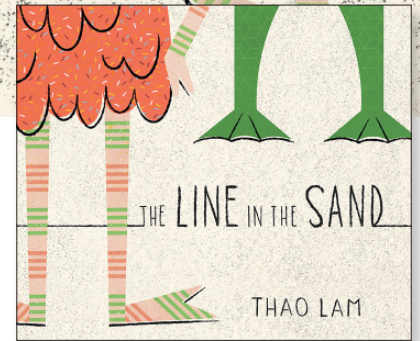


# The Line in the Sand

Discussion Guide by Vicky Timmermanis for Grades 3–6

## About the Book

A monster meanders down a beach, dragging a stick behind them and leaving a line in the sand. Meanwhile, a group of friends is at play—flying kites, building sandcastles, tossing a ball—until two of them become curious about the line that now seemingly divides them. What does the line mean? Should the line be crossed? Can it be crossed? This powerful wordless story, told in panels and illustrated in striking collage art, is at once simple, relatable, and profound and will encourage readers to think about conflict, communication, and the meaning of the lines we all draw, whether intentional or not.



Written and illustrated by Thao Lam

## About this Guide

Throughout childhood, students' perspective taking and social problem-solving skills continue to develop. Regularly learning and talking about these topics can make it easier for students to use these skills “in the moment” (when they may be feeling frustrated, angry, wronged). Discussing the feelings and perspectives of characters in books is a good way to practice these skills. Wordless books in particular provide an opportunity for students to practice using facial expressions, body language and situations to understand others' perspectives.

## SECTION ONE: Exploring a wordless picture book

A wordless book allows students to create their own story. Everyone will interpret the pictures in a unique way. The following ideas might be helpful for exploring this book with your students:

- Go through the pictures in the book multiple times.
- At first, focus on exploring the pictures. This could happen silently or by asking students to make observations about what they see in the pictures.
- Keep initial discussions general so your students don't get “locked in” to one interpretation.
- Next, encourage students to develop their own stories based on what they see.
- Students can share or record their stories in different ways. For example:
  - Telling their stories to a partner or small group. Help students understand there is no right or wrong story. Encourage them to explore the similarities and differences in their stories.
  - Writing their stories down. You could have your students focus on different story elements (e.g., character, setting, plot) or write a dialogue.

**ISBN**  
978-1-77147-570-9

**CURRICULUM LINKS**  
**Language Arts:** Reading  
Comprehension  
**Character Development:** Social-  
Emotional Learning; Conflict Resolution

**READING LEVELS**  
**Grade:** 1 and up  
**Fountas & Pinnell:** E  
**Lexile® Measure:** NP  
**Reading Recovery:** 8

**COMMON CORE**  
RL.1, W.1, SL.1, L.1



## SECTION TWO: Social-Emotional Learning Discussion Topics

### Topic 1: Understanding others' emotions and thoughts

**Aim:** To help students interpret the perspectives of others, including how misunderstandings can arise.

Prior to this discussion, introduce the difference between thoughts (what someone is saying to themselves in their mind) and emotions (the feelings someone is having in their body/mind). Provide concrete examples relevant to recent events in your class (e.g., I felt disappointed when ... I was thinking about ...).

*Guiding Questions: Choose a picture in the story. Tell us what you think one of the characters is feeling and thinking. What makes you guess that (e.g., facial expressions, body language, the situation)? Why do you think the character is thinking/feeling that?*

During the discussion, look for student responses that provide the opportunity to highlight the following ideas:

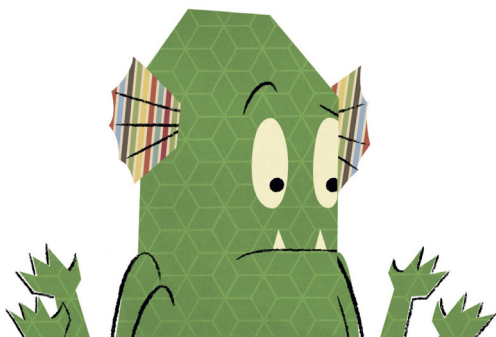
- We can make guesses about what others are thinking and feeling based on:
  - Their facial expressions (e.g., frustrated because eyebrows furrowed)
  - Their body language (e.g., angry because hands on hips or arms crossed, confused because scratching head)
  - The situation (e.g., ... thinks green monster meant to fall on orange monster)
- There isn't one "right" way to think or feel.
  - Two people can feel different things in the same situation.
  - You can feel multiple things at the same time.

