

It's Just So... Book Series

from Lizzy's World, written and illustrated by Brenda Faatz & Peter Trimarco

It's so **FUN**, it's so **RELEVANT**, it's just so... **PLAIN AWESOME!** The *It's Just So...* series is a collection of three books that take on some of the big ideas kids experience. Brenda Faatz and Peter Trimarco created a whimsical character who is sure to help readers navigate some of life's twists and turns. Her name is Lizzy and she's just so... **FANTASTIC!** Lizzy tackles the first day of school, a new sibling, and building self-confidence. She shares her feelings with readers with her own creative vocabulary. Her words are colorful, expressive, and sometimes completely made up! Bold, colorful illustrations make Lizzy come to life. Readers will feel her mood as they flip through the pages of each book. This series is essential classroom reading for supporting kids in their discovery of self, their exploration of emotions... and the occasional Bunnypalooza.

These award-winning authors have combined all of the right elements to create a series that will engage students of all ages. These books are highly relevant for young children in grades K-3 as they develop their emotional intelligence and explore their brave voices in a variety of situations. A spunky character, real conflicts, word play, and vivid illustrations are woven together seamlessly. The series is perfect for kids to read on their own, and for parents, teachers, bookstores and caregivers who love to read and explore ideas with little learners through writing and art. Older kids can enjoy Lizzy's stories as they begin to grapple with bigger ideas and more complex vocabulary. Middle-grade teachers can use this series to supplement thematic units on self-discovery, identity and perseverance. Brenda and Peter's extensive experience in theater and the arts and their dedication to social emotional learning is evident in the awards the *It's Just So...* series has received. They have earned top honors from Foreword Indies, Creative Child Magazine, Story Monster Magazine, the Mom's Choice Awards, the Moonbeam Awards, and many others. This series is just so... **NECESSARY** for child development in their ever-changing and unpredictable world.

This educator guide includes a variety of hands-on, creative, and fun ways to interact with the *It's Just So...* series. The interdisciplinary activities in this guide welcome and encourage all styles of learners to explore the concepts in the specific titles and in the series as a whole while also offering virtual learning adaptations (Virtual Boost) and suggestions for reaching learners of a variety of ages (Enrichment Extra). Theater, dance, art, writing, and other experiential activities abound! Brenda and Peter love to share with young readers how Lizzy became the quirky girl who now stars in her own book series. They offer in-person and virtual experiences (Inventive Illustrator and Awesome Author Adventure) where readers can explore the books with them directly. Teachers, use this guide to prepare for a visit from the authors or for your everyday classroom planning. Lizzy is excited to play and connect with your young learners!



To schedule an in-person or virtual author visit, email info@notablekidspublishing.com.

Follow **Brenda Faatz** and **Peter Trimarco** for the latest on the *It's Just So...* series.



Essential Questions

Use these discussion questions as a springboard for beginning a rich conversation with readers. Learners can explore and expand (virtually or in-person) upon these ideas during and after they experience the *It's Just So...* series. The questions may be adapted to fit your students' needs and ages. You know your kids best!

Questions and Discussions for the Entire, Epic, Extraordinary *It's Just So...* Series:

- What is *anticipation*? How does Lizzy handle anticipation? What strategies can be useful when managing stress and worry? Think of a favorite movie or book you've read. How have those characters dealt with worry in their lives?
- How would you describe Lizzy? What personality traits help her handle different situations? Discuss how you and Lizzy are alike and how you are different.
- How would you describe how Lizzy feels in the beginning, middle, and end of each book? Why does she feel these feelings? How does she change?
- Why do you think the authors choose to use the same "it's just so..." pattern in each book?
- Which words in each book are real words? Which words are made up? How do the authors play with words? Why might they do this?
- Discuss a connection that you experienced while reading each story. Was it a self-to-text, text-to-world, or text-to-text connection? Describe the connection and what it made you think about. Turn and talk to a partner about the first experience that came to mind. If your discussion is virtual use the chat feature to share your ideas.

Questions and Discussions for Each Brilliant, Bubbly Book When Read Separately:

It's Just So...

