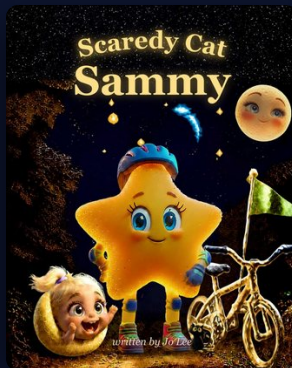




A Teacher's & Homeschool Guide to the Sammy Star Books

Four picture books. Four lessons a child gets to work out for themselves. Ages 3 to 8.



BY JO LEE · SPARKLE NORTH STAR BOOKS · PALMER, ALASKA

Free to copy. Print this guide, photocopy it for your class, hand it round your co-op or your library. You do not need to ask. All I ask is that you do not sell it.

How to use this guide

A “soft lesson” is one the child arrives at, instead of one they are handed.

The phrase came from a homeschooling mother who read the first Sammy Star book to her children. What she liked was what the book *doesn't* do: it never stops to explain itself, never tells the reader what to feel, and never ends with the moral printed in bold. It shows a small star's sparkle going out, and trusts a four-year-old to notice.

That only works if the grown-up reading it holds their nerve. Which brings us to the one rule this whole guide rests on.

Ask the question. Then stop talking.

Count to ten in your head before you say anything else. Most children need about six seconds to start an answer, and almost every adult fills that silence at four – usually by answering their own question, which ends the thinking for everyone in the room. If nobody speaks by ten, ask it again in different words rather than explaining it. **A question you answer yourself is a lesson they did not learn.**

What is in each book section

- ★ **At a glance** – ages, read-aloud time, SEL focus and standards
- ★ **What happens** – so you can plan without re-reading
- ★ **The soft lesson** – what the story is doing under the surface
- ★ **A note for the grown-up** – the bit that is for you, not them
- ★ **Three places to stop** while reading, with the question to ask
- ★ **Four questions** afterwards, from the page outwards to the child
- ★ **One activity**, low preparation, ordinary materials

The four questions

Every book has the same four-step ladder, so children get used to the shape of it:

- ★ **Remember** – something they can find on the page. Everyone can answer. That is the point.
- ★ **Understand** – why a character did a thing. Now they are inferring.
- ★ **Connect** – has this happened to you? *Answer first, about yourself.*
- ★ **Apply** – what will you do? Keep it small and this week.

Standards and SEL

Each book lists the Common Core ELA literature and speaking standards its questions naturally support, and the CASEL social-emotional competency it sits closest to. These are offered so you can slot the books into planning you already do – this is a reading guide written by an author, not an accredited curriculum, and you know your children far better than I do.



BOOK 1

Sammy Star

Identity · belonging · a parent's apology

AGES	3–8	READ-ALoud	about 6 minutes
LENGTH	26 pages	SEL FOCUS	Self-Awareness
STANDARDS	RL.K.3 · RL.1.3 · RL.2.3 · SL.K.1		

What happens

Sammy is a star born into a world of moons. His mother, worried the other moons will be unkind about how different he looks, tries four times to make him look more like them – scrubbing his points, taping them down, hiding his shine, bundling him in a hoodie. Each time, Sammy's sparkle dims a little more. When it has almost gone out, Mama Moon looks properly at her little star, realises what she has done, and tells him so.

The soft lesson

Nobody in this book ever tells a child to be themselves. Instead the child watches a sparkle go out, one step at a time, and feels the loss before anyone explains it. By the time Mama Moon says sorry, the reader has already worked out what was wrong – which is why they believe it.

A note for the grown-up

In this story the grown-up is the one who gets it wrong, and says so out loud: *"I was wrong. I'm so sorry."* That is unusual in a picture book, and it is doing real work. A child who has been apologised to by an adult sees themselves. A child who never has sees that it is possible. Read that page slowly.

Before you read

"Is there something about you that nobody else in this room has?" Take answers, don't correct them, and don't explain where you are going.

While you read — three places to stop

When Mama scrubs his points

“She’s trying to help him. How do you think it feels?”

When the hoodie goes on

“Look at his sparkle. What’s happening to it?”

