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## Enhancing Emotional Regulation in First Graders

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Running Head: ENHANCING EMOTIONAL REGULATION FIRST GRADE

Enhancing Emotional Regulation in First Graders

Clarissa Miller

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

### Introduction

Emotional regulation is the ability to have control over one's emotions; and typically develops in early childhood. Once children reach school age, they tend to be able to manage their emotions. When children are not able to regulate their emotions, they may have poorer social skills, and have challenges when learning in school. To help children further their emotional regulation skills, I have created a three-day lesson for a first grader class at Robert H. Down Elementary School in Pacific Grove, California.

### Needs Statement

Many young children have not yet developed emotional regulation skills. Emotional regulation includes being able to control how one responds when frustrated, being able to delay gratification, as well as being able to talk about one's feelings when upset. When children are not able to self regulate their emotions, it can cause negative outcomes in their development such as poor performance in school, hindering their abilities to form relationships with their peers, and mental health problems.

When children are unable to effectively regulate their emotions in an academic setting, it can inhibit their ability to pay attention, retain the information the teacher is providing them, as well as develop a working memory (Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2006). Emotions play a big role in the academic success of children. Kwon, Hanrahan, & Kupzyk (2017) stated that emotions were significantly associated with various learning outcomes such as motivation, metacognitive learning strategies, as well as course grades (pg. 76). When children struggle with emotional regulation their potential of being a successful student can diminish.

Poor emotional regulation can also affect relationships with peers. If children can talk to their friends about how they feel versus having outbursts, it is likely that they are going to have

more positive experiences with making friends. Children who are more emotionally competent are more liked by their peers (Rhoades, Warren, Domitrovich, & Greenberg, 2017). Macklem (2007) asserted that when children are excluded from their peer group due to their inability to regulate emotion, they end up having fewer opportunities to practice the regulation skills that they need; which can also lead to more aggressive and impulsive behaviors. Therefore it is essential for children to be able to regulate their emotions when trying to build peer relationships to ensure the success of friendship building, and avoid isolation from their peer group.

Furthermore, children that cannot effectively regulate their emotions can develop mental health problems such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and conduct problems. Children unable to regulate their emotions are at risk for developing externalizing behavior problems, as well as remaining anxious after stressful situations which could lead to an anxiety disorder (Nozadi, Spinrad, Eisenberg, & Eggum-Wilkens, pg. 61, 2013). Not being able to properly connect with others can create a sense of loneliness as well as low self-esteem. Stress is a common factor amongst these mental health problems. Children that are able to regulate their emotions well are generally more capable of handling stressful situations. Emotional regulation is an important skill to develop and can have negative impacts on social skills, success in learning, and mental health. Therefore, I have created a three-day lesson for a first grade class at Robert H. Down Elementary School in Pacific Grove, California.

### Theory

When children are between the ages of 5 and 12, Erik Erikson believes children are in the Industry versus Inferiority stage of the Psychosocial Stages. In this stage, children are exposed to new environments outside of the home, such as the school. In school, they are learning to read, write, make friends, and interact with adults other than their parents, or family

members, all tasks that make them feel industrious. If children do not receive praise or are not encouraged, they can develop a sense of inferiority, according to Erikson (Krebs-Carter, 2019). Inferiority means that children can feel lesser-than, or subservient compared to their peers. These feelings can make them feel incompetent and less likely to try new things (Cherry, 2020). Erikson's theory is relevant to emotional regulation because if children are not praised and supported their efforts when attempting to be in control of their emotions they might feel inferior in their abilities. This could lead to children not trying to regulate their emotions and thus do poorly in school. During this stage children are trying to figure out if they are capable, and what they are capable of. It is important to give them the necessary tools, and support, so they feel capable.

Erikson also suggests in this theory that "It is at this stage that the child's peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child's self esteem" (McLeod, 2013). What he is saying is that this stage is when friendships and relationships with peers start to form and have a major impact on a child's life. This is significant because research suggests children that are unable to properly regulate emotions are not as well liked as children who can. If the peer group is important and children are not being accepted then it could greatly hinder their ability to form friendships, as well as their social interaction skills. Since it has been said that children that feel inferior will be less likely to try new things; a child that is struggling to make friends and receives no support, or praise for doing so is likely to give up trying to make friends.

#### Diversity

My project will be conducted via Zoom with a first grade class at Robert Down Elementary school in Pacific Grove, California. The data found on the School Accountability

Report Card (SARC) states that for the 2018-2019 school year the total enrollment of students was 462. Of the 462 students there were 2.2% African American children, 1.9% American Indian/Alaska Native, 9.5% Asian, 1.5% Filipino, 17.1% Hispanic/Latino, 0.4% Native Hawian/Pacific Islander, 63.9% White, and 2.4% Two or More Races. The SARC also states that 16.5% of the students were socioeconomically disadvantaged, 3.2% were English learners, and 9.5% were students with disabilities (SARC, pg. 3, 2019-2020). There were 73 first grade students reported in the SARC for the 2018-2019 school year, and I will be conducting my project with just one first grade class that consists of 24 students. I think my participants are reflective of the population of the school. Due to the fact that I will be conducting my project in English, the participants will need to be English proficient. However the project could be modified and translated in another language, perhaps. The content of the project will be applicable to younger and slightly older students, but would be too simple for older children and would need to be tailored for their level of learning. For instance, instead of reading books for older children, maybe I would have them watch a short show or create a story.

#### Learning Outcomes

For my project I will teach three, 25 minute lessons about emotional regulation to a first grade class at Robert Down Elementary School in Pacific Grove, California.

By the end of the project the participants will be able to:

1. Identify at least one emotion they feel when they are interrupted
2. Identify one calm down technique on their own
3. Identify and match emotional expressions with the emotion word using a template

## Method

### Day 1

On the first day I welcomed the children into the Zoom session. I was already familiar with the class so I did not introduce myself. I explained to the group that we would not be doing their normal reading lesson. Instead I would be reading them a story, *My Mouth is a Volcano* by Julia Cook, and we would be doing an activity after the story. I asked the group if they all had the Volcano worksheet (See Appendix A) that they got in their take-home packet. They all had it and showed it to me. I asked them all to mute themselves and I read the story. Once finished, I asked the children what they thought about the story. After discussing it for about eight minutes, I asked the children to think of a time they had been interrupted by someone. Next, I asked the group to get out their Volcano worksheet, drawing materials, and writing materials. I explained that I wanted the children to draw a picture of how they would feel, or have felt, when someone interrupts them, and at the bottom of the page they will fill in the blank for the sentence, “I feel \_\_\_ when someone interrupts me.” I asked if anyone had any questions, then I explained that they would submit it through their classroom platform, Seesaw.

### Day 2

For the second day I welcomed the class again via Zoom, and asked them what they remembered from the book I read the day prior. After a five minute recap of the story, I asked the class to think about a time they have been angry. I showed them the book I would be reading, *Steps and Stones: An Anh's Anger Story* by Gail Silver and Christiane Kromer. I asked the group to mute themselves again and I began to read. After I finished the story I asked “Can anyone tell me what Anh did to calm himself down in the story?” Several of the children responded with the correct answers of “he counted, took deep breaths, and walked slowly.” Next I asked the children

to remember that time when they were angry and I asked, “Do any of you have something that you do to calm yourselves down when you are angry or upset?” The children raised their hands one by one and offered a variety of responses such as, “I use my breathing tool, I eat a cookie, I take a nap, etc.” All of the children provided at least one tool they had to help them calm down when angry, which I documented. At the end I thanked the children for telling me their techniques and told them I would see them the next day for another activity.

### **Day 3**

On the last day I welcomed the class again via Zoom, and asked them to tell me what they remembered from the stories, or activities from the days prior. We discussed this for about seven minutes. Next I asked the group to get out their Emotion Matching activity (See Appendix B), their glue, and their scissors. As they were cutting out the pieces I went over the words as well as the faces with them to check for understanding. Once they had the pieces cut out I explained that I wanted them to match the face to the emotion word using the pumpkin template. Then they would take a picture of their matches and submit it through their classroom platform, Seesaw. Some of the children had questions about how to match the rest because there was only one pumpkin template, so I explained that they could glue them on a blank piece of paper if they liked. After that I thanked the group for their time and said goodbye.

### **Results**

Learning outcome number one was that the children would identify at least one emotion they feel when they are interrupted by someone. I feel that this outcome was met based on what the children stated on their worksheets. The children understood the activity and thought of their own answers, rather than copying what the boy character in the book had said, which was angry.



The children completed the worksheet individually after I was done reading the book via Zoom. A majority of them said that they feel mad, or sad, but only one child replied angry. Out of 24 children in the class only 18 children turned in the worksheet. Of those 18, they all provided a correct emotion for how they would feel (See Table 1 for details). They also drew a picture that matched the emotion word they wrote. See Figure 1 for examples. This leads me to believe that the outcome was met amongst these children.

Learning outcome number 2 was that the children would identify one calm down technique on their own. The children listened to a story about Anh and his anger, and how he got rid of it. Afterwards, I asked them to identify at least one way they calm down when upset. I feel this outcome was met. I had 22 participants attend the zoom session that day and they all identified at least one calm down technique based on the story. Some of them had the same techniques, such as a breathing tool, but there were variations in their breathing tools, which led me to believe the children were not just copying what their other classmates were saying. There were 12 total techniques that the children came up with, and they were all an acceptable calm down technique, based on the content provided. I feel these techniques show that the outcome was met. See Table 2 for all techniques listed.

Learning outcome number 3 was that the children would identify an emotion word and match it to the correct emotion face using a template. There were eight faces and eight words that the children were asked to match. The words were happy, mad, sad, bored, scared, embarrassed, surprised, and worried, and there were eight faces to match them too. I feel that this outcome was not met because only 5 out of 11 children made all eight matches correctly. See Figure 2. 45% of children missed two or fewer matches, and most of them mixed up worried and embarrassed. About 9% of children missed three or more matches. There were multiple children that submitted

just one match via Seesaw, but I did not count those because it was not the entire set of eight. See Figure 3. Because of the variance amongst what the children turned in via Seesaw, as well as what the 11 children submitted I would say that this outcome was not met. See Table 3.

### Discussion

After completing this project, I believe it was successful. The children seemed to enjoy the books I read and the activities they did. They learned about how it feels to be interrupted and some calm down techniques through stories, and they had to use their knowledge of emotions to match the correct words to the correct pictures. Almost all of the children were successful in each of the learning outcomes. I think the My Mouth is a Volcano activity had the most impact because the children were able to identify how they would feel if they were interrupted which can be difficult for children. These activities were used to teach and remind children that their emotions can impact them and others around them. I think the children now have a better understanding of their own emotions as well as how others might be feeling. Since the children are in the Industry vs. Inferiority stage of Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development, their success in these activities are important. If children are not successful in their learning of important life skills such as reading and writing or in their peer relationship building, they will have difficulty completing the tasks for the next stage.. Emotional regulation plays an integral part in how a child reacts to failures as well as successes. If a child has frequent outbursts in a classroom, their peers might be less inclined to establish a relationship with them. This could be detrimental to that child's developmental success, so children need to be able to regulate their emotions in an acceptable way to maintain success and establish that sense of Industry.