**Aside:** For students who need additional support, brainstorm a list of feelings words or have your class create a feelings chart. Ask students to draw an emotion shown by a character in the book (which will help them pay attention to visual details) and label the feeling. Posting these in the classroom provides an ongoing reminder of emotion vocabulary.

### Activity about misunderstandings

**Introduction:** When we talk about others' thoughts and feelings, we are just making guesses. We might make wrong assumptions about other people's perspectives—it's possible that we guess one thing, but they are thinking or feeling something totally different. Misunderstanding someone else's viewpoint can impact our actions, lead to conflict and make it harder for us to solve problems.

Unclear/ambiguous situations can be interpreted in different ways. Ask students to find examples in the book and discuss how a character's action could be interpreted in different ways (e.g., as kind/benign or aggressive/hostile). Ask students how these different interpretations would impact actions or potentially lead to conflict.



## Activity about misunderstandings - continued

| What is the situation?                                     | What does green monster guess orange monster is thinking?                                       | What is green monster feeling? | What are green monster's actions?   |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Orange monster steps onto green monster's side of the line | "Orange monster is trying to invade my space and take over" [hostile/aggressive interpretation] | Angry, frustrated, wronged     | Waves arms angrily, points to line, says orange monster isn't welcome [conflictual action, escalates the situation] |
|  | "Orange monster wants to come play with me!" [kind/benign interpretation]                       | Excited, eager, happy          | Welcomes orange monster, asks what to play [cooperative action]   |

## Topic 2: Social problem solving (conflict resolution)

**Aim:** To learn how to navigate conflict using four social problem-solving steps (identifying the problem, generating solutions, evaluating solutions, choosing the best solution).

*Guiding question: What is the problem? What is each character's perspective?*

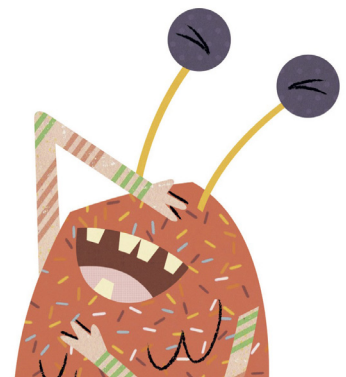
Have students select a conflict based on the pictures in the book.

*Guiding question: What are the potential solutions?*

Example student responses:

- Talking it out, listening to each other's perspectives, realizing that you might have misunderstood
- Asking for help from a trusted adult (particularly helpful if feeling scared or hurt)
- Take a break/walk away

**Aside:** When brainstorming, there are no "bad" ideas. If students make suggestions that feel problematic (e.g., physical violence), discuss the impact to the characters involved at the next step (e.g., feeling pain/sadness, consequences for rule-breaking).



## Topic 2: Social problem solving (conflict resolution) - continued

*Guiding question: What are the pros/cons of each option? What would each character think or feel about that solution?*  
Once your students have brainstormed a list, discuss the pros and cons of each potential solution. Try to encourage students to think about how the options would impact what each character thinks and feels.

| What is the potential solution?             | What are the pros?  | What are the cons?   |
|---|---|--|
| Green monster walks away from the situation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stops the situation from escalating/getting worse</li><li>• Prevents green monster from doing/saying something that they might regret or that might hurt orange monster</li><li>• Gives both monsters a chance to calm down</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Problem doesn't get solved</li><li>• Orange monster might feel annoyed/confused that green monster walked away</li><li>• Friendship between monsters might suffer if conflict isn't resolved</li></ul> |

*Guiding question: Which is the best solution to try?*

Discuss that choosing a solution involves trying find something that would work for everyone involved.

### About Vicky Timmermanis

Dr. Vicky Timmermanis is a school and clinical child psychologist who works with children, adolescents, families and educators. She currently works at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). As part of her work at the TDSB, Vicky collaborates with educators and caregivers to help students develop skills in identifying and managing emotions, making friends and navigating social conflicts. She believes that ongoing education and discussions about topics related to social and emotional well-being are important for people of all ages.