When Mama really looks at him

“Mama just changed her mind about something. What was it?”

After you read

These go from the page outwards. Ask them in order, and **wait after each one** — the silence is where the thinking happens.

1

REMEMBER

What were the four things Mama Moon tried?

2

UNDERSTAND

Mama was trying to protect him. How did it end up hurting him instead?

3

CONNECT

Have you ever hidden something about yourself so you’d fit in? *Answer this one yourself first, out loud, before you ask the children.*

4

APPLY

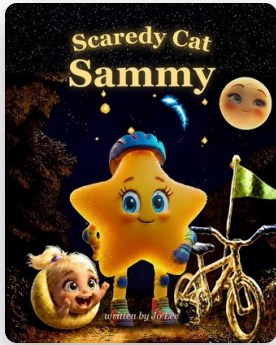
What is one thing about you that you would never want scrubbed off?

The Sparkle List

10 MINUTES • PAPER AND A PENCIL

Each child draws a big five-pointed star and writes one thing on each point that is simply **true** about them — not things they are good at. “I notice when people are sad.” “I like the smell of rain.” “I talk a lot.” Pin them up together and let the children read each other’s. The point lands on its own: no two stars match, and nobody had to be best at anything to be on the wall.

Our free **What Makes YOU Shine?** worksheet is a ready-made version of this.



BOOK 2

Scaredy Cat Sammy

Fear · courage · trying something new

AGES	3–8	READ-ALoud	about 6 minutes
LENGTH	32 pages	SEL FOCUS	Self-Management
STANDARDS	RL.1.3 · RL.2.3 · SL.1.1 · SL.2.1		

What happens

Sammy's friends all get shiny comet-trail bikes. Sammy wants one desperately, and tells his mother that bikes are dumb. Mama Moon asks, very gently, whether he is afraid. He admits he is, and she gives him a three-step tool: notice the shivery-quivery feeling, take a deep breath, and *decide*. Sammy falls off twice, and uses the tool himself.

The soft lesson

Sammy says “bikes are dumb” before he can say “I am scared.” Children recognise that sentence immediately, because they have said it. The book never explains that dismissing something can be fear wearing a costume. It just shows it, and lets the reader catch themselves.

A note for the grown-up

The tool in this book is not invented. Noticing the feeling, breathing, and relabelling it is a child-sized version of something adults get taught too – a racing heart feels almost the same whether you are frightened or thrilled, so calling it excitement is not a lie you tell yourself. Worth saying out loud to older children. Note also *who* says the line at the end: Mama says it first, Sammy says it last. That hand-over is the whole story.

Before you read

“What is something that was scary the first time, and is easy now?” Let them hear each other's answers before you start reading.

While you read — three places to stop

"Bikes are dumb"

"Do we think Sammy really believes that?"

When his chin quivers

"What changed when Mama asked if he was afraid?"

When Sammy says the line himself

"Mama said that first. Who is saying it now?"

After you read

These go from the page outwards. Ask them in order, and **wait after each one** — the silence is where the thinking happens.

1

REMEMBER

What did Sammy say about bikes at the beginning?

2

UNDERSTAND

Why was it easier to say "bikes are dumb" than "I am scared"?

3

CONNECT

Where in *your* body do you feel shivery-quivery? Point to it.

4

APPLY

What is one thing you would like to be a Braveheart about this week?

The Braveheart Card

15 MINUTES · INDEX CARDS

Fold an index card in half. On the front, the child writes Mama's three steps in their own words — not copied from the book. On the back, the one thing they are going to try this week. They keep the card. **Put a date in your diary and ask them about it in seven days** — the asking is what makes it work, not the card.

Children who cannot write yet can draw the three steps instead.



BOOK 3

Sammy Star Sings!

Joy · teasing · not having to be good at it

AGES	3–8	READ-ALoud	about 7 minutes
LENGTH	32 pages	SEL FOCUS	Social Awareness · Relationship Skills
STANDARDS	RL.1.3 · RL.2.3 · SL.2.1		

What happens

Sammy loves to sing and is genuinely terrible at it — he sounds like a sick frog in shoes two sizes too small — and he does not mind at all. Then a new child laughs at him on the playground, and Sammy stops singing. The playground goes quiet and colourless. Mama Moon helps him see that his joy was never about being good, and he sings again.

