are you guys feeling? (*Hurt, disappointed, sad, angry*)

► Do you think they'll remain friends with Bulldozer?

Note: Point out that it depends on whether or not they can work things out. The friends need to explain to Bulldozer about the surprise they had planned.

► Who wants to explain this to Bulldozer?

► Ask Bulldozer how he feels now. (*Guilty, terrible, dis-believing*)

► Should Bulldozer apologize?

Note: Help the children understand that he should apologize because he made a mistake.

► What if Bulldozer's friends really *had* forgotten his birthday? Should he forgive them?

Note: Yes. It may take a little while for Bulldozer to get over his hurt feelings, but he should try. Everyone makes mistakes. And unless someone does something really bad, you should always try to keep your friends.

► If Bulldozer's friends forgot his birthday would he feel that he's unimportant?

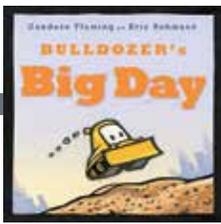
Note: Kids will say yes. Tell them: Many kids would feel that way but it's not true. When someone makes a mistake, it's their mistake and has nothing to do with you.

### Activity: I'm Important

To work on this self-esteem/identity enhancer, give the children a standard stick-on name tag. These usually have "My name is" at the top. Write "is important" at the bottom, leaving room for them to add their name above that phrase.

An alternative is to use construction paper. Cut it into ovals in advance and write "is important," leaving plenty of room for their name, which they will add. The facilitator can have each child ceremoniously pin her declaration to the board.





## Activity: Expressing Feelings

The facilitator should give each child three pieces of paper. Ask the children to draw one picture of Bulldozer that shows how he feels at the beginning of the book.

On the second piece of paper they can draw what Bulldozer feels like when he thinks all his friends have forgotten his big day.

On the third piece of paper, have the children draw what Bulldozer feels like when he discovers that everyone remembered his birthday after all.

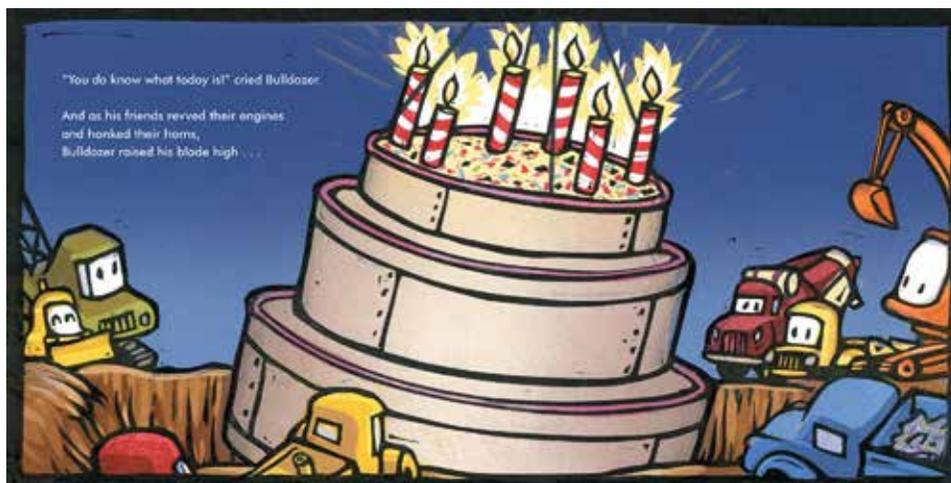
These pictures don't have to actually show Bulldozer. One can consist of colors that depict joy and excitement to the artist, while the other can show the emotional pain Bulldozer feels when he thinks his special day has been forgotten.

## Read It Again!

Don't be surprised if the children ask to hear the book again. Repetition is a good way for them to think through the idea of feelings, the different types that they can identify, and the way someone acts appropriately to disappointment, feeling left out, or feeling hurt.



Photo credit: sergey mansurov



"You do know what today is!" cried Bulldozer.  
And as his friends revved their engines  
and honked their horns,  
Bulldozer raised his blade high . . .

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