

BEWARE THE GUARDED HEART

Grade Level: Kindergarten to 2nd Grade, Ages 5-8

Objective: Explore emotional awareness, trust, and personal growth. Reflect on what it means to open up, build friendships, and navigate emotions in a healthy way.

Materials Needed: A copy of “*Beware The Guarded Heart*” by Jaybie D. Paper, crayons or markers, glue, scissors, construction paper, small boxes or envelopes, and emotion word cards or feeling faces.

Introduction (5 minutes): Ask if they’ve ever felt like keeping their feelings hidden? Why do people sometimes put up “walls” around their hearts? Explain that today’s story is about a character who builds walls to protect their heart and what Aidan learns about letting others in.

Read Aloud (10 minutes): What do you think will happen next? Why do you think the character is so guarded? How would you feel if you met someone who was afraid to open up? Encourage students to look for clues in the illustrations about the character’s emotions and changes throughout the story.

Discussion (10 minutes): Talk about emotions and trust. Why do some people find it hard to trust others? What helped the character in the story feel safe enough to open up? Have you ever met someone who was shy or didn’t talk much at first? What helped them feel more comfortable?

Transition to personal questions: What are things that make **YOU** feel safe and comfortable when talking about your feelings? How can we help others feel included and understood?

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Activity Options (15-20 minutes):

1. "Guarded Heart" Art Activity

- Give each student a small paper heart or let them make their own.
- Give them a small box or envelope to decorate.
- On the heart, they can draw or write things they care about but sometimes keep hidden (fears, dreams, emotions).
- Decorate the box/envelope to make it look like a wall that protects their heart.
- **Discussion:** What makes them feel safe enough to share their heart with others? When should we open up, and when is it okay to protect our feelings?

2. Friendship Bridge Challenge

- Split students into small groups and give them building materials (blocks, paper straws, tape, etc.).
- **Their challenge:** Build a bridge that represents connecting with others, just like the character in the story.
- **Discuss:**
 - What makes a strong bridge? (Trust, support, teamwork—just like relationships!)
 - How does this relate to real friendships?

Conclusion (5 minutes): Share the "guarded hearts" or bridges and reflect on how emotions and trust shape friendships. Discuss how it's okay to be careful with your feelings, but opening up can lead to amazing friendships. Encourage kindness and empathy by asking: What's one way you can help a friend feel comfortable sharing their feelings? How can we make our classroom a place where everyone feels safe and supported?