

## Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

By Judith Viorst

This book begins and ends with the main character in his pajamas, so the reader has a glimpse into Alexander's day from start to finish! The story depicts a series of frustrations and disappointments experienced by Alexander throughout the day. The detailed illustrations invite discussion about a range of expression for each character. This book prompts discussions about what leads to a bad day as well as what Alexander could do differently to express his disappointments. The book encourages perspective sharing and provides insight into the emotional experiences of children, teachers, and parents.

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6rp0SZX7lg>



Teacher Curriculum

**Reading the Story**

**Important talking points to cover before reading the book:**





- Introduce the book by asking the group to look closely at the picture on the cover when reading the title.
- Ask the children what they see on the cover of the book and what time of day might be depicted in the picture of Alexander in his bed.
- As the group examines the cover of the book ask them to identify words to describe how Alexander might be feeling.
- Use the title of the book to prompt children to share a time when they had a bad day, and then ask what happened to make the day get better. Encourage the children to identify daily frustrations and irritations that lead to feeling disappointed.
- Engage the students in a discussion about the term disappointment. Talk about times when children are disappointed by daily frustrations and when plans do not work out as expected. Assist the children in recognizing Alexander's disappointments and frustrations throughout the day.
- Explain that feeling sad and angry about disappointments is a normal response. Learning to express anger appropriately takes practice and support from teachers, friends, and family!
- This book is a valuable resource in sparking conversations about the experiences children have daily and the associated feelings and emotions.
- Encourage students to put on their "thinking caps" to imagine the steps needed to manage a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day!

### Circle Time:

Introduce the book by asking the children to look at the picture on the cover and to take turns describing what they see in the picture. Tell the students that the boy's name is Alexander and ask them to imagine how Alexander might be feeling. The children may imagine that Alexander is feeling a variety of feelings such as sleepy, sick, grumpy, sad, mad, lonely, or angry. Read the title of the book and ask the children to listen to the story of Alexander's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. After reading the book talk to students about how the story begins with Alexander getting out of bed in the morning. At each part of the day discuss what happened and how Alexander responded. Then ask what happened next? This type of dialogue encourages students to contemplate and express a variety of thoughts, feelings, and actions. Explain to the children that we all experience disappointments. Use age appropriate terms to define disappointments with examples from the story. For example, Alexander was disappointed to wake up and with gum in his hair, and his feelings of disappointment led him to think that his day was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Alexander's thoughts led him to feel sad and angry, which certainly got his day off to a bad start! Expand this conversation by inviting the youth to reflect on a time of disappointment. Prompt the students with open ended statements such as "I felt disappointed and angry when..." Next begin a conversation about the times of day that the students enjoy by prompting the children to express "I look forward to..." or "I feel happy and excited when..."