- Describe Lizzy's feelings when she goes to school for the first day. How did you or your sibling or friend feel on the first day of school? What helpful advice could you offer Lizzy?
- What is the most important part of Lizzy's day? What part of her day do you think she was most affected by: the scary school bus, the humongous school, the wombatty social studies class, or the bubbly bath? What evidence leads you to your conclusion?
- How does Lizzy's view or opinion of going to school change as the day goes on? How do we know that her thoughts have shifted?



It's Just So... Little!

- Discuss the connection between the tree that Lizzy is growing and the new addition to her family. How are they alike? How are they different?
- Explore other ways to prepare for a new member of the household. Families introduce new members in many different ways. Explore the ideas you have about how families change. What are some different things that might happen in families that cause a change?
- Predict what kind of a big sister Lizzy might be. What evidence makes you think this and supports your opinion?

It's Just a Bunnypalooza

- Discuss the main problem in the story. What causes Lizzy to doubt herself? What happens that may have made Lizzy worry?
- In this book, what is a Bunnypalooza? How does it help Lizzy? What do you think the Bunnypalooza represents? What is a real life connection to a Bunnypalooza? Think about a time that someone was not being treated well. How did you respond?
- What are some lessons that Lizzy learns? Discuss the reaction that Lizzy's classmates have to her plans for the spring jamboree. Think of a time when you or someone you know had a similar experience. Describe your emotions, positive or negative. What was the lesson learned?



Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Social Emotional Learning Competencies:

SELF AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts

SELF MANAGEMENT: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

Social Justice Anchor Standards:

IDENTITY: Students will recognize that people's multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.

ACTION: Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.

It's a... Lizzypalooza!

Activities that work well with all three books

The whole series is just so... **PERFECT** to help your learners dig deeper into their feelings about Lizzy, themselves, and the big world around them!

It's Just So... Musical!

Lizzy loves to dance and to use her imagination. Explore how music can help us express ourselves. How does music help Lizzy express herself and handle new experiences? Finding different outlets for children to express themselves is so important for their mental and physical health and well being.

Music has many different moods—like we do! Create a curated playlist with a variety of musical genres and moods. We've got your back and started one for you below. Invite everyone to move their bodies as the music changes. If dancing isn't their thing, suggest drawing and doodling as the music shifts. At the conclusion of the playlist, invite dancers and doodlers to turn and talk to their neighbor. They can discuss their experience and discover if their feelings were the same or different. Did particular music affect how they moved? Why might that be?

Native American Flute Music – [[video.link/w/Xud3b](#)]

Miles Davis: Burn – [[video.link/w/9wd3b](#)]

Bobby McFerrin: Don't Worry Be Happy – [[video.link/w/oyd3b](#)]

Kris Kross: Jump – [[video.link/w/rt8Rb](#)]

Happy Latino Instrumental Music – [[video.link/w/KJQ5b](#)]

Sad Melancholic Classical Music – [[video.link/w/k6d3b](#)]

Traditional Chinese Music – [[video.link/w/K6s7b](#)]

Virtual Boost: Have a virtual dance party! Play the music and allow time to dance and draw. The group can show their feelings from a distance in a meaningful way.

Enrichment Extra: Invite readers to choreograph their own dance routine and challenge the audience to describe the feelings the dancer is trying to express.



Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Social Emotional Learning Competencies

SELF-MANAGEMENT: The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

Social Justice Anchor Standards

DIVERSITY: Students will examine diversity in social, cultural, political and historical contexts rather than in ways that are superficial or oversimplified.

It's Just So... Brave!

Everyone has unique fears and worries. How we handle them can affect whether we grow and learn or get stuck and unable to move forward. Lizzy has many strategies for facing new experiences that can sometimes be scary. Dancing, writing, drawing, and laughing all help her persevere. After reading and discussing the *It's Just So...* series, guide readers to think of things that make them scared, nervous, or simply uncomfortable. Privacy is a priority with these sensitive thoughts. Allow time for young readers to write each idea or draw a picture on a little piece of paper so that it can be placed in their own personal small jar, box, or envelope. The act of naming the feeling and tucking it away has been used as a technique for coping with challenging ideas, negative thoughts, and worries. Readers can channel their inner Lizzy and add positive thoughts, descriptive words, and colorful drawings on the flipside of their worries. Turn this Container of Concerns into a Brave Box! When the worry returns they can retrieve the paper from their personal box and remember the positive ideas that they added. This simple act can change a mindset and create a healthy habit for the future. Lizzy is the perfect model for handling anticipation and challenges with positivity!