I feel that my project was inclusive to everyone in the class in terms of diversity. However, I did assume that all the children would be able to write the emotion word on their own when completing the My Mouth is a Volcano activity. Most of the children did their best at spelling, and I was able to figure out what they were writing.

Now that I have completed the project, there are some adjustments I would make. An obvious one is to do all of it in person rather than via Zoom. If I did have to do it over Zoom again, I would have done the Emotion Matching activity differently. First I would have offered more of the pumpkin templates. I think this would have had more children complete all eight matches, rather than just one match. I also would have had the children make the faces of the word so that they could identify some of the faces better. Lastly, I would have posted on Seesaw that they needed to complete all eight matches, so that the children that did not attend the Zoom session would have understood what to do also. My goal for this activity was for children to be able to accurately identify the emotion faces and words so that they would have a reference for their in person interactions with their peers. With that being said I feel that the children learned about emotional regulation as well as some tools to help themselves when they get frustrated.

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*Table 1**List of responses to My Mouth is a Volcano Worksheet*

Responses	Number of times mentioned
Frustrated	1
Sad	8
Bad	1
Mad	7
Angry	1

*Table 2**List of Calm Down Techniques children identified*

Technique	Number of times mentioned
Take Deep Breaths	3
Count	1
Get Some Space	5
Breathing Tool	5
Eat a Cupcake / Cookie / Candy	2
Meditate	1
Take a Nap	1
Read a Book	1
Think of Something Nice	1
Stress Ball	1
Draw / Color	2
Kick a Ball	1

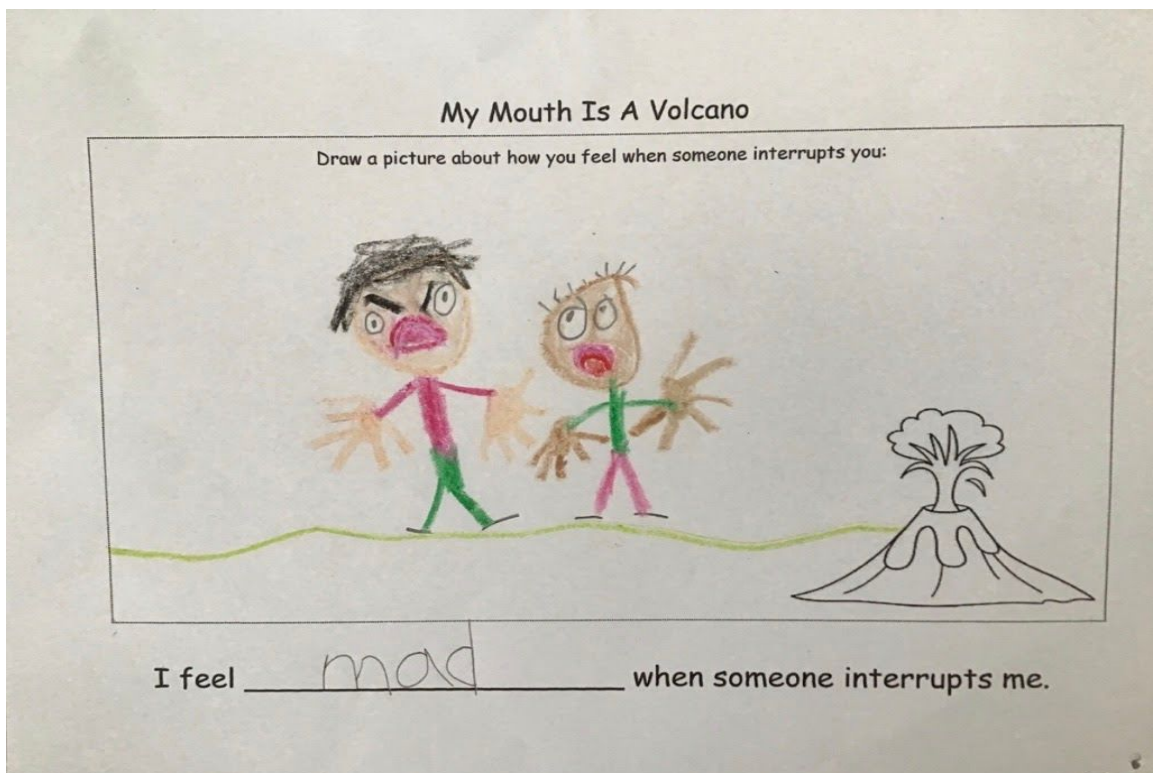
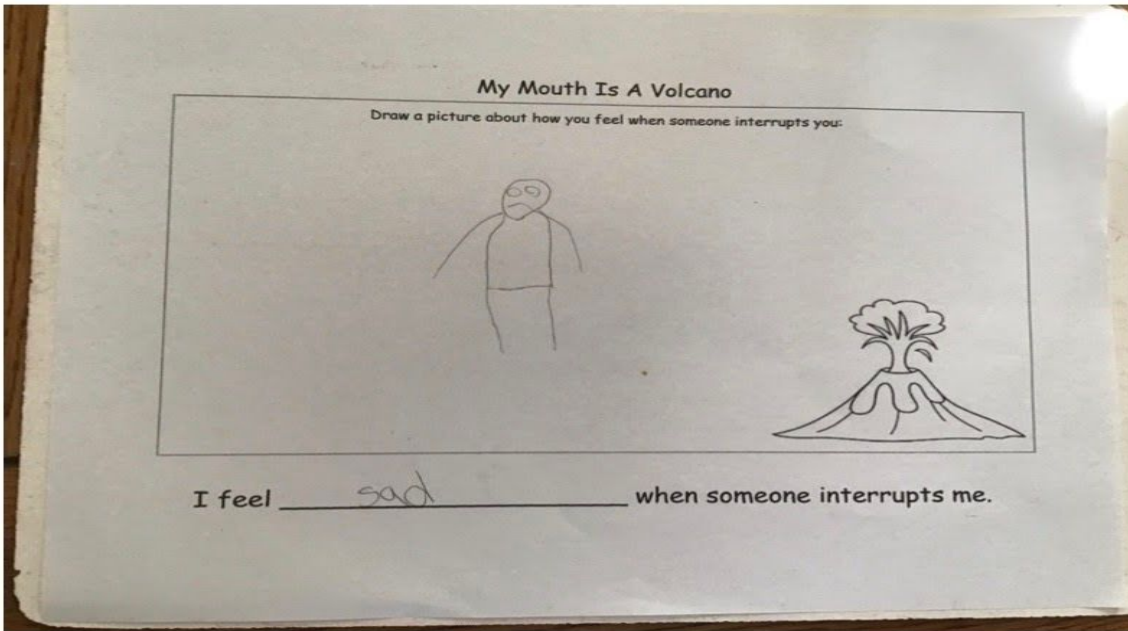
*Table 3**Table of results of Emotion Matching activity*

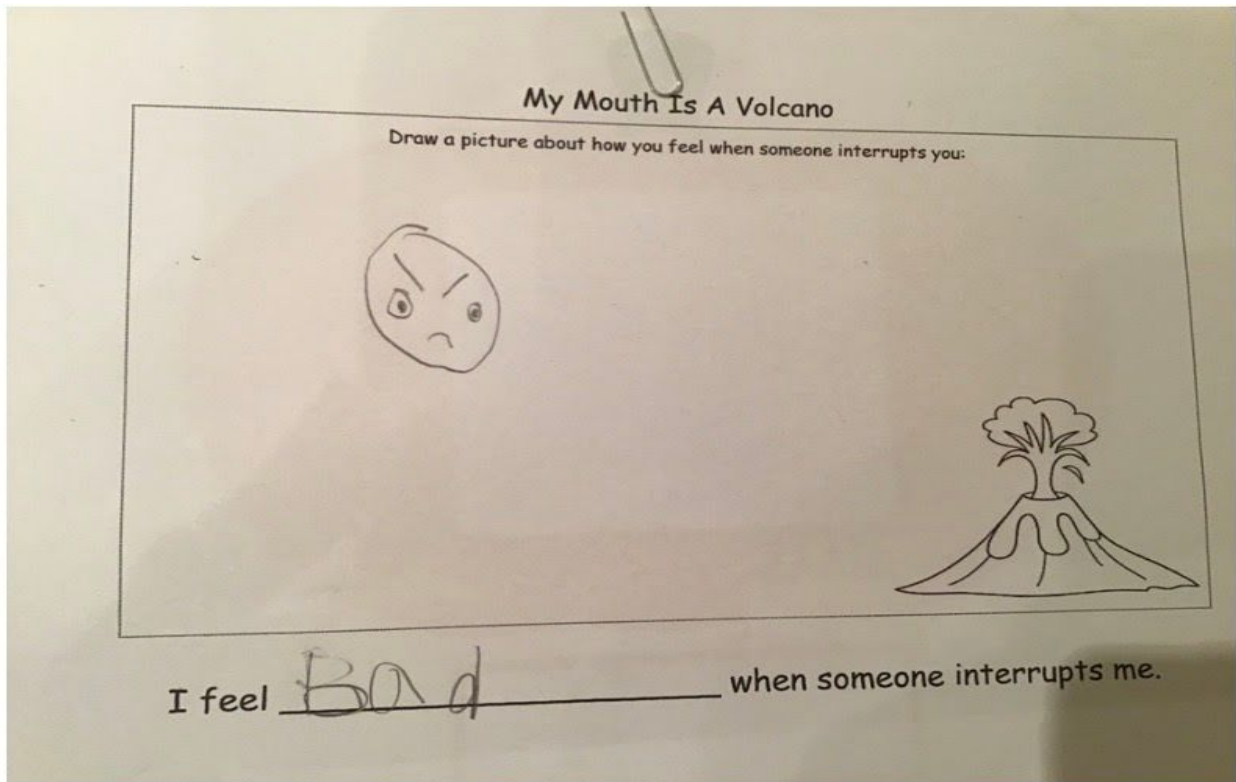
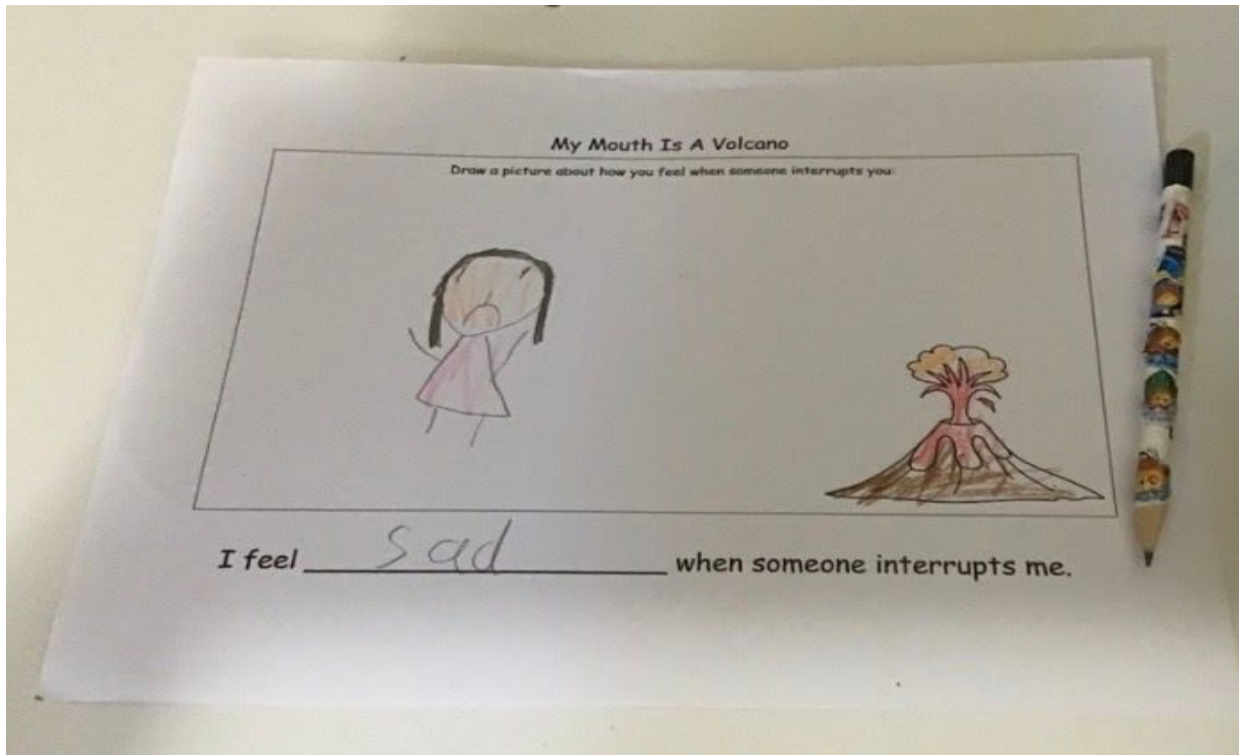
Children who matched all faces correctly	Children that missed 2 or less matches	Children that missed 3 or more matches
5	5	1

