EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

What Do You Do With a Problem?

Grades CD–3

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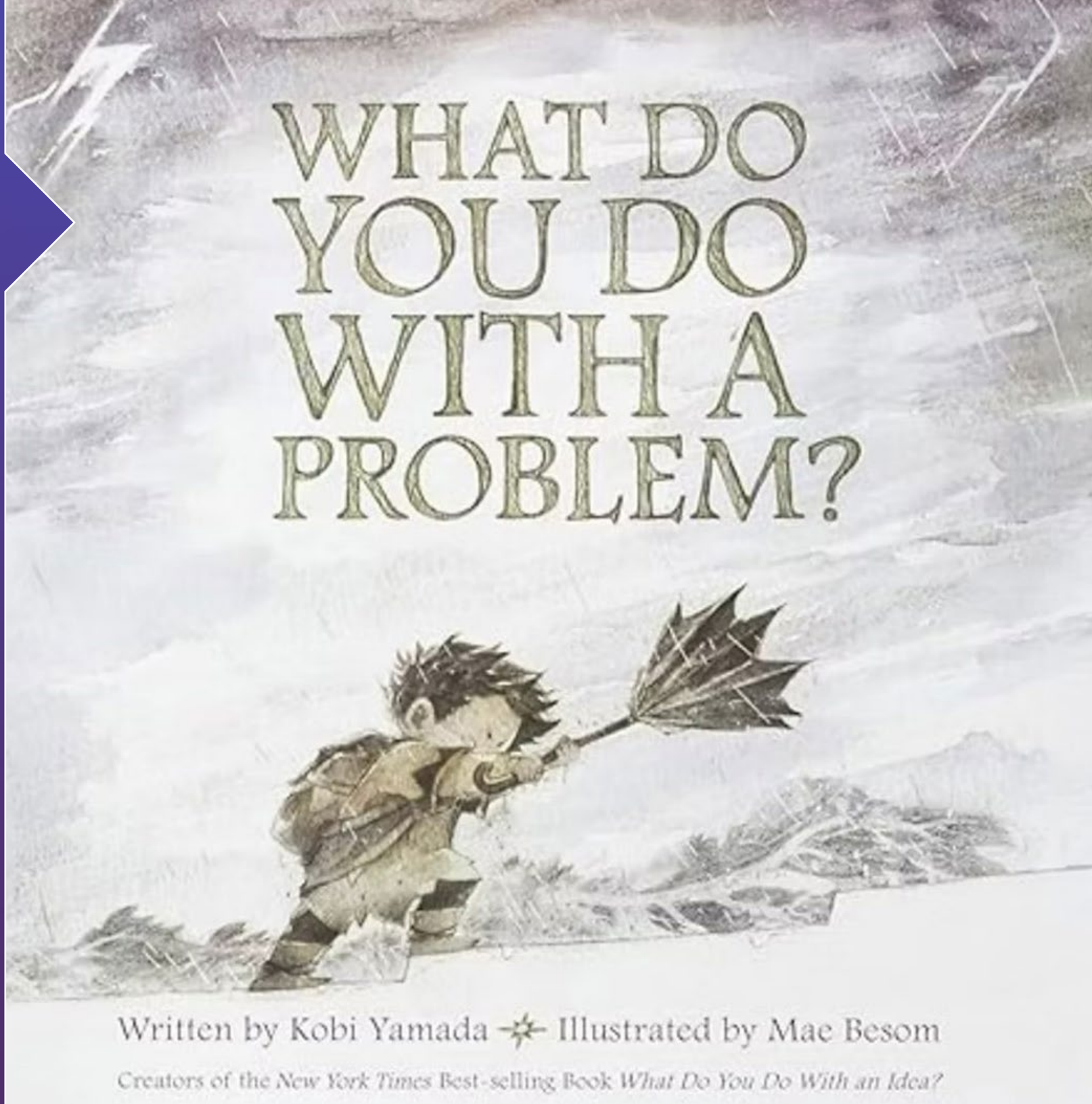

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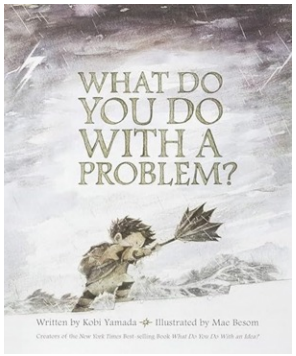
ABOUT THE SHOW



ABOUT THE SHOW

A dance theatre adaptation of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller by Kobi Yamada, *What Do You Do With a Problem*? tells a powerful and imaginative story about a child learning to face a persistent challenge.

