

The Elsebeneath Series: An Educator's Guide

Supporting Students Through Stories of Creative Resilience and Emotional Growth

About the Elsebeneath Series

The Elsebeneath is a fantastical realm where children go when they're struggling with learning, creating, or growing—not as punishment, but as a place of understanding and gentle guidance. These stories follow Sam and his companions as they navigate the universal challenges of childhood: perfectionism, creative blocks, comparison, and the courage to keep trying.

Reading Level: Middle Grade (Ages 8-12)

Themes: Growth mindset, emotional resilience, creative persistence, friendship, self-acceptance

Why These Stories Work in Educational Settings

Social-Emotional Learning Integration

- **Self-Awareness:** Characters model recognizing and naming difficult emotions
- **Self-Management:** Stories demonstrate healthy coping strategies for frustration and disappointment
- **Social Awareness:** Emphasis on understanding different perspectives and experiences
- **Relationship Skills:** Authentic portrayals of friendship, conflict resolution, and mutual support
- **Responsible Decision-Making:** Characters learn to make choices based on growth rather than perfection

Growth Mindset Reinforcement

- Celebrates the process of learning over immediate mastery
- Normalizes struggle as part of growth

- Shows multiple paths to understanding and success
 - Models resilience in the face of setbacks
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Key Themes & Classroom Applications

1. The Power of “Almost” (*Island of Almosts*)

Core Message: Progress matters more than perfection

Discussion Questions:

- What’s something you’re “almost” good at? How does that feel?
- Why might “almost” be more important than “perfect”?
- How do you encourage yourself when something is difficult?

Activities:

- Create an “Almost Achievement” board celebrating student progress
- Write about a time when “almost” led to something better
- Draw or write about your own “Island of Almosts”

2. Patience with Process (*Valley of Yet-Stills*)

Core Message: Some things need time to grow

Discussion Questions:

- What’s something you’re still learning? How do you stay patient with yourself?
- When have you wanted to give up but kept going anyway?
- What would you tell a friend who’s frustrated with their progress?

Activities:

- Create “seed packets” of goals students are growing toward
- Journal about something they’re “yet-still” learning
- Design their own “patience tools” for difficult tasks

3. The Courage to Climb (*Mountain of Mastery*)

Core Message: The journey teaches as much as the destination

Discussion Questions:

- What makes a challenge worth attempting?
- How do you know when to ask for help vs. push through alone?
- What “mountains” are you climbing in your own life?

Activities:

- Map out the “path” of learning something new
 - Share stories of times they helped or were helped by others
 - Create motivational “trail markers” for classroom challenges
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Supporting Different Student Needs

For Perfectionistic Students

Stories particularly helpful: Island of Almosts, Mountain of Mastery

- Emphasize that characters grow through struggle, not despite it
- Discuss how perfectionism can sometimes prevent learning
- Highlight moments when characters choose growth over being right

For Students Facing Creative Blocks

Stories particularly helpful: Valley of Yet-Stills, Village of Voicekeepers

- Normalize creative frustration as part of the process
- Explore different types of creativity and expression
- Discuss how taking breaks can be part of creating

For Students Struggling with Peer Comparison

Stories particularly helpful: Island of Almosts, Archive of Unsaid Things

- Focus on individual growth journeys
- Discuss how everyone’s “almost” looks different
- Emphasize the value of supporting others’ growth

For Students Processing Loss or Change

Stories particularly helpful: Archive of Unsaid Things, Village of Voicekeepers

- Validate that big feelings need space and time
- Explore healthy ways to honor what we’ve lost while moving forward

- Discuss how communities can support us through difficult times
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Practical Implementation Ideas

Individual Reading Support

- **Reading Conferences:** Use story themes to discuss student challenges with learning
- **Book Clubs:** Small groups can explore themes more deeply
- **Independent Projects:** Students create their own Elsebeneath locations or characters

Classroom Community Building

- **Morning Meetings:** Use story quotes or themes as discussion starters
- **Conflict Resolution:** Reference how characters handle disagreements and misunderstandings
- **Goal Setting:** Help students identify their own “mountains to climb”

Writing Workshop Extensions

- Students write their own Elsebeneath adventures
- Create character journals exploring growth and challenges
- Write “advice letters” from Elsebeneath characters to students facing similar struggles

Art Integration

- Design personal “Voicekeeper chimes” representing important thoughts or feelings
 - Create visual maps of learning journeys
 - Illustrate scenes from favorite Elsebeneath moments
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Discussion Prompts by Story

Island of Almosts

- “Sam struggles with yo-yo tricks that seem easy for others. When have you felt this way?”
- “What would your personal ‘Island of Almosts’ look like?”
- “How do the characters on the island help each other feel less alone?”

Valley of Yet-Stills

- “What’s something you’re ‘yet-still’ learning? How do you stay motivated?”
- “Why do you think some things take longer to learn than others?”
- “How does Sam’s attitude toward waiting change throughout the story?”

Mountain of Mastery

- “What makes Sam decide the mountain is worth climbing?”
 - “When have you had to choose between an easier path and a more challenging one?”
 - “How do the characters support each other on difficult parts of the journey?”
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Red Flags: When to Seek Additional Support

While these stories can support student emotional growth, watch for:

- Students who identify intensely with characters’ struggles but seem unable to move toward growth
- Perfectionism that interferes with daily functioning or causes significant distress
- Students who withdraw from challenges entirely after reading
- Signs of depression, anxiety, or other mental health concerns that go beyond normal developmental struggles

Remember: Stories can open conversations and provide comfort, but they don’t replace professional mental health support when needed.

Building Parent Connections

Family Reading Nights

- Host discussions about growth mindset themes
- Provide take-home discussion questions for families
- Share how families can support children through learning challenges

Parent Resources

- Suggest stories for families dealing with homework struggles
 - Provide tips for discussing perfectionism and resilience at home
 - Share how these themes connect to developmental psychology research
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Quick Reference: Matching Stories to Student Needs

Student Challenge	Recommended Story	Key Message
Fear of failure	Island of Almosts	“Almost” is still progress
Impatience with learning	Valley of Yet-Stills	Growth takes time
Giving up too quickly	Mountain of Mastery	The journey teaches resilience
Difficulty expressing feelings	Village of Voicekeepers	Everyone deserves to be heard
Processing grief/loss	Archive of Unsaid Things	Memories can be honored safely
Perfectionism	Any story	Growth matters more than perfection
Social anxiety	Kitten Named Kippen	Authentic connection over performance

Contact & Additional Resources

For questions about using these stories in your classroom, discussion guides for specific themes, or information about author visits (virtual or in-person), please visit: [your website]

Remember: The Elsebeneath isn’t a place of failure—it’s a place of becoming. Just like our students.