



Frieda B. A Great Day at the Dog Park:
A Tale about Being a Hero, by Seeing with Your Heart

Dear Parents and Caregivers:

What does it take to be a hero? Strength, courage, perseverance, kryptonite, spandex? One or more of these may be true for any champion of justice. But at the core of each and every true hero is a beautifully powerful motivator: Empathy.

Empathy is the ability to imagine and care about what someone else is going through. And it is one of the greatest gifts we can encourage in our children, because it is fundamental to our sense of belonging and purpose. As humans, we long to *receive* empathy, because it is evidence that we're not alone, that someone understands, someone cares. But *providing* empathy also is a tremendous blessing because it connects us with others in a deeply meaningful way. In short, empathy is the glue that can bond us to each other and make us safer, more content, more intentional. More heroic. Empathy is the foundation for a purposeful life.

And so empathy is the key message I've woven into *Frieda B. A Great Day at the Dog Park*.

In the first half of the book, the storyline is designed to engage the imagination through play... exemplified by how Frieda and Zilla see ordinary playground objects as fantastic adventures. This primes a child's brain to consider seeing things differently.

Moving into the second half of the book, Frieda observes a boy yelling at Zilla, which makes her angry and defensive. She implores her parents to yell at the boy for being bad. But her father gently asks her to see things differently - to reconsider how she sees the boy, by taking time to talk with him.

In the dialogue and actions that follow, through her dad's lead Frieda learns to see with her heart... to hear and internalize the pain and fear the boy is experiencing due to the loss of his dog. From there flow compassion, connection and communication, which enable Frieda to see a solution. This, then, makes her a hero at the book's close.

I very much want for our children - for yours, for mine, for all - to grasp the beauty of a world seen with the heart. I hope this book accomplishes that in some measure. It's no secret the world always can use more heroes.

Renata Bowers
Author of the *Frieda B.* Series of Children's Books

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Notes from the Author: Things to talk about with your child.

Read the opening pages of the book. Why is Frieda so excited? Name some of the things she does to get ready before leaving the house [makes her bed, brushes her teeth and hair, eats breakfast, puts the dishes away]. Why are these things important?

[Prompt the child to take a look at the various play features within the dog park. As the reader, understand that the green tires, the bridge and the tunnels all will have significance on the next pages.]

Once Frieda and Zilla are free to go play in the park, they take *off through the grass with the sun on their faces, imagining all kinds of make-believe places*. Explore the next six pages, with the sea serpent, the bridge and the noodles... how are Frieda and Zilla seeing things differently than they are? [Reference back to the tires, bridge and tunnels. Discuss how our imaginations allow us to see things differently... what a wonderful thing! Encourage the child to look at things around him/her and discuss how he/she could see those things differently, just as Frieda and Zilla do.]

Frieda and Zilla meet a puppy in the park. As you read about the puppy, what do you learn about him? [He has two floppy ears, a big nose, small evergreen twigs in his fur, his collar is missing, he has no I.D. Encourage the child to remember these details.]

As Frieda and her parents are enjoying a snack, Zilla walks up to a boy sitting by himself. Why does Zilla do that? How does the boy respond? How does Frieda respond?

Take a look at Frieda's dad. What does he wear on his face that no one else wears? [Glasses] Why do people wear glasses? [To help them see things more clearly.]

What does Frieda's dad say to her when he takes her hand? Do you see how he is trying to help Frieda see things differently? Just as when Frieda saw the three tires in the park as a sea serpent... her dad is asking Frieda to take time to see the boy differently – to understand the boy's heart, not just his words. This takes a special skill called empathy. Do you know what empathy is? Empathy happens when we use our imagination to try to understand how another person feels. [Find one or more ways to help the child "try out" empathy, by sharing scenarios of how someone might act differently than he feels. Discuss.]

Frieda's dad knows it is important to try to understand how the boy is feeling, in order to help him. What does he tell Frieda is a good way to start? Frieda's dad is gentle and kneels down to talk with the boy, and lets the boy know he and Frieda care. What do Frieda and her dad learn about the boy, once they use empathy and see the boy with their hearts? [The boy has lost his dog. Ask the child to share emotions someone might feel if he/she lost a pet. Discuss how one might be so full of lots of difficult emotions that it might come out as anger. This is why it's important to see others with our hearts, to better understand the difficult and sometimes jumbled emotions that are inside.]

Once Frieda and her dad see the boy with their hearts, they want to help. What does Frieda's dad do? [He calls on his family to help find the boy's dog.] What does Frieda do? [She asks the boy to tell her about his dog. Take time to let the child connect the boy's answers with the puppy Frieda met earlier in the story. Go back to the pictures if that helps. This is allowing the child to help solve the mystery!]

When Frieda hears the boy's answers to her question, what does she do? Seeing someone with your heart, with empathy, can allow you to be a hero. How is Frieda a hero in this story? How about her dad? Zilla?

Lastly... Did you see the hot dog cart way back on pages 8-9, where everyone is entering the park? Frieda must have. 😊