Virtual Boost: After reading the *It's Just So...* series encourage learners to gather supplies from home or school to create a habit and routine in their own personal out-of-school space for using writing to cope with their fears, worries, hopes, and dreams. The personal nature of this activity makes it the perfect at-home extension.

Enrichment Extra: Expand the activity to meet the needs of your more prolific writers. Encourage them to start a journal where they can record their feels in a more detailed way. Journaling can be a very effective coping strategy.

Check out this website to help your learners fill their coping toolbox – [bit.ly/3apQYrL].

It's Just So... Haiku-rific!

Haiku poetry is fun and perfect for those who are new to the poetry game. Teach readers the rules of a Haiku and let them experiment with Lizzy's words to create their own original poetry. To prepare for writing Haiku poetry encourage readers to sort Lizzy's fun, made up vocabulary by the number of syllables. If Haiku is a completely new idea for your group, check out this video to get them started. – [video.link/w/ijz6b].

Virtual Boost: Young poets can create a digital slide that includes their Haiku and clip art or photographs that complement their writing. Collect all of the slides and create a slideshow set to music. It will be an amazing poetry presentation that can be enjoyed virtually.

Enrichment Extra: Invite writers to learn about other forms of poetry. Encourage budding poets to explore this website: [bit.ly/3u974Oi]. Once they have added to their poetry menu, encourage them to try out a new form.



Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Social Emotional Learning Competencies

SELF-AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

It's so... Independent!

Activities for each book when read separately

If one topic at a time is best for your learners, here are activities that will help them expand their thinking as they encounter their own life adventures along with Lizzy—one book at a time.

It's Just So...

Lizzy is going to school! It's her first day and she's not sure what to think. She takes on the day and ends on a high note, at home, snuggled in her bed, feeling comfy with all of her friends.

It's Just So... Dramatical!

How was Lizzy's first day of school? It was busy! Take the day from the page to the stage for an epic retelling of Lizzy's first day of school. After reading *It's Just So...*, break readers into small groups to act out her day. Each group can take a different and important part of the day: waking up, getting dressed, getting on the bus, reading, math, science, art class, lunchtime, social studies, music class, returning home, and going to sleep. Allow time for the groups to meet, brainstorm their skit, and make props. Props can include drawings, posters with Lizzy's words, and anything else the group feels will convey the mood of that particular part of Lizzy's day. As the class performs their dramatic interpretation of the book they can enjoy Lizzy's first day adventure through the lens of their fellow readers. At the conclusion of each performance discuss how the retelling was the same as the book. How was it different? How did the props help in the retelling?

Virtual Boost: Invite readers to record a short video clip of one of the parts of Lizzy's day. Share the videos with the group. Anyone who is camera shy can contribute by offering creative ideas to those that thrive on camera.

Enrichment Extra: *It's Just So...* uses bold language, but with few words. Encourage readers to expand the events of each page and write a script for Lizzy. Include dialogue and descriptions of what may have been happening during each part of her day.



Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

It's Just So... Little

Lizzy is learning about growing up. She is noticing all of the changes that are going on around her and, after a few bumps along the way, it's just so... **AMAZING!** turns out that all living things grow and change and it's our job to take care of each other. What an important life lesson. Lizzy's adventures never stop!

Complement or follow-up this book with the *Growing and Changing* reproducible included in this guide. It will help readers connect their own development to the changes that Lizzy experiences in *It's Just So... Little*.



