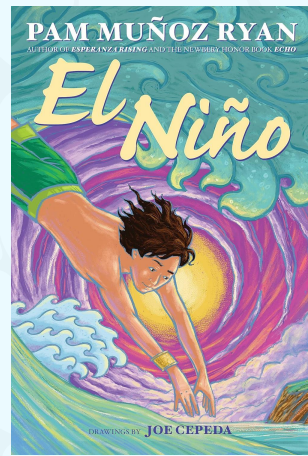


El Niño

By Pam Muñoz Ryan

Create a “Coping Toolbox” Activity

Developed by Isabella Duskin, Jordan Loudon
Matts, and Emma Pieracci for the CU Children’s
Book Festival 2025, Open Education Resource



Grade and Colorado Academic Standard

Grade	6th Grade
Content Area	Comprehensive Health
Standard	#3 Social and Emotional Wellness
Grade Level Expectation	Understand how to be mentally and emotionally healthy.
Evidence Outcome	Identify emotions and feelings associated with loss and grief.

Activity Overview

- This activity aims to help students identify their feelings, and identify healthy ways in which they can boost their mood and reduce anxiety.
- Students will first fill out the provided worksheet on identifying emotions.
- Students will discuss in **groups** and then as a **class** about their responses regarding feelings and emotional responses.
- Materials will be distributed and students can decorate their coping toolbox and write down coping mechanisms on little slips of paper.
- **Coping boxes provide an easy and readily accessible way to remembering healthy coping strategies and ways to process emotion.**

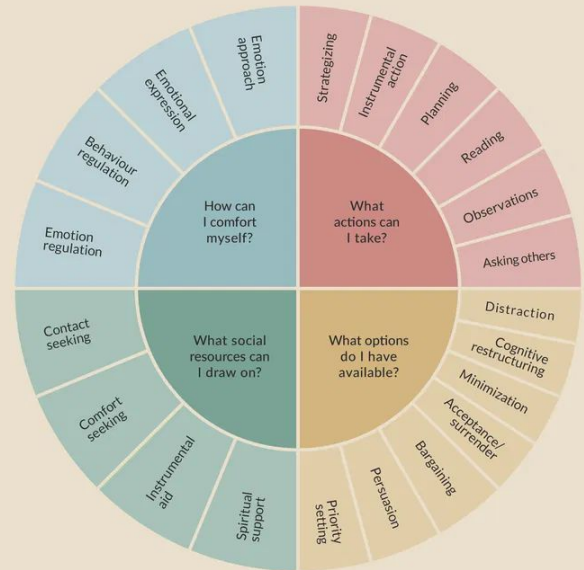
This activity connects well with *El Nino* in giving students an opportunity to use the book and identify emotions, how characters addressed them, and if that method was successful or not.

This activity was adapted from Connecticut Children's "When Your Child Is Anxious, Try a Coping Toolbox!"

Available via:

<https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/growing-healthy/when-you-r-child-anxious-try-coping-toolbox>

ADAPTIVE COPING STRATEGIES WHEEL FOR DIFFICULT TIMES



Materials

STUDENTS

- Empty tissue box, one per student
- Strips of paper
- Markers, crayons, pencils
- Colored paper
- Scissors

TEACHERS

- White board
- Dry erase marker
- Extra tissue boxes
- Coping mechanisms sheet (printouts, or to display on projector)

Free Resources for Printable Coping Mechanism Sheets:

Giant List of Coping Skills by Change Counseling

8 Coping Worksheets for Adults and Youths by Positive Psychology

Free Printable Coping Skill Lists by PrintBlame

Coping Skills List by Scribd

Step by Step Directions

1. Begin by using the [Worksheet](#) or having a guided discussion with the class, asking questions like: What were some emotions or feelings we think our main character was feeling and why?
2. After identifying specific emotions (sadness, confusion, fear, hope, happiness, etc.), then, ask the students what the main character did to help himself feel better when he was having challenging emotions (swimming, talking to his friend Aaron, hugging a family member, etc.)
3. Have the students reflect and discuss when they have felt emotions similar to the character.
4. Follow up this step with: What are some of the things the students have done or tried, that have helped them feel better when they were experiencing those things? Write down these ideas where it is visible to all students. Briefly define the word *coping*.
5. Now the students are going to build their own Coping Toolbox.

Directions cont.

6. Have each student bring in an empty box (could be an empty tissue box, cereal box, or any empty box will do).
7. Have each student write down a coping skill or strategy that they can use (on a strip of paper), like Kai did in the book.
8. Remind students that it can be helpful to engage all of their senses when experiencing the emotions they named.

Example

Sight: Name 5 things I can see

Sound: Listen to my favorite song

Touch: Hold a frozen orange

Smell: Go outside and name 3 different smells

Taste: Eat a sour candy

Other: Hug my mom, talk to my friend, go play soccer

Additional Suggestions

Extensions, Adaptations, and Recommendations:

- Invite emergent bilingual students to write their tools or coping skills in their preferred or home language.
- If possible, provide additional craft supplies (paint, stickers, gems, etc.) to allow students to decorate and personalize their tool boxes.
- Additional Activity: Students get to practice coping skills (bringing in frozen orange, sour candy, taking students outside, etc).

Some **examples from the text** of Kai displaying grief or other complicated emotions: Pg. 21 (see image)

Pg. 190

Pg. 197

undivided coaching attention. Cali had wanted it for him, too.

"Are you having second thoughts? Because you know how Dad feels. Once you commit to something—"

He shook his head. "I'm going to work hard." He just didn't want to get everyone's hopes up, least of all his own. The past two seasons on his local swim team, his times had steadily dropped and he'd slipped to the middle of the rankings, a place he'd never settled.

He dug into the bag of bagels and tried to push away any negative thoughts. Being invited onto the team felt even more important now. It was a chance to break his slump and give himself and his family something to be proud of again.

"Remember, no matter what anyone says, the coaches chose swimmers on past performances and *potential*," said Mom. "They see something in you."

Kai groaned through a mouthful of bagel. "I *know*." She was doing it again—trying to smooth

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The CU Children's Book Festival is supported by a grant from the CU Office for Public and Community Engaged Scholarship (PACES)



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We also hope you can join us on Saturday, November 8th at the Boulder Public Library for the 2025 Children's Book Festival!

This event offers the opportunity to meet Pam Muñoz Ryan and hear more about *El Niño* in person, along with other wonderful authors and illustrators!

For more information:

<https://www.colorado.edu/event/bookfest>