

## Problem-Solving Practice is an Open Book

Many teachers agree that giving students tools to solve problems is one of the strengths of the Open Circle program. There are various ways to help students learn and practice those skills outside of Open Circle meeting times. One way students can practice problem-solving skills is by “walking in the shoes” of fictional story characters.

Children’s literature presents students with compelling “hypothetical” problem situations. From *Harriet the Spy* to *Harry Potter*, memorable stories have at least one thing in common—conflict. Open a child’s favorite book, and it won’t take long to encounter a character who feels strong emotions associated with a problem. “Max” is frightened when he first meets the “Wild Things.” “Dorothy” feels miserable because she can’t leave Oz and go home. “George” feels ashamed when his curiosity gets him into trouble.

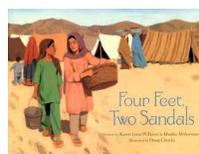
Not only does literature provide a rich source of problems for students to discuss, it serves as a link between academics and social and emotional learning. Discussing stories reinforces comprehension, as well as Open Circle skills. Some follow-up questions to a story might be: What is the problem in this story? How is the character feeling? What might be some solutions to the problem? Which solution do you think the character will try? What do you think will happen? This process gives students ways to analyze characters’ problem-solving skills, while simultaneously practicing their own. Since most students read, or are read to, almost every day as part of their academic schedule, linking Open Circle concepts to literature ensures that students have many opportunities to practice Open Circle skills.

Teachers frequently use books that they already have on their shelves to reinforce a variety of Open Circle skills, including the problem-solving

process. Teachers can also use the Literature Connections section at the back of the *Open Circle Curriculum* binder to find literature resources that support Open Circle skills instruction.

Here are some other books, new to the Literature Connections list, that connect to specific steps in the problem-solving process as taught in the *Open Circle Curriculum*.

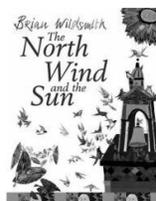
### DECIDE ON A POSITIVE GOAL



***Four Feet, Two Sandals***, by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammad. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2007. (Gr. 2-4)

This story highlights the fact that sometimes people have multiple problems, and more than one positive goal. The tale begins when two girls meet at a clothing donation site in a refugee camp. Initially, readers might think that the main characters share the goal of wanting to have the pair of sandals that they find in a pile of donated clothing. As students read on, and observe how the relationship between the Lina and Feroza develops, another goal comes into focus: maintaining a friendship.

### EVALUATE SOLUTIONS



***The North Wind and the Sun (Oxford Classic Fables)***, by Brian Wildsmith. Oxford University Press, 2000. (Gr. K-5)

In this classic fable, Wind and Sun have distinctly different approaches to proving which of them is more powerful. This story gives readers a chance to practice the Evaluate Solutions step in the problem-solving process. During or after reading the fable, teachers can invite students to discuss the pros and cons of the methods Wind and Sun use to make a man remove his cloak.

## MAKE A PLAN AND TRY IT

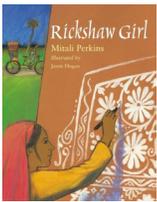


***Scaredy Squirrel Makes a Friend***,  
by Melanie Watt. Kids Can Press,  
2007. (Gr. K-2)

*Scaredy Squirrel* feels too nervous  
and afraid to make a new friend.

He uses problem-solving skills to devise an elaborate plan that will help him reach his goal of having someone to play with. This story illustrates how important it is to be ready to revisit and revise your plan!

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES, RECOGNIZING DISCRIMINATION



***Rickshaw Girl***, by Mitali Perkins.  
Charlesbridge Publishers, 2007. (Gr.  
3-5)

When 10-year-old Naima wrecks her father's rickshaw, she causes her family's financial situation to go from bad to worse. As if economic obstacles are not hard enough, Naima must find a way to surmount gender discrimination in her efforts to help her family.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For an extensive list of children's literature grouped by Open Circle themes, see the Literature Connections section in the *Open Circle Curriculum* and in the Resources area at [www.open-circle.org](http://www.open-circle.org).