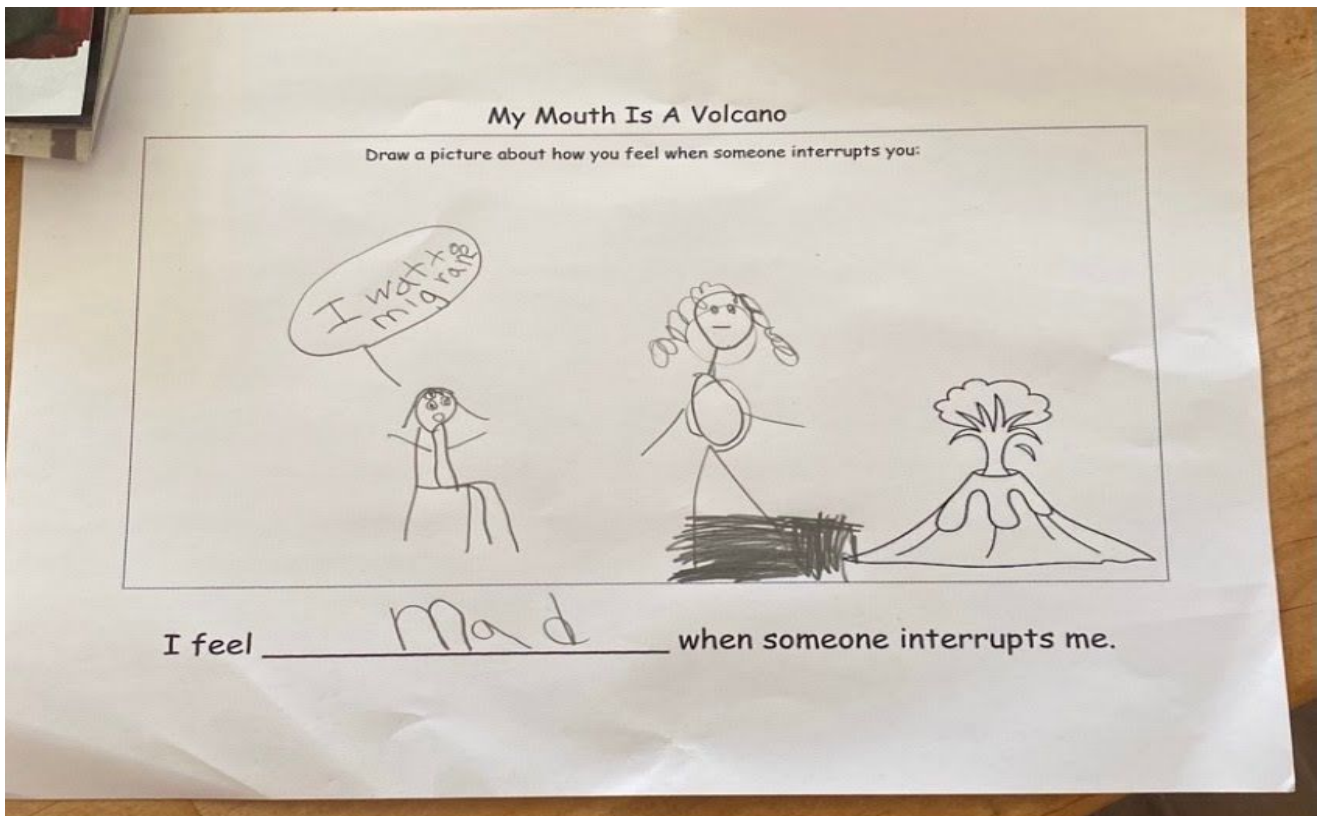
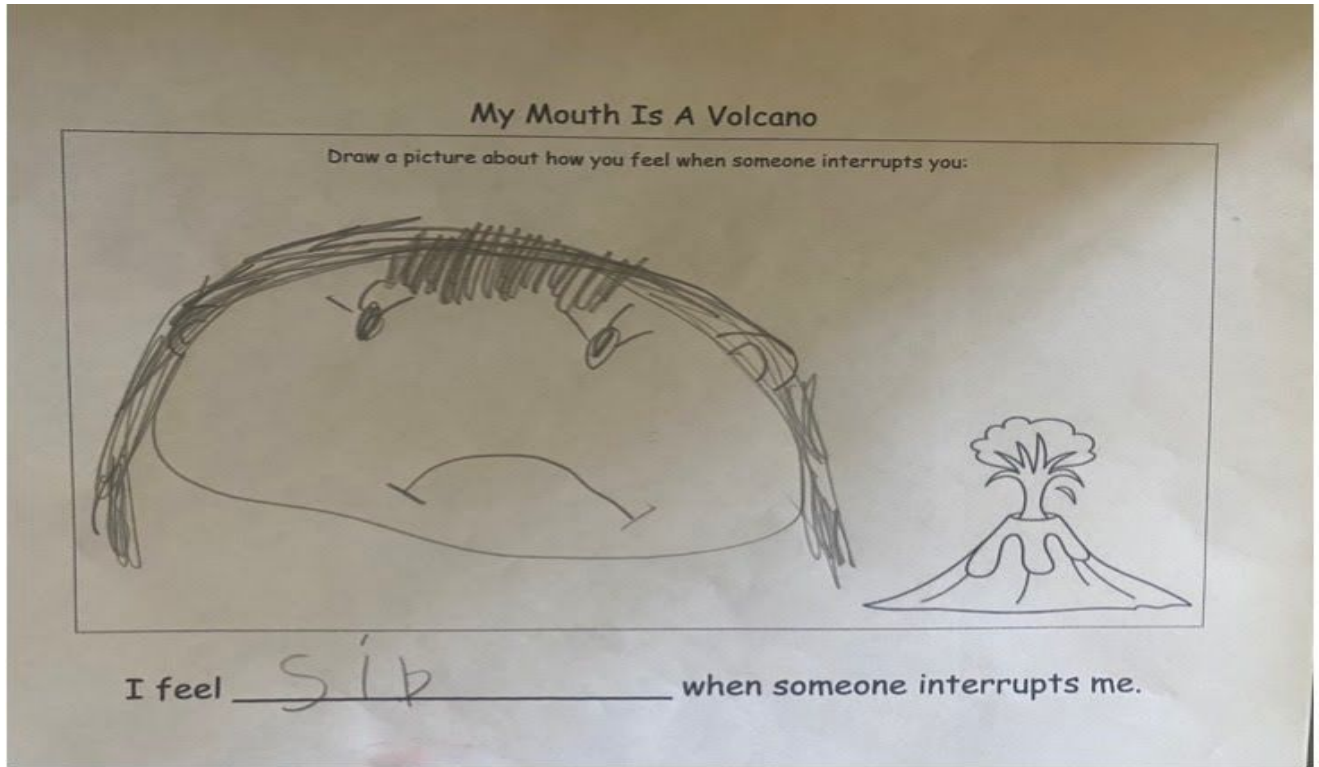