At first, the child tries to ignore the problem. The more the problem is avoided, the bigger and more overwhelming it seems to become. Through courage, curiosity, and resilience, the child eventually chooses to confront the problem directly, only to discover that the very thing that felt frightening may also hold unexpected possibilities.

Through expressive movement and storytelling, this production invites audience members to reflect on how we approach challenges in our own lives. The story encourages viewers to see problems in a new light, reminding us that within every problem may be an opportunity for growth, discovery, and understanding ourselves more deeply.[1]

This world premiere production debuted in June 2025. It was made possible with commissioning support from the TYA Tour Development Collective, with contributions from Des Moines Performing Arts, Dayton Live, Playhouse Square, Gogue Performing Arts Center, Zoellner Arts Center, Midwest Trust Center, and Wharton Center for Performing Arts.

Adapted with permission from the book WHAT DO YOU DO WITH A PROBLEM?
Written by Kobi Yamada; illustrated by Mae Besom
Published by Compendium, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC.
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Choreographed by the company's Founder and Executive/Artistic Director Bill Wade, in collaboration with the cast.
Original score by Jeremy Allen
Narrated by Dee Perry
Scenic design by Ian Petroni and Jenny Hitmar Shankland
Costumes by Sue Berry
Original Lighting Design by Brydon Lidle

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Inlet Dance Theatre is a professional contemporary dance company known for its collaborative approach to creating meaningful and engaging performances. Founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 2001 by executive and artistic director Bill Wade, the company has become one of the Midwest's most distinctive dance organizations.

Rooted in the traditions of American modern dance, Inlet Dance Theatre operates as an ensemble-based culture that values craftsmanship, artistic mastery, and collaboration. Rather than a traditional top-down creative structure, the company uses a collaborative creative process, inviting artists to contribute ideas and perspectives throughout the development of new work. This approach reflects Bill Wade's belief that collaboration leads to more inclusive artistic spaces and produces work that is dynamic, diverse, and deeply human.

Read more about Inlet Dance Theater here

WATCH

Inlet Dance Theater *What Do You Do With an Idea?*
Inlet Dance Theatre concert demo reel

1. *"What Do You Do With a Problem?"* Holden & Arts Associates, accessed May 28, 2026, https://www.holdenarts.org/whatdoyoudowithaproblem.

CONNECT

CLASSROOM WORKSHOPS

Emotion Color Wheel
Grades CD–3
In this workshop, students read *What Do You Do With a Problem?* by Kobi Yamada and explore how emotions are represented through colors in the book's illustrations. Students then create a personalized emotion color wheel, connecting different colors, lines, and patterns to feelings inspired by the story.
Click here for the workshop

Acting With Emotion—Improvisation Theater
Grades 1–3
Students will explore how emotions can be expressed through facial expressions, body language, and movement inspired by the story *What Do You Do With a Problem?* by Kobi Yamada. Students will practice communicating feelings through emotion-based games and improvisation scenes.
Click here for the workshop

Emotions In Motion—Dancing Statues
Grades K–3
Students will work in groups to explore how emotions can be expressed through dance by creating frozen "statues" and movement transitions. Students will then showcase their statues in a gallery walk to show how emotions can change over time, similar to themes from *What Do You Do With a Problem?*
Click here for workshop

Music Listening—Emotion Detectives
Grades CD–3
Students will explore how music can evoke different emotions by listening to a variety of musical selections and identifying the feelings they hear in the music. Through discussion and movement, students will connect musical elements such as tempo and dynamics to emotions like happiness, calmness, or excitement. This activity helps students prepare for the *What Do You Do With a Problem?* performance by recognizing how music and movement work together to express emotions and tell a story.
Click here for workshop

CONNECT

MEET KOBI YAMADA

Kobi Yamada is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author known for books that encourage readers of all ages to explore creativity, courage, and possibility. His stories often focus on big ideas, taking chances, confronting fears, embracing failure, and experiencing wonder.