The soft lesson

The clever turn is that the whole playground gets worse, and even the child who did the teasing notices. The book never says “teasing hurts everybody.” It shows the colour draining out of a place, and lets the reader add it up. And the teaser is not punished or shamed — he joins in, which is a kinder and more useful ending than most books manage.

A note for the grown-up

Read this one if a child has quietly stopped doing something they used to love. The useful question is not “has somebody been unkind to you?” — which gets a shrug — but “what did you used to do that you don’t do any more?” Children will often answer the second one honestly without realising they have answered the first.

Before you read

“What is something you love doing that you are not very good at?” **Answer first, honestly, about yourself.** If you do not go first, neither will they.

While you read — three places to stop

<i>When the new kid laughs</i>	“What do you think Sammy’s face looks like right now?”
<i>The quiet, colourless playground</i>	“What is missing from the playground?”
<i>When the new kid’s toes start tapping</i>	“What changed his mind?”

After you read

These go from the page outwards. Ask them in order, and **wait after each one** — the silence is where the thinking happens.

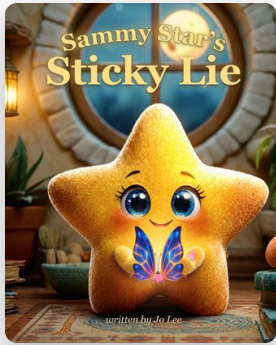
- 1 REMEMBER
What did the book say Sammy sounded like? Can you say it the way the book does?
- 2 UNDERSTAND
Only one person stopped singing. Why did the whole playground go quiet?
- 3 CONNECT
Is there something you stopped doing because somebody laughed?
- 4 APPLY
Mama said happy people make people happy. Who makes *you* happy, and how?

The Terrible Talent Show

20 MINUTES · NO PREPARATION

Everybody performs something they are genuinely bad at. Singing, cartwheels, whistling, drawing a horse. **The grown-up goes first and must actually be bad at it.** No prizes, no judging, no “well done” — applause for everyone, the same amount. This collapses the moment the adult is secretly quite good, so pick something you cannot do.

Pairs well with a reading of the frog lines out loud, as badly as you can manage.



BOOK 4

Sammy Star's Sticky Lie

Honesty · mistakes · repair · kintsugi

AGES	4–8	READ-ALoud	about 8 minutes
LENGTH	32 pages	SEL FOCUS	Responsible Decision-Making
STANDARDS	RL.2.1 · RL.2.3 · SL.2.1		

What happens

Sammy breaks his mother's glass butterfly, sticks it back together with his chewing gum, and says nothing. His tummy feels "jibbly" all afternoon. At supper Mama Moon asks three times, gently, and he finally tells the truth. She is not angry. She peels off the gum and repairs the butterfly properly, with gold – and tells him that the one thing that cannot be repaired is his word.

The soft lesson

The lie is a *feeling* in this book long before it is a wrong. A jibbly tummy, all afternoon, that will not settle. Children who have lied recognise the stomach-ache before they recognise the ethics, so the story gets in through the body and the argument arrives afterwards, already agreed to.

A note for the grown-up

Everything in this book rests on one distinction: *"It was an accident, not an on-purpose."* Mama is not angry about the butterfly and is glad about the truth, and she keeps those two things apart out loud. This matters more than it looks – a child who expects punishment hides more, not less. Notice too that she asks three times, each time offering an easier way to own up. That is modelling for the adult in the room, not the child.

Before you read

If you have something at home that has been mended and still shows the mend, bring it. Ask: "What should we do with something that gets broken?"

While you read — three places to stop

<i>The chewing-gum repair</i>	"Is that going to work?"
<i>The jibbly tummy</i>	"Why does his tummy feel like that? He didn't eat anything bad."
<i>When the gold goes on</i>	"Mama says it's more beautiful now. Do you agree with her?"

After you read

These go from the page outwards. Ask them in order, and **wait after each one** — the silence is where the thinking happens.