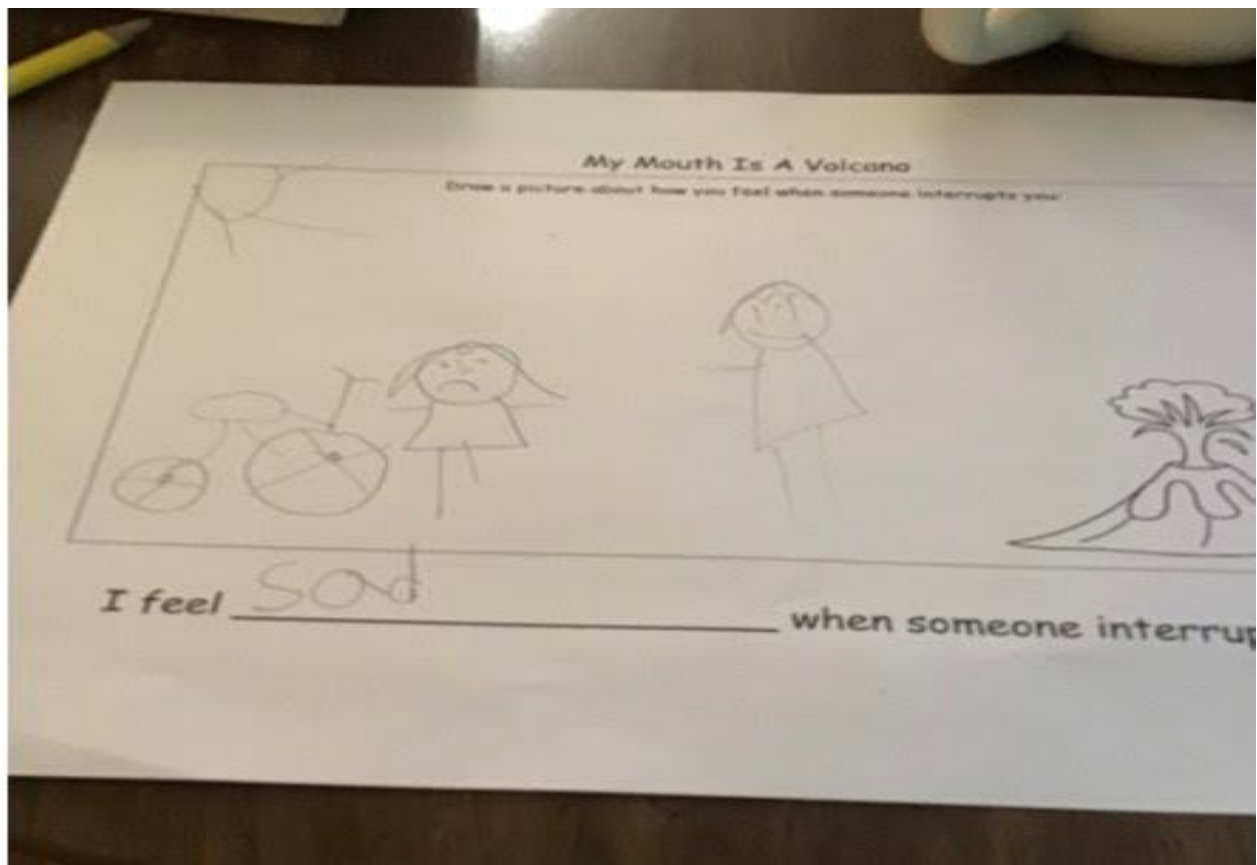
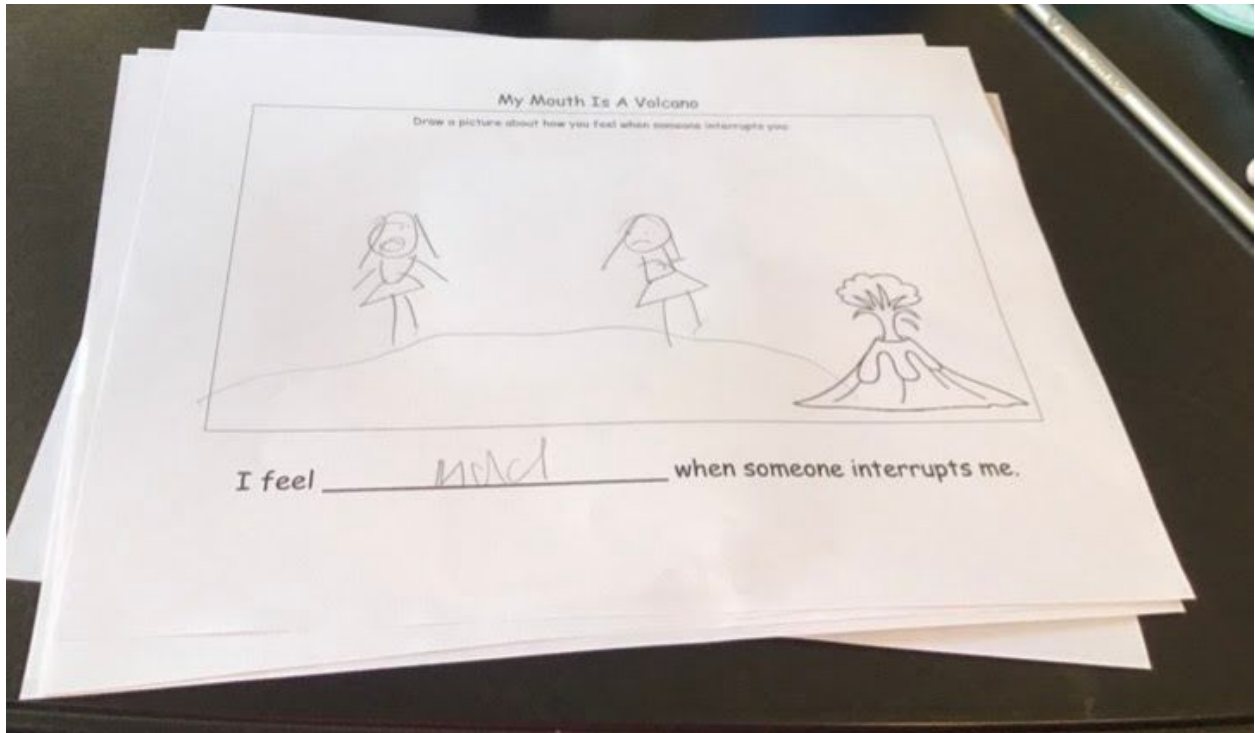
Figure 1

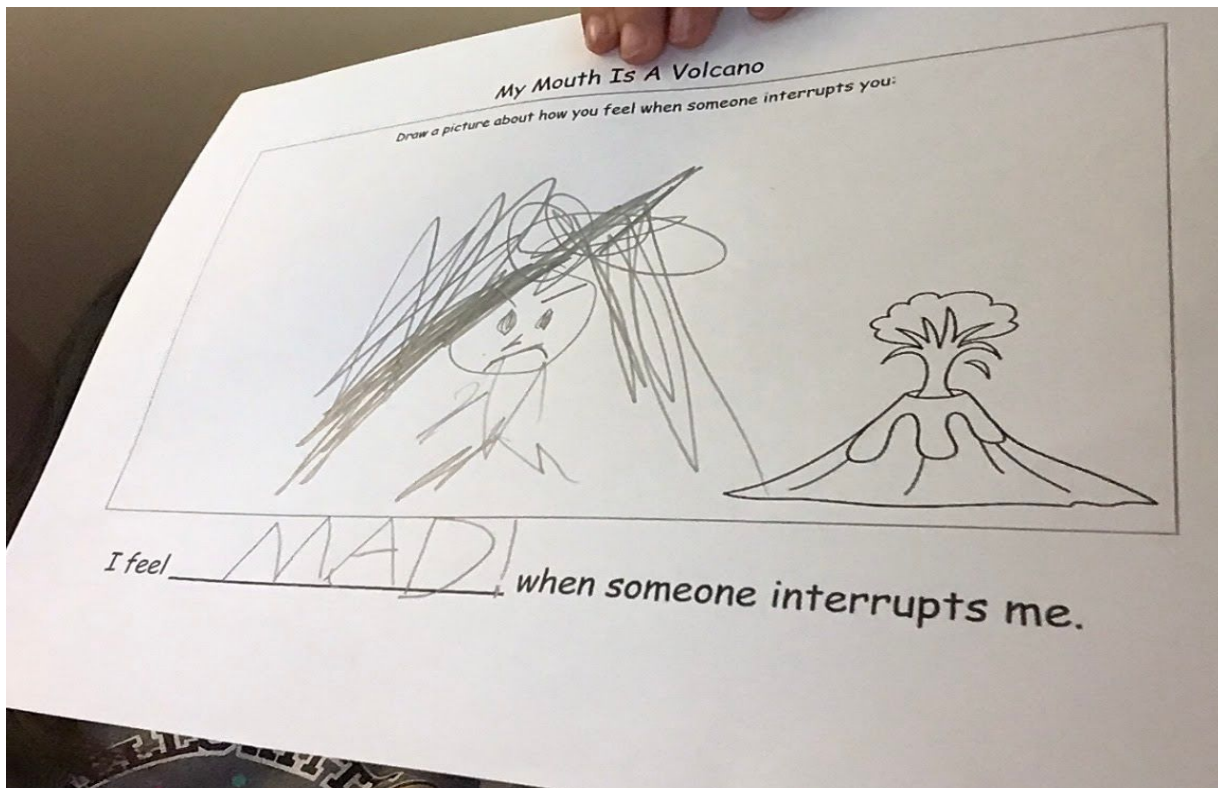
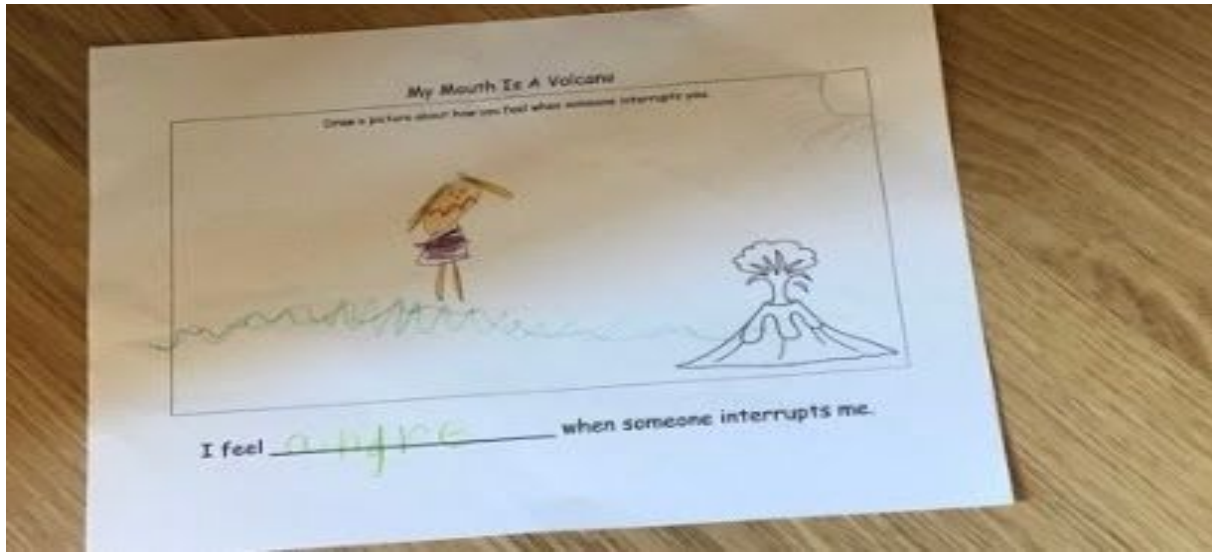
Results of how children feel when interrupted