Yamada is the author of many beloved and award-winning books, including *What Do You Do With an Idea?*, *What Do You Do With a Problem?*, *What Do You Do With a Chance?*, *Because I Had a Teacher*, and *Finding Muchness*. These stories have resonated with readers around the world and have been translated into many languages.

His popular *What Do You Do With*... series encourages readers to see ideas, problems, and opportunities in a new way. In *What Do You Do With a Problem?*, the story's main character learns how avoiding a problem can make it feel bigger and scarier, but facing it with courage can reveal new possibilities and growth.

In addition to being an author, Yamada is also the president of Compendium, a company that creates books, journals, and other products designed to inspire people to live meaningful and creative lives.[2]

Read more about Kobi Yamada here

WATCH

Maybe read by Kobi Yamada
What Do You Do With an Idea? read by Kobi Yamada

READ

EXPLORE

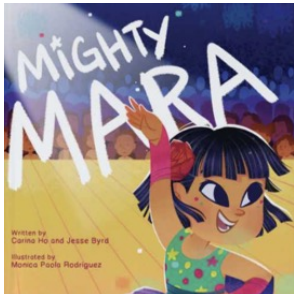
THEMES IN THE STORY

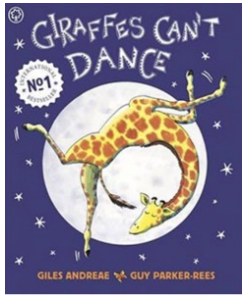
Through his writing in *What Do You Do With a Problem?*, Kobi Yamada encourages readers to believe in their ideas, face challenges bravely, and imagine the possibilities they can create in the world. His stories remind us that even difficult problems can lead to important discoveries about ourselves and the world around us.

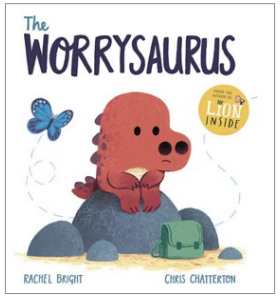
Courage

At the beginning of the story, the child feels worried and overwhelmed by a problem. Instead of facing it, the child tries to ignore it. As the story unfolds, the child learns that finding the courage to face a problem can help transform fear into confidence and strength.

RECOMMENDED READING ON BEING COURAGEOUS



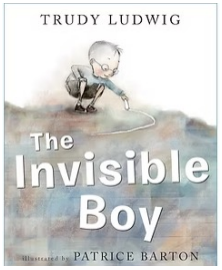


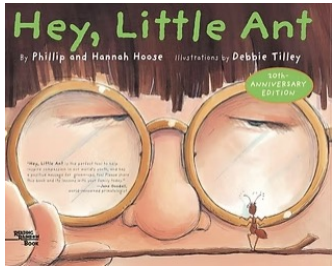


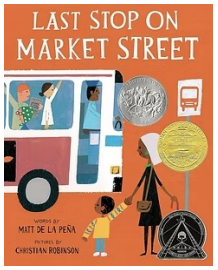
Perspective

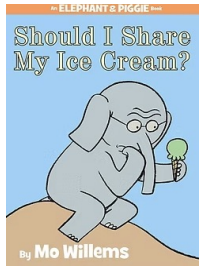
What Do You Do With a Problem? shows how the way we think about a problem can change how we experience it. When the child stops avoiding the problem and begins to look at it more closely, something surprising happens – the problem becomes an opportunity to learn something new.