It's Just So... Gigantonormous and Itsy-Bitsy

Lizzy experiences a BIG change when her baby brother is born. She prepares for the arrival by taking in a baby tree as the season begins to change to autumn. She sees that the little sprout needs extra care and protection in order to grow. As the story continues Lizzy sees small transformations in the tree as the seasons change until one day the tree is big enough to be planted outside and can survive on its own. She learns the important lesson that life is full of big and small changes and that we have it in our power to deal with these changes. Discuss some of the ways that Lizzy deals with the changes in her life in *It's Just So... Little*! Explore big and small life moments in your students' lives. Share some of your own! What are some coping strategies they (and you!) use that are helpful during these situations? Record their ideas on a chart as the group discusses. See sample below:

Situation	Size	Coping Strategy
The teacher changed the seats in the classroom.	Big Little	Breathe: I can take a deep breath and think of all of the positive things about the new seat (ex. It's closer to the window, I will not be distracted by my friends...)
A new baby will be born in the spring.	Big Little	Self-Talk: I can help my parents with the new baby and when he or she is older I will have someone to play with. I'll feel like a big kid and feel responsible.

Next, make a one of a kind deck of cards—the Grapple Deck! The Grapple Deck allows students the opportunity to empower themselves by brainstorming ways they can grapple or deal with challenging situations.

Directions:

- Pass out one 3x5 index card to each student.
- Instruct readers to write on one side of the card a description of a situation where a challenging change occurs. (Each participant can choose one personal life moment or create an original, fictional idea.) Add a small illustration.

(Directions continue on next page)

(Directions continued)

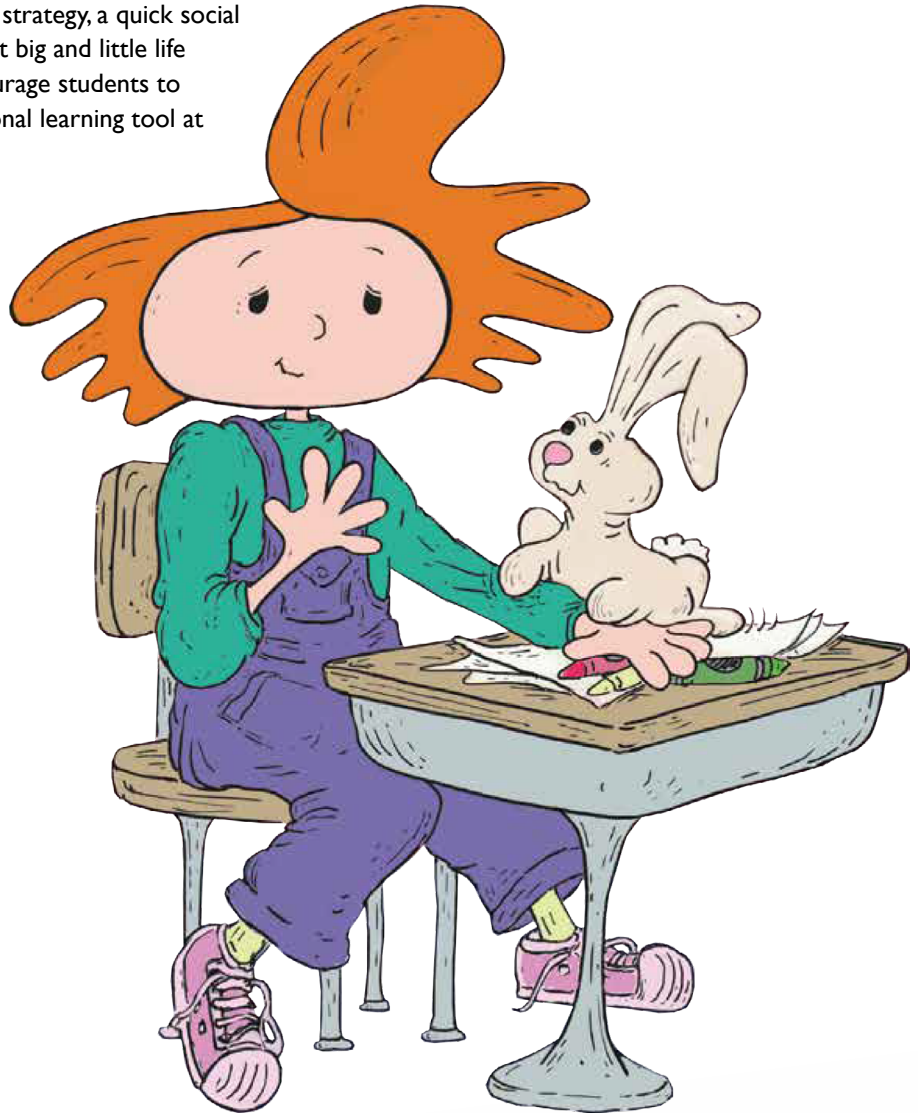
- On the back of the card, write a coping strategy or tips for grappling with that situation.
- Once the cards are completed, review the cards together and put this unique deck of cards in an easily accessible space in the classroom (or a digital file if remote learning is necessary) so that it can be freely referenced.