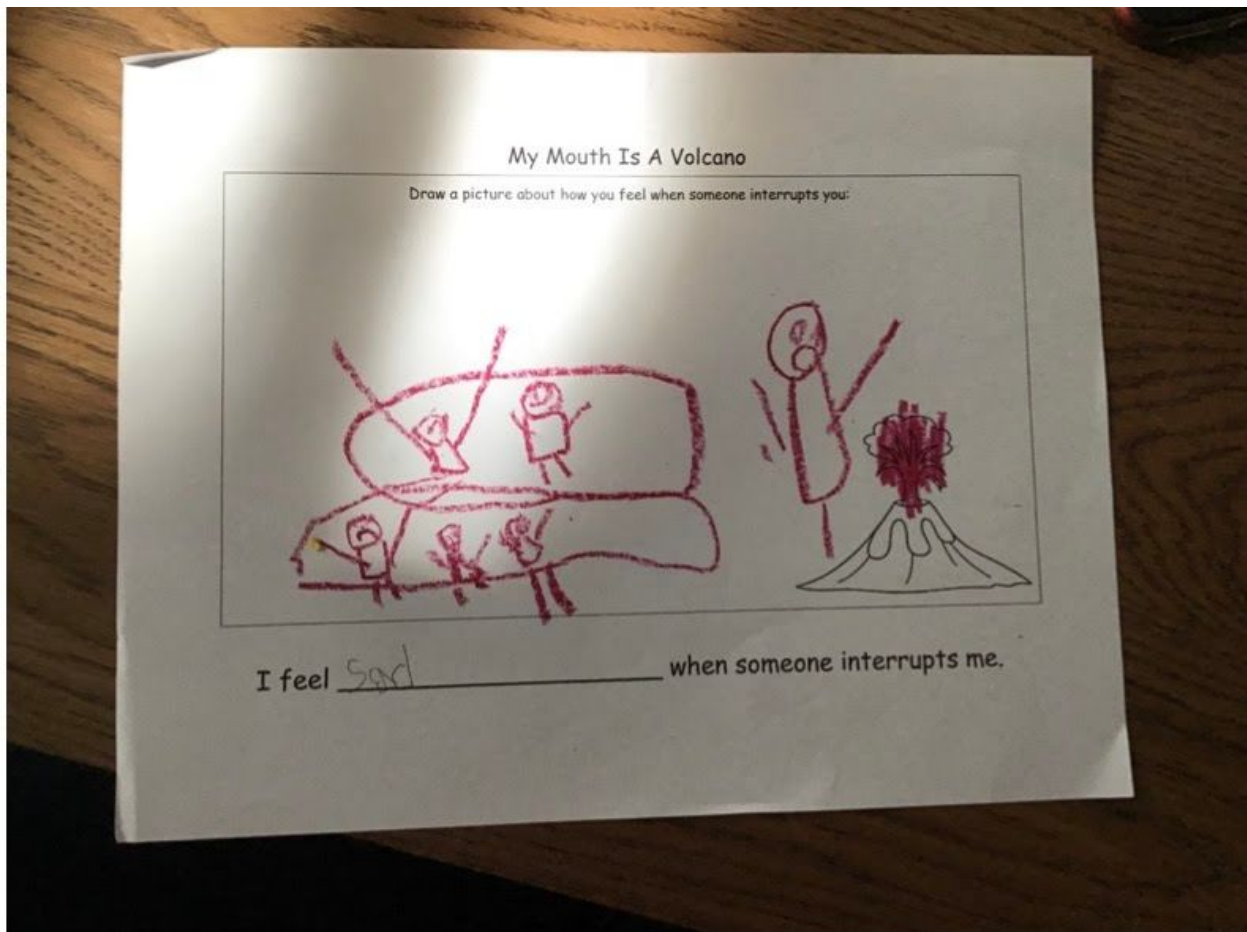
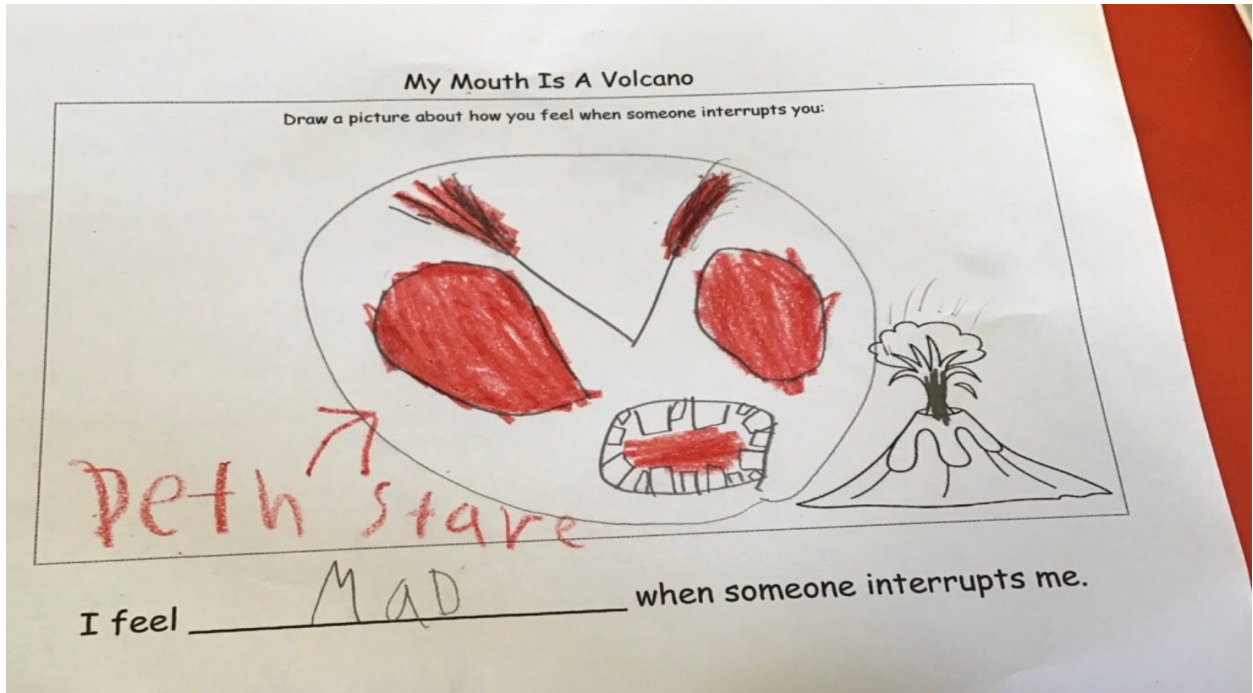












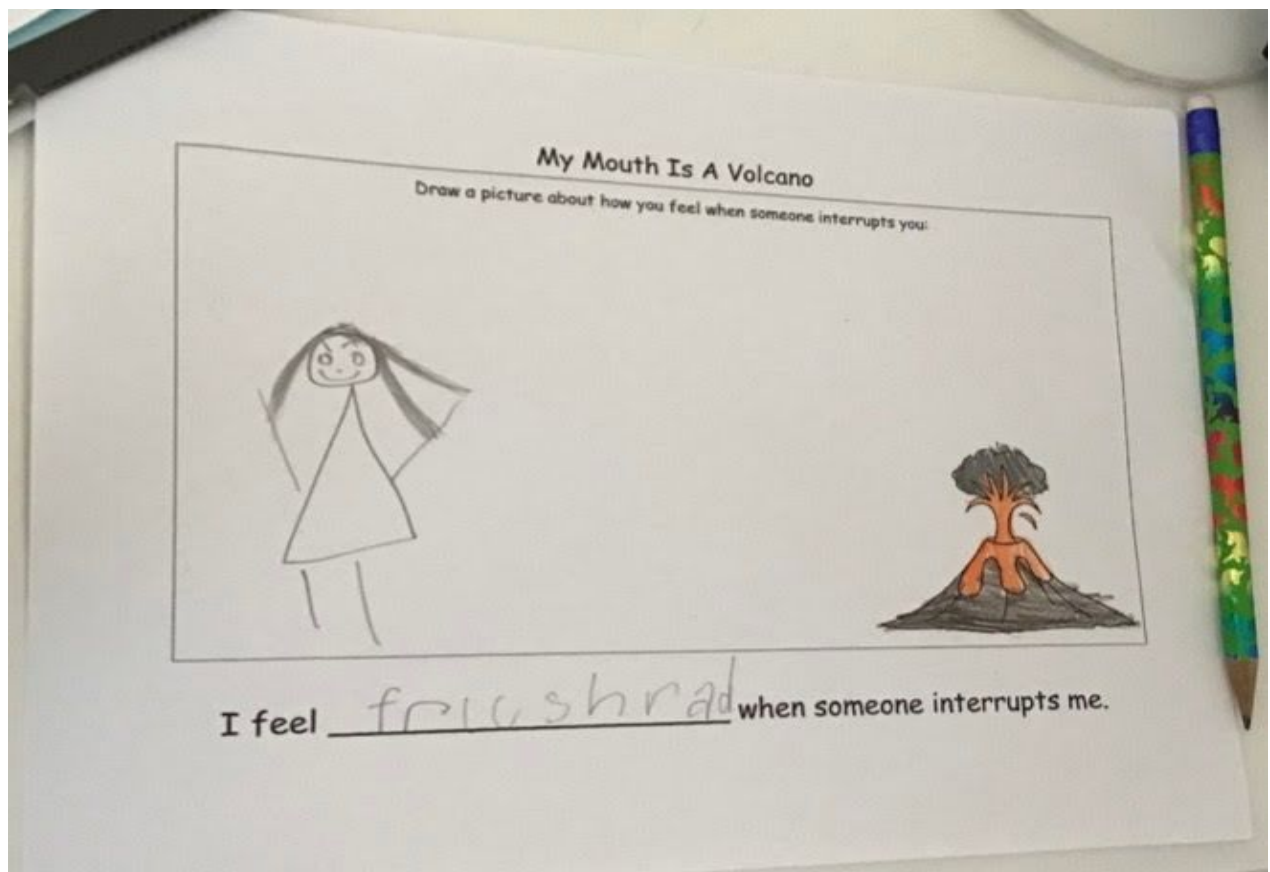
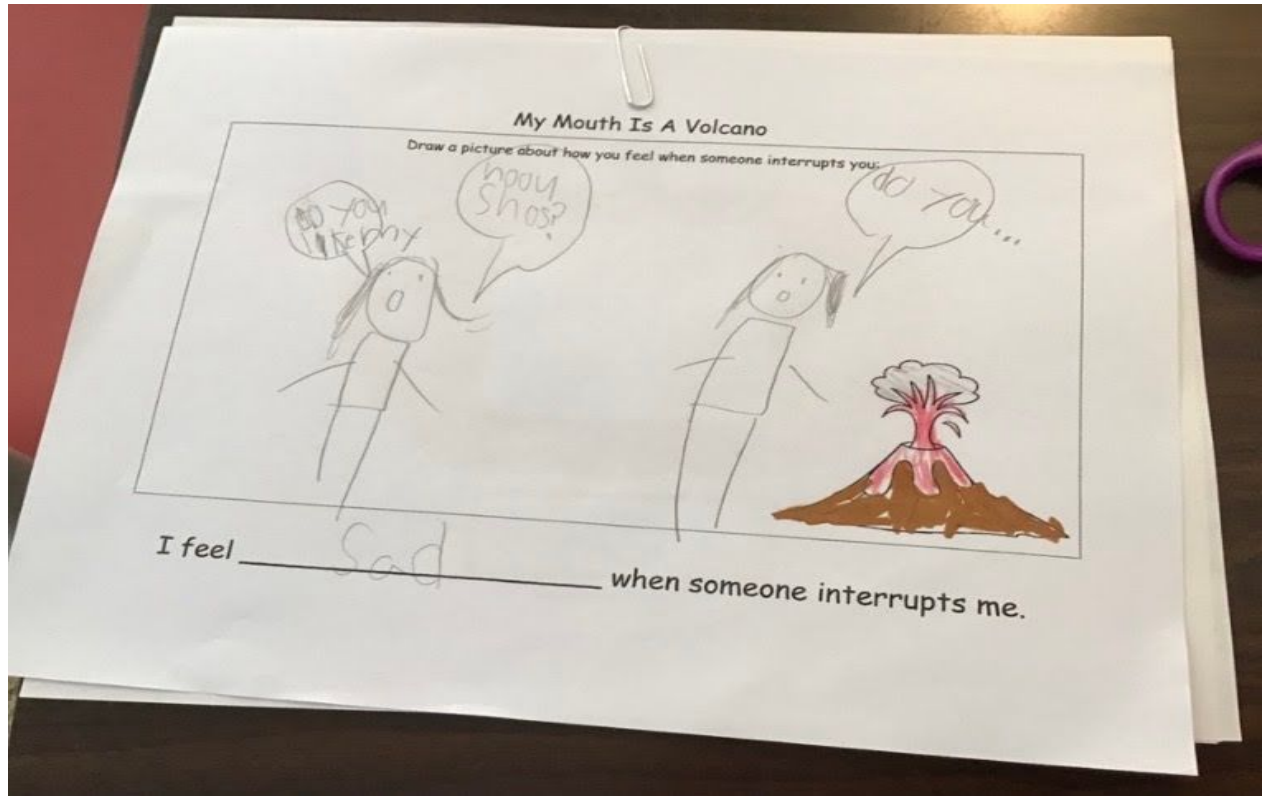
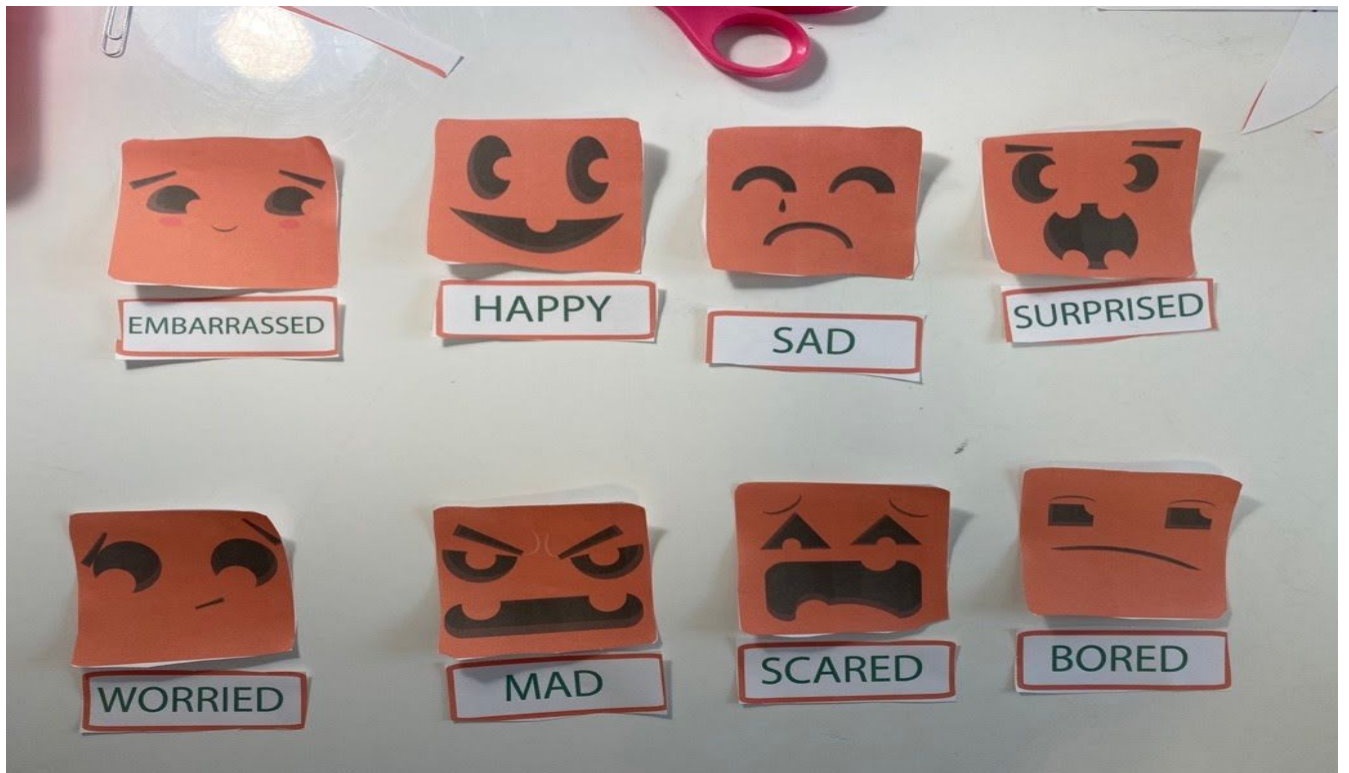
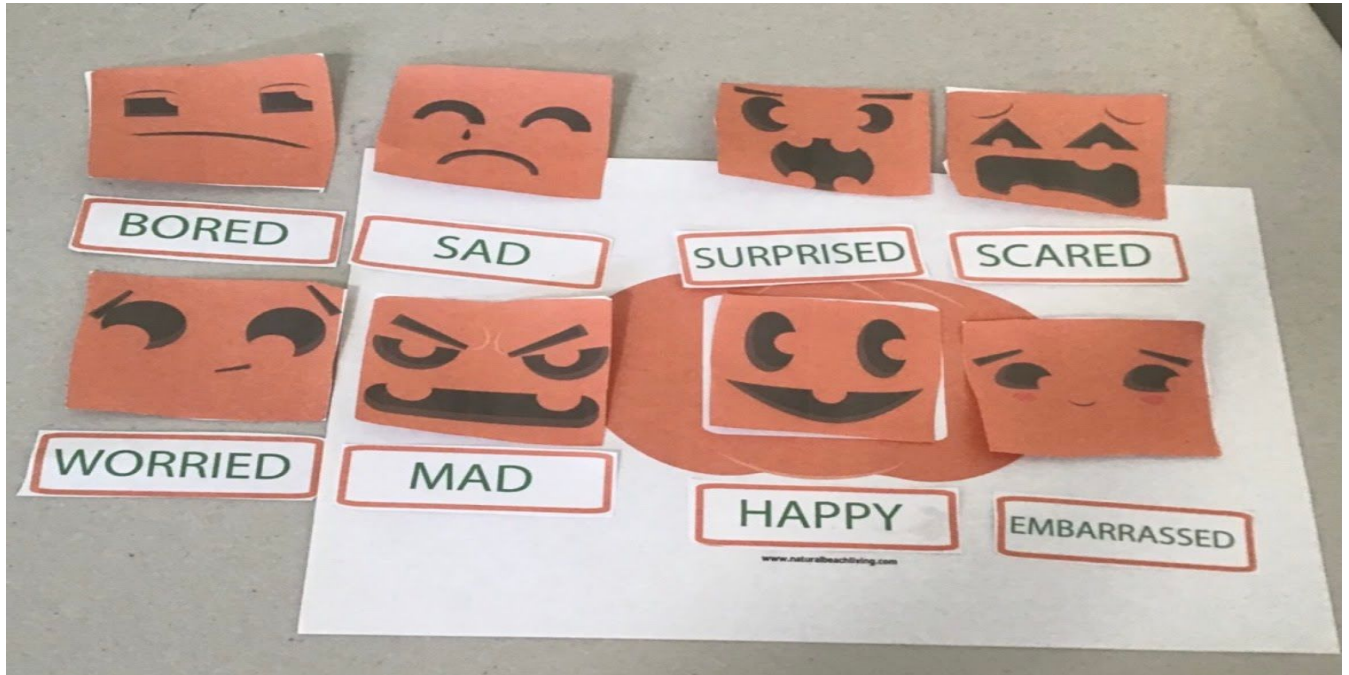