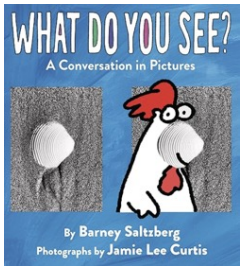
RECOMMENDED READING ON BEING COURAGEOUS











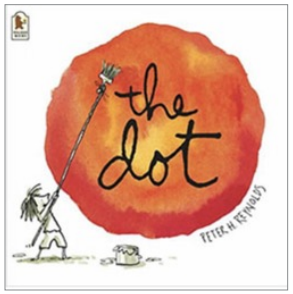
EXPLORE

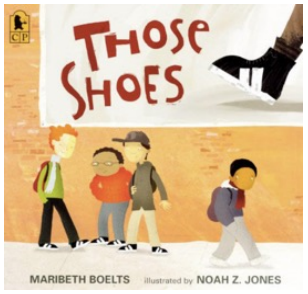
THEMES IN THE STORY

Growth and resilience

Challenges are a natural part of life. *What Do You Do With a Problem?* reminds us that problems can help us grow, develop resilience, and discover abilities we didn't know we had. By facing difficulties with curiosity and bravery, we can become stronger and more confident.

RECOMMENDED READING ON RESILIENCE:

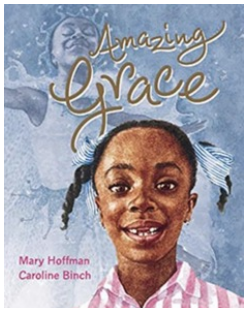


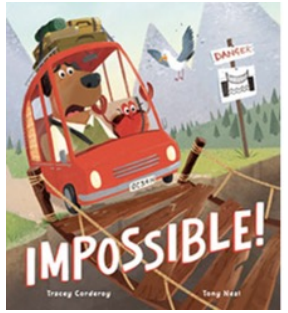


Possibility

One of the most powerful messages in *What Do You Do With a Problem?* is that problems sometimes contain unexpected opportunities. When we approach challenges with an open mind, they may lead to creativity, discovery, and new possibilities we might not have imagined before.

RECOMMENDED READING ON RESILIENCE:





EXPLORE

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

"Social Emotional Learning," Education Learning Point, accessed May 28, 2026, https://elt.nysut.org/getting-back-on-track/social-emotional-learning.

The themes in *What Do You Do With a Problem?* connect closely to skills and concepts rooted in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL is the process through which children and adults develop important life skills such as self-awareness, recognizing emotions, managing challenges, building positive relationships, and making responsible decisions. These skills help individuals navigate everyday experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Exposing young audiences to stories and lessons based on SEL skills allows them to see how emotions and actions are connected. These skills help learners recognize that it is normal to experience difficulties and that there are positive ways to respond when problems arise.

Why Does Social Emotional Learning Matter?

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) plays an important role in helping children develop resilience and empathy. When students learn to recognize their feelings and understand how others may feel, they are better able to communicate, collaborate, and support one another. These skills are essential not only for academic success but also for building healthy relationships and strong communities.

SEL also encourages a growth mindset, the belief that abilities and understanding can develop through effort and learning. When children view challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles, they are more likely to persevere and approach difficult situations with confidence.[3]

3. Jessica Souza, "What is social and emotional learning?", Child Mind Institute, updated April 22, 2026, https://childmind.org/article/what-is-social-and-emotional-learning/.

EXPLORE

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The arts provide powerful opportunities for artists and audiences to connect with their emotions and explore ideas rooted in SEL skills. Dance, music, visual arts, theater, and storytelling can communicate emotions such as fear, curiosity, determination, joy, and grief.

Dance

Dance allows performers to express feelings and ideas through movement instead of words. Dancers use their bodies through gestures, posture, and space to show feelings and tell stories. This can create a personal and emotional experience in which each viewer connects the movement to their own emotions and experiences.

"Dancing with words - choreography lab," Flyde Coast Youth Dance Company, November 7, 2011, https://fyldecoastdance.wordpress.com/2011/11/07/dancing-with-words-choreography-lab/.

For example:

- Slow, heavy movements might express sadness or struggle.
- Light, quick movements may show joy or excitement.
- Expansive movements reaching outward might represent freedom, hope, or discovery.