The content can remain anonymous to preserve the privacy of all participants.

The Grapple Deck can also be used as a calming strategy, a quick social emotional learning review, or can be used to sort big and little life situations. As changes and challenges arise, encourage students to add to the Grapple Deck. Having a social emotional learning tool at young people's fingertips is useful in any setting.

Virtual Boost: Brainstorm situations and calming strategies using the chat feature in a virtual meeting. Compile ideas into a slideshow that can be sent to the group. This tool can be accessed anytime!

Enrichment Extra: Encourage individuals to continually create cards to add to their own personal Grapple Deck. The deck can grow as they do!



Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Social Emotional Learning Competencies

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

It's Just a Bunnypalooza!

Lizzy is ready to show off her talents in the Spring Jamboree! She wants to dance in the show and her bunny friends are going to help her give it a go. When she shares her plans with the class, they laugh at her and make her feel unsure. Lizzy has to dig deep to find her courage and be proud of herself. With the bunnies right by her side, she puts on a stellar performance and learns the most important lesson: be yourself!



It's Just So... Individual!

It's not always easy for young people (or Lizzy!) to know how to dig deep into who they uniquely are or who they choose to be. This activity is a great fit before or during transition periods—beginning the school year, exploring a new unit about identity, welcoming a new student to the class—where celebrating one's special qualities helps students really get to know one another and helps create a community of self-acceptance and respect.

In *It's Just a Bunnypalooza*, Lizzy eventually understands how unique she actually is. She says “I can dance to my rhythm and choose to be me!” (39). Showcase this quotation to young readers. What does it mean to “choose” to be you? How does Lizzy do this in *Bunnypalooza*?

Invite readers to write (or draw!) about themselves and what makes them unique. They may need to invent some new words just like Lizzy to express their superb selves! Once they have written about their unique qualities, empower the group to share themselves in any way they wish: dance, poetry, painting, sculpting, music, acting, rap, digital collage, creative stories or another idea they come up with are all encouraged. The culminating experience can include presentations to the group, live or virtual. This self discovery may lead some to realize that performing for a group isn't their thing. That's great too! Encourage them to share in a way that fits their personality and comfort level. Perhaps a one-on-one, a poster, or powerpoint would be a better fit. Be sure to celebrate students' bravery as they share their individuality. Their true selves will shine for all to see when they have their own bunnypalooza moment!

Do your readers need some help getting started? Here are some prompts to inspire their thinking:

- I am unique because...
- The most interesting thing about me is...
- Something I like about myself is...
- My friends think that I am special because...
- I have been told that I...

Virtual Boost: Personal presentations can be shared virtually. If the group is large and the presenter prefers a more intimate setting, use virtual breakout rooms for small group shares.

Enrichment Extra: Learners who are ready for more may share their work with a younger group. This kind of peer modeling can be extremely powerful for younger children that are just beginning their journey to self-discovery.

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Social Emotional Learning Competencies

SELF-AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

Social Justice Standards

IDENTITY: Students will recognize that people's multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.

This teaching guide was written by Room 228 Educational Consulting, with public school teacher Shannon Rheault as lead teacher and Tim Henderson as graphic designer timhenderson.design. We at Room 228 are true believers in young people expressing themselves through writing, art and the occasional made up, make-believe-alicious word. To learn more, visit rm228.com.