

Educator's Guide for

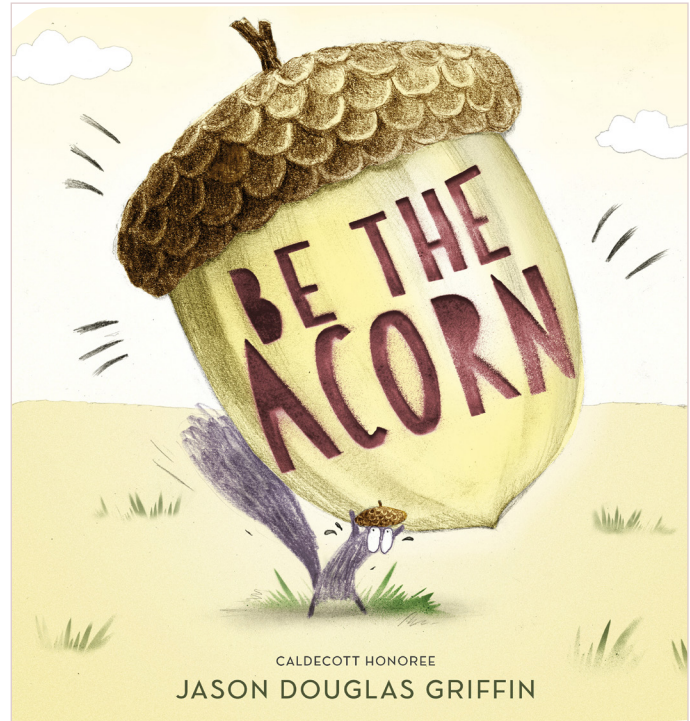
BE THE ACORN

by Jason Douglas Griffin

ABOUT THE BOOK

There's a hole in the ground where the squirrel family's tree used to be, and so they set out on a hunt to find a new home. Choko Choko, the smallest squirrel, is determined to help, but he's told he's too little to join. "Too LITTLE?!" Choko Choko starts to have BIG feelings that grow into a storm cloud of BAD feelings. Luckily his grandma, Great Haha, always knows just what to say: "Like an acorn, you may be small, but you have big possibilities . . . Be the acorn."

When Choko Choko discovers the largest acorn he has ever seen, he remembers Great Haha's wise words, and he realizes that although he's small, he can dare to dream big. Caldecott Honoree Jason Douglas Griffin's inspiring bright-eyed and bushy tale about a valiant young squirrel reminds young readers that with patience and time, they too can grow into something beautiful.



9781250417220 | Ages 4–8

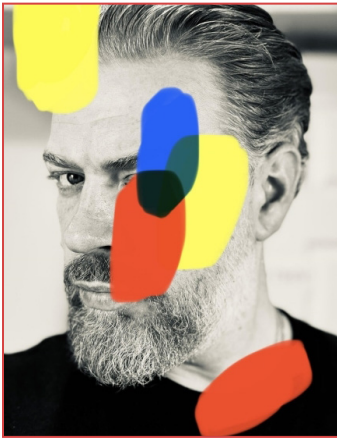


Photo © Jason Douglas Griffin

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

JASON DOUGLAS GRIFFIN received a Caldecott Honor for his artwork in *Ain't Burned All the Bright*, written by Jason Reynolds, and also illustrated Reynolds's *My Name Is Jason. Mine Too*. Griffin is an artist and master collaborator, who has shown his art in major cities all over the world. His most recent projects include a commissioned mural for the children's cancer wing at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, as well as a residency at the new contemporary art museum in Amsterdam, Het HEM. He currently creates in Queens, New York.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE YOU START THE STORY Look carefully at the front and back covers of the dust jacket. If you can, remove the dust jacket and look at the case cover. Then look at the title page.

1. What do you expect from this book?
2. What do you think the title means?
3. Do you notice anything unusual about the illustrations?
4. What do you know about squirrels and acorns?
5. Why do you think the artist drew the acorn SO much bigger than the squirrel on the dust jacket?
6. What differences do you notice between the dust-jacket illustrations and the case cover illustrations?
7. Looking at the back of the dust jacket, what do you think "One small squirrel. One BIG dream." means?



DURING THE STORY Pause and ask questions to maintain engagement.

1. "The acorn may be small," says Great Haha, "but every acorn has BIG possibilities." Does this opening line give you any clues about what might happen in the story?
2. "...because there is a giant hole where the family tree used to be..." What do you think happened to the squirrel family's tree?
3. "Choko Choko, you're too little to hunt with us. Stay back with Great Haha." Have you ever been told you are "too little" for something? Did you feel some of the same emotions as Choko Choko?
4. "Feeling so much all at once is overwhelming for Choko Choko." The illustration shows Choko Choko in a "storm cloud" of emotions. Is that how overwhelming feels to you, or would you illustrate it in a different way?
5. "Choko Choko thinks of the possibilities." Do you have any suggestions for what Choko Choko could do with that big acorn?
6. "The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree." What do you think Choko Choko means when he says this to Great Haha?

AFTER YOU FINISH READING Some questions for reflection.

1. Go back through the book, looking at all the faces of Choko Choko. How many different emotions does he show? Be specific. Look for ideas beyond happy, sad, and mad.
2. We typically look at faces to understand emotions. Look at the illustration of Choko Choko and Great Haha under the little oak sapling at the end of the book. How does the illustration show the relationship between these two characters?
3. So, what does it mean to "Be the acorn"?

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ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE EMOTIONS

CALM THE STORM Ways to help students handle a storm cloud of emotions.