Music

Music often expresses emotions that are difficult to describe with words. It allows listeners to feel deeply connected to the sound. Melody, harmony, rhythm, and tempo all shape how music makes us feel.[4]

For example:

- Fast tempos can create a feeling of energy or excitement.
- Slow, gentle melodies may evoke calmness, sadness, or nostalgia.
- Changes in volume and intensity can build or release tension.

Visual Arts

Visual arts such as painting, drawing, sculpture, and photography communicate emotions through color, shape, texture, and composition.[5]

"Emotions and art," Erin Hanson, February 28, 2021, https://www.erinhanson.com/blog?p=emotionsandart&srsltid=AfmBOopUr3dIc8-uwXtAY6wxS5ifNZLV2MX7aIX8QNcX4T-mKRhagfmp.

For example:

- Bright, warm colors may suggest joy, warmth, or celebration, or even anger.
- Dark or muted colors might evoke mystery, sadness, or reflection.
- Bold lines and shapes can create a sense of energy or movement.

4. "How tempo and rhythm impact our emotional response to music," The Emory Wheel, June 22, 2025, https://emorywheel.com/article/how-tempo-and-rhythm-impact-our-emotional-response-to-music-20250622.
5. Kendra Cherry, "How color psychology affects moods, feelings, and behaviors," VeryWell Mind, April 14, 2026,

EXPLORE

THE ROLE OF THE ARTS IN SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Theater

Theater brings together storytelling, acting, dialogue, movement, and design to explore emotions and human experiences. Actors portray characters who face challenges, relationships, and choices, allowing audiences to see different perspectives.

Opera, for example, combines theater and music and expresses powerful emotions. The story unfolds with performers singing their lines instead of speaking them, and feelings are often intensified through melody, vocal tone, and orchestral accompaniment. Even if the audience does not understand every word, the music and vocal expression allow them to feel the emotion of the story.[6]

For example:

- A soaring high note may express joy, love, or triumph.
- Slow, minor-key music can communicate sadness or longing.
- Dramatic orchestral moments build tension, excitement, or fear.

"Opera, the Art of Emotions," Opera Vision, accessed May 28, 2026, https://operavision.eu/feature/opera-art-emotions.

Poetry

Poetry expresses emotion through carefully chosen language, rhythm, and imagery. Poets use descriptive words and figurative language to help readers "paint a mental picture" and imagine feelings and experiences.

For example:

- Nature imagery might represent emotions, such as storms for anger or sunshine for happiness.
- Repetition can emphasize an important feeling or idea.
- Rhythm and pacing influence how a poem feels when read aloud.

Ashwini Dodani, "Why Should You Try Poetry?", Writing Cooperative, October 13, 2017, https://writingcooperative.com/why-should-you-try-poetry-6218021bb152.

WATCH

Art & Emotions
Go Noodle mood walk
Sesame Street emotions dance
Sesame Street: Emotions Through Dance - Alvin Ailey Dance Theater
Cosmic Kids Yoga - Exploring Feelings

6. Eleni Hagen, "Understanding Opera," The Kennedy Center, March 7, 2024, https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/opera/understanding-opera/.

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KaraFun Karaoke. “‘You’ve Go a Friend in Me’ (Toy Story).” January 21, 2021. YouTube. 2 minutes, 3 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agSKYf1qmPg&list=RDagSKYf1qmPg&start_radio=1.

Lang Lang. “Saint-Saens: ‘Carnival of the Animals: Aquarium.’” November 10, 2023. YouTube. 2 minutes, 27 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NEdFFGjS7o&list=RD1NEdFFGjS7o&start_radio=1.

Mr. Paulson Reads. “What Do You Do With a Problem?” April 9, 2019. YouTube. 3 minutes, 41 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrElYjbllTk.

Sesame Street. “Emotions Dance.” April 17, 2020. YouTube. 2 minutes, 56 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwcFltsOfz4.

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wocomoMUSIC. “Rimsky-Korsakhov: ‘Flight of the Bumblebee.’” October 13, 2020. YouTube. 1 minute, 39 seconds. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59QXMCsx_5E.

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