- 1

REMEMBER

What did Sammy use to fix the butterfly? What did Mama use?
- 2

UNDERSTAND

Mama said she was not mad. So what *was* she feeling?
- 3

CONNECT

What does jibbly feel like? Have you ever felt it?
- 4

APPLY

Mama said your word cannot be repaired. What do you think she meant?

Kintsugi in a Cup

25 MINUTES · CROSS-CURRICULAR: ART AND WORLD CULTURES

Kintsugi is a real Japanese craft: broken pottery is mended with lacquer dusted in gold, so the repair becomes the most beautiful part instead of being hidden. A classroom version: **an adult** breaks a cheap terracotta plant saucer inside a cloth bag, then children reassemble the pieces with white glue stirred with gold paint. While the glue dries, ask why a craftsperson would choose to make the crack the most visible thing about the bowl.

Safety: an adult does the breaking, inside a bag. Use terracotta, never glass, and count the pieces before and after.

Four weeks with Sammy Star

One book a week, in order. The books stand alone, but read together they build: who I am, what I do when I am afraid, what I do when somebody is unkind, and what I do when I get it wrong.

WEEK	BOOK	THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK
One	Sammy Star	Who am I when nobody is asking me to be anything else?
Two	Scaredy Cat Sammy	What do I do with the shivery-quivery feeling?
Three	Sammy Star Sings!	What does it cost everybody when one person goes quiet?
Four	Sammy Star's Sticky Lie	What happens after I get it wrong?

Write the question of the week somewhere the children can see it. Do not answer it on the first day. Ask it again on the last day and see whether the answers have moved – that shift is the only assessment this unit needs.

Free printables that go with it

All free, no sign-up, print as many as you like, at sparklenorthstarbooks.com/printables

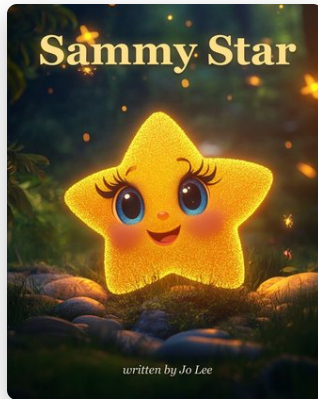
- ★ **What Makes YOU Shine?** – the star worksheet. Pairs with Week One.
- ★ **Help Sammy Get Home to Mama Moon** – a maze, with an answer key. Any week, or the five minutes before everyone melts down.
- ★ **The Moon Changes Its Face** – all eight moon phases to colour, drawn correctly, with a seven-night Moon Watch log. A science lesson hiding in a colouring sheet.

If you only have one session

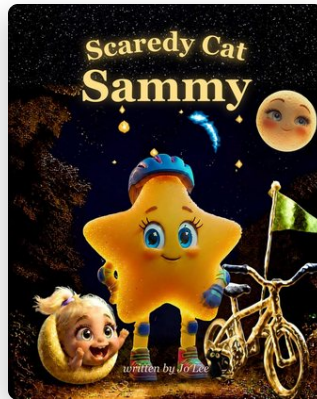
Read *Sammy Star*, ask the four questions, and do the Sparkle List. It is the book the other three are built on, and a single session with it is worth more than skimming all four.

The books

All four are paperback picture books for ages 3 to 8, full colour, from a very small publisher in Palmer, Alaska. A fifth is on the way.



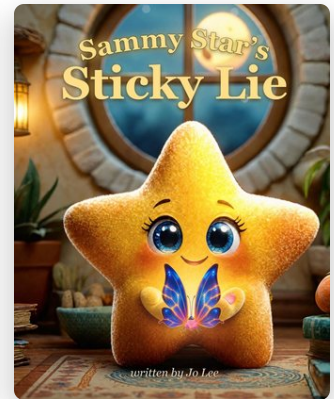
Sammy Star



Scaredy Cat Sammy



Sammy Star Sings!



Sammy Star's Sticky Lie

Where to find them

- ★ Every book, with links to all the shops: sparklenorthstarbooks.com
- ★ Also available to order through Barnes & Noble, Bookshop.org and Amazon
- ★ **Librarians and schools:** they are distributed through IngramSpark, so your usual supplier can order them by ISBN

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So you be you — and shine on, you sparkly star.