Figure 2

Results of children that matched all eight emotions







*Figure 3*

*Results of children submitting only one emotion*





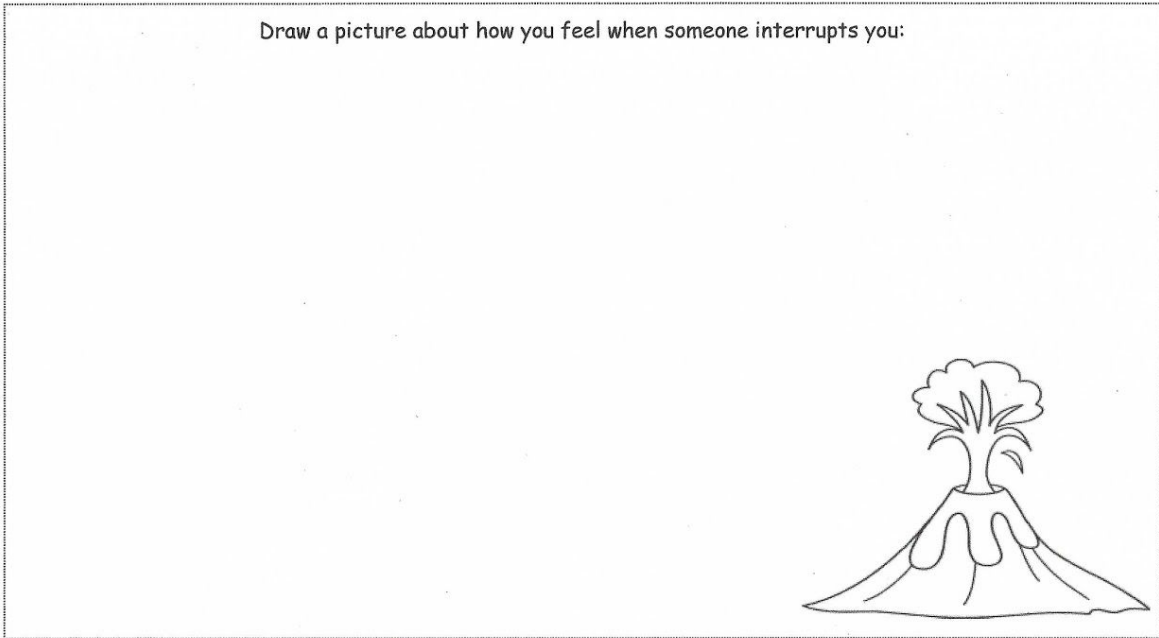


*Appendix A*

*My mouth is a volcano worksheet*

**My Mouth Is A Volcano**

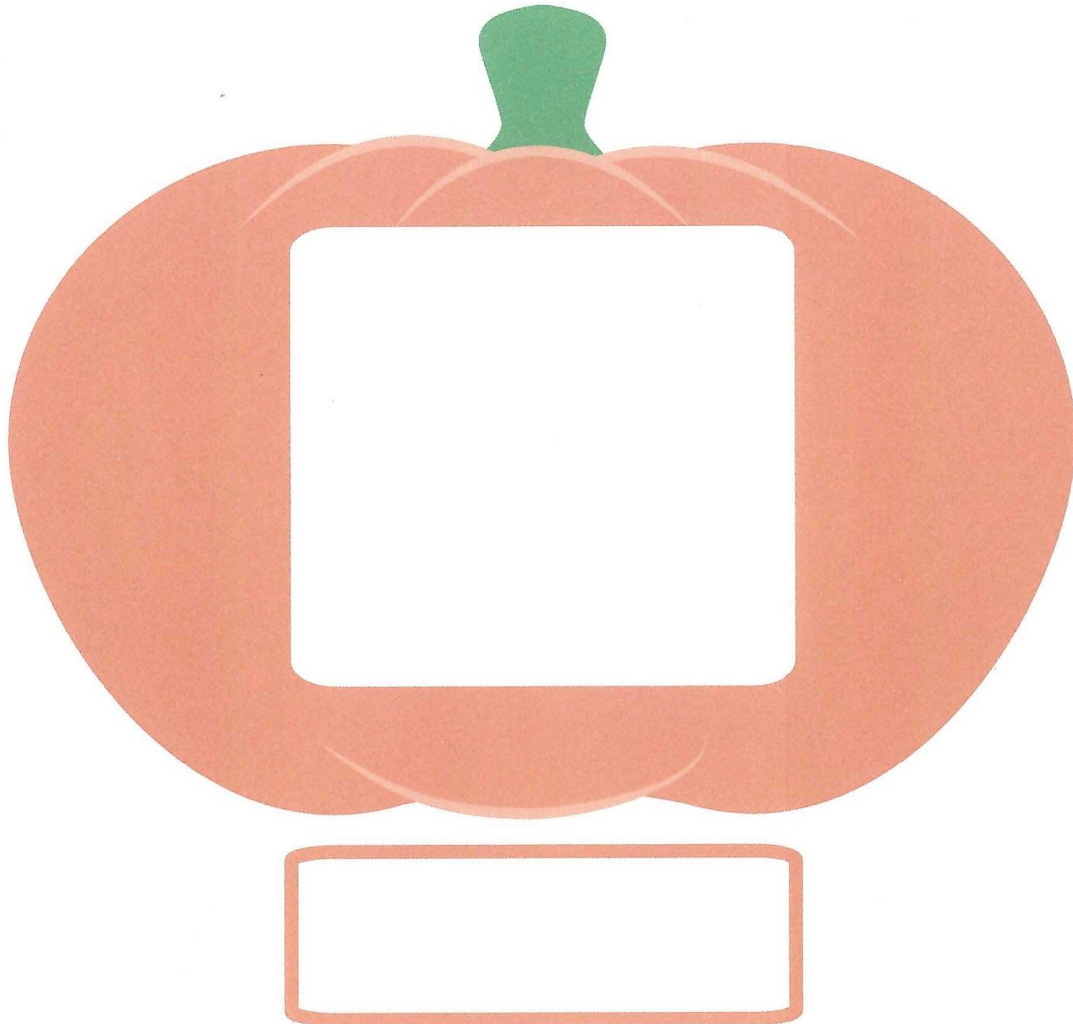
Draw a picture about how you feel when someone interrupts you:



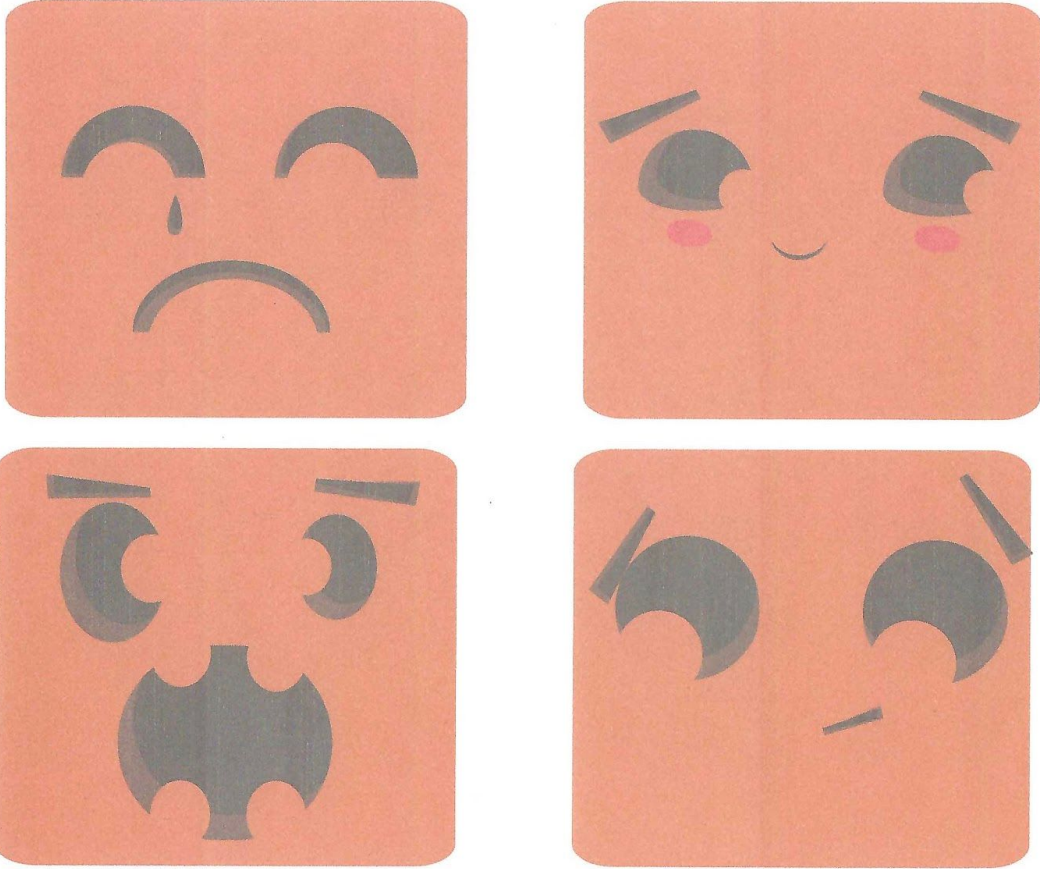
I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when someone interrupts me.

*Appendix B*

*Emotion Matching Activity*









HAPPY

SAD

MAD

EMBARRASSED

BORED

SURPRISED

SCARED

WORRIED

*Appendix C*

*Presentation from Capstone Festival*

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# Enhancing Emotional Regulation in First Graders

By  
Clarissa Miller

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## Need Statement

Children's abilities to regulate their emotions is very important because it can have effects on their:

- Performance at school
  - Ability to form relationships with peers
  - Mental health status
-

## Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development

### Stage 4

#### Industry vs. Inferiority

- Children are learning important life skills and feel industrious when successful
- Children are learning how to develop and maintain peer relationships
- Sense of inferiority if not successful in these tasks

### Project

- Taught three, 25 minute lessons about emotional regulation delivered via Zoom
- A First Grade Class
- Robert H. Down Elementary School Pacific Grove, Ca



## Learning Outcomes

By the end of the project the participants will be able to:

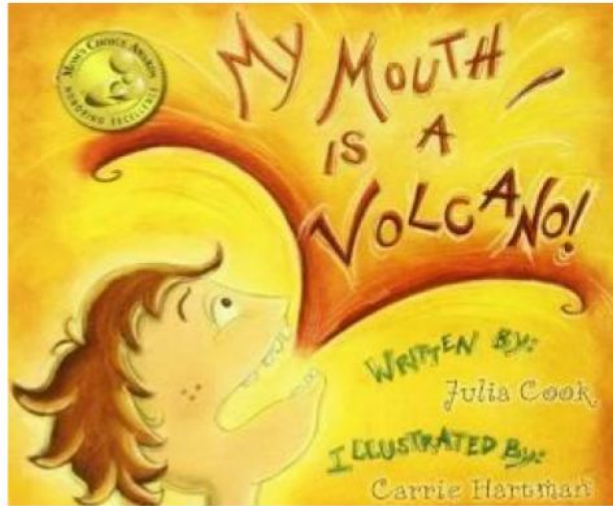
1. Identify at least one emotion they feel when they are interrupted
2. Identify one calm down technique on their own
3. Identify and match emotional expressions with the emotion word using a template

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## Method


## Day 1

- Read story to class
- Asked them to identify how they feel when interrupted on worksheet

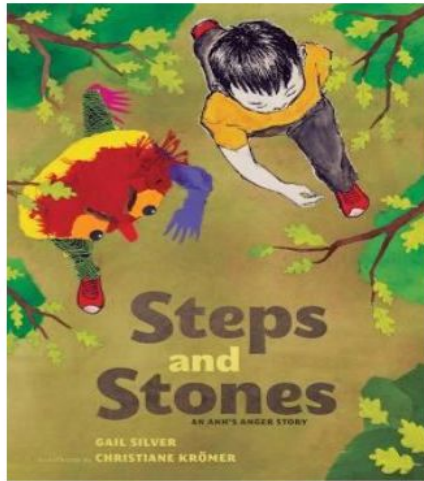


**My Mouth Is A Volcano**

Draw a picture about how you feel when someone interrupts you:



I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when someone interrupts me.

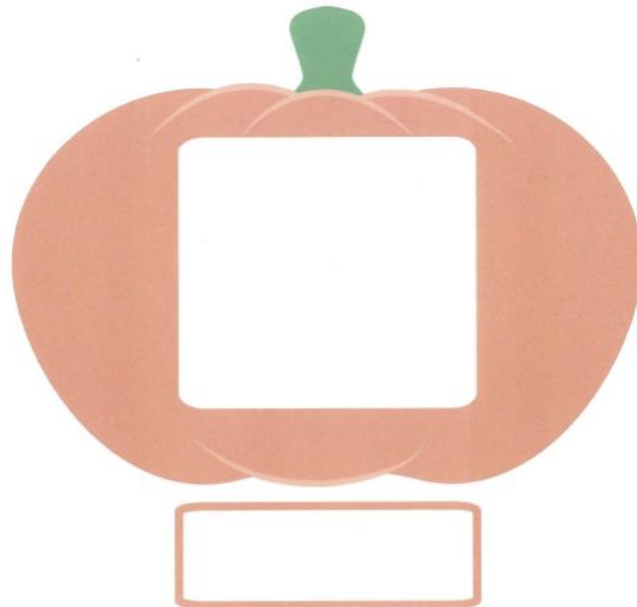


## Day 2

- Talked about previous day's book and activity
- Read class the story
- Asked them to identify their own calm down techniques

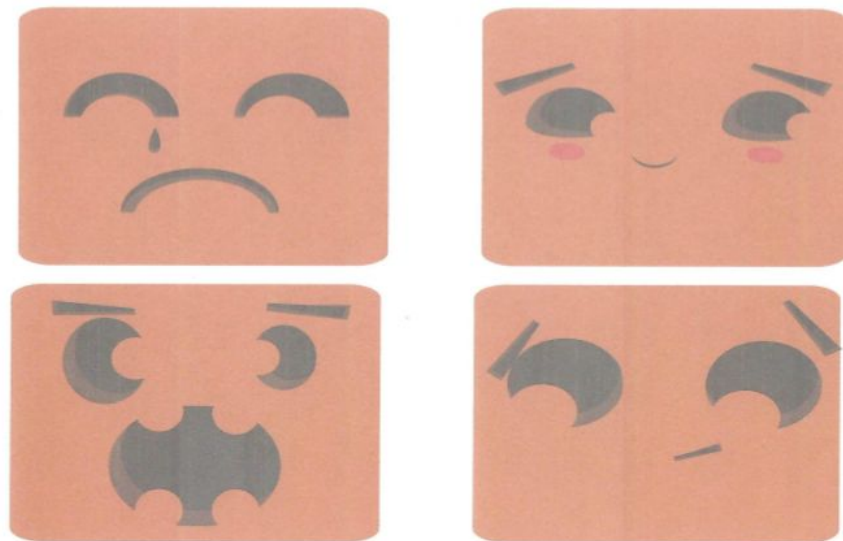
## Day 3

- Talked about previous day's book and lesson
- Children were asked to match the emotion face to the emotion word using the pumpkin template