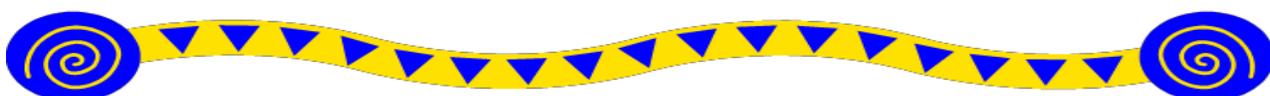


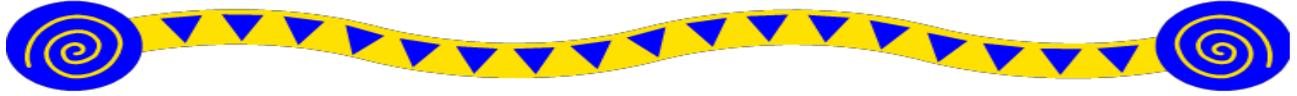


**Writing/ Language Centers:** Create a timeline of Alexander’s Day to teach children how to create a sequence of events to support reading comprehension and problem solving. This activity may be completed individually by the students or as a group project. When creating a timeline of Alexander’s day, students have the opportunity to review and describe daily activities. Encourage students to express their thoughts and feelings about preferences and expectations with descriptive terms that will sharpen their vocabulary skills. The timeline may be used to teach the students how to read a clock as well as the hours and minutes of the day. Talk to students about how the story begins with Alexander getting out of bed in the morning. At each part of the day discuss what happened and Alexander’s response, and then ask what happened next? For this activity the video is useful after reading the book during circle time. The video will allow pauses for each part of Alexander’s day: waking up, breakfast, carpool, school experiences with art, music and friends, lunch, after-school activities, dinner, television, bath-time, bed-time. When creating the timeline introduce students to the use of metaphors to communicate their ideas. Instruct the children to think about how symbols can be used to describe feelings. For example, a bright yellow sun could depict waking up in the morning with happy, warm, and sunny feelings. Rain clouds or symbols of lightning or storms might represent other feelings such as anger, fear, and sadness. Collect an assortment of symbols from nature (animals, plants, insects, weather), universal symbols (hearts, flags, stars, circles, geometric shapes) and other imaginative images or symbols to activate creative thinking. Complete the timeline by integrating descriptive phrases and symbols to depict the sequence of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors described in the story.

**Problem Solving Skills:** Build upon the students ability to sequence and problem solve by asking the children to identify actions and behaviors that make them feel safe, supported, and encouraged when they are disappointed. What actions or steps could Alexander take to reduce his frustration and anger? Provide the children with colorful strips of paper that will be used to create a paper chain. Write the action steps in short phrases on the strips of paper. Use the strips of paper to form a paper chain that the students can use to reflect the sequence of actions and behaviors that help them manage anger and disappointment. Explain to students that when we take time to imagine another way of responding we develop self-control over anger and disappointment. Give each child the opportunity to “perform” the problem solving skills they created on the paper chain in teams or as group. Imagine all the possibilities for Alexander to use to have a wonderful, fantastic, different, very good day!

**Art Activity—Create Thinking Caps:** This art activity is a way to engage students in using creativity and imagination to recognize self-talk and to learn how thoughts are connected to feelings and actions. Use the online link provided for an instructional video to learn how to make a paper hat. Practice making the paper hats in different sizes to accommodate the students’ ages and stages of development. Instruct and assist the students in folding the paper to form a “thinking cap”. The paper hat may be decorated with paint, stickers, markers, feathers, or a wide variety of art materials. Invite the children to wear their hats as they learn a definition of self-talk. Explain that self-talk is made up of the words and pictures we have in our minds. Self-talk includes the things that we say to ourselves, or the thoughts we have about what is happening and how we feel. Self-talk is difficult to recognize, but we can learn to do that by closing our eyes and carefully putting on our thinking caps. Begin this exercise by showing the students how this is accomplished. Demonstrate by placing your hands on the sides of the thinking cap in preparation for placing on your head. Close your eyes and slowly and quietly place the thinking cap on your head. Explain to the children that this may feel silly, but try very hard to be quiet. Use the following dialogue to guide the students in recognizing self-talk. While you are quiet and your eyes are closed listen closely to the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing. Use your energy to focus on





remembering what you are thinking and feeling. When you open your eyes we will take turns telling the group about our self-talk or what you were thinking and feeling. Thank you for using your thinking caps!

Another way to implement this activity is by creating smaller thinking caps for stuffed animals or puppets. The smaller thinking caps can be made from white copy paper and decorated with a variety of art materials. This accommodation supports learning about self-talk for younger children as well as youth who are uncomfortable with closing their eyes for this exercise. The thinking cap is placed on the stuffed animal or puppet and the student is asked to imagine what the puppet is thinking or feeling. Thinking caps are amazing!

**Online link to instructional video:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCJvzSuVT6Q>

*This Book Curriculum was developed by Dr. Sarah Hamil. Dr. Hamil has a Ph.D. in Expressive Therapies and is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Tennessee. She is a Registered Play Therapist-Supervisor, and a Registered and Board Certified Art Therapist. She is a private practitioner in Tennessee offering art therapy and play therapy for individuals and groups across the lifespan. She is an adjunct instructor for expressive therapies graduate studies at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She also serves as an adjunct instructor for social work graduate studies at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. One of her research interests is museum-based art therapy. This research interest focuses on integrating art therapy in community arenas such as museums to meet the needs of diverse groups in the community, and examines the benefits of using these spaces for healing and transformation.*