Mindful Breathing When you don't have Great Haha around to give you a hug, you can use deep, mindful breathing to help calm your emotions. Hold up your left hand with the fingers splayed out wide and your right index finger by your left wrist. Inhale as your right index finger goes up the outside of the left thumb, and exhale as you go down the thumb. Inhale as you trace up the left index finger, and exhale as you go down. Continue, ending on the outside of your left pinky. The combination of deep, slow breaths with the tactile sensation is soothing and helps settle the brain. Try this as a class and see if you can sync up your breathing and become calm together. (This strategy is a great one to share with families.)

A Calming Box Brainstorm items that can go in a Calming Box to help students who need a few minutes to weather an emotional storm. Some ideas:

- crayons and paper
- modeling clay
- small fidget toys
- a stress ball
- beads and pipe cleaners
- a small puzzle

WHOSE EYES ARE WHOSE? Griffin uses eyes to show emotions throughout the book.

Can you guess whose eyes are whose in your class? Take a picture of each student's face and print two sets. Keep one set whole and trim the other set to show only the eyes. Put the pictures of full faces out on the table and those of the eyes in a basket. Have students select a picture of just eyes, try to guess who the eyes belong to, and then match it with the full-face picture to check. You can also make bigger prints of just the eyes and use them as a guessing game at circle time. (Write the name of the student lightly in pencil on the back of each eye card.)

BEING OVERWHELMED FEELS LIKE... For Choko Choko, too many emotions at once feels like a storm cloud. As a class, brainstorm a list of metaphors for feeling overwhelmed. Using the attached printable, have students draw the idea that describes how they feel when they are overwhelmed. (Older students can write a description to go with the illustration.)



BUILD A FACE Put out a tray of loose parts and allow students to combine them to make faces showing different emotions. Items for the tray could include:

- felt ovals for faces
- yarn in different colors
- ribbon
- flat florist marbles
- large googly eyes
- pompoms
- small tiles
- buttons
- pipe cleaners

Students can write the emotion on a card and place it under the face. Photograph them for a class book. (Older students can write a story about the face they have constructed.)

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STORY BASKET Put out a copy of the book with materials for retelling the story, including squirrel figures, acorns, a small flower glued to a rubber band for Great HaHa, an acorn cap glued to a rubber band for Choko Choko, a storm cloud cut out of gray felt, a very large acorn made out of felt or cardstock, a small branch of an oak tree. You can make a tree for the last page out of a paper towel roll with a hole cut in the side.

EXPLORE THE ARTIST Put out a variety of pencils (graphite, colored, charcoal) with drawing paper for students to explore Griffin's art style. You can add black paper and white pastels for the illustration of "a HOME."

STEM ACTIVITIES

SENSORY NATURE WALK To explore the setting of *Be the Acorn*, take a nature walk and use your senses to explore the outdoors. What do you see, hear, and smell as you walk outside? What textures can you find in nature? Bring a bin and hand clippers and collect some natural materials (moss, small stones, twigs, leaves, seeds, acorns) to use in your classroom as you explore the book. After your walk, add magnifiers, a balance scale, and rulers to the bin. Add some of the collection to the tray for the **Build a Face** activity above.

A HOME FOR CHOKO CHOKO'S FAMILY Add materials from your **Sensory Nature Walk** and other loose parts to your blocks for building a home for the squirrels. Include clipboards and pencils to allow students to sketch a design before building. Some ideas for loose parts:

- pine needles
- leaves
- yarn
- cotton balls
- small twigs
- moss
- fabric scraps
- small tiles
- small stones
- acorns
- pictures of squirrels and other woodland creatures

LEAF RUBBINGS Use leaves from your **Sensory Nature Walk** for leaf rubbings. Arrange leaves vein-side up on a clipboard and cover them with clear contact paper, pressing firmly around the leaves' veins and edges. Students can then clip their paper to the clipboard and rub with the side of a crayon (with the wrapper removed), layering different colors on their rubbing. They can practice scissor skills by cutting around the individual leaf rubbings. Older students can use tree field guides to identify the trees that the leaves came from. (Check with the cooperative extension service for tree identification resources.)



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PLANT SEEDS Growing acorns can be tricky because they need to be harvested at just the right time to germinate, but snow peas have large white seeds that are easy to handle and germinate quickly. Give each student a clear plastic cup of potting soil. Have them use a pencil to poke two holes in the soil along the side of the cup and place one seed in each hole. Moisten the soil with a spray bottle of water and cover with plastic wrap, secured with a rubber band. Set in a sunny window and remove the plastic when the seeds sprout. By putting the seeds close to the edge of the cup, students will be able to observe the changes their seeds undergo and compare those changes to the acorn in Choko Choko's dream. Pea shoots are edible and sweet, so students can harvest some leaves to taste once the plants are established.



WHAT COMES FROM TREES? In *Be the Acorn*, students learn that trees provide food and shelter for animals. What else do trees provide? Some tree-derived items are maple syrup, rayon fabric, biodegradable bags, cinnamon, cork, aspirin, rubber, carnauba wax, coffee, chocolate, cellulose sponges and latex for gloves and balloons. Make a *Does It Come from a Tree?* trivia game, mixing these items with non-tree products.

TREE PLANTING Add a native tree to your school's landscape to provide shelter for squirrels and other wildlife. Contact the cooperative extension service or a local garden club for assistance.

TREE SNACKS Enjoy foods that come from trees (careful of allergies) and show pictures of those trees. Some options include:

- tree nuts like almonds, pecans, walnuts
- dried fruits like figs, apricots, dates
- fresh fruits like apples, oranges, peaches, pears
- unexpected foods like maple syrup and chocolate

GUIDE AUTHOR

Sara Hudson was an early-childhood educator for sixteen years and worked for five years for a literacy nonprofit, developing book-related materials for schools. She is now a bookseller and freelance writer.

Name: _____

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"Feeling so much all at once is overwhelming for Choko Choko."

When I feel overwhelmed, it feels like