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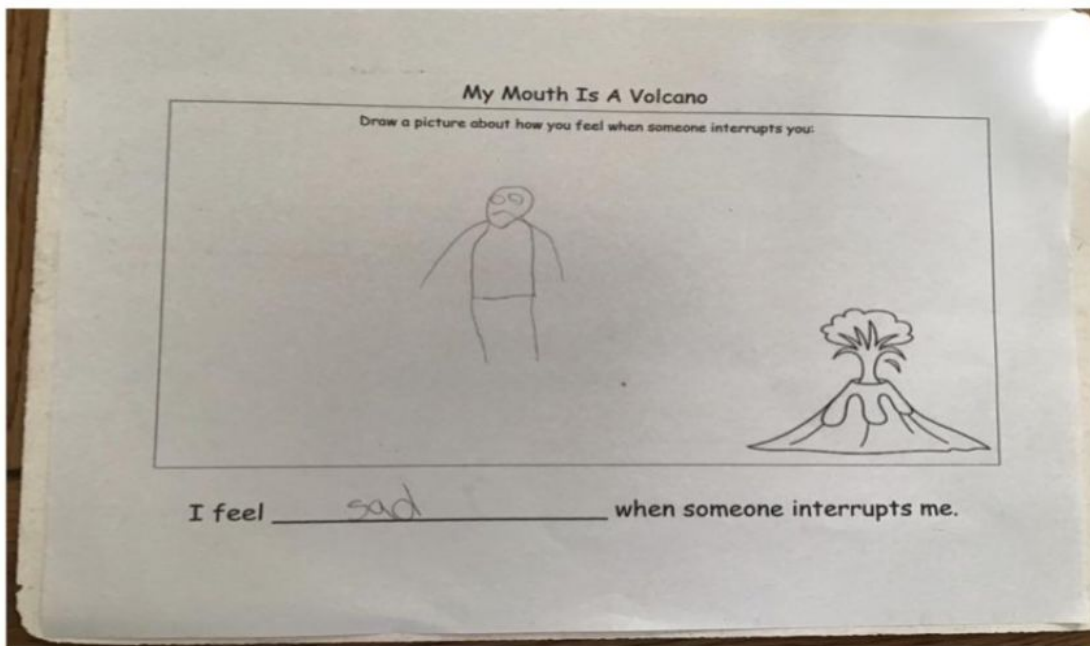
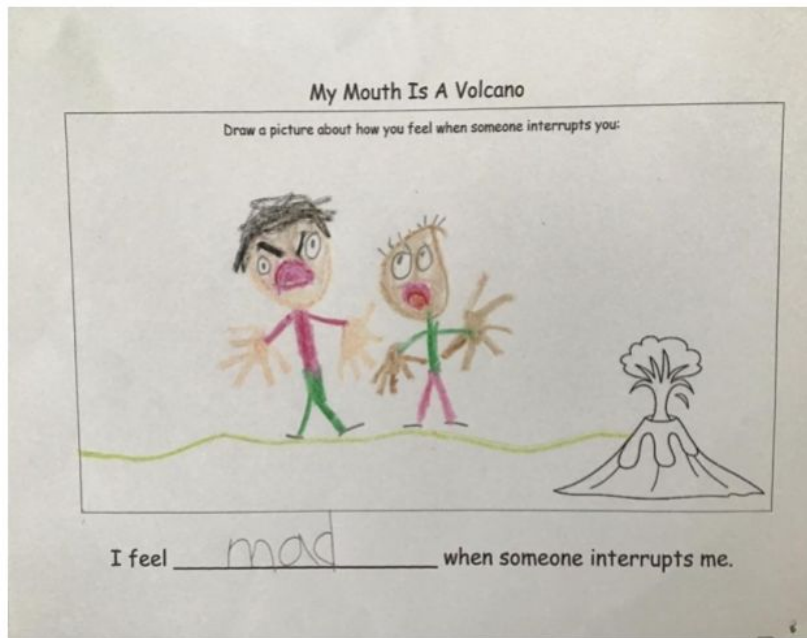
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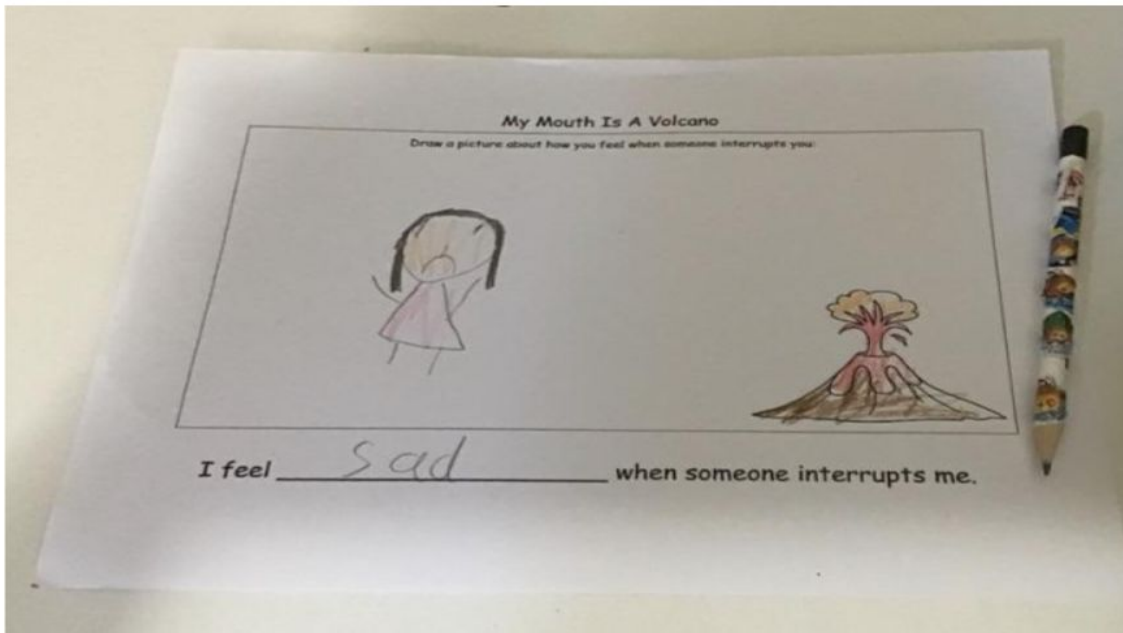
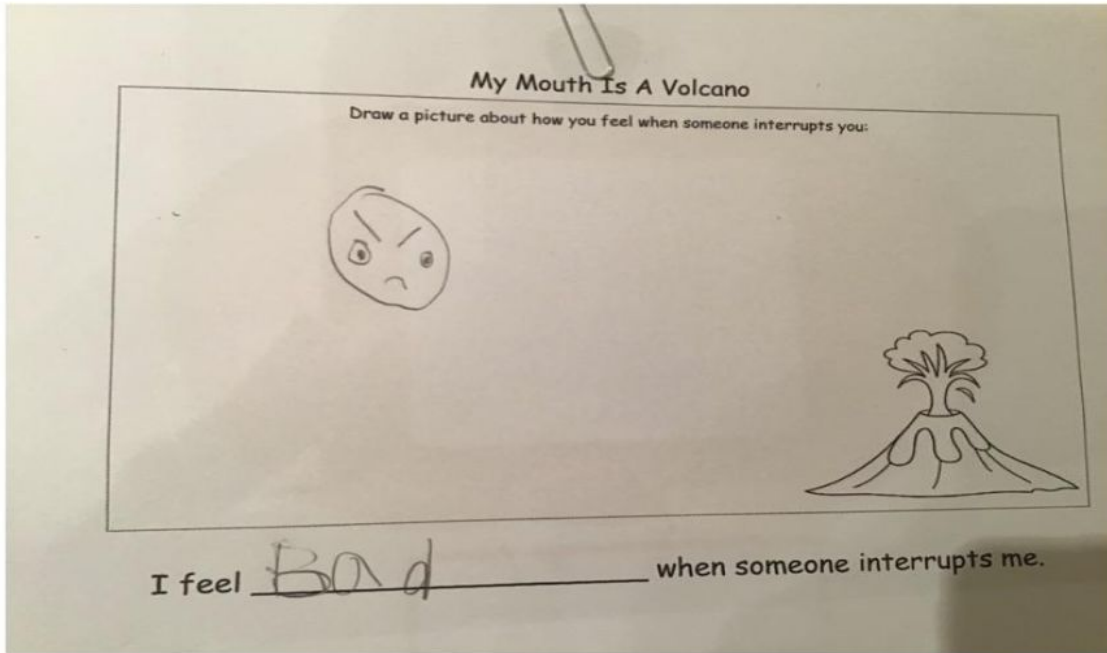
# Results



**Learning Outcome #1:**

The children identified how they felt when interrupted





Responses	Children with same responses
Frustrated	1
Sad	8
Bad	1
Mad	7
Angry	1

18/24 children participated

## Learning Outcome #2:

Children identified many different strategies they use to calm down.





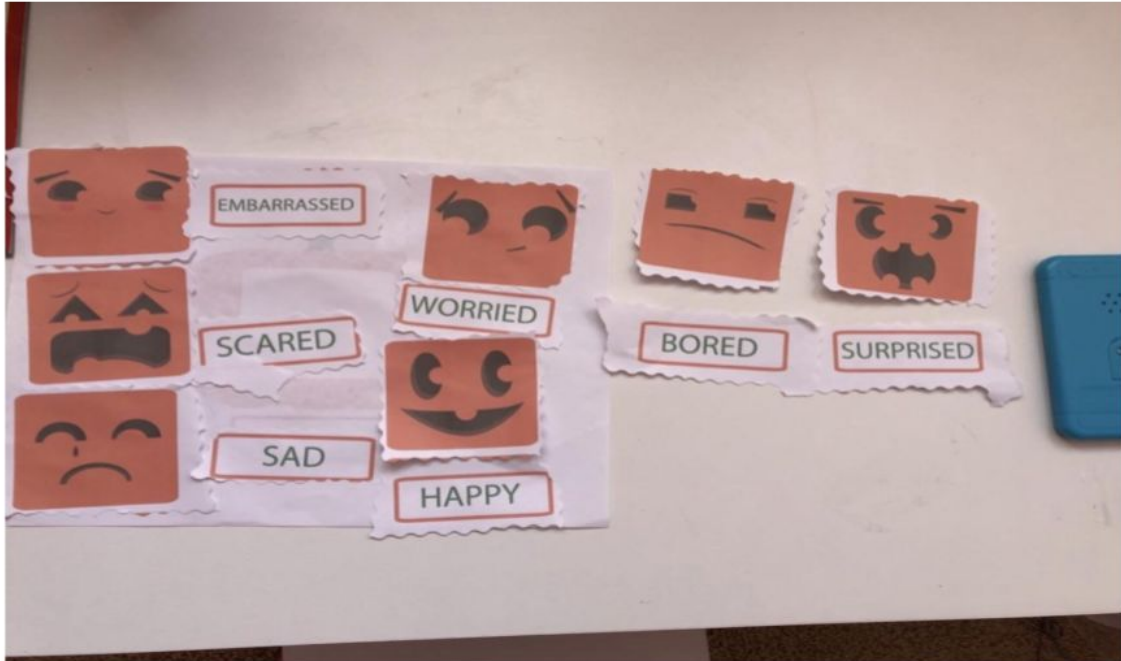
Calm Down Techniques	# of Children that use Technique	Calm Down Techniques	# of Children that use Technique
Take Deep Breaths	3	Take a Nap	1
Count	1	Read a Book	1
Get Some Space	5	Think of Something Nice	1
Breathing Tool	5	Stress Ball	1
Eat a Cupcake/ Cookie/ Candy	2	Draw / Color	2
Meditate	1	Kick a Ball	1

22/24 participants

### Learning Outcome #3:

Children matched emotion words to emotion faces.





Children who matched all faces correctly	Children that missed 2 or less matches	Children that missed 3 or more matches
5	5	1

11/24 participants

## Discussion

Possible changes to make for future:

- Add more pumpkin templates to the emotion matching activity.
- Better explanation on how to submit pumpkin matching activity via Seesaw

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Thank you for your time!  
Any Questions?  
-Clarissa Miller-